

**THE ANXIETY OF SIGNIFICANCE:  
A STUDY OF FORM AND MEANING IN EARLY CHINESE LITERARY THOUGHT**

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## Abstract

This dissertation inquires into the relationship between form and meaning regarding literary representation, as presented in literary and critical discourses, in the vein of early Chinese literature. The concept of “significance” serves to epitomize, as “signification” does in modern semiotics, the indeterminate relationship between literary configuration of the world (form) and the spiritual freedom of man (meaning).

Starting with a survey of Western ideas on the subject, this research looks into the Chinese equivalent, typically analysed within five component discourses: (1) myth, especially the mythological accounts centering on the spiritual freedom of a primordial sage—the Chinese archetype of man; (2) the *shi*, or the orthodox literary discourse of poetry modelled on the *Classic of Poetry*, the early interpretation of which came to formulate fundamental rules for poetic thinking; (3) the *shuo*, or the preliminary literary discourse of narrative talks, argued here to be the precursor of *xiaoshuo* (petty talks), the Chinese designation for prose fiction; (4) the metalinguistic notion of *ming*, or Names, under which the relationship between language and meaning was fruitfully debated in the classical era; and (5) the *wen*, a quintessential literary discourse not only referring to prosaic writing in a rhetorical and ornate style, but gradually to the supreme art of letters.

In the end, this study tries to reach an eclectic synthesis of literary theories, seeing them as successive attempts to normalize the relationship between form and meaning, with the loci of significance varying with the flux of poetics and hermeneutics. The distinction between Eastern and Western literary thought, however, partly lies in that, whereas the epistemological pendulum has kept swinging between *mimesis* (i.e., a real and thus reliable representation) and *poiesis* (i.e.,

a false and artificial creation) in the West, Chinese literary minds have long been comfortable with the spirit of *transformation*—a constant *différence* in the workings of literary signs, as well as in the history of literary discourses.

## Preface

Chapter 3 of this thesis has been published as Zheng Cai, “Sage-centric Creation Myths and the Transcendental Ethos of Chinese Literature,” *Peking University’s Journal of Comparative Literature and World Literature* 5.1 (2014): 37-49.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Paradox of Significance in Poetics .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Early Poetics: East and West.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Debate over Significance: Hirsch, New Criticism, Derrida, Searle.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>Chapter Two The Anxiety of Significance—Setting the Terms.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>The Metaphysical Age.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>The Empirical Age.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>The Linguistic Turn.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<b>Chapter Three Sage-centric Creation Myths and Transcendental Spiritual Freedom in Early Chinese Literature.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<i>Creation Myths on the Origin of Man.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Etymology of the Divine.....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Fu Xi: the Primordial Sage.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>The Chinese Mythos of Eternal Return.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<b>Chapter Four Fu, Bi, and Xing: the Chinese Theories of Poetic Interpretation.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<i>Problematic Transparency.....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Contemporary Scholarship.....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Classical Presumptions: Confucius and the “Great Preface”.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Fu, Bi, and Xing: Zheng Xuan, Zheng Zhong, and Zhu Xi.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>The Problem of Wen: from “Records of Music” to the “Great Preface”.....</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>Three Structures of Meaning: Auerbach.....</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>The Legendary Structure of Fu: Hymns and Major Odes.....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>The Historical Structure of Bi: Minor Odes.....</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>The Theological Structure of Xing: Minor Odes and Airs of the States.....</i>	<i>156</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>167</i>
<b>Chapter Five The Difficulties of Persuasion—The Shuo as a Legalist Form of Speech .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<i>Han Fei.....</i>	<i>171</i>
<i>Liu Xiang.....</i>	<i>176</i>
<i>Classical Criticism.....</i>	<i>177</i>
<i>Xiaoshuo.....</i>	<i>178</i>
<b>Chapter Six The Mystery of Mysteries—The Paradox between Form and Meaning in Early Chinese Thought on Names .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<i>Lao Zi.....</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>Hui Shi.....</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>Gongsun Long.....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>Zhuang Zi.....</i>	<i>204</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>213</i>

<b>Chapter Seven The Criss-crossing in the Pattern of <i>Wen</i>—The Rhetoric of Meaning in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Literary Thought</b> .....	<b>216</b>
<i>Wen: from the Linguistic to Literary Sign</i> .....	217
<i>Fu: a Quintessential Type of Wen</i> .....	225
<i>Parallelism</i> .....	228
<i>Polemics on the Fu: Yang Xiong and Ban Gu</i> .....	234
<i>Han Horizons of Truth and Pattern</i> .....	250
<i>Anti-rhetorical Voice: Wang Chong</i> .....	255
<i>Pro-rhetorical Practice: Zhang Heng</i> .....	258
<i>Neo-Daoist Continuum of Significance: Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Wang Bi</i> .....	264
<i>Jin Discussions on the Fu: Zuo Si, Huangfu Mi, and Zhi Yu</i> .....	283
<i>Wen as the Global Sign: Liu Xie and Xiao Tong</i> .....	287
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	298
<b>Chapter Eight Conclusion The Chinese Poetics of Transformation</b> .....	<b>301</b>
<i>The Literary Idea of Transformation in Liu Xie's Account</i> .....	302
<i>Transformation as Trope</i> .....	311
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>317</b>
<i>Works in English</i> .....	317
<i>Works in Chinese</i> .....	328

## Principal Chinese Dynasties and Periods

Xia	2000-1650 B.C.	
Shang	1650-1046 B.C.	
Zhou	1046-256 B.C.	
Western Zhou	1046-770 B.C.	
Eastern Zhou	771-256 B.C.	
Spring and Autumn period	771-476 B.C.	
Warring States period	475-221 B.C.	
Qin	221-207 B.C.	
Han	202 B.C.-220 A.D.	
Western Han	202 B.C.-9 A.D.	
Xin	9-25	
Eastern Han	25-220	
Three Kingdoms	220-265	} Six Dynasties (220-587)
Wei	220-265	
Shu	221-263	
Wu	222-280	
Jin	265-420	
Western Jin	265-316	
Eastern Jin	317-420	
Southern Dynasties	420-587	
Song	420-479	



Qi	479-502
Liang	502-557
Chen	557-587
Northern Dynasties	386-581
Sui	581-618
Tang	618-906
Five Dynasties	907-960
Later Liang	907-922
Later Tang	923-936
Later Jin	936-948
Later Han	946-950
Later Zhou	951-960
Liao (Khitans)	907-1125
Xixia (Tibetans)	990-1227
Song	960-1279
Northern Song	960-1127
Southern Song	1127-1279
Yuan (Mongols)	1260-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Qing (Manchus)	1644-1911
Republic	1912-1949
People's Republic	1949-

## **Notes on Romanization, Translation and Quotation**

1. Pinyin Romanization is used in this dissertation.
2. Unless otherwise credited, translations are my own.
3. Some sentences and phrases in their Chinese original are put in footnotes for two reasons: (1) they are too long to be left after their English translations in the text without interruption of reading; (2) in case of disagreements on the English translation, the Chinese original may provide the reader with a quick reference.

## Abbreciations

<i>CQFL</i>	<i>Chunqiu fanlu</i>	春秋繁露
<i>HFZ</i>	<i>Hanfeizi</i>	韓非子
<i>HHS</i>	<i>Houhanshu</i>	後漢書
<i>HNZ</i>	<i>Huainanzi</i>	淮南子
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hanshu</i>	漢書
<i>LH</i>	<i>Lunheng</i>	論衡
<i>LJ</i>	<i>Liji</i>	禮記
<i>LY</i>	<i>Lunyu</i>	論語
<i>LZ</i>	<i>Laozi</i>	老子
<i>SGZ</i>	<i>Sanguo zhi</i>	三國志
<i>TPYL</i>	<i>Taiping yulan</i>	太平禦覽
<i>YWLJ</i>	<i>Yiwen leiju</i>	藝文類聚
<i>WX</i>	<i>Wenxuan</i>	文選
<i>WXDL</i>	<i>Wenxin diaolong</i>	文心雕龍
<i>ZZ</i>	<i>Zhuangzi</i>	莊子

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### The Paradox of Significance in Poetics

The fusion of cultural horizons, then, is both possible and necessary. Paradoxically, by becoming aware of the unspoken presuppositions as well as consciously held beliefs of one culture, a person may hope to transcend them and understand those of another culture.

(James J. Y. Liu, *Language—Paradox—Poetics* 118)

It is a classic concern of literary criticism, both in the East and West, as to whether poetry serves as a reliable source for representation of truth. While the nature of truth is in itself subject to changes, the form of poetry—the means by which poetry comes into form, and the manner in which poetry is related to truth—is far from being stable in various discourses of poetics. What appears enduring in the history of poetics is paradox, a relative twist in meaning, in form, and in the relationship between the two.

#### Early Poetics: East and West

In Western literary criticism, for example, the critical attitude toward the gap between poetry and truth often becomes a matter of what kind of truth to register. By denouncing the mimetic nature of poetry, which allegedly caused an inferior representation of both the world of appearances and timeless universals, the Platonic bias of seeing poets as liars made its way till the eve of European Renaissance. It was likewise based on the mimetic nature of poetry, however, Aristotle conceived of the prominent notion of *mythos*, or plot structured in accordance

with “probability” or “believability” of human actions, which was resurrected in the Renaissance and exemplified by the novel or realist fiction in the modern era.

In terms of the means of poetry in question, the Homeric poems in the scope of Plato’s *Republic* are characterized by narratives in speech, or storytelling, as informed by the prevalence of an oral culture which had yet dominated the literary education of poetry in classical Greece while showing hostility toward the alien concept of writing. Allegedly performing an imitation of senses rather than reasoning of truth, and teaching neither the knowledge of craftsmanship nor that of moral goodness, storytelling is accused by Plato of its illusiveness. By extending the means of poetry from narratives in speech to narratives in theatre, on the contrary, Aristotle invested epic and tragedy with self-sufficient literary merits independent of didactic purposes. In imitation of human actions based on plausibility, of which the components are comprehensively discussed in the *Poetics*, poetry is said to have excelled in informing the audience of the universal knowledge of humanity by arousing such purging emotions as pity and fear. Whether carrying out an inferior imitation of divinity or a fine imitation of humanity, the mimetic nature of narrative poems is frequently likened—in classical Western thought—to that of painting and sculpture, which are notably characterized by their iconic representation of reality.

The relativism of meaning and form of poetry becomes more distinct in the scope of comparative poetics, across the borders between the West and East. In the classical tradition of Chinese literary thought, the most prominently discussed literary work—which occupies the same position as the Homeric epic and Greek tragedy in the West—is doubtless the *Classic of Poetry*. As the first preacher of the classic, Confucius is believed to have put down some of the earliest literary commentaries on poetry, which are dispersed in his didactic sayings collected in the *Analects*. Unlike the ample reasoning characteristic of the literary criticism in the *Republic*

and *Poetics*, Confucius' commentaries on poetry are largely made out of intuition. Besides such discrepancy in the intellectual modes of inquiry, Confucius' view about the relation of poetry to the world focuses on elements somewhat different from those in the theories of Greek philosophers: in terms of the empirical reality in literary representation, for example, which falls into the Platonic concept of "world of appearances" and the Aristotelian notion of "human actions," Confucius proposed it to be either cultural entities such as political administration (*zheng* 政) (*Lunyu zhengyi* 13.5.525), kingship (*jun* 君), and fatherhood (*fu* 父), or natural objects such as birds, animals, grass, trees (*niaoshou caomu* 鳥獸草木) (17.8.689); regarding the supreme truth in representation, which was expected by Plato to be "timeless universals" preordained by divinity, Confucius claimed them to be social institutions such as rituals (*li* 禮) (8.8.298) and morals (*de* 德) (14.4.555); about the effects of poetry on the audience, which were generalized by Aristotle as the distribution of knowledge and pleasure, Confucius summarized them as to inspire (*xing* 興), to inform (*guan* 觀), to assimilate (*qun* 群), and to criticize (*yuan* 怨) (17.8.689). Generally speaking, Confucius considered poetry's meaning to lie in affirmation and reinforcement of cultural institutions, whereas Plato and Aristotle traced poetry's meaning further to its potential representation of the original sources of culture, say, divinity or humanity.

As for the form of poetic representation, which supposedly enables the *Classic of Poetry* to pass on cultural institutions, Confucius broadly labelled it as "verbal straightforwardness" (*cida* 辭達) (15.41.642). The implied advocacy for verbal transparency upholds the same ethical assumption as the Greek philosophers expected of verbal representation: good poetry is all that makes true representation of truth. Confucius devoted a particular term to the ethical ideal of good poetry—"thinking no evil" (*si wuxie* 思無邪), the ultimate designation bestowed to the

*Classic of Poetry* (2.2.39).<sup>1</sup> At this point, Confucius' opinion about the form of poetic representation characteristic of the *Classic of Poetry* counters Plato's assumption about the mimetic nature of the Homeric epic, which was blamed for its false representation of moral goodness. By virtue of certain forms of poetic representation acclaimed yet not elaborated by Confucius, the metaphysical sphere of moral goodness—which according to Plato can only be approached through philosophical reasoning—becomes accessible through poetry.

In contrast with the narrative vitality in the Greek epic and tragedy, the *Classic of Poetry* displays a different rhetorical mode, which may be described as descriptive lyricism with limited narrative elements. Instead of a chronically structured assembly of characters and events, the poems in the *Classic of Poetry* present miniature poetic utterances about normally immobile scenes, which were claimed by Confucius to refer to individual moral situations. This distinctive formal nature of poetic representation is further confirmed by the critical practice in which the symbolic art of music (*yue* 樂), rather than the iconic arts of painting and sculpture, was invoked by Confucius as his favorite analogy for poetry (9.15.345).

Classical Confucian poetics—distinguished from classical Western poetics by its lyricism, presumed verbal transparency, and symbolic reference—was by no means immutable. It would soon be split, in the hermeneutical tradition of the *Classic of Poetry*, into the New Text School and the Old Text School in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.),<sup>2</sup> and later evolve into

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to the source of “thinking no evil,” the Confucian scholars in the Han dynasty considered it to be the critical mind of the poet. The Confucian scholars in the Song dynasty, however, or the so-called Neo-Confucian scholars represented by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), considered the source to be the reader.

<sup>2</sup> The New Text school and Old Text school in Han times were both hermeneutical and political schools. They can be likened to modern political parties, one conservative, the other progressive. Unlike modern political polemics focusing on the interpretation of the text of laws, such as the constitution, the Han schools, as well as their descendants in later times, were focused on the interpretation of the text of Confucian canon. The equivalent practice in the West can be found in the Roman Catholic church's interpretation of Scripture in the Middle Ages.

metaphysical poetics under the influence of Neo-Daoism and Buddhism during the Six Dynasties (220-589). The relativism of comparative poetics, as found within and across separate literary conventions, manifests speculative distinctions between cultures and times. At the center of discursive speculations over the reality of poetics is the ever perplexing relationship between meaning and form that poetry assumes.

In the tradition of Western poetics, the relationship between meaning and form of poetry has ever been a problematic issue in the light of the paradox between *mimesis*, an iconic copy of truth, and *poiesis*, the making or creation of an object. Moreover, *poiesis*—a nucleus conception informing the sheer artificiality of *poesy*—has served as the etymological origin of fiction in terms of poetry's fictitious representation of truth. Now, with the same issue inspected in the scope of Chinese poetics, a similar inquiry arises as to what serve as the seminal Chinese ideas about that relationship. With the objective to trace out the Chinese counterpart of the Western rivalry between *mimesis* and *poiesis*, this dissertation inquires into the relationship between meaning and form of poetic representation, as presented in literary and critical discourses, in the vein of early Chinese literature.

Six literary and critical conceptions, separate in form yet integral to the topic, are discussed in this study: (1) myth, especially the mythological accounts centering on the spiritual freedom of the human being, as personified by an archetypal sage; (2) the *shi*, or the literary discourse of poetry modelled on the *Classic of Poetry*, of which the poetics is closely associated with early hermeneutical practices; (3) the *shuo*, a preliminary literary discourse of narrative *talks*, argued here to be the precursor of *xiaoshuo* (petty talks), the Chinese designation for prose fiction; (4) *ming*, or names, a metalinguistic conception under which the relationship between language and meaning was fruitfully debated at an early age; (5) the *wen*, a complex literary



discourse not only referring to textual writing in a rhetorical and ornate style in particular, but gradually to literature in general; and (6) *bian*, or transformation, an eclectic literary idea that derives from Daoist philosophy and gets further theorized in Liu Xie's *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, a 5<sup>th</sup>-century magnum opus of literary criticism that came to lay out a systematic conclusion to early Chinese literary thought.

All together, the six chapters are aimed at solving an age-old issue raised in the *Classic of Changes*: “Wring is incapable of illuminating speech; speech is incapable of illuminating ideas” (7.342). In particular, the chapter of creation myths focuses on the problem of the destination of all ideas or meanings; the chapter of poetry (*shi*) focuses on the problem of speech; the chapter of persuasion (*shuo*) on the problem of fictional narrative; the chapter of names (*ming*) on the problem of language; the chapter of prose (*wen*) on the problem of writing. In the end, the conclusion chapter puts them together, under the literary notion of “transformation” (*bian*), into a continuum of transformation, which not only characterizes the tropological mechanism of poetics and hermeneutics, but highlights the anxiety of significance—or the “anxiety of influence” as Harold Bloom puts it—running through the entire history of a national literature.

The above six literary and critical conceptions are singled out to help shed light on two fundamental issues: *what* poetry is supposed to mean, an issue regarding interpretation and hermeneutics; and *how* it operates to mean, an issue concerning verbal forms and thus poetics. These two issues constitute the two correlated sides of this study: meaning and form, as confined to their presentation and explication in early Chinese literature. Here “form” does not refer to the form of versification or prosody, such as the metrical and rhyming pattern, which do not necessarily create meaning; but it refers to the poetic pattern, in which meaning is transferred from literary signs to human understanding. In other words, form in the vocabulary of this

research corresponds to—in semiotic terms—the relationship between the signifier and the signified of poetic signs.

As for the time span of early Chinese literary thought discussed in this study, it ranges from the beginning of the tradition, such as fragmentary and rudimentary accounts in early texts, to the Six Dynasties, the heyday of classical Chinese literary thought, marked by Liu Xie's *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. In between, relevant literary thought can be found in the accounts of philosophical discourses from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, in hermeneutical texts from the Han dynasty, and in the genre theories from the Three Kingdoms and the Jin dynasty.

The research is conducted with the method of a comparative study, not in that equivalent subjects and types of literature in the Western tradition are imported as the counterparts of the Chinese experiences, but in that all the data regarding Chinese literature and thought are necessarily interpreted and analyzed with the terminology in particular, and critical norms in general, rooted in the Western practice. To achieve this goal requires a preliminary setting of relevant terms and norms, without which foreign or heterogeneous experiences are simply untranslatable. For this purpose, first of all, it is fundamental to assign to the subject of this research a denomination, a central term that is, on the one hand, general enough to circumscribe the terms and norms to be surveyed and, on the other, precise enough to integrate the core issues regarding meaning and form.

### **Debate over Significance: Hirsch, New Criticism, Derrida, Searle**

This denomination is *significance*, a term critically used by American literary critic E. D. Hirsch Jr. in his controversial polemic for a separation between meaning and form. Arguing against the formalist approach of New Criticism in particular, and against interpretative

relativism of “modern theories” in general, Hirsch urged to make a distinction between objective interpretation, aimed at construing a correct textual meaning as intended by the author, and evaluative criticism, dedicated to a further study of the text’s significance, or its “present relevance,” to the reader in terms of the ethical, cultural, or aesthetic values he holds. A determinate textual meaning rooted in the authorial intention, in other words, precedes the text’s varying significance to its critic-reader. In his *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), Hirsch distinguishes between the two concepts, meaning and significance, as follows:

The object of interpretation is textual meaning in and for itself and may be called the *meaning* of the text. The object of criticism, on the other hand, is that meaning in its bearing on something else (standards of value, present concerns, etc.), and this object may therefore be called the *significance* of the text. (211)

The problem of Hirsch’s distinction between meaning and significance lies in its radical split, both logically and chronologically, between an objective referent and its attribute, as though—echoing a 5<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese dispute over the separation between body and spirit—sharpness could be split from a knife.<sup>3</sup> This becomes most evident in the problematic example Hirsch gives as an illustration of the distinction. Borrowing from German philosopher Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) the terms *Sinn* [meaning] and *Bedeutung* [significance], Hirsch tries to showcase a plausible and necessary separation between meaning and significance:

For example, the statement, “Scott is the author of *Waverley*,” is true and yet the meaning of “Scott” is different from that of “the author of *Waverley*. The *Sinn* of

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<sup>3</sup> The Chinese anti-Buddhist philosopher Fan Zhen 范縝 (450-510) says in his *Essay on the Extinction of the Soul*: “The body is the substance of the soul; the soul is the functioning of the body. . . . The relationship of the soul to its substance is like that of sharpness to a knife, while the relationship of the body to its functioning is like that of a knife to sharpness.” Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Vol. 2), 290.

each is different, but the *Bedeutung* (or one aspect of *Bedeutung*—the designatum of “Scott” and “author of *Waverley*) is the same. . . . [D]ifferent *Sinne* have an identical *Bedeutung*, but it is also true that the same *Sinn* may, in the course of time, have different *Bedeutungen*. (211)

In an effort to separate meaning from significance, Hirsch fails to observe the paradoxical interdependence of the two concepts. That is, while the meaning of “Scott” is different from that of “the author of *Waverley*,” it is the shared significance—the intersection between the two meanings—that fuses them into “Scott is the author of *Waverley*,” of which the textual meaning is considered by Hirsch to be true. Along with the alteration of significance, moreover, the referent of “Scott” can be fused with another different referent, as in the new statement “Scott is a Tory;” in the case of “the author of *Waverley*,” likewise, there may be built a new textual meaning like “*Ivanhoe* is by the author of *Waverley*.” Despite making an acute observation that “different meanings have an identical significance, but it is also true that the same meaning may, in the course of time, have different significances,” Hirsch undertakes a problematic divergence away from the innate form of meaning toward a separation between them.

Significance serves both as form and as meaning. It is meaning in terms of its tracing the significant attributes out of an obscure being. It is form, on the other hand, in terms of its shaping new meanings out of dull meanings. At this point, significance is the inseparable unity of the *significant meaning* and the *significant form*. The paradox involved in such a fusion of meaning and form is relentlessly critiqued by Hirsch, who quotes as the target of his attack the following statement by the New Critics René Wellek (1903-1995) and Austin Warren (1899-1986):

It could be scarcely denied that there is [in textual meaning] a substantial *identity* of “structure” which has remained the *same* throughout the ages. This *structure*,

however, is dynamic: it *changes* throughout the process of history while passing through the minds of its readers, critics, and fellow artists. (*Theory of Literature* 144)<sup>4</sup>

This quotation expresses the New Critical concern with the autonomous life of structure. In Hirsch's view, however, it is simply unimaginable that "First the 'structure' is self-identical; then it changes" (214). To solve this dilemma, we may have to conceive the New Critical concept of *structure* as *significance*—a dual entity comprising the significant meaning and the significant form, like a sheet with two sides. What is self-identical and "has remained the *same* throughout the ages" is the significant form, the structure whereby two dull meanings intersect with each other at the point known as the significant meaning. What is dynamic, on the other hand, and "*changes* throughout the process of history" is the significant meaning, the touched point where two dull meanings may possibly meet.

The paradoxical structure in its New Critical sense can be illustrated by one well-known paradox proposed by the early Chinese philosophical School of Names, active in the Warring States period (476-221 B.C.): "Wheels do not touch the ground."<sup>5</sup> According to the paradox, wheels and the ground—two names carrying dull meanings—simply coincide at one point. While the act of touching is always the same, the touched point changes forever. At this point, wheels do not touch or fully identify with the ground. Applied to the conception of significance, we may say, the *touching* serves as the significant form, and the *touched* as the significant meaning. What Hirsch calls the textual meaning of "Scott is the author of *Waverly*", like that of "Wheels do not touch the ground," is becoming meaningful only when the two different referential meanings come to touch at the point known as significance.

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<sup>4</sup> The brackets and italics are made by Hirsch. See Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 214.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Vol. 1), 217-18.

Purposefully excluded by Hirsch from his model of objective interpretation and thus of determinate meaning, the conception of significance marks the dividing line wherefrom Hirsch and the New Criticism—essentially phenomenology and structuralism—are opposed to each other. At bottom, the very issue underlying the dispute is about the origin of meaning. Sharing a tacit consensus in the inseparability between meaning and form, the New Critics perceive structure—paradox or the “equilibrium between opposed forces”—as the origin of varying meaning. Hirsch, on the contrary, insists in the authorial intention being the origin of meaning, by proclaiming that “This permanent meaning is, and can be, nothing other than the author’s meaning” (216).

Another dispute, along the same line of whether meaning derives from consciousness or form, broke out in the 1970s—around a decade after Hirsch’s polemic—between French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and American philosopher John R. Searle.<sup>6</sup> Derrida sees the verbal text, either written or spoken, as a finished object marked by the absence both of the author and the reader. Once it is created, that is, the verbal text is thrown onto the ground of the world, like a wheel created by a craftsman, and begins interacting with its surrounding in the same way a wheel (un)touches the ground. Proposed by Derrida as the identity of the verbal text, *iterability*—a paradox between repetition and alteration—corresponds to the unity of the significant form of *touching* and the significant meaning of the *touched*. Like a wheel rolling along the ground, that is to say, the text perpetually repeats the act of touching its surrounding—the linguistic, institutional, and historical context—and yet eternally alters the touched point. At this point, the meaning of the text is no other than the significant meaning, which is

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<sup>6</sup> About Derrida’s noted dispute with Searle on the speech-act theory of John Austin, cf. Derrida, *Limited Inc* (1998); Jonathan Culler, ‘Meaning and Iterability,’ in *On Deconstruction* (1982); and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, ‘Derrida and the Ethics of Criticism,’ in *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society* (1999).

indeterminate because of its consistent changing (i.e., self-deconstruction) from moment to moment.

Yet for Searle, as well as for Hirsch, a determinate meaning intended by the author has been transmitted into the text in the process it is created. Just as God has created things in the universe and thus ordained divine truth to everything, the author creates his own artefact and instills into it an intentional meaning. The involved semi-religious attitude toward the origin of meaning in the creator's intention explains why structuralists and poststructuralists came to be labelled by Hirsch as "cognitive atheists." Though not rigorously denying the text's significance varying along with the changing context, both Hirsch and Searle treat the intentional meaning as the starting point, rather than an alternative point, of significance.

In this research, significance serves as a more sophisticated term than signification. Signification is a construct of the signifier and the signified, which are neutral. Significance, however, is a construct of the significant form and the significant meaning, which are always involved in power relations. The significant meaning, that is, is always the meaning that is in power. The significant form, consequently, must be the form that helps to lead to this meaning in power. The mimetic form, for example, is the significant form that leads to the powerful meaning of reality. The manifestative or revelatory form is the one that leads to the powerful meaning of divinity. The expressive form suggests the powerful meaning of the authorial genius. The autonomous structural form focuses on the powerful meaning of inherent structure. Ever since deconstruction brought up the significant form of *textuality* or *rhetoricity*, it has to be noted, the significant meaning or meaning in power starts to be self-deconstructed.

The above-mentioned dispute between Searle and Derrida, as well as that between Hirsch and the New Criticism, are just a recent splash in the old river of surging endeavors to trace the

origin of meaning, and thus to determine the form of verbal and literary representation in relation to meaning. Beneath such modern polemics lies a long history of literary ideas dominated by the anxiety of significance, which surely finds a parallel in the history of Chinese ideas.

Before proceeding to Chinese theories, this research undertakes in the next chapter a comprehensive survey—from classical to modern times—of prominent Western ideas on the relationship between meaning and form of poetry. The survey serves two purposes:

First, it serves as a historical review of the topic in the Western tradition. In particular, it helps to expand the relationship between meaning and form from the synchronic *signification* to the diachronic *significance*, which can be eventful with historical and cultural diversity. Along the survey, we are about to see that the criteria of literary studies—namely those of distinction, interpretation, and evaluation of literature—vary greatly with the prevailing presumptions about the significant meaning and form. In the end of the survey, a tentative reconciliation is to be made—under the Hegelian telos that being-for-itself be represented by being-in-itself—among competing ideas, to see whether postmodernism comes to mark “the end of history” of literary criticism.

Second, it serves as a handy manual of critical terms and norms for a comparative study of Chinese theories. “One major problem in dealing with Chinese literary criticism,” as Pauline R. Yu points out, citing James J. Y. Liu for sympathy, “is the tendency of many writers to use ‘highly poetic language to express not so much intellectual concepts as intuitive percepts, which by their very nature defy clear definition’ (Liu, p. 6)” (“Chinese and Symbolist Poetics” 293). A preliminary setting of terms and norms shall prove to be helpful in translating Chinese literary criticism into understandable comparative poetics.



## **Chapter Two**

### **The Anxiety of Significance**

#### **—Setting the Terms**

There are two ways of thinking about various things. The first thinks of truth as a vertical relationship between representations and what is represented. The second thinks of truth horizontally—as the culminating reinterpretation of our predecessors’ reinterpretation of their predecessors’ reinterpretation. It is the difference between regarding truth, goodness, and beauty as eternal objects which we try to locate and reveal, and regarding them as artefacts whose fundamental design we often have to alter. (Richard Rorty 92)

Literary criticism is an enterprise of terms. The use of terms, on the one hand, has its tradition; on the other, it can be a messy forest of ideas. This chapter on “setting the terms” gives a survey, as well as a re-organization, of Western ideas related to the central theme of “significance.” The subsequent discussion of Chinese ideas on the same theme largely relies on a rendering between equivalent terms. To begin with, let us settle for the survey a contextual framework of criticism, a test case, and a general division of historical periods.

The American literary critic M. H. Abrams has set up the influential four-coordinate framework of artistic criticism, whereby all accounts of literature can be discussed in the four categories of universe, work, artist, and audience (6-7). In order to reflect the distinction between referent and meaning, which becomes apparent both in traditional metaphysics and in modern linguistics, we are dividing the category of “universe” into “reality,” which refers to the totality

of natural objects, historical events, and human acts that happens in time and space, and “truth,” an epistemological horizon for meaning which putatively matters beyond time and space. In the meantime, as the source or origin of meaning keeps changing in various discourses, we may have to add another horizon, “tradition,” to designate the history of power relations between discourses, institutions, and disciplines. In this survey, therefore, all the accounts on meaning and form of literature are discussed within a six-horizon framework, including (1) text, (2) reality, (3) truth, (4) author, (5) reader, and (6) tradition.

A short verse line taken from Chinese Tang poetry is used as a test case, subject to a close reading whenever it is illustrative of the theory in question. This verse line reads: “A leaf falling informs the autumn befalling under the heaven (一葉落知天下秋).” It is chosen for several reasons. First, it may suggest the absence of referent. For a reader who does not read Chinese, the verse line in the written form of Chinese instantly shows that referent is not present in language. Hence the verse in Chinese serves as a sustaining reminder of the distinction between language and referent. Second, it also suggests the absence of authorial intention, for it is an anonymous verse. No biographical and intertextual material related to the author can be attained so as to help to retrieve an intentional meaning of the text. Third, it is characteristic of ambiguity of meaning. It is indeterminate as for whether the predicate indicates “to inform,” functioning as an ontological signification from Nature’s point of view, or “to know,” functioning as epistemic knowledge from man’s point of view. As the consequence, the verse line may be alternatively paraphrased as “A leaf falls informs all under the heaven of the autumn befalling.” Lastly, the intertextual history of the verse line gives an example of the presence of poetic form in various linguistic uses. As a lyric poetic line from the Tang era (618-907), the verse finds its intertextual origin in a philosophical discourse dated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., and thence goes into ordinary

language in the form of a four-character idiomatic expression.<sup>7</sup> Its most commonly accepted meaning about the withering of human life finds similar versification in, to name a few, “My way of life / Is fall’n into the sere, the yellow leaf” (*Macbeth* 5.3.23-24), and “My days are in the yellow leaf” (Lord Byron, “On This Day I Complete My Thirty-sixth Year” line 5).

The history of Western ideas covered in this survey is divided, on an epistemological basis, into three periods: the metaphysical age, spanning from classical Greece and Roman till the end of the Middle Ages, when it was thought that there was a priori truth or knowledge beyond the world of things; the empirical age, spanning from Renaissance to Romanticism, when it was thought that no truth or knowledge existed prior to the empirical experiences of human mind; the linguistic turn, ranging from structuralism to poststructuralism, when pre-existed meaning or truth started to give way to the poetic structure of language and the text. The entire history of Western ideas concerning the meaning and form of literature is characterized by a transition of the concept of representation, from imitative representation to substitutive representation.

### **The Metaphysical Age**

Despite the rise of Sophists during the late 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. at Athens, who professed and taught rhetoric as an independent knowledge for persuasion, poetry had played the role to teach the knowledge of crafts or practical wisdoms ever since the Homeric age. It was not until Plato (cir. 427-347 B.C.) that the nature of knowledge was proclaimed to be timeless universals known as Forms or Ideas, which were regulated by the supreme Form of Good. This metaphysical orientation of knowledge further led to Plato’s definition of the relation between poetry and

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<sup>7</sup> The four-character idiomatic expression is “一葉知秋 [A leaf informs the autumn].” The philosophical discourse is the *Huainan zi* 淮南子, of which the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter contains the following words: “以小明大, 見一葉落, 而知歲之將暮 [By the small is the large illuminated. Seeing a leaf falling, one knows of the year coming to its end]” (16.21). Other than indicated, the translation is mine.

knowledge. Defined as an inferior representation of external objects that were themselves inferior copies of Forms or Ideas, poetry was considered to be “two steps away from” timeless universals (10.599a). While such metaphysical knowledge was accepted as truth, poetry was censored as lies in terms of its deteriorating representation of truth. Consequently, the central position of poetic education in Greek culture was argued by Plato to be replaced by philosophical education in an ideal republic to be ruled by philosopher-guardians.

Speaking of poetry, Plato specifically referred to the Homeric poems and tragic plays, which were regularly cited by Socrates—Plato’s mouthpiece in the majority of his philosophical dialogues. The narrative poems relating ancient heroic stories were denounced by the philosopher as distorting timeless universals and thus ruining moral goodness. This judgement about the nature of poetry virtually labelled literary representation as being illusory. According to Plato, the illusory, immoral status of poetry was caused by the form it wore in relation to truth: *mimesis*. By banishing poetry from his ideal republic, Plato argued for the foundation of philosophy, which allegedly helped to secure authentic *logos* for morals. So long as metaphysical universals reigned as truth, as was the case from the classical times through the Renaissance, poetry was condemned to be inferior to philosophy. It was not until the rise of modern philosophy, when the metaphysical tradition came to be challenged by humanistic values, that the superiority of timeless universals started to give place to individual experiences. One exception was Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), the student of Plato.

The philosophy of Aristotle was epistemologically different from that of his teacher in terms of the sources of truth as well as of knowledge. Whereas Plato resorted to the metaphysical realm of universal being for truth and moral goodness, Aristotle looked into the elements and structures of particular things in the realm of reality. Rather than condemning poetry as inferior

to truth and perilous to ideal government, as did Plato, Aristotle turned his attention toward the inherent elements and structures of poetry, as investigated in his *poetics* and *rhetoric*. According to *Poetics*, for example, the objects of poetic mimesis, in the Homeric poems and tragic plays, are not lofty Forms or Ideas, but the actions and lives of human beings (6.1450a).<sup>8</sup> Mimesis, therefore, does not corrupt human beings, but educate and entertain them as required by the natural causes of human culture (3.1448b). In comparison with Plato who considered poetry to be devoid of truth and knowledge, not only did Aristotle reorient philosophical concerns with truth from Platonic universals to human particulars, but also inaugurated poetics as a fundamental branch of knowledge.

Aristotle's contribution to the theory of poetics lies in that, in distinguishing poetry from history, he outlines the significant form of poetic representation as *probability* and, justifiably, *improbability*. Poetry is the kind of art that depicts incidents "that may happen" instead of those "that have happened" (8.1451b). As the most important part among the six parts of tragedy,<sup>9</sup> plot is structured in accordance with "probability" or "necessity," which Aristotle regards as the universal derived from particulars. Aristotle's departure from his teacher, in terms of his philosophical revision of the nature of truth, marked a significant transition in literary criticism with regard to *mimesis*: whereas Plato considered poetic mimesis to be twice moved away from metaphysical truth, Aristotle claimed poetry to be philosophically superior to history by virtue of its representation of empirical truth derived from particulars.

Aristotle defines a poet to "be a composer of plots rather than of verses" (9.1451b). The finest tragic poet, suggests Aristotle, is the one who structures complex plots that contain

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<sup>8</sup> The Bekker numbers are used in citing Aristotle's *Poetics*, as is the universal way of documenting the Greek philosopher, with the figures referring to the pages and columns of the 1831 edition by Immanuel Bekker.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle saw tragedy as comprised of the six parts of plot, characters, diction, song, reasoning, and spectacle.

reversals or recognitions, of which the effects are to arouse terrors or pities in the audiences (9.1452a). Occupying the central position in Aristotle's discussion on poetics, reversals or recognitions mimic possible transitions in the sequence of historical incidents and thus fulfill probability or necessity all poetry are aimed at. As the highest standard for poetic representation of human actions, probability or necessity serves as the significant form by which a logical analogy is made between plot and historical incidents. Despite his stress on the unity of time—namely the 24-hour constraint on plot—which Ian Watt considers to be conflicting with the time process featuring modern realism, Aristotle's idea of probability or necessity marks the initial attempt in theorizing the nature of realism.

Another realistic element in the Aristotelian form of probability or necessity consists in the logical analogy made between characters and common people. The twist of reversals or recognitions in tragedy, according to Aristotle, is alternatively accomplished by a great error made by the character who, instead of being superior or inferior in virtue, is moderate as common people and may be superior only in magnitude (13.1453a). This realistic approach to characterization would later be applied by Northrop Frye to his extended classification of five modes of fiction. The low mimetic mode in Frye's system, for instance, which is defined in part by the similarity between heroes and ordinary people and fits into the literary manner of realism, finds its earliest articulation in Aristotle's discussion on characters.

In contrast with Plato's critique of the mimetic nature of the Homeric poems, Aristotle proclaims Homer's marvelousness in the art of representation. Homer's construction of plots, in Aristotle's view, exemplifies the ideal structure of plot: that is, a simple focus on a whole action, like the siege of Troy in *Iliad*, and a complex transformation of the sequence of incidents, like the recognition in the end of *Odyssey* (23.1459a). As probability or necessity serves as the

significant form of poetic representation, however, Aristotle seems obliged to justify a series of improbabilities in the Homeric poems. It is from here, till the end of *Poetics*, that Aristotle extends literary criticism to a much broader sphere, which covers such issues as representation, aesthetics, and interpretation. Based on these issues, the philosopher examines not only the gap between representation and reality, but also that between representation and the composer, as well as that between representation and the spectator.<sup>10</sup>

From the first type of relation, or the gap between representation and reality, arises either probability or improbability based on the variety of reality, which ranges from things as they are, through things as they are said to be, to things as they should be. When poetry represents things as they are said to be and as they should be, which fall under improbability, it can become credible only by employing persuasive embellishment such as rhetoric (25.1460b). The difference between probability based on things as they are and improbability based on things as they are said to be and as they should be lies in that, whereas the former gives rise to a representation in accordance with reasoning, the latter leads to a representation blemished by oddities. Although improbability is considered by Aristotle to be secondary to probability, its credibility can still be remedied by rhetoric, which is likewise considered by the philosopher to be secondary to representation. It has to be noted that, therefore, the concept of credibility or believability, which regularly appears in the Aristotelian terminology regarding poetics, is not only an effect caused by probability in the representation of reality, but also the receptive response of a spectator who is convinced by rhetoric.

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<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 25 of *Poetics*, Aristotle gives explanations in response to the criticism of 12 types of improbabilities in the Homeric poems. The dozen improbabilities seem to be caused, in general, by 3 kinds of relationship involving representation, as listed here.

From the second type of relation, or the gap between representation and the composer, arises improbability based on the nature of the composer, who may err either by his problematic knowledge about reality or by his lack of skills in the art. The erring by the poet's ignorance of reality, according to Aristotle, can be remedied either by a skilful representation or by the poet's creation of things as they should be (25.1461a). In contrast with Plato, who maintains that poetry is a form of divinely inspired madness or genius, Aristotle claims poetry to be a form of art based on two aspects: its formal reliance on skills of representation and its accommodation of creation of things as they should be. While probability is doubtless held by Aristotle as the highest standard for poetic representation of reality, improbability is yet acceptable for poetry by virtue of its artistic effects. This type of improbability, which is remedied by the poet's skills of representation and especially by his original creation of ideals, serves as another source of the significant form, other than probability or necessity. The involved authorial approach to poetic representation would eventually lead to critical concerns with the roles played by the author's ideology in the construction of narrative, as concerns Hayden White in his *Fiction of Narrative*.

From the third type of relation, or the gap between representation and the spectator, arises improbability based on the variety of interpretation, which is conditioned either by the use of rhetoric and metaphor in poetry or by readers' assumptions about poetry's signification. The significant form marked by this type of improbability had always been active in biblical hermeneutics, which considers the divine truth to be preserved in fictional parables. From the 1960s onward, Aristotle's concerns with the improbability generated in readership has been revived in such reader-response theory as Wolfgang Iser's aesthetic response, which sees the meaning of text as being constantly generated throughout the reading by a reader who appropriates both his experience and imagination.



In his *Ars Poetica* (18 B.C.), the Roman poet Horace (65-8 B.C.) appears to be a reconciler between Plato and Aristotle by viewing poetry as a blending of genius and craft. By his poetry, moreover, he acted as a mediator between Greek classics and contemporary Roman literature. Horace, on the one hand, encourages new generations of Roman poets to draw their lines from substantial and accurate imitations of the model of current life and manners (287-88); on the other, he prefers retelling of Greek myths and epic cycle to invention of names and circumstances that are unknown and unsaid (282-83). The high literature in Horace's view, therefore, is a transitional one, which both builds a promising identity of Roman manners and claims its ancestry in the Greek tradition. Such literature was exemplified by Virgil (70-19 B.C.) and Ovid (43 B.C.-18 A.D.). Ovid's *Metamorphosis* echoed the call for a great transformation by its comprehensive transfiguration of Greek deities into local images, while Virgil's *Aeneid* started from the thick of the Homeric poems and extended the blood of Greek origin to the new world of Rome.

Virgil and Ovid's poems, as well as the Horatian poetics, introduced another significant form of poetry, which rests on the gap between revision and tradition. As long as tradition had been established as truth or reality—e.g., the Greek tradition of poetic representation in the hands of Roman poets—poetry was not only subject to the principle of mimesis set forth by Plato and Aristotle, but also brought forth a new horizon of poetic imitation whereby poetry tended to imitate great predecessors. Horace's instruction regarding the relation between contemporary poetry and tradition anticipated a series of theoretical concerns with the intertextual connections among literary works, as presented by some modern theorists: (1) the history of literature may be presented as a complex network of texts or traditions referential to each other, as described by the term *intertextuality* coined by Julia Kristeva; (2) so long as intertextuality is based on the

canonization of tradition—namely, subsequent literature admirably imitates its predecessors by extending or branching from them—the cycle of literature may take the form of *palimpsest*, or an accumulative body of *hypertexts* and *hypotexts*, as suggested by Gérard Genette; (3) so long as intertextuality is based on the negation of tradition—that is, subsequent poets ironically imitate their predecessors by revising or reevaluating them—the literary lineage may be characterized by a struggle of revisionism against the anxiety of influence, as discerned by Harold Bloom.

As the founder of Neo-Platonism, the Roman philosopher Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) revised Plato's dismissive view about poetry in terms of its relation to truth. Whereas Plato regarded poetry as imitation twice removed from the Divine Oneness and thus inferior to both truth and reality, Plotinus considered poetry to be the emanation of the divine Intellect, which sustains an intellectual ascent of poets and readers to the Absolute Being. This notion of poetry as the emanation of truth is derived from Plotinus' principle that truth is not an external spectacle to be perceived by the spectator, but a divine identity to be conceived by human soul. Without the divine Intellect being the archetype of human soul and thus of art, poetry would have failed in conveying the meaning of truth.

It has to be noted that, as a Neo-Platonist, Plotinus still followed Plato in evaluating art within a hierarchical order of existence. The hierarchy comprised a superior, transcendental realm, where universal Forms or Ideas ruled as truth, and a lower, mundane realm, where things existed as secondary copies of the metaphysical. It was over the question of whether poetry came to reconcile or aggravate the hierarchical order that Plotinus departed from Plato. Whereas Plato criticized poetry for being secondary copies of the physical world and thus moving farther away from truth, Plotinus proclaimed poetry's manifestation of truth by virtue of the involvement of the poet's intuitive acquisition of universal Forms or Ideas. Plotinus' revision of Plato's idea

entailed a series of new concerns with the meaning and form of poetry: (1) poetry serves rather as manifestation than as mimesis of truth; (2) poetic manifestation of truth is achieved through the intellectual participation of the poet; (3) poetry helps sustain an intellectual ascent of both the poet and the reader toward truth. The involved transcendental view of poetry and the poet's intuitive approach to truth would be echoed in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century American Transcendentalism championed by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).

Plotinus' theory of manifestation is grounded on the idea that a primal wisdom presides over the making of all works including nature and craft. In the Plotinist hierarchical order of universe, it is the divine Intellect, or the supreme and omnipresent Wisdom of the Absolute Being, that serves as the principle for all forms of existence. In terms of the realms of its residence, the Intellect may manifest itself in three grades of principle: the Intellectual-Principle, which is the primal archetype only existing in the transcendental realm; the Reason-Principle, which is the equivalent of the primal archetype existing in human soul; and the Nature-Principle, which is the equivalent of the primal archetype existing in material forms (424). As far as they are regarded as real beings—i.e. the existence possessing the verity of the transcendental—nature and craft take on their forms as the manifestation, or emanation, of the primal archetype of the divine Intellect. In contrast with Plato who sees poetry as passive and indifferent copies of the sensible world, Plotinus regards the soul of the poet as one integral part of the transcendental world and consequently treats poetry as the formal manifestation of truth through the intellectual participation of the poet.

The intellectual participation of the poet is aimed at the Reason-Principle, the intellectual image of the divine Intellect obtained by human soul through contemplation based on knowledge and wisdom. Just as the statue of Olympian Zeus was created against the material resistance of

an unpatterned stone by the Greek sculptor Pheidias upon his apprehension of what image the god must take if manifesting to vision, the art of poetry or music derives its intellectual beauty from the Reason-Principle of the divine Beauty, which is held by its designer who simultaneously knows how to subdue the crude resistance of the formal material with his senses (422-23). Once the artistic work is completed, suggests Plotinus, the Reason-Principle of beauty previously owned by the soul of the designer is communicated into the Nature-Principle of beauty found in the material being of art (423).

Plotinus' conception of the intellectual participation of the poet departed from Plato's concept of *genius* in that it considers the Reason-Principle, rather than divinely inspired madness, to be the creative source of poetry. For the first time in classical literary criticism, the position of the poet was promoted as high as next to—in the metaphysical tradition—the transcendental realm of truth. Aristotle discussed the role played by the poet's *ideals* in the representation of things as they should be, but his conception of intellectual participation of the poet is subordinated to *probability* derived from historical reality, which is held as the significant form of mythos in the Aristotelian poetics.

In the Plotinist theory of manifestation, therefore, the divine Intellect is an existence prior to poetry. It is through the intellectual participation of the poet that poetry acquires its form of beauty, which tends to identify with the intellectual Beauty. According to Plotinus, the degree of beauty gets weaker in the entire process of reaching outside as manifestation, i.e. throughout the transmission of universal Forms or Ideas from the primal Intellect in its concentrated unity through the Reason-Principle in human soul to the Nature-Principle in the matter of art (422). As for the reason of this decrease in truth, the philosopher suggests that the material nature of art performs resistance to the manifestation of the Intellect and is therefore to be subdued throughout

the process of artistic creation (422). Because of the losses found in the subdual of the poetic discourse, poetry created in the light of the Reason-Principle of the poet does not sustain unchanged images of the primal archetype of the Intellectual-Principle, but displays a lesser real manifestation of the original. It is in this sense that Plotinus notes that ancient Egyptians relied on the drawing-forms, rather than the writing-forms which allegedly “represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasoning,” to keep a transparent manifestation of the divine Intellect (427). In Plotinus’ view, that is, texts would put more resistance to the manifestation of truth because of the phonetic representation and discursive reasoning involved in the writing-forms.

Not only does truth decrease, according to Plotinus, in the subdual of material resistance of art, but also in the formation of *imago* in human soul. By the term *imago*, “portrait” or “statue” in Latin, Plotinus refers to the ideal form in the poet’s soul, and thus the highest form of art, that identifies with the divine Beauty. In addition to its formal resistance—that is, its indirect, verbal representation of reality—poetry, like other types of art, cannot bridge the gap between the *imago* acquired by the poet and the divine Intellect. Although it is one of Plotinus’ doctrines that the ideal image formed in human soul is intuitive emanation of the divine Intellect, the ideal image of Zeus in the soul of the sculptor Pheidias is merely the initial manifestation of the intellectual, formless being of the god. “The very figment of being,” admits Plotinus, “needs some imposed image of Beauty to make it passable, and even to ensure its existence” (430). It is in this sense that the intellectual participation of the poet boils down to the *imaginary* which furnishes the divine Intellect with the form of beauty. The concept of *imaginary*—the human being’s fascination with *imago* or form—would be elaborated by the 20<sup>th</sup>-century French psychologist Jacques Lacan, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As an educator of rhetoric, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian (30-100 A.D.) devotes most of his philosophical speculations, in his *Institutio Oratoria*, on the relationship between language and the orator, as well as that between language and the audience. In an effort to re-organize the traditional and often confusing uses of rhetorical modes, Quintilian makes a major distinction between *tropes*, which are “applied to the transference of expression from their natural and principal signification to another,” and *figures*, which are “employed when we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and ordinary” (3.351). Both of them are essential to the use of language because they either “help out our meaning” or “adorn our style” (3.301). Upon a further distinction between figures of thought and figures of speech, Quintilian comes to imply the originally figurative nature of “the mind, feeling or conceptions” and the expressive nature of speech in that “we conceive ideas before we express them” (3.357-59). By positioning the central meaning or significance of a rhetorical speech onto the inner activities of the orator, Quintilian harbingered the expressive theory of literature that would be largely echoed in the ideas of Romanticism. At the same time, by asserting “there is no more effective method of exciting the emotions than an apt use of figures” (3.359), he also carried forward the pragmatic theory of literature that focuses on the effects of “delight” and “instruction” in the Aristotelian tradition.

As a Christian theologian zealous in the establishment of Biblical Scriptures toward the end of the Western Roman Empire, St. Augustine (354-430) helped lay down a theoretical tradition that would dominate an authoritative interpretation of the Bible throughout the Middle Ages. The core of the Augustinian theory regarding Biblical interpretation rests on the correspondence between the “word of man” and the “Word of God.” As the divine truth prior to the word of man, the Word of God, on the one hand, “is scattered in the sounds of many different

languages through the hearts and mouths of men;” on the other, “in the likeness of our word, there is also this likeness of the Word of God” (*Trinity* 478-79). The rhetorical correspondence between the two spheres of likeness is claimed by Augustine to be realized through *tropes*, or figurative signs that “occur when that thing which we designate by a literal sign is used to signify something else” (*Christian Doctrine* 43). Elaborating on the metaphorical statement made by the apostle Paul—“We see now through a mirror in an enigma” (1 Corinthians 13.12)—Augustine strikes a balance between the classical mimetic theory and the tropological theory regarding the workings of language. Profoundly influential to the ideas of such modern linguists as Saussure, the referential structure in the Augustinian sign theory points to the significance of Godhead, the ultimate meaning to be sought out of the Bible.

This mutual correspondence between the signified things and the ultimate significance in the Augustinian sign theory was further developed by the 12<sup>th</sup>-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor (1097-1141), in the *Didascalicon*, to a triple structure of exposition aiming at an appropriate reading of Scriptures. For Hugh, an interpretative exposition pays attention to three things: the letter (words), the sense (the obvious meaning presented by words), and the inner meaning (a deeper understanding to be realized only through interpretation and commentary) (92). Although the sense, or the meaning on the linguistic surface, tends to disagree, the divine deeper meaning “can never be absurd, never false” and “admits no contradiction, is always harmonious, always true” (149-50). Furthermore, Hugh proposes a threefold meaning system involved in the “deeper meaning” of Scriptures: the historical (which refers to the sacred history of God and humankind), the allegorical (which refers to the spiritual and theological principles), and the tropological (which refers to the moral and contemplative undertakings) (120). While acknowledging the fact that “a great multitude of true concepts [are] elicited from a few words,”

Hugh prescribes that the multiplicity of Biblical meanings should be governed by the significance of “sound faith,” which pre-exists both reading and interpretation of Sacred Scriptures (150).

In the same Christian exegetical tradition as established by Augustine 8 centuries earlier, the theoretical issue that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) faced, in his *Summa Theologica*, was still about the reconciliation between the sacred truth and the figurative language of the Bible. With a conspicuous transition in the intellectual development of medieval scholasticism, nevertheless, Aquinas “turned the preoccupation of Christian metaphysics from the Platonic realm yonder of forms to an Aristotelian, immediately experienced world of natural substances” (Wimsatt 125-26). This new preoccupation with a substantial world is reflected in the focus on the “material things,” or “corporeal things,” which are fundamental for the divine and spiritual truths in Holy Writ to be expounded (Aquinas 1.6). The referential process of Biblical language is thus divided by Aquinas into two stages: the first or literal signification “whereby words signify things,” and the second or spiritual signification “whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification . . . , which is based on the literal, and presupposes it” (1: 7). While proposing an alternative fourfold division of signification, which includes the literal/historical sense, the allegorical/theological sense, the tropological/moral sense and the anagogical/mystical sense, Aquinas emphasizes that “all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended in allegory, as Augustine says” (1: 7). By now, the medieval theories of Biblical exegesis that began with the Augustinian transcendence toward the “Word of God” had come down to the Thomistic interests on sensible objects.

In the millenium from Augustine through Hugh to Aquinas, the medieval exegetical tradition saw an expansion of allegory theory, which developed from the dual correspondence



between the literal sign and the divine meaning, through the triple structure, to the fourfold system of interpretation dedicated to an explication of various layers of sacred significance. This interpretative phenomenon of multiple meanings contained in the sacred text was called by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), in his *Letter to Can Grande*, as *polysemous*, which comprises four types of meaning, still in the Thomistic terminology, including the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical (99). What distinguishes Dante from his predecessors lies in his ground-breaking division between the “allegory of theologians” and the “allegory of poets.” While all the four layers of meaning in the eyes of a theologian are historically and spiritually true, according to Dante in the *Il Convivio*, the allegorical significance intended by a poet—i.e., the divine meanings of the allegorical, moral and anagogical—“is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction” (40). With divine meanings still serving as the ultimate significance in poetry, that is, the literary sign at the literal level of meaning is open to secular fiction, rather than being strictly historical, whenever it takes on the form of a secular text such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. This historic transition in the theoretical thinking regarding the polysemic nature of poetic language is most clearly stated in Erich Auerbach’s division between “figurism” and “allegorism.”

Under the influence of Dante’s idea regarding the legitimacy of fiction in the representation of truth, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) proceeds to proclaim that “poetry . . . is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented” and “it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction” (39). The truth wrapped in the artificially invented fiction, according to Boccaccio, includes such moral and divine meanings as “the truly praiseworthy ideals of human character, the forces of our Mother Nature, the true good, and the secrets of heaven” (33). It is this gap between the fiction

on the surface and the truth under the veil that causes obscurities which further lead to multiple interpretations of poetry. With the moral and divine significance being the desired meaning, as explained by Boccaccio, the ultimate discovery of the hidden truth will pay off all strenuous intellectual efforts by manifesting the poetic majesty and dignity that are designed after all to “enhance the reader’s pleasure and support his memory” (61-62).

Two renaissance scholars, Giacompo Mazzoni (1548-1598) and Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), need to be noted here for their landmark comments in defense of poetry, with the latter defending the fictional nature of poetry in general and the former defending the phantastic aspect of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. According to Mazzoni, in his treatise *On the Defense of the Comedy of Dante*, Dante excels all the other poets in carrying out the highest mode of poetry, which is elaborately defined by Mazzoni as “a game made with verses, number, and harmony, singly or together, imitating the credible marvelous and invented by the civil faculty to delight the people in a useful way” (108). With *mimesis* or imitation still occupying the pivotal position in the process of poetry-making, Mazzoni’s definition of poetry is distinguished from medieval ideas both by his neo-Aristotelian emphasis on the credible in poetic imitation and by a shift of significance from divine theology to civil faculty. Echoing the Platonic theme in instilling into the civil society the moral philosophy regarding worthy goodness, on the one hand, Mazzoni regards poetics as a fundamental branch of the civil faculty, arguing the end or significance of poetry to be residing in the noble concepts of “moral teachings seasoned with poetic sweetness” (99). On the contrary to Plato’s favour of the icastic or realistic imitation over the phantastic or imaginary imitation, on the other, Mazzoni maintains that phantastic poetry, descending from ancient sophistry, “offers feigned things to our intellects in order to regulate the appetite” and “contains under the outer covering of fiction the truth of many noble concepts” (83). As for the

fiction of feigned things that allegedly serve as the outer coat of moral truth, Mazzoni incorporates the specific Platonic term—“the making of idols”—to define the subject of poetic art as the making of credible images or sensible simulacra based on comparisons and similitudes, instead of relying on the rigid realistic standards that are merely concerned either with the true and the false or with the possible and the impossible (76-78).

Importing the continental, and especially the Italian, critical ideas into the English criticism, Sir Philip Sidney harbingered, by his “The Defence of Poesy,” a theoretical debate over the form and meaning of poetic imitation in the British literary tradition descending from Chaucer. With *mimesis* serving as the dominant idea regarding the nature of poetry from the classical period to the Renaissance, Sidney brings forth his definitions of poesy that both reconcile the Platonic and Aristotelian views on the role of poetry in human life and synthesize classical and medieval literary ideas. Following the increasing emphasis on the fictional nature of poetry in the late medieval criticism, Sidney lifts the status of a poet to that of “a maker,” and therefore elevates the role of poetry right after the Scriptures, by arguing that “only the poet, disdain[ing] to be tied to any such subjection (to nature), lifted up with vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature” (8-9). Based on his belief in the creative faculty of a poet, Sidney proceeds to refute the classical accusation of poets as liars by claiming that right poets “imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be, but range only reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what may be and should be” (11). The ultimate meaning or significance of poetry, as asserted by Sidney to be “what may be and should be,” conforms to the Platonic ideal of Forms or Ideas which act as the original sources of the moral good. In order to approach such an end as the providential

design, poetry needs to follow a representational pattern different from philosophy and history. Excelling in both vividly illustrating philosophical principles and universally dramatizing historical accounts, concludes Sidney, “so in poesy looking for fiction, they (readers) shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention” (34-35). As for the moral status of the creator of fiction, “the poet . . . nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth” (34).

### **The Empirical Age**

The distinctive favor held by European humanists of the Renaissance toward the robust nature of the human being in classical representation, though largely incorporated into the religious framework of Christianity, anticipated the elevation of human liberty as the central theme of Enlightenment. An intellectual movement lasting from the 17<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Enlightenment saw the transition of a universal truth from religious revelation to human nature. While the term “nature” was in itself of ambiguous references in the contemporary system of knowledge, the emphases on various aspects of human nature in different trends of literary thought had better be described in contrast with the values that humanity came to counteract. In opposition to the corrupt nature of mankind as established in the religious discourse, Renaissance started to weigh this-worldliness over other-worldliness; subduing the “animal” nature of human instincts, Neo-Classicism proposed human reason as the universal truth of humanity with which to re-order human activities; turning against the dehumanization of Nature brought about by modern sciences and technologies under the

influence of human reason, Romanticism urged to bring Nature back into the light of human feelings.<sup>11</sup>

A synthesizer of gentile history, medieval theology, and modern ideas, the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) redefines the figurative signification characterizing medieval hermeneutics as the origin of all poetic representation. In his enlightenment project of the *New Science*, which aims at establishing a universal theory of human history, Vico describes an ideal eternal history as the historical development of human institutions that are forever conducted by divine institutions or the divine providence (102). As the two branches growing from the same trunk of human institutions, the civil theology provides human beings with such institutions as logic, morals, religions, and history, and the natural theology offers physics and relevant natural sciences (112). In the gentile or pre-Christian history, which had allegedly run through the three stages of gods, heroes, and men, the correspondence between human and divine institutions was realized by the poetic theology which, as the “master key” of the *New Science*, regulates human institutions through such sensible signs as poetic characters created by the earliest poets in the gentile world (21-22). A famous example given by Vico about the origin of poetry, of which the language has been lost in modern humanity immersed in abstract reasons, is about the poetic creation of Jove by gentile humanity abounding in imaginary senses: the natural wonders of lightning and thunderbolts were considered by gentile poets as the sign or language of a divine will, which was personified in the poetic character of Jove according to their corporeal understanding of the universe.

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<sup>11</sup> As for a comprehensive survey of the senses of the term *nature* used in the Neo-classical age, cf. A. O. Lovejoy, “Nature as Aesthetic Norm,” *Modern Language Notes* XLII (1927): 444-50, wherein a list of 37 senses is set forth; quoted by Wimsatt, *Literary Criticism*, 317.

This primitive poetic wisdom, Vico maintains, differs from modern rhetorical practices in that, whereas the former creates animate substances such as a variety of divine beings to signify the physical bodies of the sky, the earth, the sea, etc., the latter make use of particular images to explain spiritual things (127-128). Yet both of them share the same poetic modes of four master tropes—metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony—which find their original use in the poetic expression of the first human beings (131). It was based on the poetic wisdom characterized by senses and imagination rather than on the philosophical wisdom featuring reasoning and generalization, according to Vico, that early gentile nations came to describe the beginnings of an unknown world via imaginary metaphors and fables (297). As a departure from the classical mimetic theory of poetry, the expressive nature of Vico's poetic theology brings the poet's consciousness to the center of literary interpretation. The significance of human ideas, which in Vico's understanding precedes both speech and writing, is to be interpreted based on the figurative correlation between natural objects and anthropomorphic deities. Reflecting the enlightenment preoccupation with human spirituality, the Vichian theory prefigures the expressive nature of poetry that dominates the literary ideas of Romanticists.

#### Neo-Classicism

Despite the elevated significance of human consciousness in its scope, Vico's theory of poetic theology retains the medieval preference for divine institutions over human institutions, a preference that Neo-Classicism came to reconcile with human nature. With its reference to the universal actions and passions of men, human nature in its Neo-classical sense is an integral part of the cosmic Nature—the whole of all things in the universe that strive toward what Aristotle called the *entelechy*, or the completeness of the genuine being. The natural canon of formal uniformity and moral perfection, as most wonderfully represented by the literary canon from

classical antiquity, became the most desired truth to be imitated by poetry in the eyes of Neo-classical critics. At this point, the classical truth of the divine purpose, as embodied by Nature, started to be overshadowed by the distinctive order of Nature in the light of the Neo-classical criticism. Consequently, the creative power held by the demiurge, in imitation of which a classical poet creates poetry, gradually gave way to the creative process of Nature as the tribunal of literary art.

In addition to the foregrounded truth of cosmic Nature, a fundamental transition in the mode of interpretation emerged along with the rise of *deism*, a strong strand of theological rationalism that came to prominence during the European enlightenment. Shifting from the interpretive mode of revelation to that of reasoning, *deism* relied on man's universal, empirical experiences of Nature for the evidence of God's creation, rather than on particular, mystical events recorded in the scriptures for the signals of divine ordinance. Affected by this time spirit of rationalism, the allegorical interpretation—once held as the foundation of medieval hermeneutics—passed its dominance back to the classical theory of *mimesis* which, in its Aristotelian sense, treats poetry as a representation of human actions in reality. The Neo-classical ideal of literary imitation found its best formulation in the metaphor of “a mirror held up to nature,” a poetic image adapted from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>12</sup> The involved process of imitation, it has to be noted, is three-fold: (1) the subject matter of poetry is an imitation of Nature; (2) the poet carries out his poetic creation in imitation of the natural creation; (3) the artistic craft of poetry finds its model in classical canon. It is based on this composite nature of formation that poetry may bring to the reader such effects as pleasure and instruction.

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<sup>12</sup> In Act III, Scene ii, Hamlet is giving one of the three players his instructions as follows: “. . . for any thing so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature . . .” (*Hamlet* 3.2.19-22)

The poetic idea that strings together the above-mentioned three aspects of Neo-classical imitation was encapsulated in particular in the term *wit*, a critical concept re-discovered and enriched by the English critics from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Normally referring to the mental faculty of someone to perceive keenly or express subtly, *wit* started to designate the conceptual fusion of disparate things or ideas, as distinguished from *judgement* by the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

For wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another. (II.XI.2)

Here Locke makes a distinction between *wit* and *judgement*, or the two opposite tendencies of merging and differing as performed in the discerning operation of the human mind. Based on Locke's philosophical account of *wit*, Joseph Addison (1672-1719) extends the use of the concept to the poetic fusion of dissimilar things or ideas, as embodied in such rhetorical species as "metaphors, similitudes, allegories, enigmas, mottoes, parables, fables, dreams, visions, dramatic writings, burlesque, and all the methods of allusion" (185). Earlier than Addison, John Dryden (1631-1700) defined wit as "a propriety of words and thoughts elegantly adapted to the subject" (98); unsatisfied with Dryden's rather indistinct definition, Addison makes a further distinction between true wit, which "consists in this resemblance and congruity of ideas," and false wit, which "consists in the resemblance and congruity sometimes of single letters, . . . sometimes of syllables, . . . sometimes of words, . . . sometimes of whole sentences or poems"



(185). This Neo-classical distinction between true wit and false wit echoed the distinction made by medieval rhetoricians between “difficult” rhetoric, or tropes consisting of metaphorical transference of meaning, and “easy” rhetoric, or figures comprising varying patterns of words.<sup>13</sup> Moving beyond the distinctiveness of rhetoric, however, which had usually drawn a strict line between the pro-dialectic Neo-Platonism and the pro-rhetoric Neo-Aristotelianism, Addison looks upon truth as the basis of wit, as presented in his paraphrase of the same idea held by the French critic Dominique Bouhours (1628-1702):

Bouhours . . . has taken pains to show that it is impossible for any thought to be beautiful which is not just, and has not its foundation in the nature of things; that the basis of all wit is truth; and that no thought can be valuable, of which good sense is not the ground work. (187)

As the basis of all wit, truth is in Addison’s opinion the union of the beautiful, just and valuable. This ideal union is partly derived from the “good sense,” or vintage judgement, held by the poet in dealing with the subject matter, meaning and form of poetry in harmony par excellence. Wrapped under these rather abstract prescriptions of truth is the Neo-classical concept of Nature, or the universal system of ideas and forms, which all things and human beings must have shared in common in all times and across different places. The same type of universal truth was most distinctly declared by Alexander Pope (1688-1744), in his versified *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), as the following passage reads:

First follow NATURE, and your Judgement frame  
By her just Standard, which is still the same:  
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,

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<sup>13</sup> For the distinction between “difficult” and “easy” ornaments as put forward by medieval rhetoricians, see Wimsatt & Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, 223.

One clear, unchang'd, and Universal Light,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
At once the Source, and End, and Test of Art. (lines 68-73)

In the distinguished form of heroic couplet, which finds its classical origin in Homer and Chaucer, these lines put forth the Neo-classical synthesis of art, judgement and Nature. Being the ultimate truth that allegedly keeps unchanged over time and pervasively illuminates across space, Nature is acclaimed as the standard of the poet's judgement and, moreover, the timeless meaning of his poetry. By a slight oversimplification, this all-inclusive concept of Nature had best be understood as the Neo-classical ideal of the metaphysical *logos*, which simultaneously manifests itself in the operation of the physical reality and may be perceived by human reason. If there was a Neo-classical departure from the classical imitation of Nature, however, it lied in the transition of significance from didacticism, or the teaching of moral and religious values, to sensationalism, or the evocation of feelings about the beautiful, the sublime and the novel in the presence of supreme orders. As for the form in which the verbal meaning of poetry extends to the metaphysical meaning of truth, Pope considers it to be "true wit," as notably suggested in the following passage:

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,  
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest,  
Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,  
That gives us back the Image of our Mind:  
As Shades more sweetly recommend the Light,  
So modest Plainness sets off sprightly Wit. (lines 297-302)

In comparison with Addison's definition of true wit, which focuses on the horizontal resemblance between dissimilar things or ideas, Pope's concept of true wit is more of a vertical association between concrete things and lofty ideas, as conveyed in the formula of "nature dressed to the advantage of Nature." The novelty caused by the poetic discovery of petty similarity, that is, was reoriented toward that of newly invoked reality which has never been applied to represent the unchanging truth. The relationship between poetic imagery and truth, according to Pope's poetical rendition of his theory, is that between "shades" and "light," a philosophical contrast that helps to realize the transformation from things to ideas. The "modest plainness," which in Pope's view underlies true wit, refers both to plainly sensible objects in the form of sight or image, and to the plainly logical unity of empirical realities and the universal Nature.

The Neo-classical ideal of Nature as the universal obtained the most authoritative appraisal from Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), the last giant of 18<sup>th</sup>-century English literary criticism, who drew for the poet, in the voice of the fictional philosopher Imlac, the charter of poetry-making:

The business of a poet . . . is to examine, not the individual, but the species: to remark general properties and large appearances. . . . [T]he knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted with all the modes of life. . . . He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind. (*History of Rasselas* 90)

Echoing Sidney's appeal for the poet-legislator of mankind, the grandeur of generality is meant by Johnson to secure for human beings the universal validity of moral norms. The moralistic legislation thus conveyed by poetry, it has to be noted, was not derived from religious doctrines

in the Middle Ages, nor from the spiritual subdual effected by the sublime of grand nature upon observers, but from general human conditions supervised by reason in all times and at all places. Advocating the universal human nature as the truth to be presented by poetry, Johnson identifies two poetic modes that help to reach the desired meaning, respectively in dramatic poetry and lyric poetry. With regard to the contemporary composition of lyric poetry, as represented by such Augustan poets as John Donne (1572-1631) and Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), Johnson broadens the poetic of metaphysical wit from the “happiness of language” to the “strength of thought”, which can be philosophically understood as a kind of *discordia concors*, or harmonious disharmony, denoting “a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike” (*Lives of the English Poets* 348). As for the dramatic poetry, with Shakespeare as its greatest master, Johnson renders its poetic mode as *fiction*, by which realities are brought to the mind of the audience based on the Aristotelian criterion of *probability* (*Preface to Shakespeare* 312). It was likewise based on a belief in the audience’s awareness of fiction on stage, paradoxically, that the Neo-classicist Johnson defended the Shakespearean breach of Neo-classical unities of time and place.

With the Aristotelian unity of action being retained, Johnson’s objection to the unities of time and place follows from his conception of dramatic (and poetic) verisimilitude as rooted in fictional reassembly of particulars in the spirit of *probability*, rather than in strict imitation of historical facts. In other words, what poetry comes to represent—from the perspective either from the poet or from the reader—is truth in general instead of truth in particular. In an attempt to summarize the Neo-classical ideal of the universal in literature, Wimsatt enumerates nine senses of the Johnsonian idea of generality.<sup>14</sup> To achieve a somewhat simplified understanding

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Wimsatt & Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, 331-33.

of the subject, let us apply a pragmatic analysis, from the view of a Neo-classicist, to our Chinese poetic line, reducing the primary senses of generality to three: (1) the semantic meaning of poetic diction, such as “a leaf falling” and “the autumn befalling” in their immediate references, must be general enough for the speakers of the language to understand; (2) the logical association, from the concrete natural scene of a falling leaf to the abstract natural law of the coming of autumn, should be generally intelligible to any man of reason; (3) the mental transcendence from the external nature, as informed in this case by the autumn’s falling leaf, to metaphysical ideas related to cosmic Nature, such as the decadence of human life or history, can be universally performed by anyone susceptible to the sweeping law of life. As shown in the above analysis, the significance of the Neo-classical universal is dual. With respect to meaning, on the one hand, the grandeur of generality asks for the universality of truth, be it physical or metaphysical; with respect to the creation of meaning, on the other, the universal serves as the means with which to remove, in sequence, the division between language (poetic diction) and understanding, that between the particular (“a leaf falling”) and the general (“the autumn befalling”), and that between things (nature) and ideas (Nature). The Johnsonian conception of metaphysical wit as *discordia concors*, as well as that of dramatic fiction as reassembly of particulars by probability, are both aimed at reaching the ideal of the universal in different genres and various rhetorical figures alike.

In terms of his opposition to French classicism and promotion of Shakespeare, the German dramatist and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) can be regarded as Samuel Johnson’s counterpart in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany. As a provocative critic of religion’s dominance of one ultimate truth, Lessing spent a lifetime practicing polemics as the means to guide man’s search for alternative truths. The method of polemical argument led to his characteristic

emphasis on distinctions to be made among ideas and things. In his *Laocoön, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), for instance, which sets out to dissect the Horatian epigram *ut pictura poesis* (poetry resembles painting), Lessing makes a distinction between the art of painting and that of poetry on the basis of their use of distinct media, namely, the verbal or the visual. Arguing that poetry is a verbal art of time, whereas painting is a visual art of space, Lessing in effect disentangles the knot ever tied between the Platonic idea of mimesis as the imitation of forms and the Aristotelian concept of plot as the imitation of actions:

Objects or parts of objects which exist in space are called bodies (forms). Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting. . . . Objects or parts of objects which follow one another are called actions. Accordingly, actions are the true subjects of poetry. . . . Painting can use only a single moment of an action in its coexisting compositions . . . . [P]oetry in its progressive imitations can use only one single property of a body. (*Laocoön* 78-79)

Largely based on a reflection upon man's empirical experiences limited to time and space, Lessing's painstaking discrimination between painting and poetry—one as progressive imitation, the other stationary—has become futile in the face of modern motion picture. At one point, however, when a comparison is made among distinct expressions of Homeric wheels in Homer's language, the French language, and the German language, Lessing comes across the "happy structure" of poetic language, which is built with the "accumulation and combination of epithets" (93). Caught within a fascination about the distinguished power of words, Lessing asks: "when the happy structure of his (the poet's) language permits him to do this in a single word, why should he not be allowed to add a second word now and then? And why not even a third, if it is

worth the trouble? Or even a fourth? (92-93)” The reference of such combined words goes not merely in the empirical dimensions of space and time, but in the rational dimension of meaning. Rather than contemplating the relationship between poetic language and certain universal meaning, however, as Samuel Johnson did in English literary criticism, Lessing professed a transition of critical significance from meaning to beauty:

I should prefer that only those be called works of art . . . in which beauty was his (the artist’s) first and ultimate aim. None of the others, which betray too obvious traces of religious conventions, deserves this name because in their case the artist did not create for art’s sake, but his art was merely a handmaid of religion, which stressed meaning more than beauty. (55-56)

Carrying forward the Lockean philosophy of empiricism, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) relied on empirical experience to undermine the foundation of *deism*—natural and rational theology. Neither does truth reside in innate human reason, that is to say, nor can meaning be found in external objects in themselves. The nature of human understanding, according to Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757), is determined by human sentiment which, unlike natural or rational determination of the understanding, “has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always right,” and which “marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind” (230). Against the backdrop of the rise of aesthetics in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, Hume’s concept of sentiment foresaw the advent of Romanticism in that it helped broaden the variety of beauty on a psychological basis, which had by far been confined to classical ideals, and consequently in that it helped define Taste as an aesthetic judgement that holds onto individual experience rather than universal standard. If there is a universal form of beauty, as Hume notes, with literature as a particular instance of the arts,

“many of the beauties of poetry and even of eloquence are founded on falsehood and fiction, on hyperboles, metaphors, and an abuse or perversion of terms from their natural meaning” (231). While prevailing truths such as “theories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology” are subject to the revolutions of chance and fashion every other age, Hume asserts, “[t]he case is not the same with the beauties of eloquence and poetry” (242). In Hume’s empirical philosophy, the neoclassical meaning that had been considered so far to reside either in things-in-themselves, or in innate human reason, gave way to the romantic significance of human sentiment, the ultimate standard of aesthetic judgment that comes to connect external objects to the human mind.

The Neo-classical distinction between nature, or external phenomena, and Nature, or the metaphysical order that underlies nature, was advanced by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to the modern distinction between the realm of nature and that of freedom (of *will*), thus entailing the distinction between the philosophy of nature and that of ethics. Establishing the German idealist tradition concerning the dominant role played by *a priori* reasoning (rather than empirical experiences) in man’s cognition of his existence, Kant accordingly divided human reason—the major subject of enlightenment—into two kinds: the pure reason dealing with the concepts of nature, and the practical reason engaging with the concepts of morality, as respectively constitute the topics of the philosopher’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1785). The gap between the two kinds of human reason—namely, between human understanding of nature and ideas of freedom—is bridged, in Kant’s view, by judgement, as further informs the subject of his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). A lucid definition Kant gives to judgement goes as follows:



Judgement in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, or law) is given, then the judgement which subsumes the particular under it is *determining*. . . . If, however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgement is simply *reflective*. (*Critique of Judgement* 15)

Here, as we can see, Kant picks up the Neo-classical concern with the relationship between the particular and the universal. The *reflective* judgement, which is marked by the transcendence from the particular to the universal, attends to what Kant calls the *purposiveness* of nature, or the “agreement of a thing with that constitution of things which is only possible according to ends (i.e., *a priori* concepts of individual objects)” (16). The principle of the *reflective* judgement, therefore, is to reflect upon the nexus, as inherent in the constitution of things, to hold together phenomena in nature—say, the natural relation of “a leaf falling” to “the autumn befalling”—as well as to unite nature with freedom—that is, the unity of the natural law behind “the autumn befalling” and the metaphysical truth that “the entire universe elapses.”

A representation of the external object, in Kant’s view, is indispensable in accomplishing such a reflective judgement as reflecting upon the purposiveness of nature, proceeding from the particular natural law through the universal natural law to freedom of will. Kant makes a distinction between two sides of the representation of external things, based on the reference of the representation: (1) the subjective side, where the representation of an object makes a reference to the subject, or to the aesthetic character of the representation; (2) the objective side, which holds a reference to the object, or to the logical validity of the representation (23-24). The reflective judgement involved in the representation of nature, consequently, can be divided into the aesthetic judgement (taste) and the logical judgement. In the sphere of aesthetic judgment,

according to Kant, the object is considered *beautiful* when the feeling of pleasure is aroused by the conformity between the particular form of its representation (in nature or art) and the subject's judgement concerning a universal form; the object is even judged to be *sublime*, furthermore, if the form of the representation comes in accord with that of freedom and thus gives rise to a higher intellectual feeling, such as awe (26-27).

In the form of a threefold division that commonly characterizes Kant's synthesis of philosophical elements, we may summarize the Kantian theory of aesthetics as follows. On the side of nature, a particular object is related to the universal natural law via the purposiveness of nature, which serves as the principle *a priori* of man's understanding of nature or knowledge. On the side of human mind, man's understanding of nature interacts with his freedom of will through judgement, which either determines the concrete meaning of a natural object according to a supreme system of freedom *a priori* (ideology) or reflects on possible meanings of freedom based on the multiple forms of a natural object. A representation of a natural object is indispensable in embodying either way of the judgement. When the form of this representation of an external object coincides with the form of freedom in the mind of the spectator, it arouses the feeling of pleasure, or displeasure in the opposite situation, and thence transforms itself into art possessed of aesthetic values.

In his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the English philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) considers the significance of a work of imagination to consist in the arousal of the Taste, or the aesthetic judgement about the sublime and beautiful, in the author or observer. Rather than some simple idea, the Taste operates as a complexity of various faculties of the human mind, as suggested in the following statement:

[W]hat is called Taste, in its most general acceptation, is not a simple idea, but is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations of these, and concerning the human passions, manners and actions. (22)

In addition to its echoes of Lockean sense experience and the Neo-classical subject of reason, Burke's speculation on the Taste pays much attention to the Romantic element of the imagination. "[T]he mind of man," observes Burke, "possesses a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order" (16). Designating both the process of image-making and that of a free play of mind, Burke's conception of the imagination has led to his observation of two consequences of that human power: the comparing of distinction and resemblance between things, and the obscurity of the relation of things to ideas. "[T]he thing which we understand by it," says Burke, "is far from a simple and determinate idea in the minds of most men, and it is therefore liable to uncertainty and confusion" (12). Rather than any determinate meaning deriving from a thing, in Burke's view, it is the interrelationship between things that matters to the human mind. "When two distinct objects have a resemblance," concludes Burke, "we are struck, we attend to them, and we are pleased" (17). The significance of the work of linguistic art, therefore, is no more than the aesthetic effect performed by things upon the human mind:

In reality poetry and rhetoric do not succeed in exact description so well as painting does; their business is to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to

display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves. (V.v 157)

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) narrows the complex meanings of history down to one point: the desire for one's spiritual freedom to be recognized by the other. This desire derives from the existence of the human being as a spiritual unity, which differentiates it from external things, of *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*. To realize such a unity of self-consciousness, it is necessary for one to mediate with the other—a different self-consciousness likewise comprised of *in-* and *for-itself*. This mediation, according to Hegel, manifests itself in the form of a life-and-death struggle; the one whose spiritual freedom obtains recognition in the end of the struggle becomes the Master, the other who retains life (*in-itself*) at the expense of spirit (*for-itself*) the Slave (113-115). In its adaption to modern history, the Hegelian conception of life-and-death struggle has given rise to two conflicting political models: the class struggle proposed by Karl Marx, and democracy concluded by Francis Fukuyama as marking “the end of history.”

In addition to political institution, there is an alternative mediation through which one's spiritual freedom is to be recognized: production of art. In Hegel's opinion, the fulfillment of one's fundamental desire, through the life-and-death struggle, “is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence” (118). It is through the “formative activity,” which creates a stable object to signify his desire, that one reaches “the individuality or pure being-for-itself of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence” (118). Be it artistic or practical, the work outside of one's self-consciousness carries a twofold significance: the positive significance with regard to the eventual recognition of spiritual freedom; and the negative significance about the initial fear of loss of life. The twofold

significance marks out, for Hegel, the primitive alienation of the human being between being-in-self and being-for-self in the face of death, the absolute Master. In its mediation of alienated existences, as we can see here, the external “work” correspondingly performs two kinds of affective effects: fear, awe, the sublime, on the one hand; delicacy, the individual, the beautiful, on the other.

The significance of spiritual freedom is thus extended from the experience of history to that of aesthetics. In the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835-38), Hegel considers art to be the external duplication of man’s spirit. “Man does this,” he states, “in order as a free subject to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness, and to enjoy in the shape and fashion of things a mere external reality of himself” (36). In contrast to the classical idea that art is a representation of nature, the Hegelian notion of art ranks it higher than nature by virtue of its representation of spirit. Contrary to the Platonic idea that art is twice removed from the divine Ideas and Forms, moreover, no natural product, in Hegel’s mind, is able to present the divine Ideas and Forms as properly as art, which gives form to man’s spirit—a superior medium to God’s spirit than unspiritual nature. Here Hegel has reached the point to announce his comprehensive understanding of the nature of art in the Romantic voice:

The universal need for expression in art lies, therefore, in man’s rational impulse to exalt the inner and outer world into a spiritual consciousness for himself, as an object in which he recognizes his own self. He satisfies the need of this spiritual freedom when he makes all that exists explicit for himself within, and in a corresponding way realizes this his explicit self without, evoking thereby, in this duplication of himself, what is in him into vision and into knowledge for his own mind and for that of others. This is the free rationality of man, in which, as all

action and knowledge, so also art has its ground and necessary origin. (*Lectures on Aesthetics* 36)

In the light of this Romantic ideal of art, Hegel proceeds to divide art—according to various relations of the inner Idea to its outward shaping—into three historical forms: the symbolic, classical, and romantic form of art (82-88). The symbolic art, allegedly characteristic of “the early artistic pantheism of the East,” tends to apply unworked natural objects to stand for the inner Idea that is still in its obscure and indeterminate status. The classical art, with Greek antiquity as its heyday, achieves an efficient relation of the Idea to its external form both in their adequate status, as observed in the union of the concrete idea of divinity and the bodily form of man. At last, art arrives at an even higher form—the romantic art—when the individual human being comes to be conscious of his own spirit, and to represent it with the desired form of external objects and events. Within this Hegelian scheme of art, so to speak, the “falling leaf” falls under the symbolic art when related to the abstract idea of a “befalling autumn.” It can become the classical art, however, if replaced by a “falling man” conveying the concrete idea of the doomed ordeal as ordained by the divine will. As soon as it carries the poet’s melancholy sentiment about withering life, the “falling leaf”—like Whitman’s grass leaf—starts to gain infinite meaningfulness and, therefore, ascends to the romantic art.

### Romanticism

While greatly advancing human undertakings in the fields of industry, market, mass media and political struggle, the Neo-classical universal truth of Reason had unexpectedly put man’s spiritual freedom under the shackles of grandiose social progress. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 became the signal of the historic retreat of individual voices in the face of collective causes. Initially fascinated by the revolution, the English poet William

Wordsworth (1770-1850)—the publication of whose *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 marked the beginning of the Romantic era in English literature—started to reflect upon the setback in the European movement of Enlightenment. “[A] multitude of causes, unknown to former times,” as the poet states in his preface to the 1802 edition of *Ballads*, “are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor” (99). A surge of extravagant subjects and styles in European literature allegedly emerged to cater for this numbness in spirit, driving classic works of poetry into neglect. Opposed to this tendency of degraded literature, Wordsworth announces the objective of his poems as follows:

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.

(96-97)

Among all the elements of good poetry in his foregoing statement, Wordsworth especially stresses the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and poetic diction. His ideal of poetic diction lies in the naked and simple style of “language really used by men,” which allegedly characterized the earliest poets of all nations but has been hackneyed in the false hands of succeeding poets. The end of poetic diction, as Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes, is “to

illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement” (98), or “to produce excitement in co-existence with an over-balance of pleasure” (109). With its numerous alternative expressions in the preface—“emotions,” “passions,” “enthusiasm,” “lively sensibility,” “sympathy,” “sensation,” “affections,” etc.—the Wordsworthian notion of excitement or pleasure refers to the feelings produced when *one*’s ideas are realized in *the other*, such as objects, humans, and events. In a sense reminiscent of Addison’s *true wit* and Johnson’s *discordia concors*, Wordsworth considers the pleasure to be deriving “from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude, . . . the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder” (111). Rather than from the mimetic resemblance between the external object and its artistic representation, that is to say, it is from the philosophical similitude between the artistic imagery and the inner idea that the poet, or the reader, develops his aesthetic experience of pleasure. Different from the neoclassical universal ideas, it has to be noted, the Romantic concept of human ideas connotes singular and individual concerns; pure ideas, moreover, started to concede their significance in poetry to the expression of idea-ridden feelings.

One particular element of poetry that Wordsworth lists but fails to elaborate in his “Preface”—“a certain colouring of imagination”—is picked up by his friend and collaborator Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a loose autobiography of the poet’s literary life and thought. Criticizing neoclassical metaphysical poets for sacrificing emotion to reason, and contemporary poets for sacrificing both reason and emotion to fancy, Coleridge argues for “the two cardinal points of poetry, [i.e.,] the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination” (II.5). From the unity of these two points derives good poetry: imagination diffuses truth over familiar images, just like in the poetry of



nature the moon or sun-set diffuses charming light and shade over a familiar landscape. As divine as the *primary imagination* that runs through the eternal act of creation by infinite God, the poet's *secondary imagination* "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; . . . at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify . . . all objects [that] are essentially fixed and dead" (I.304). For Coleridge, the imagination is the soul of poetic genius, performing the synthetic and magical power to sustain the cooperation of various faculties—images, thoughts, and emotions—in the poet's mind. Operating behind the Romantic truth of feelings, the imagination helps realize the significant meaning through its philosophical power of fusion, as Coleridge concludes:

This power [of the imagination] . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. (II.16-17)

During the zenith of the Romantic era, the two all-important qualities of romantic poetry—the imagination as the significant form acknowledged by Coleridge, and pleasure as the significant meaning argued by Wordsworth—were integrated by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), in his *Defence of Poetry* (1821), into the "mighty cause and effect" of poetry. "Poetry," says Shelly with regard to its effect, "is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls, open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight" (12.516). In Shelley's

discourse, the wisdom conveyed by poetry corresponds to the high beauty of moral good, which naturally effects pleasure in men. Born to pursue moral good, “a man . . . must put himself in the place of another and of many others;” the great instrument of morals consists thereby in the imagination, or “a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own” (13.517). With this power of identifying one’s being with another, the imagination serves as the cause from which poetry proceeds to produce its effect of pleasure. Because the process of identification keeps forming “new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food,” the imagination—as “the organ of the moral nature of man”—lives an eternal life in the form of poetry (13.517). Poets, who spread the imagination and pleasure leading to moral good, are thus proclaimed by Shelley as “the unacknowledged legislators of the World.”

It seems that, from the late 1600s through the early 1800s, the development of European literary ideas was characterized by a general tendency to withdraw from the outer world into the inner being. Various faculties in the constitution of the human mind—“senses” in the discourse of the Lockean empiricism, “reason” in the Neo-classical rationalism, “feelings” in the Romantic movement—had successively become the frontiers in the exploration of the significant meaning of poetry. This European trend was extended in America, mainly by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), to the transcendental knowledge of the world, which stressed the instinct and intuition of the mind. With the religious cast of Unitarian Universalism on its claims, the American Transcendentalism contended to find the truth about God in the intuition of every individual mind, which coincides with Nature but rejects conventional institutions. “The universe,” states Emerson in his 1844 essay “The Poet,” “is the [externization] of the soul” (325);

that is, Nature and Science serve merely as the appearance of the intellectual nature of the human being, a subject that can only be probed by self-knowledge, morality, religion, and metaphysics.

In Emerson's opinion, every man is living a poetic life in the sense that he depends on the objects in Nature for ritual worship of the soul. As a hunter rides on a horse for the inexplicable beauty of life, so a poet rides on his horse of words for the fascination of truth. This fascination, after all aimed at reaching the significance of indwelling divinity, resides in the *symbol*, or the symbolic use of objects found in Nature. The poet has a good command of the true science of poetry, claims Emerson, as "he uses forms according to the life, and not according to the form," and as "he does not stop at these facts, but employs them as signs" (329). In the sphere of signs, on the one hand, a single object or form from Nature is capable of carrying multiple ideas. A single idea, on the other, is free to find its multiform manifestations in various objects. As the master of such poetics, "the poet is the Namer or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their [multiform] appearance, sometimes after their [multiple] essence, and giving to every one its own name and not another's, thereby rejoicing the intellect, which delights in detachment or boundary" (329).

By the foregoing statement, Emerson comes to suggest, in a tone akin to later structuralism, that naming or language serves as the means whereby the intellect gives boundary to things, and thereby rejoices in it. Unlike the structuralist criticism upholding the superiority of language, however, Emerson treats language as a secondary nature grown out of the first nature of poetry—the "metamorphosis," or the self-regulated motion or change of things in light of the soul (330). It was out of the same conviction of the universal metamorphosis of tradition, that Emerson made the appeal, in his speech "The American Scholar" delivered in 1837, that the spirit of the American scholar—with the full eligibility to approach the divine truth with his own

forms and ideas—should proceed to gain independence both from the mind of the past and from the mind of others (48-50).

### Modern Psychoanalysis

Eventually, the empirical stream of Western literary ideas flowed—through the ranges of senses, reason, feelings, and intuition—into the territory of desires and unconsciousness, as related in the modern psychoanalysis championed by Freud and Lacan.

Echoing the Roman philosopher Plotinus' notion of *imago*, the conception of the imaginary was proposed by the French psychologist Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) as one of the three orders that help structure human existence, the others being the symbolic and the real. In contrast with Plotinus who considered the imago in human soul and art to be successive manifestations of the divine Intellect, Lacan sees the imago as some external form to be identified with by the imaginary in human ego (76-77). Without ascribing truth to the transcendental, that is, the Lacanian imago corresponds to an empirical otherness, such as one's figure in the mirror, which functions as the object of the imaginary. It is based on the interaction between the imaginary and imago that Lacan is able to define the psychological origin of the ego as resting upon the identification between the self and the other. The psychological construction of the ego is thus claimed to be fictional by virtue of the elemental imaginary in the process of identification, which invariably entails an alienation from an autonomous self (76).

The Lacanian theory about the fictional nature of the ego sheds light on the fictional nature of poetry on the ground that, as the verbal representation of the poet's imaginary that tends to identify the self with the external imago, poetry performs the self's identification with the imago on the one hand, and involves an alienation both from the external imago and the self on the other. As a significant form preceding the symbolic (i.e. linguistic) form of human

existence, the imaginary marks—in the act of poetry-making—the intellectual participation of the poet. In accordance with the sources of the real in various intellectual traditions, moreover, the imaginary tends to identify with varying imago associated with the prevailing truth. In the classical Neo-Platonic tradition founded by Plotinus, for example, which saw the transcendental realm as the source of the real, the imaginary within the poetic mind was expected to serve as the intellectual emanation of the divine Intellect and thus to identify with the divine Beauty. In the modern psychoanalytic tradition pioneered by Freud and Lacan, however, wherein the self or ego is deemed prior to the world, the external imago—either in the form of language or of symptoms—is analyzed in a way the imaginary is revealed to serve not as confirmation of external things, but as performance of inner freedom of desires and unconsciousness.

Yet still, in either of the traditions, the conception of imaginary as an intellectual complex simultaneously involves the contradictory tendencies of identification and alienation. In the hierarchical order of Plotinus' universe, the relation of the poetic mind to divine truth is characterized by an eternal transcendence toward the Absolute Being. It is through this intellectual ascent that individuals, such as poets and readers, are able to obtain ecstatic unification with the higher Heaven (Enneads 424-25). In the Lacanian theory, however, this ecstatic unification is directed toward the totality or autonomy of the self, which paradoxically builds upon one's socially fragmented body. Rather than the intellectual ascent toward metaphysical truth, the Lacanian imaginary is characterized by an eternally ongoing intellectual displacement with the other, which enables the formation of one's self—paradoxically fragmental and unitary—based on its identification with an external form.

## The Linguistic Turn

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the historical project of significance—from classicism consisting of Platonic metaphysics and Aristotelian realism, through medieval theological hermeneutics, to modern humanism—arrived at its linguistic turn, whence not only poetics but all human activities came to be reinvestigated on the basis of the structure of language. Known as structuralism, the linguistics-ridden criticism began with Saussure’s theory of semiology, expanded to the studies of various fields, and came to be criticized by waves of poststructuralist thought. Yet first, let us begin with Heidegger’s phenomenological contemplation on the role of language.

For the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the significance of all philosophical inquiries goes to the meaning of “being”—the existential origins and truth of the human being. Following the linguistic transition of the later Heidegger, the primarily poetic nature of language is proclaimed as the ultimate origin of human understanding of the world and all the things therein. The world does not serve as a pre-existing entity prior to language; instead, it is the poetic language that creates the essential meaning of the world by which human minds come to understand their conscious existence. In a philosophical boldness that overturns established ideas regarding the nature of poetry—mimesis of external reality, figurative or symbolical references to divine truths, and expression of inner feelings and thoughts—Heidegger argues that “language speaks:” namely, the poetic language in its inaugural and performative manner grants the “thinging” of things, the “worlding” of the world, and eventually the “being” of man (193-202).

Therefore, man is poetically dwelling in the abode or house of things, which are called into being by language, within the context of the world, which is likewise called into being by

language. While the world is generalized as a unitary fourfold of sky, earth, mortals, and divinities, things specifically named abide in and unfold the world (199). As for how the world and things are called into being through language, as is necessary for the ultimate being of man, Heidegger applies the term *dif-ference* to highlight the linguistic performance. Instead of calling into being the world and things separately, poetic language actually calls into being the philosophical threshold of *dif-ference* which, simultaneously involving conceptual fusion and division, appropriates the world and things into the onefold of their intimacy (202-203). Reflecting a confluence of phenomenology and hermeneutics, Heidegger's view of language as "the house of being" departs from the medieval hermeneutical tradition, wherein the text lies at the bottom of a hierarchical structure of meanings, and embraces the structuralist and poststructuralist criticism that privileges language over established truths in the practice of textual interpretation.

#### The First Wave: Structuralism

Before the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), language had surely been rigidly studied in traditional philology, but mainly as a nomenclature, or the system of names, to designate things. Saussure's contribution to the shift from philology to modern linguistics lay in his insight, as transcribed into the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), that language as a system of vocal signs should be studied as a self-efficient entity, without natural references either to external things or to particular ideas conceived by individual minds. The objective of linguistics as such was to map the true nature of *la langue*, or language in general, which regulated human activities as fundamentally as did political, legal, and other categories of social institutions. As for *la parole*, or utterances in particular, it remained the subject of philologists.

The true nature of *la langue*, in Saussure's view, can be investigated at two levels with respect to the operation of language. The first level focuses on the nature of the composition of any single linguistic sign. Language operates as a self-sufficient system of linguistic signs, with each of them comprising a signifier (the sound-imprint on mind) and a signified (the corresponding concept-imprint on mind). As inseparable as the two sides of a sheet of paper, the signifier and signified are connected by an arbitrary association of sound and concept, in the way a slice is made onto the vague plane of sounds and the chaotic mass of consciousness. The original arbitrariness of the sign starts to disappear once it gains currency, together with all other signs, in the language community and thus becomes conventional (I.i 67-68).

The second level focuses on the nature of the interplay between linguistic signs. The linguistic value of a sign, either phonic or conceptual, is realized only by its differentiation from all other signs in the overall system of language. The distinction of sound and concept of any single sign, that is, does not derive from the positive qualities of the sign itself, but from the negative opposition it bears with surrounding signs. This rule of the distinction of a sign's value as based on its differentiation from other signs, says Saussure, applies to grammatical units of all kinds, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, etc. Whether a sound, a word, a phrase, a sentence, etc., in other words, "everywhere and always there is the same complex equilibrium of terms that mutually condition each other" (II.iv 111-122). According to whether appearing inside or outside speech, various differences between linguistic signs can be classified into two groups of relations: syntagmatic relations and associative relations. Associative relations refer to the differences out of which a distinctive linguistic unit comes into being, in the same way a distinctive style of stone column is chosen out of equivalent styles of it; syntagmatic relations designate the differences with which a succession of linguistic units takes its shape



based on a particular order, in the same manner stoned columns are arranged in a certain pattern to support an architecture (II.v 123-124).

Saussure's theory suggests that, rather than an extra-linguistic entity to be found in Nature, the metaphysical domain, divinity, or the human mind, the significant meaning—the linguistic value of a sign as he sees it—is no more than an effect produced, or a function performed, by the significant form of *la langue*, i.e., the differences between signs that come to define the distinction of a sign in its associative and syntagmatic co-ordinations.

Despite its major concern with the nature of *la langue*, the Saussurean mode of significance can be illustrated by an analysis of our “leaf” verse as *la parole*. With respect to the associative relations, on the one hand, every single linguistic unit in the line—“A leaf falls, and all under the heaven know the autumn befalls”—is a chosen sign differentiated from a selection of equivalent signs, thus distinguishing the entire line from any alternative one, say, “Myriad petals fly, but none in the world becomes aware the spring departs.” With respect to the syntagmatic relations, on the other, the differential relation of “a falling leaf” to the “befalling autumn” is presented as the contiguity between a singular object and a universal phenomenon, rather than as other types of combination. The above two forms of relations come together to define the distinction of the lyrical *parole*, whose meaning or linguistic value derives from its differentiation from surrounding signs or combination of signs afforded by *la langue*.

Moreover, the “leaf” verse does not stagnate as a linguistic sign sufficed with its current value, but proceeds to become a signifier itself, seeking extra-semantic meanings. For instance, the natural imagery conveyed by the verse about Nature—“a falling leaf signals the befalling autumn”—triggers an association toward self-reflective ideas concerning the withering of the human being. In short, it becomes a poetic sign signifying *being-for-itself* with *being-in-itself*,

with language serving as the means connecting the Hegelian dialectic of being. The Saussurean arbitrariness between the signifier and signified likewise applies to the poetic sign: that is, the relation of the natural imagery to the melancholy sentiment about life is sheerly arbitrary. The same feeling can be fitted to various equivalent imageries; conversely, the same natural imagery may lead to a variety of ideas concerning human spiritual freedom. The present connection is simply a hackneyed one. At this point, Saussure's insight about the arbitrariness and differentiation in the operation of signs both informs the formal concern of structuralist studies, and anticipates the element of ambiguity at the core of poststructuralist theories.

Saussure says, "language is a form and not a substance" (II.iv 122). Language, in other words, gives pattern to substance. It is through the linguistic pattern imposed upon substance, moreover, the human being is capable of seeing himself in things, thus marching on the path of struggling for his spiritual freedom. Language, however, is not the only system of signs that gives form to human experience. "By studying rites, customs, etc. as signs," notes Saussure, "I believe that we shall throw new light on the facts and point up the need for including them in a science of semiology and explaining them by its laws" (Intro.iii 17). With the convictions that language and culture come to provide intelligible forms for the world, as well as that these forms are operated within the system of signs, structuralist studies undertook to map the structural working of signs—semiology, or semiotics in C. S. Peirce's (1839-1914) term—that seems to underly all kinds of human behavior, in the fields of anthropology, sociology, religion, myths, psychology, linguistics, folklore, literary studies, etc. Among the most prominent structuralists are early Roland Barthes (1915-1980) who helped extend the idea of signs from what he called "the first-order semiological signs" to "the global sign," and Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) who singled out the "poetic function" among various functions of the linguistic sign.

Rather than focusing on the self-sufficient relationships operating within the system of signs, as did Saussure, Jakobson once looked into the differential interrelationships between a sign and its external surroundings. Considering *la parole* to be a “speech event,” or an “act of verbal communication,” he introduced into the situation of a sign such factors as addresser, addressee, context (subject matter), message (signs spoken, written, performed, etc.), contact (vehicle of signs), and code (metalanguage), and thus invested into the meaningfulness of a sign such functions, correspondingly, as emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic, and metalingual (“Linguistics and Poetics” 66-71). The diversity of functions operates not on an equal basis, but in a differential hierarchical order based on various situations of the sign. While present in all kinds of speech event, for instance, the poetic function predominates and prevails in the discourse of poetry. Though his argument about the emotive and conative functions of verbal communication anticipated the performative theory of speech acts, which would further come into an unresolved debate with deconstruction, Jakobson’s concern is mainly with the poetic function of verbal communication, or poetics of verbal art, which he claimed to be the focal point of literary studies.

The empirical linguistic arrangement effecting the poetic function, for Jakobson, operates along two semantic axes: the axis of selection, whereby linguistic signs are selected on the basis of equivalence (either of similarity or dissimilarity), and the axis of combination, whereby linguistic signs are sequenced on the basis of contiguity. Apparently, the two axes continue in the direction of the associative and syntagmatic relations specified by Saussure with regard to the structure of linguistic signs. Thence comes Jakobson’s brilliant insight on the significant form of poetics:

The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. (“Linguistics and Poetics” 71)

The brilliance of the above definition of the poetic function lies in its discernment of the poetic transformation from things to events: that is, poetics arises from the moment when equivalent elements come to be organized into contiguous sequences. In the “leaf” verse, for example, the elemental images of “a falling leaf” and the “universally befalling autumn” are equivalent to each other in terms of their shared similarity in the empirical tendency of “falling,” as well as of their dissimilarity in category; they can be replaced by each other without impeding the common impression about certain movement in Nature. Now that they both appear in a sequence arrested in the verse line, equivalence is projected into contiguity, thus combining autonomous things into an eventful life. In the same manner, as we may infer, the poetic function of lyric poems derives from the projection of equivalent natural objects into an eventful imagery; the poetics of prose fiction arises from the transformation of equivalent human acts into an eventful plot; and, eventually, the poetics of literature in general originates in the transformation from beings-in-themselves to beings-for-themselves. At this point, the history of hermeneutics, is no more than a great span of process to construct the spiritual freedom of the human being out of things and experiences, via the medium of signs proffered by poetics.

The bipolar structure of poetic function was later articulated by Jakobson as the metaphoric and metonymic poles of verbal behavior. In the same structuralist spirit of the Saussurean semiology as being applicable to human culture in its entirety, Jakobson suggests that the dichotomy of metaphor/metonymy applies to human behavior in general (“Two Aspects of

Language” 112).<sup>15</sup> Human behavior in various fields, that is, be it political or cultural, can be understood according to the structure of poetic function, whereby the principle of equivalence is projected from the selection of being-in-itself into the sequence of being-for-itself. This structuralist principle seems likewise true of the poststructuralist, as well as postmodernist, paradigm wherein the human being takes up shifting identities in a sequence whose elements can be found in endless substitution of fetishism.

The signifying system of literature, or the literary semiology consisting of the differential and complex play of literary signs, belongs to what Roland Barthes (1915-1980) called the “second-order semiological system,” or the “mythical system” of myth—any discourse or text that employs a system of communication and signification, such as speech, writing, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.—which uses as its signifiers the signs derived from the “first semiological system” of language (93-100). “Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writing,” Barthes points out, “myth wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain” (99-100). This distinction between the first semiological system (*la langue*) and the second-order semiological system (myth) is twofold. First, rather than a simple combination of linguistic signs derived from *la langue*, literary writing—a branch of myth—consists of a linguistic-derived yet autonomous system of literary signs, with particular works of literature uttered as the *la parole* of such a system. This aspect of the distinction between language and writing anticipated Derrida’s philosophical focus on the *textuality* of writing, a semiological system parallel to *la langue* in the Saussurean linguistics.

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<sup>15</sup> An expansion of Jakobson’s basic distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic dimensions of language can be found in David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (1977).

Second, the conception of the global sign as a sum of signs indicates the re-productivity of literary signs, in the same manner as the second-order semiological system evolves from the first semiological system through a complex process of creation and interpretation. The global sign, that is to say, in the form of either a lyrical verse or a prose fiction, is subject to the same signifying process wherein the sign—be it global—proceeds to become a signifier looking for a signified, as well as to the same circulation-to-be wherein it becomes an elemental unit in the literary semiology, as all the constituent signs have undergone at various levels before coming together into a sum. The inconsistency between the global sign and its meaning, not only caused by the signifying arbitrariness at its own level but by the entire differential system of multi-layered signs, would be best described by de Man as the *rhetoricity* of reading, a deconstructive concern with the indeterminacy of meaning from the perspective of interpretation.

#### The Second Wave: Deconstruction

Marking the second wave of the linguistic turn, the theoretical school of deconstruction held a critical model that was both *different* from and *supplemental* to structuralism. Whereas structuralism tacitly considered language and semiology to be signs of extra-linguistic truth, on the one hand, deconstruction set out to question the pre-existence of truth prior to the text. Deconstruction was supplemental to structuralism, on the other, in that it promoted the linguistic structure elaborated by Saussure and Jakobson to the signifying structure underlying the text. With its reference to *writing* in general, the concept of *text* played the same role in deconstruction as *la langue* played in structuralist linguistics, prescribing synchronic rules and codes for *la parole* of particular writings. In the same manner as structuralism denied language as a nomenclature of external things, deconstruction denied the text as a system of representation

of pre-existed and determinate meaning. Rather, the text is the site where meaning is invoked into being—a metaphysical presence that turns out to be illusionary.

The deconstructive project was most prominently championed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), who put to question determinate *meaning* on the one hand, and foregrounded the autonomous structure of the text on the other. For Derrida, determinate meaning is a metaphysical presupposition running through the entire history of Western philosophy and culture. It takes on its ultimate form in *logos*, which finds its locus in the various realms—under different intellectual and institutional circumstances—of Nature, history, metaphysical domain, divinity, human mind, psychology, etc. Despite its various loci, the idea of *logos* prescribes fundamental certainties for human thought, which can be outlined at three levels. (1) There is a presence of ultimate truth. (2) Reason is the counterpart of that truth in human consciousness. (3) Speech is the natural outflow of a conscious intention about the truth. At each level, moreover, a privilege has always been granted to one side of the underlying binary oppositions over the other. That is, presence is privileged over absence, truth over falsity, reason over desire, speech over writing, etc.

This tendency of Western metaphysics toward *logos* was labelled by Derrida as “logocentrism,” and in turn the entire history of Western philosophy hitherto the logocentric epoch. For the philosopher, the origin of all the knowledge about the world resided not in *logos*, but in what *logos* was most blinded to and thus subdued to the very bottom of the above three levels—writing. The field where Derrida set out to work in was indicated by the title of one of his major books, *Of Grammatology* (1967), etymologically meaning the *logos* of writing. On the banner flying over his philosophical territory was inscribed the famous slogan “il n’y a pas de hors-texte,” or “there is nothing outside of the text.” Rather than aiming at a destruction of a

meaningful world, as often radically interpreted, Derrida's deconstructive project intended to unfold the problematic textuality, or the structural nature of the text, which gave rise to the indeterminacy of meaning.

The significant form of the text, or textuality, is best expressed in two Derridean neologies: *différence* (difference/deferment) and *supplément* (substitute/addition). Indeed, they equally present a lexical crystallization of Jakobson's poetic structure characterized by a projection of the axis of equivalence into the axis of contiguity, which can further be traced back to Saussure's integration of associative and syntagmatic relationships among linguistic signs. In its actual operation, *différence* indicates the ultimate structure whereby the seemingly determinate meaning of any textual unit is forever deferred along the chain of language or text because of the inherent difference between its elements. Likewise, *supplément* refers to the same structure whereby, alternatively, the seemingly determinate meaning of any textual unit forever encounters addition along the chain of language or text because of the inherent relationship of substitution between its elements. With the help from the Hegelian conception that being-for-itself can only be realized through a representation (substitution) of it with being-in-itself, we may understand the Derridean structure of the text from a philosophical perspective. That is, the seemingly determinate meaning of being-for-itself is destined to be forever deferred or supplemented along the contiguity of being, into which is projected the substitutive equivalence of things-in-themselves. This ultimate structure encapsulated in the term *supplément* is claimed by Derrida to be all-inclusive in a philosophical sense, as quoted below:

[T]he theme of *supplément* . . . describes the chain itself, the being-chain of a textual chain, the structure of substitution, the articulation of desire and of



language, the logic of all conceptual oppositions . . . , and particularly the role and the function . . . of the concept of Nature. (II.2 163)

As Derrida suggests here, the significant form of *supplément*—with an analogy to a chain—underlies not only language and text, but also Nature, human mind, and metaphysics, eternally articulating them through the structure of substitution. Corresponding to the structure of textuality as such, moreover, the significant meaning to be interpreted by deconstructive reading is the theme of *supplément*, or the indeterminacy of meaning. Derrida undertakes a rigid reading of Rousseau, and other prominent philosophers in the history of Western metaphysics, on the grounds that their writings are *la parole* most revealing of the inherent structure of writing, and therefore most deconstructive of logocentrism. Rather than demonstrating the meaninglessness of the world, again as often radically interpreted, deconstruction helps reveal infinitely multiplied meaningfulness of the world. Only that the endless meaningfulness derives not from human mind as Romanticists and humanists presume, but from the infinitely multiplied structure of the text. In this way, Derrida comes to embark on his philosophical project of unravelling the logocentric *presence*—the top subject matter of Western metaphysics—by showing how it is indeed indefinitely multiplied by the essential process of *representation* (substitution), as quoted below:

[T]he indefinite process of *supplément* has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. Representation in the abyss of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc. (II.2 163)

Because of the indefinite multiplication of representation (in the sense of substitution projected into sequence), the presence of meaning is forever deferred to the next moment, or the next ring

along the chain of text, and therefore remains a perpetual absence. A Derridean reading of our “leaf” verse—“A leaf falls, and all under the heaven know the autumn befalls”—would probably be focusing on the indeterminate meaning of “all under the heaven,” a phrase in Chinese both referring to the entire natural world and to all the human subjects. It is undecidable as to whether it is Nature or a collective human mind that comes to be aware of the advent of autumn. Either interpretation—a preference of Nature to human mind, or vice versa—falls into the metaphysical residue of logocentrism. This indeterminacy of meaning is caused by the deconstructive structure of writing, wherein the presence of Nature is necessarily brought about by the invocation of Man as its substitute or supplement, and vice versa. The meaning of the phrase, therefore, as well as of the entire discourse of the verse, is forever deferred or supplemented by additions or differences.

While Derrida undertook to reveal the deconstructive structure of the text from the perspective of writing, Paul de Man (1919-1983), the Belgium-born American scholar, carried out the same project from the perspective of reading. Upon the structural origin of indeterminate meaning—to which Derrida assigned the conception of textuality—de Man applied the term rhetoricity. The rhetorical nature of writing proffers, as the title of one of his prominent books suggests, the “allegories of reading.” The rhetorical or metaphorical pattern inherent in language and literature, for de Man, constitutes the structural origin of the metaphysical categories of presence, essence, action, truth, and beauty (15). Rather than a self-evident entity, that is, the entire system of Western metaphysics relies on the metaphor, or foreign substitutes, to bring about its seeming presence. This rhetorical or metaphorical transformation is realized by means of language, with poetic writing being the most advanced and refined mode of the linguistic structure.

The rhetorical infrastructure of metaphysics has indeed perpetually manifested itself in the practice of rhetorical reading undertaken in the engagement with texts from classical didactics through modern literary criticism. But the inherent self-deconstructive structure—a contradiction between presence and metaphor—had never been put into question in the long history of Western metaphysics until, as de Man repeatedly stresses, Nietzsche set out to reveal the structure of rhetorical tropes. For de Man, the long-lasting ignorance of the deconstructive structure is caused by the long-accepted “superiority of metaphor over metonymy.” By virtue of its “necessary link” guaranteeing the presence of truth, that is, metaphor has been considered to be superior to metonymy, which merely presents a relational contiguity formed “perchance.” This is not true, according to de Man, for it is inevitable for any metaphor to be arranged into a metonymical order:

[P]recisely when the highest claims are being made for the unifying power of metaphor, these very images rely in fact on the deceptive use of semi-automatic grammatical patterns. The deconstruction of metaphor and of all rhetorical patterns such as mimesis, paronomasia, or personification that use resemblance as a way to disguise differences, takes us back to the impersonal precision of grammar and of a semiology derived from grammatical patterns. (16)

The “semi-automatic grammatical patterns,” as de Man calls it, correspond to Jakobson’s axis of metonymy, which voluntarily combines metaphorical substitutes into a sequence; the process is “semi-automatic” merely because it still relies on an utterer to motivate the sequence of words. Without the interference from an utterer, i.e., in the realm of *la langue*, the semiology of grammatical patterns is notable for its “impersonal precision,” in terms of its precise cast of the absence characteristic of metaphor into the presence characteristic of metonymy. This transition

from absence to presence, or the projection from metaphor to metonymy, is always and everywhere in operation so long as language persists as the ground of metaphysics. It is exactly this fundamental linguistic structure, featuring a transformation from metaphor to metonymy, that simultaneously constructs an event, in the sense of presenting an intrinsic “necessary link,” and deconstructs it, in the sense of displaying no more than a contiguity formed “perchance.”

While fully relying on the rhetorical reading to construct certain metaphysical truth, as de Man criticizes, contemporary prominent scholarships of European formalism and American New Criticism—like their metaphysical predecessors—fail to discern the self-deconstructive structure of rhetorical writing. The task of literary criticism, therefore, is to carry out a deconstructive type of rhetorical reading, unravelling the figuration in metonymy into the metafigural pattern of metaphor. Along the metonymical sequence of our “leaf” verse, for example, the presence of an autumn is introduced by the particular image of a falling leaf; on the axis of metaphor prior to metonymy, however, the falling leaf is no more than a singular, accidental event in contrast with the universal, sweeping autumn. In this way, the seeming presence of autumn, which is after all brought about by the falling leaf, is proved to contain a self-deconstruction of its determinate presence.

Despite the metalinguistic and metafigural standpoint of deconstruction—i.e., deconstructivists choose to overlook the attendance of an utterer—de Man still recognizes the dim voice of a self, uttering behind the seemingly mechanical projection from metaphor to metonymy:

By passing from a paradigmatic structure based on substitution, such as metaphor, to a syntagmatic structure based on contingent association, such as metonymy, the mechanical, repetitive aspect of grammatical forms is shown to be operative in a passage that seemed at first sight to celebrate the self-willed and autonomous

inventiveness of a subject. Figures are assumed to be inventions, the products of a highly particularized individual talent, whereas no one can claim credit for the programmed pattern of grammar. (15-16)

As de Man points out here, there seems to exist a self-willed subject, behind the rhetorical pattern of grammar, who autonomously invents or produces figuration that is fundamental to language. This prospect of an invisible self as the creator of linguistic figuration leads to a philosophical inquiry. Is the verbal object—either speech or writing—a mere locution, referring to external reality as classicists believed or expressing inner feelings as Romanticists affirmed, or a pure structure or form, making the world into being as structuralists, formalists, New Critics, and deconstructivists argued? This question was partly touched upon, yet far from fully solved, by the Speech-act theory, first developed by the British philosopher John L. Austin (1911-1960) and then explored by the American philosopher John R. Searle.

As the title of Austin's posthumous book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) suggests, the verbal object composed of words is that with which people "do" things. Contemplating verbal phenomena mainly in the field of ordinary language, Austin makes a distinction between performative utterances and referential utterances. In contrast with referential utterances, which occupied the old philosophical fallacy of seeing all uses of language as referential statements based on a true-or-false basis, performative utterances contain performances of a large variety of non-referential acts intended by the speaker, as well as to be rightly understood by the hearer ("Performative Utterances" 235-36). The two standard grammatical forms in correspondence to such performative utterances are: (1) it "begin[s] with the verb in the first person singular present indicative active," such as "I order that . . .," performing the act in the eyes of the speaker; or (2) "the verb is in the passive voice and in the second or third person, not in the first," such as "You

are (or he is) hereby authorized to . . .,” performing the act from the perspective of the hearer (242-43). Based on this observation, Austin announces the significant form of performative utterances:

[A]ny utterance which is performative could be reduced or expanded or analysed into one of these two standard forms beginning “I . . .” so and so or beginning “You (or he) hereby . . .” so and so. (244)

But Austin comes to notice that, rather than an explicit performative utterance, a locution very often appears in the form of what he calls a “primary” performative utterance. That is, neither an attendant subject (the speaker or hearer) nor an explicit performative verb is present in the utterance. In a primary performative utterance, such as “Shut the door,” the nature of the performative act—whether it’s ordering, entreating, imploring, beseeching, inciting, or tempting, etc.—is indeterminate or “infelicitous,” and therefore depends on the attendant context (linguistic, institutional, and situational circumstances) for further discrimination (245).

In the meantime, Austin realizes that, rather than mutually exclusive, a referential utterance and a performative utterance are not very often distinctive from each other; moreover, in a radical manner, a referential utterance can be considered a type of performative utterance, in terms that it carries out the speech-act of “stating.” “[A]fter all when we state something or describe something or report something,” claims Austin, “we do perform an act which is every bit as much an act as an act of ordering or warning” (1440). At this point, being “true” and “false”—once attached to referential utterances—are no more than being “felicitous” and “infelicitous” with which performative utterances are evaluated.

The above two aspects of speech-acts—frequent missing of explicit performative verbs (i.e., the context) and a confusion between referential and performative utterances, as Austin

admits, “revel in amiguity” in determining the meaning and force (felicity) of a locution. The one thing that Austin proposes to be of a very great help in discovering the meanings and forces of speech-acts is “a list of explicit performative verbs,” which turns out to have led to cumbersome analyses of context in both linguistic studies and literary criticism. With regard to the problematic relation between meaning and context, as put forward here by Austin, Derrida tries to solve it by pointing out the breaking of the text from its original context, and the subsequent attachment of the text to new contexts, as quoted below:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written, in a small or large unit, can be *cited* [iterability], put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring. (“Signature Event Context” 12, Derrida’s italics)

On the contrary, Searle insists on that the meaning of the text corresponds to the intentionality under its original context, as quoted below:

[We can] decide to make a radical break . . . think of it as a sentence of English, weaned from all production or origin, putative or otherwise. But even then there is no getting away from intentionality, because *a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act*. (“Reiterating the Differences” 202, Searle’s italics)

The opposition between the above contentions lies in that, whereas Searle tends to identify the intentional meaning with the referential meaning of the text, Derrida discerns that meaning can only derive from the ever-changing moment when the three horizons—the text, the external

referent, and the inner consciousness—come to intersect with, rather than identify with, each other. The contradiction thereof is so fundamentally relevant to the conception of significance that a tentative reconciliation between them is undertaken in the following section of conclusion.

### **Conclusion**

Now let us conclude the entire survey of Western ideas on meaning and form of verbal and literary representation, first with a tentative reconciliation between the Derrida-Searle dispute over Austin's speech-act theory, and then with a larger reconciliation between competing ideas within the scope of postmodernism.

To settle the Derrida-Searle dispute, first of all, it is necessary to look into the connection between Austin's speech-act theory and Jakobson's idea on poetic function. Despite his exclusion of poetic language from ordinary language, Austin's hesitance—his original distinction and subsequent reconciliation between referential utterances and performative utterances—prevents him from moving a step further toward the poetic structure featuring a projection from metaphor to metonymy. Though insightful of the difference between referential and performative utterances, that is, Austin is blinded to the deferment whereby the "things" appearing in referential utterances serve as the metaphors to be projected into a metonymical sequence by performative utterances so as "to do things." Searle's intentionality, on the one hand, cannot be self-evident and thus must depend on metaphorical otherness to metonymically perform itself; Derrida's textuality, on the other, which stresses the otherness of the text—as well as de Man's rhetoricity, which emphasizes the otherness of metaphor—is after all subject to a metonymical reading aimed at reaching an indeterminate yet destined meaning issued from a conscious being. This reconciliation seems an *aporia*, but it is a deadlock that is operative within the Hegelian *telos* that being-for-itself be represented by being-in-itself.



Poetry—or literary text in general—represents the typical type of utterance that lacks, at least on the grammatical level, an utterer and an explicit performative verb. The efforts of interpretation, as confirmed by the history of hermeneutics, have been largely focused on finding out the explicit performative verb—i.e., how the conscious being is “doing” things—and the list of explicit performative verbs turns to be indefinitely long, given the increasingly expanded space of interpretation. The missing utterer of such performative acts cannot be restored to the personal poet who produces the poetry, as reassured by the structuralist distinction between actual and implied author, or by the New Criticism’s critique of “the intentional fallacy,” or by the poststructuralist claim of the “death of author.” Rather, just as the deconstructivist de Man senses the invisible existence of a Self behind the programmed pattern of grammar, so the writer or reader bears in mind the pervasive existence of a conscious being issuing the performative verb, which is absent in the text and yet present in the process of writing or reading. That conscious being can be described with Searle’s term “intention;” it’s best described, though, by the Hegelian “being-for-itself” or the spiritual freedom of the human being.

From the above reconciliation of the Derrida-Searle dispute we are moving on to the specific issues of meaning and form. The meaning experience consists of two correlative types of meaning: the referential meaning and the intentional meaning.

Intention, in its phenomenological sense defined by Husserl, is the relation between inner consciousness and the external object. It is what we may call the intentional meaning to be experienced via language or other kinds of symbol. With the Hegelian *telos* imported, we may say that the intentional meaning consists in the relation between being-for-itself and being-in-itself. This intentional meaning or relation can only be the significant meaning where being-for-

itself and being-in-itself intersect with each other, just as a wheel and the ground touches each other at the significant point.

Meaning may also be the relation between one external object and another. But this referential meaning is subordinate to the intentional meaning, for the relation between external objects is predicated on consciousness and thus on being-for-itself. Like the intentional meaning, the referential meaning can only be the significant meaning where external objects intersect with each other, which proceeds to serve as an integral object or being-in-itself in relation to being-for-itself. At this point, the referential meaning is not the ultimate meaning, but the “ground” to be touched by the “wheel” of being-for-itself so as to produce the intentional meaning.

Language, either spoken or written, is the semiological representation or substitute of the meaning experience. It is a system of material marks (sound plus graph) that exists independently, or arbitrarily, of both being-for-itself and being-in-itself. But it serves as the “abracadabra” that conjures or invokes the conceptual touching between being-for-itself and being-in-itself, as well as that between beings-in-themselves. Language is the rut that drags together the wheel and the ground. This rut, however, belongs neither to being-for-itself or being-in-itself, but proffers an indefinite succession of different yet supplemental points whereby being-for-itself and being-in-itself come to touch each other.

The significant form whereby language operates, and whereby the meaning experience operates, is the poetic structure featuring the projection from metaphor to metonymy. This poetic structure, developed by Saussure and elaborated by Jakobson, is not only characteristic of language but of the meaning experience. This is exactly why Heidegger, quoting Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), came to announce “Poetically man dwells.” The metaphors along the axis of equivalence constitute the semiological selection of being-in-itself to be projected into

metonymy; the metonymy along the axis of contiguity conducts the speech act by which being-for-itself performs its coming-into-being, with various illocutionary acts being its component elements. Whereas illocutionary acts perform from various aspects the coming-into-being of the being-for-itself on the side of the author, perlocutionary acts perform from various aspects the coming-into-being of the being-for-itself on the side of the reader. They do not necessarily identify but possibly coincide with each other, as elaborated by the reader-response theory.

The ambiguity or indeterminacy of meaning is caused by *significance*, the dual entity of the significant meaning and the significant form. From the perspective of the significant form, the seemingly determinate meaning along the syntagmatic sequence comes to be deconstructed by the metaphorical and thus substitutive nature of all its elements. Besides, the lack of an utterer and a performative verb in the utterance of poetry makes reading into an act of interpretation aimed at listing possible explicit performative verbs. From the significant meaning point of view, the concept of meaning as the relation between being-for-itself and being-in-itself, as well as that between beings-in-themselves, can only be the significant meaning, which eternally alters along with the changing relation between the two horizons.

Being-for-itself—the spiritual freedom of either the collective or individual human being—is a horizon of multiple significant meanings rather than a centered spot of single meaning; the same can be said about the horizon of being-in-itself, so long as external objects are invoked via language to represent being-for-itself; and the same can be said about the horizon of language, either spoken or written, a system of signifiers ever rigorously seeking new signifieds—namely, new significant meanings that come into being along with the interaction among various horizons.

All competing theories with regard to the origin of meaning—realism, metaphysics, empiricism, rationalism, Romanticism, transcendentalism, psycho-analysis, phenomenology, structuralism, and poststructuralism—respectively hold a particular horizon as the locus of meaning. All competing theories with regard to form—mimesis, emanation, expressive theories, aesthetic theories, pragmatic theories, formalism, structuralism—correspond to relevant theories of meaning. The conception of significance comes to reconcile them by unveiling that meaning derives from the interaction among horizons rather than from any particular horizon, and that form likewise designates ever-changing intersection among horizons rather than any solid correspondence. The involved pluralism of meaning, as well as eclecticism of form, can only find its expression or representation in the critical practice of postmodernism. Once the Hegelian *telos*—(multifaceted) being-for-itself be represented by (multifaceted) being-in-itself—is consolidated via a system of paradoxical juxtapositions of symbols (language, culture, institutions, etc.), we may say that man comes to embrace, in Francis Fukuyama’s term, “the end of history” of (literary, cultural, political, etc.) criticism.

**Chapter Three**  
**Sage-centric Creation Myths and Transcendental Spiritual Freedom**  
**in Early Chinese Literature**

Therefore, as for the images, the sage had the means to perceive the mysteries of the world and, drawing comparisons to them with analogous things, made images out of those things that seemed appropriate. In consequence of this, they called these “images.”  
*(Zhouyi zhengyi 7.344)*<sup>16</sup>

Mythological accounts about the birth of man may suggest the philosophical destination of the human being, that is, where the human existence eventually goes. In Hegel’s terms, this is a question about how the human being as an abandoned thing is finally reconciled with human existence as spiritual freedom. This cycle is also called by Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) as the “myth of eternal return.” The argument of this chapter is that, in Western mythologies and theology, the eternal return is marked by man’s return to Godhead. In Chinese mythologies and moral cosmology, however, the eternal return is marked by man’s return to Sagehead. This sagehead is personified as an archetypal sage, standing at the centre of the cosmos, and applying his all-seeing gaze at the universe. He is the human agent who contemplates the ultimate truth and puts down symbols and texts as the representation of the truth. This image of an archetypal sage has ever become the ideal personality that poets and writers in the history of Chinese

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<sup>16</sup> The translation is made by Lynn, *Classic of Changes*, 68.

literature have aspired to return to. That is why to “consult the sage” was listed by Liu Xie as one of the major principles of literary creation.

Many ancient mythologies contain creation stories, which have provided mythical theories regarding the origins of a primeval universe and man. Despite the divine authorship of the creation of man, the rise of humanity did not occur with the birth of the first man. It was not until a mythical tension arose between the divine and mortals that the human being becomes conscious of his human identity. On the one hand, the fall motif that originated in the creation myths perpetuates the inferior nature of man by contrast with the divine. On the other hand, despite entailing doomed ordeals of mankind, the fall of man indicates a de facto rise of humanity from nature to culture. Once this human-divine tension was institutionalized as the archetype of human existence in a religious culture, such as the polytheism in classical Greece and monotheism in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the intellectual convention concerning the distinction between an earthly world and a transcendental world has been characterized by its remorse over the fall of man and an appeal for a return to divinity. The religious dialectic born of the mythological human-divine tension has fundamentally influenced Western intellectual history, which Hegel claimed was driven by conflicts between the divine providence and concrete evils (78-86). Reflected in the tradition of fiction, according to Northrop Frye’s archetypal theory, the falling and rising movements in the divine cycle have evolved into distinctive intellectual modes evident in such fictional genres as tragedy, comedy, romance, and irony (*Anatomy* 158-223).

A common observation made by Sinologists regarding Chinese mythology is that Chinese creation myths lack the image of a creator or a divine will, which ordained divine creation, and thus do not establish a mythological foundation of a transcendental authority within

a monolithic religious culture (Birrell 24). The absence of a divine creator in Chinese mythology raises a series of questions regarding the intellectual nature of its creation myths. These questions include: first, do Chinese creation myths follow a demiurge-centric pattern to explain the origin of the world? Second, what has become of the cultural source of the rise of humanity, as initiated by the fall of man in the Western mythological tradition? Third, what particular structure, such as the human-divine dialectic in the Western tradition, can be found in Chinese creation myths to qualify as a distinctive intellectual mode that influences Chinese literature?

### **Creation Myths on the Origin of Man**

A well-accepted argument regarding the nature of Chinese creation myths relates to its naturalistic approach in explaining the beginning of the cosmos, which is represented as a mechanism of creation without the interference of a divine creator.<sup>17</sup> Such an organismic version of the creation story can be found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, an encyclopaedic anthology of archaic texts compiled during the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. by Daoist-oriented scholars under the patronage of Liu An 劉安 (179-122 B.C.), vassal of Huainan 淮南, partly as a political project dedicated to the royal court of the Western Han (202 B.C.-9 A.D.):

When Heaven and Earth were yet unformed, all was ascending and flying, diving and delving. Thus it was called the Grand Inception. The Grand Inception produced the Nebulous Void. The Nebulous Void produced space-time; space-time produced the original *qi*. A boundary [divided] the original *qi*. That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven; that which was heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth. It is easy for that which is pure and subtle to converge

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<sup>17</sup> The absence of a divine creator in ancient Chinese myths cannot be interpreted as the lack of an ancient mythological system rendering the sacred history of pre-historical times. Though common in classical Chinese literature, mythical representations of a divine world are not included here in the investigation of archaic creation myths in this chapter.

but difficult for the heavy and turbid to congeal. Therefore Heaven was completed first; Earth was fixed afterward. The conjoined essences of Heaven and Earth produced *yin* and *yang*. The supersessive essences of *yin* and *yang* caused the four seasons. The scattered essences of the four seasons created the myriad things.

(Major, et al. 114-15)<sup>18</sup>

天墜未形，馮馮翼翼，洞洞瀾瀾，故曰太昭。道始于虛霏，虛霏生宇宙，宇宙生氣。氣有涯垠，清陽者薄靡而為天，重濁者凝滯而為地。清妙之合專易，重濁之凝竭難，故天先成而地後定。天地之襲精為陰陽，陰陽之專精為四時，四時之散精為萬物。(Huainan honglie jijie 79-80)

This mythical account describes the creation of the universe as a process of cosmic evolution instead of an instant and simultaneous exposition. Miscellaneous celestial movements occur following a majestic order represented by its numeric sequence: the cosmos originates in the monolithic mass of *taizhao* 太昭 [Great Inception], evolves into the dualistic system of sky and earth, then further into the four seasons, and eventually disperses into the myriad things of *wanwu* 萬物 [ten thousand things]. In the history of classical Chinese ideas, this numerical spirit is acknowledged as articulating the supreme law of the universe which emphasizes the omnipresent phenomenon of change. As the absolute principle underlying the natural order of cosmic transformations, the *Dao* 道 ordains the manner in which human behaviour harmonizes

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<sup>18</sup> The English translation quoted from the *Huainanzi* is re-organized in a prosaic style, which is different from that of Major's translation formatted in verse, to be compatible with the Chinese text quoted from the *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 [Collected Annotations of Master Huainan]. Here and following, Major's text has been rearranged likewise.



with nature.<sup>19</sup> Despite the absence of a divine will, the natural ideal of the *Dao* functions as the intellectual counterpart of the divine ideal on which a demiurge bases the creation of the world. Unlike the subordination of the divine ideal to a demiurge, however, the autonomy of the *Dao* allows humanity to acquire its spirit without divine intervention. This discrepancy between the two types of creation myths is indicative of the different cultural origins in the rise of humanity: if in the demiurge-centric mode of creation myths humanity originated in the tension between man and the demiurge, in the spirit-centric mode of creation myths humanity emerges rather as an autonomous realm.

Despite the naturalistic nature of some prominent creation myths dispersed in classical Chinese scriptures, the renowned Chinese mythographer Yuan Ke 袁珂 (1916-2001) traced the mythical figure of Pan Gu 盤古 in both minority folklores and mythological materials, and suggested him as the primal demiurge in Chinese creation myths (35-40). One of his major textual resources is found in the monumental *Taiping yulan* 太平禦覽 [Imperial Review of the Taiping Era], a tenth-century encyclopedia compiled during the reign of Emperor Taizong of Song 宋太宗 (976-997) to supposedly accommodate the whole of knowledge existing prior to the Song empire:

[It is said in Xu Zheng's *Historical Records of the Three Majestic Lords and Five Emperors*:] Heaven and Earth were in chaos like a chicken's egg, and Pan Gu was born in the middle of it. In eighteen thousand years Heaven and earth opened and unfolded. The limpid that was *Yang* became the heavens, the turbid that was *Yin* became the earth. Pan Gu lived within them, and in one day he went through nine

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<sup>19</sup> In both the Daoist and Confucianist traditions, the *Dao*, literally meaning the Way, designates the supreme principle of the universe. A roughly equivalent concept in the Western tradition is the Platonic *logos*.

transformations, becoming more divine than Heaven and wiser than earth. Each day the heavens rose ten feet higher, each day the earth grew ten feet thicker, and each day Pan Gu grew ten feet taller. And so it was that in eighteen thousand years the heavens reached their fullest height, earth reached its lowest depth, and Pan Gu became fully grown. Afterwards, there were the Three Sovereign Divinities. (Birrell 32-33)<sup>20</sup>

徐整三五曆紀曰：天地混沌如雞子，盤古生其中。萬八千歲，天地開辟。陽清為天，陰濁為地。盤古在其中，一日九變。神於天，聖於地。天日高一丈，地日厚一丈，盤古日長一丈。如此萬八千歲，天數極高，地數極深，盤古極長。後乃有三皇。(TPYL 2.8)

The *Sanwu liji* 三五歷紀 [Historical Records of the Three Majestic Lords and Five Emperors] was compiled by Xu Zheng 徐整, a third-century scholar, to collect in one source document ancient myths and legends relating to the mysterious deeds of pre-historical ancestral sovereigns. The original text was later lost and its extant fragments are only to be found in such referential documents as the *Imperial Review of the Taiping Era*. Based on this creation myth, Pan Gu was a primeval deity created along with the creation of the cosmos rather than a divine creator. Instead of a prior almightiness eligible for a cosmic creation, Pan Gu was characterized by his physical and intellectual power that grew and surpassed a primordial divine world after the creation. Unlike the demiurge in the Hellenic and Judeo-Christian traditions, Pan Gu as the legendary forerunner of the Three Sovereign Divinities 三皇 ordained neither a divine will nor majestic laws to be obeyed in the entire universe.

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<sup>20</sup> Here and following, the Wade-Giles transliteration P'an Ku in Birrell's translation has been replaced by the Pinyin transliteration Pan Gu.

Moreover, in the *Wuyun linianji* 五運歷年紀 [A Chronicle of the Five Cycles of Time], another book of mythical records compiled by the same scholar, the divine nature of Pan Gu seems to be problematic:

[It is said in *A Chronicle of the Five Cycles of Time*: From the permeating primordial energy came the germination. Divided are the sky and earth, establishing the entire universe. With the origination of *Yin* and *Yang*, the primordial energy was distributed. A neutralisation was thereupon conceived, as is how humans were begot.]<sup>21</sup> When the first born, Pan Gu, was approaching death, his body was transformed. His breath became the wind and clouds; his voice became peals of thunder. His left eye became the sun; his right eye became the moon. His four limbs and five extremities became the four cardinal points and the five peaks. His blood and semen became water and rivers. His muscles and veins became the earth's arteries; his flesh became fields and land. His hair and beard became the stars; his bodily hair became plants and trees. His teeth and bones became metal and rock; his vital marrow became pearls and jade. His sweat and bodily fluids became streaming rain. All the mites on his body were touched by the wind and were turned into the black-haired people. (Birrell 33)

五運歷年紀：元氣濛鴻，萌芽茲始，遂分天地，肇立乾坤。啓陰感陽，分布元氣，乃孕中和，是為人也。首生盤古，垂死化身，氣成風雲，聲為雷霆，左眼為日，右眼為月，四肢五體為四極五嶽，血液為江河，筋脈為地

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<sup>21</sup> The translation in the brackets is mine. Anne Birrell's translation does not include the first 8 verses in the original Chinese text quoted here.

里，肌肉為田土，髮髭為星辰，皮毛為草木，齒骨為金石，精髓為珠玉，  
汗流為雨澤，身之諸蟲，因風所感，化為黎甿。(Yishi 繹史 1.2)

In this mythical account, which suggests the naturalistic nature of his birth, Pan Gu is acknowledged as the first human begot by the neutralisation of the *yin* and *yang*. While dying, his body parts were transformed in an analogical manner into myriad things in the world. In a deprecating way the human race is said to have been generated from the multitude of mites inhabiting his body. Despite his human nature, Pan Gu partly fulfilled the role of a demiurge in terms of finalizing the creation of a primordial world inhabited by mankind. Unlike the divine creation in the Hellenic and Judeo-Christian traditions, however, the analogical metamorphoses of Pan Gu's body parts were not originated in a prior divine design that is otherwise conceived by the creator in demiurge-centric creation myths as an archetypal pattern for the universe. No intellectual engagements, either from the divine or the human being, can be discerned within this mythical account. The world seems neither copied from a transcendental ideal conceived by a creator nor entailing any cultural resource by which the human race can obtain identification of themselves apart from the divine. This account regarding the origin of man in the fashion of Pan Gu failed to prevail anyway due to its dismissive manner toward the human being (Yuan 40). It was the story of Nü Wa 女媧 that gained the most enduring popularity among various creation myths retelling the origin of man:

[It is said in *The Complete Book of Ancient Customs*:] People say that when Heaven and earth opened and unfolded, humankind did not yet exist. Nü Wa kneaded yellow earth and fashioned human beings. Though she worked feverishly, she did not have enough strength to finish her task, so she drew her

cord in a furrow through the mud and lifted it out to make human beings. That is why rich aristocrats are the human beings made from yellow earth, while ordinary poor commoners are the human beings made from the cord's furrow. (Birrell 35)

風俗通曰：俗說天地開辟，未有人民，女媧搏黃土作人。劇務力不暇供，乃引繩於[緝]泥中，舉以為人。故富貴者，黃土人也；貧賤凡庸者，緝人也。(TPYL 78.365)

In the *Fengsu tong* 風俗通 [The Complete Book of Ancient Customs], a second-century encyclopedia of historical records regarding ancient customs and religious rituals compiled by Ying Shao 應劭 (cir. 153-196 A.D.), the primeval goddess Nü Wa, despite the oblivion of her divine lineage, is claimed to be the creator who undertook the skilful feat of creating human beings out of earth and mud. The raw materials applied to create people in this account are reminiscent of the similar use of water and clay in the Olympian myths and that of dust in Hebrew myths. What seems innovative in this Chinese creation story is that, different from the common mythological disposal of a hierarchical separation between the divine and mortal, it also accounts for the hierarchy of human society that is derived from the material origins of man. This account incidentally brings forth the issue of human identity; however, there seems no critical intellectual breakthrough that would lead to a free will applied by the human being to identify himself from his surroundings.

### **Etymology of the Divine**

According to both Nü Wa and Pan Gu myths regarding human creation, a mythological representation of the rise of humanity as well as its cultural origin, if not entirely beyond early intellectual concerns in Chinese creation myths, is at least free from the motif of divine

retribution, or a punishing interference in human life from the demiurge or the divine will.

Neither can it be observed that a deteriorating humanity necessarily undergoes salvation through the post-retributive atonement required by the divine of the secular. A primordial intellectual dominance of the demiurge or the divine will upon man seems almost completely absent in early Chinese intellectual history; even in the largely symbolic images of Chinese writing system, the etymological identification of heavenly divinity does not only appear relatively late, but also denotes fluid references. In the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 [An Explication of Written Characters], a comprehensive second-century dictionary written by Xu Shen 許慎 (cir. 58-147 AD) on the etymological structure of Chinese characters, the definitions of the two collective names for divinity are recorded as follows:

禎,<sup>22</sup> the heavenly divinity who introduces myriad creatures. It adopts 示 as its semantic symbol and 申 as its phonetic symbol.<sup>23</sup>

禎 (神), 天神引出萬物者也。從示, 申聲。(3)

祗, the earthly divinity who introduces myriad creatures. It adopts 示 as its semantic symbol and 氏 as its phonetic symbol.

祗 (祇), 地神引出萬物者也。從示, 氏聲。(3)

According to the definitions regarding the references of the most commonly used written symbols for the divine realm, the Chinese conception of 神, the equivalent of *divinity*, should have been established already to signify either the identity or quality of divinity by the Eastern Han period (25-220 A.D.). It can be further speculated based on the combinative

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<sup>22</sup> The writing form of characters used by Xu Shen in the entries of his treatise is known as *xiaozhuan* 小篆, a simplified writing style popularly used from the unification of Qin 秦 (221 B.C.) till the end of the Western Han (202 B.C.-9 A.D.), postdating pre-Qin *dazhuan* 大篆 and predating subsequent *lishu* 隸書.

<sup>23</sup> Other than credited, translations from the Chinese, here and elsewhere, are my own.

structure of the written symbol that its signification of divinity must be etymologically derived from the concepts respectively signified by the two component symbols. In the aforementioned definition about 𤞪 (神), the character is classified in the category of phono-semantic compound,<sup>24</sup> with its left radical 示 (示) carrying the semantic reference and its right radical 申 (申) rendering the phonetic value. Besides its phonetic loan, 申 as a written symbol carries significant semantic references relevant to the meaning of 𤞪. In the same dictionary, Xu Shen provides two definitions about the single character 申:

1. 申, thunderbolt.

申，電也。(673)

2. 申, divinity.

申，神也。(746)

Apparently, Xu Shen's perspective of 申 as carrying the phonetic value in the compound character 𤞪 somehow ignores either of his definitions about 申. Instead, his argument for the meaning of 𤞪 relies on the semantic reference carried by 示:

示， engagement with the divine.

示，神事也。(2)

Due to the lack of evidence from archaic writing systems, the arguments made by Xu Shen were mainly based on professional observations from the perspective of a philologist instead

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<sup>24</sup> The classical Chinese character classification formulated by Xu Shen is known as the Six Writings (六書), including pictograms (象形), simple ideograms (指事), ideogrammic compounds (會意), phonetic loan characters (假借), phono-semantic compounds (形聲), and derivative cognates (轉注).

of an archaeological linguist.<sup>25</sup> Xu Shen’s definition regarding the etymological nature of 禘 and its radical components would have been largely adjustable in the light of earlier written symbols. In the earliest mature Chinese writing system of oracle bone scripts dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. (late Shang Dynasty), 𠄎, the archaic form of 𠄎, is a pictographic representation either of the bursting collision between *yin* and *yang* or the glinting emission of lightning (Yang 16). This is critical evidence for the fact that, before it questionably started to carry a conceptual reference to divinity, the written symbol 𠄎 had originally signified the natural image of a thunderbolt. Likewise, in the early writing system of oracle bone scripts, 𠄎, the archaic form of 𠄎, mimetically represents the stone or wood erected during royal rituals to summon the spirits of ancestors (Jiang 77). The real identities of these ancestors, suggested Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927), are the thirteen ancestral kings and lords in the royal lineage of the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.) (423-27). Different from Xu Shen’s interpretation of 𠄎 as “engagement with divinity,” the written symbol 𠄎 actually signifies the archaic worship of royal ancestors. A combination of the two scripts 𠄎 (申) and 𠄎 (示), which would be in the form of 𠄎 (神), did not appear until the bronze inscriptions (金文), a child writing system of the oracle bone scripts found mainly during the Zhou 周 Dynasty (1045-256 B.C.) (Tian 356-57). This historical integration of the two scripts finally assigned to the new written symbol 𠄎, the forerunner of 禘 (神), a more sophisticated signification of divinity. Otherwise, neither of its semantic components seems to ever carry an archetypal concept of “god,” as distinguished from the morphology of the word *divine*

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<sup>25</sup> The discovery and scholarship of the oracle bone scripts dating from the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.) was not established until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is believed that the existence of the oracle bone scripts was beyond Xu Shen’s knowledge about ancient writing systems.



which can be traced through the Latin word *divinus* or *divus* (godlike) to the Greek radical *Deus* (god) or *Zeus*.

Although the early evolvement of certain written symbols does not directly justify the absence of a demiurge in Chinese creation myths, it implies two clues for an alternative perspective regarding the conceptual origin of divinity in early Chinese intellectual history: the symbolic idea regarding divinity seems derived from both the mimetic representation of heavenly objects, denoted by 𠄎 (甲), and the anthropolatric identification of mankind with their ancestors, denoted by 𠄎 (示); the conceptual association of the human and heavenly realms, denoted by 𠄎𠄎 (神), conveys an intellectual integration of humanity and divinity, while bypassing the phase of identification of the divine as a superior deity which would otherwise entail a separation between humanity and divinity. In other words, early Chinese written symbols of the divine designate the inclusive quality of divinity permeating the universe rather than the exclusive identity of lofty deities. Such a pantheistic connotation of divinity in early Chinese ideas has been further reified into miscellaneous divine subjects invoked in ancient rituals:

With a blazing pile of wood on the Grand altar they sacrificed to Heaven; by burying (the victim) in the Grand mound, they sacrificed to the Earth. [(In both cases) they used a red victim.]

By burying a sheep and a pig at the (altar of) Great brightness, they sacrificed to the seasons. (With similar) victims they sacrificed to (the spirits of) cold and heat, at the pit and the altar[, using prayers of deprecation and petition]; to the sun, at the (altar called the) royal palace; to the moon, at the (pit called the) light of the night; to the stars at the honoured place of gloom; to (the spirits of) flood and drought at the honoured altar of rain; to the (spirits of the) four quarters at the

place of the four pits and altars; mountains, forests, streams, valleys, hills, and mounds, which are able to produce clouds, and occasion winds and rain, were all regarded as (dominated by) spirits. He by whom all under the sky was held sacrificed to all spirits. The princes of states sacrificed to those which were in their own territories; to those which were not in their territories, they did not sacrifice.<sup>26</sup>

燔柴於泰壇，祭天也。瘞埋於泰折，祭地也。用騂、犢。

埋少牢於泰昭，祭時也。相近於坎、壇，祭寒暑也。王宮，祭日也。夜明，祭月也；幽宗，祭星也。雩宗，祭水旱也。四坎、壇，祭四方也。山林、川谷、丘陵能出雲，為風雨，見怪物，皆曰神。有天下者祭百神。諸侯在其地則祭之，亡其地則不祭。(Liji jijie 45.1194)

According to this record found in the *Li ji* 禮記 [Book of Rites], the ancient royal ceremonial sacrifices were dedicated to miscellaneous spirits (神) who were believed to dominate a comprehensive range of earthly realms. Compared to the pantheistic religion in the Greco-Roman tradition, the pre-Buddhist Chinese religious tradition ignores the existence of a primary god that presides over minor deities and neglects figural personification of divine spirits as identifiable deities.<sup>27</sup> Instead, the mythical spirits are conceptualized as individual yet unidentifiable divine beings manifested by earthly forms.

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<sup>26</sup> The translation is adapted from Legge, *Sacred Books of China*, IV: 202-203.

<sup>27</sup> Similar to the ancient Roman Empire's historic conversion from the Greco-Roman pantheistic religion to Christianity in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism was not established in China as the dominant religion until the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Though having largely influenced pre-Buddhist Chinese ideas, the much earlier native religion of Daoism had not replaced archaic pantheistic religion either.

## Fu Xi: the Primordial Sage

Without the predominance of a supreme god and a rigid separation between the divine and human realms, the rise of humanity in Chinese creation myths can hardly be derived from an archetypal conflict between the divine and mortal, which is typified by the fall of Man in the Olympian and Hebrew-Christian traditions. However, the quintessential archetype of humanity is brilliantly represented in the mythical figure of Fu Xi 伏羲 who, as the first well-defined human agent as well as the primary *shengren* 聖人 [sage], introjected a pre-existent divine universe and created the intellectual system of *bagua* 八卦 [Eight Trigrams]. In Chinese creation myths, it is the mythological account about the immemorial lord of Fu Xi found in the *Yijing* 易經 [Book of Changes] that initially integrates essential elements of a distinctive beginning of humanity:

When in ancient times Lord Bao Xi ruled the world as sovereign, he looked upward and observed the images in heaven and looked downward and observed the models that the earth provided. He observed the patterns on birds and beasts and what things were suitable for the land. Nearby, adopting them from his own person, and afar, adopting them from other things, he thereupon made the eight trigrams in order to become thoroughly conversant with the virtues inherent in the numinous and the bright and to classify the myriad things in terms of their true, innate natures. (Lynn 77)

古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。  
(*Zhouyi zhengyi* 8.350-51)

Bao Xi 包犧, or Fu Xi 伏羲, is alleged to be the first lord in the sacred ancestry of Chinese primogenitors, i.e., the Three Majestic Lords and Five Emperors (三皇五帝). Positioned in the centre of the universe, the pre-historical lord is credited with the creation of the Eight Trigrams, a comprehensive intellectual system of signs with which to designate and categorize the infinite movements of the world. As a foundational myth in Chinese mythology regarding the establishment of a human-inhabited world, the Fu Xi story is distinctive in two respects when compared with Western creation myths: different from the Hellenic mythology's perception of the world as being mimetic of a pre-existent divine model, the Chinese mythopoeia emphasizes the demystification of a primordial order of the universe, which is accomplished by profoundly sage intelligence through symbolic interpretations; different from the Judeo-Christian tradition which considers humanity the opposite of divinity in the dialectic of the universe, the Chinese tradition locates the human being in the centre of the universe. The latter property of the Chinese intellectual mode may constitute the major reason for which Chinese creation myths lack the fall motif in representing the rise of humanity, while the former implies that divinity is conceptualized in the traditional Chinese understanding as the numinous quality of a sacred universe, which is to be illuminated by a sage, rather than the personified identity of deities as the counterpart of humans. As for the critical moment of the rise of humanity, the following classical commentary found in the *Book of Changes* shows how the primary sage Fu Xi accomplished his pivotal work of transplanting the numinous cosmic principles into humanity by virtue of the symbolic system of Eight Trigrams:

Therefore, as for the images, the sage[s] had the means to perceive the mysteries of the world and, drawing comparisons to them with analogous

things, made images out of those things that seemed appropriate. In consequence of this, they called these “images.” The sage[s] had the means to perceive the activities taking place in the world, and, observing how things come together and go smoothly, they thus enacted statutes and rituals accordingly. They appended phrases to the hexagram lines in order to judge the good and bad fortune involved. This is why these are called “line phrases.” [ . . . ] To plumb the mysteries of the world to the utmost is dependent on the hexagrams; to drum people into action all over the world is dependent on the phrases; to transform things and regulate them is dependent on changes; to start things going and carry them out is dependent on the free flow of change; to be aware of the numinous and bring it to light is dependent on the men involved; to accomplish things while remaining silent and to be trusted without speaking is something intrinsic to virtuous conduct.<sup>28</sup> (Lynn 68)

是故夫象，聖人有以見天下之賾，而擬諸其形容，象其物宜，是故謂之象。聖人有以見天下之動，而觀其會通，以行其典禮，繫辭焉以斷其吉凶，是故謂之爻。極天下之賾者存乎卦，鼓天下之動者存乎辭。化而裁之存乎變，推而行之存乎通，神而明之存乎其人。默而成之，不言而信，存乎德行。

(*Zhouyi zhengyi* 7.344-45)

Compared with the patriarchal sages in other mythological traditions, such as Utnapishtim in the Mesopotamian epic of *Gilgamesh* and Noah in the Biblical *Genesis*, who are preserved by the divine will from the great deluge, Fu Xi is not subject to interventions from deities.

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<sup>28</sup> It is to Fu Xi, the primary sage, that the holy accomplishments described in the text are ascribed, as is the reason to bracket the plural endings in the quoted translation.

Neither can allusive references be found in the Fu Xi tales pertaining to a divine ordainment for the sage's revelation of the numinous divinity of the universe. Without a retrospective intention of divinizing the origin of the universe, the Chinese patriarch in this explanatory narrative demystifies the sacred cosmic order into the two archetypal categories of images (*xiang* 象) and movements (*dong* 動). Upon his discovery of the two elementary categories within the universe, the sage further conceived two signifying systems, the symbolic (*gua* 卦) and the literary (*ci* 辭), to respectively represent the cosmic images and movements. Finally, the sage illuminates the two absolute principles of change (*bian* 變) and a smooth flow of change (*tong* 通), which interpret the numinous law of the universe, and urges that they be implanted into the human being in the character of moral merits (*dexing* 德行). In this mythical account regarding the rise of an original numinosum embedded in humanity, the sage is placed in the pivotal position that is otherwise occupied by a demiurge or the divine will in other traditions of creation myths. The archetypal dialectic between the divine and human is thus reconciled in the Chinese tradition by the human agent of a primary sage as well as his foundational institution of an overall intellectual system that bridges divinity and humanity.

The absence of a demiurge in Chinese creation myths seems to be an intellectual exception in comparison to other mythological traditions. Not only is the supreme being of a divine creator replaced in the sage-centric Chinese mythical-cosmogony by the human agent of a primary sage, but the pivotal position occupied by the sage in both the universe and intellectual prehistory has secured a moderation of the tension between divinity and humanity. However, both the dialectic mode in the demiurge-centric mythology and the pivotal mode in the sage-centric mythology seem to embrace a common theme of “eternal return,” which is applied by

Mircea Eliade to designate the cyclical pattern by which humanity experiences the repetition from destruction to regeneration (86-90). In the religious discourse of eternal return, one anticipates returning to a superior divine inception in the aftermath of this life. As a literary discourse that occurs simultaneously with primordial religions, mythology tends to echo the theme of eternal return by assuming a pre-existence of a divine world as well as promising an eventual re-entrance of people into the overarching realm of divinity.

In the demiurge-centric mythologies, the thematic representation of eternal return is of epic proportions due to the dialectical conflict between divinity and humanity, which culminates in the polar motifs of the fall of humanity and the return to divinity. In the Hindu tradition, for example, the fall motif is featured in the decline of humanity throughout the four yugas, and the return motif in the successive incarnations or avatars of the Hindu Trinity.<sup>29</sup> In the Hebrew tradition, likewise, the fall motif is represented by the banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden, and the return motif by Abraham's post-catastrophe mission of salvation ordained by Providence. In both of the religio-mythological traditions, a transitive moment from fall to return is marked by a catastrophic incident of divine retribution, such as the destruction of the universe in the Hindu tradition and the deluge in the Hebrew tradition, which forcibly guarantees an eternal return of humanity to divinity.

Nevertheless, in the sage-centric Chinese mythology, neither the fall motif nor the divine retribution can be observed. The great flood recorded in the *Shangshu* 尚書 [Book of History], a prehistoric equivalent of the deluge in the Mesopotamian or Hebrew tradition, never underwent a

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<sup>29</sup> The three primal gods of Hinduism, traditionally called "the Hindu Trinity," are Brahma the creator of universe, Vishnu the preserver of universe, and Shiva the destroyer of universe. The divine workings of the Hindu Trinity help generate four yugas, of the circle of four ages: Satya Yuga or the age of gods, Dvapara Yuga or the age of humankind, Treta Yuga or the age of degeneration, and Kali Yuga or the age of demons.

religious or mythological orientation to trace its retributive origin. A forcible separation of humankind from deities, which seems reminiscent of the fall motif, can be found in the following mythological account, regarding the blockade of the passage between earth and heaven, as recorded in “Lü Xin 呂刑 [Marquis of Lü on Punishments]” in the *Book of History*:

The king said, “. . . The great emperor compassionated the innocent multitudes that were (in danger of) being murdered, and made the oppressors feel the terrors of his majesty. He restrained and (finally) extinguished the people of *Miao*, so that they should not continue to future generations. Then he commissioned *Chong* and *Li* to make an end of the communications between earth and heaven; and the descents (of spirits) ceased. . . .”<sup>30</sup>

王曰：“……皇帝哀矜庶戮之不辜，報虐以威，遏絕苗民，無世在下。乃命重、黎，絕地天通，罔有降格。……” (*Shangshu zhengyi* 631-34)

In the above account, the emperor ordaining the separation of humankind from deities is asserted to be the ancestral sovereign of the Yellow Emperor (黃帝) or the pre-historical lord of Yao (堯). Unlike the punitive intervention from a divine will, the blockade of the heavenly passage in that mythical account is undertaken as an earthly project to stop the disorder aroused in humankind by malicious deities. Instead of an epic mythos undergirded by the fall motif and divine retribution, the universal theme of eternal return in the Chinese religio-mythological tradition is represented in a metaphysical spirit which romanticizes a return of humanity from an earthly existence to a sacred initial nothingness, as is exemplified in the following mythical narrative:

Cavernous and undifferentiated Heaven and Earth, chaotic and inchoate  
Uncarved Block, not yet created and fashioned into things: this we call the

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<sup>30</sup> The translation is adapted from Legge, *Sacred Books of China*, I: 256-57.



“Grand One.” . . . . In antiquity, at the Grand Beginning, human beings came to life in “Non-being” and acquired a physical form in “Being.” Having a physical form, [human beings] came under the control of things. But those who can return to that from which they were born, as if they had not yet acquired a physical form, are called the “Genuine.” The Genuines are those who have not yet begun to differentiate from the Grand One. The sage does not for the sake of a name become a corpse; does not for the sake of stratagems store things up; does not for the sake of affairs take on responsibility; does not for the sake of wisdom become a ruler. [The sage] dwells in the Formless, moves in the Traceless, and wanders in the Beginningless. . . . . Thus, the sage conceals his brilliance in the Formless and hides his traces in non-action. (Major, et al. 536-38)

洞同天地，渾沌為樸，未造而成物，謂之太一。……稽古太初，人生於無，形於有，有形而制於物。能反其所生，故未有形，謂之真人。真人者，未始分於太一者也。聖人不為名屍，不為謀府，不為事任，不為智主。藏無形，行無跡，遊無朕。……故聖人掩明于不形，藏跡于無為。(Huainan honglie jijie 14.463-64)

This creation myth from the Daoist-oriented *Huainanzi* illuminates three archetypal intelligent entities that fulfill the sacred generation as well as an initial return of the human being. According to the mythical account, first of all, the pre-existent divine power begetting the creation of the universe is conceptualized as an ideal entity, the Grand One (*taiyi* 太一), instead of being identified as a demiurgic being. This divine oneness can find its equivalent in the Hindu conception of Brahman, a universal spirit that provides a divine ground for all

kinds of forms and beings in the universe.<sup>31</sup> Second, the human being is accordingly generated from the divine oneness that becomes the archetypal model of the genuine human being (*zhenren* 真人) who keeps returning to the formless and free existence of the Grand One. Third, as the earthly manifestation of the genuine human being, the sage (*shengren* 聖人) conforms his being to the supreme truth of the divine oneness and thus is untrammelled by all secular forms. In the sage-centric mythical-cosmogony, therefore, the eternal return of humanity to divinity is accomplished rather through an intellectual self-consciousness characterizing sageliness than by a forcible interruption from deities such as the divine retribution. This non-interruptive mode of eternal return, which defines the primal relationship between humanity and divinity, helps lay down the intellectual pattern for the distinctively introspective and transcendental spirit of traditional Chinese literature. While the intense archetypal dialectic between the divine and secular in the Western mythical-cosmogony reinforces an epic mythos in the fictional representation, a primordial weakening of the intellectual tension between divinity and humanity gives rise to the introspective and transcendental ethos characterizing classical Chinese poetics.

### **The Chinese Mythos of Eternal Return**

The ancient verses of Chu (*Chuci* 楚辭), such as “Heavenly Questions” (Tianwen 天問) and “Encountering Sorrow” (Lisao 離騷) by Qu Yuan 屈原 (cir. 340-278 BC),<sup>32</sup> establish the transitive form from myth to literature, as the Homeric poems do in the Western tradition.

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<sup>31</sup> In Hinduism, Brahman is a prior existence of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma (the creator of the universe), Vishnu (the preserver of the universe), and Shiva (the destroyer of the universe). Therefore, Brahma, the demiurge in the Hindu creation stories, does not represent the ultimate origin of the universe.

<sup>32</sup> Despite the controversy over the authorship of “Heavenly Questions,” David Hawkes suggests Qu Yuan as at least the adapter of the poem that appears to have been developed from an ancient ritual text, as is based on the material and stylistic similarities between it and “Encountering Sorrow.” See Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 126.

Instead of an epic mythos that in the Homeric poems and Greek tragedies is mimetic of the actions of deities and earthly beings, the narrative poems in the *Chu ci* are characterized by a transcendental ethos that romanticizes the poet's self-consciousness of being elevated into the grand status of sageliness. This distinction between the two traditions of fictional poetics originates from the heterogeneous cosmogonies regarding the divine creation. A demiurge-centric cosmogony, as represented in Olympian creation myths, sets fictional narratives in a motion advanced by the motifs of fall and return. A sage-centric cosmogony, as represented in the Fu Xi stories in Chinese creation myths, implants into fictional narratives a self-conscious soul whose return to a divine oneness is accomplished by a melancholy transcendence of the self. The pervasive questioning voice in "Heavenly Questions" features an archetypal self-conscious soul as such, whose metaphysical inquiries about the sacred history of the universe are reflections upon the real nature of a transcendental self:

Who passed down the story of the far-off, ancient beginning of things?

How can we be sure what it was like before the sky above and the earth below  
had taken place?

Since none could penetrate that murk when darkness and light were yet undivided,  
how do we know about the chaos of insubstantial forms?

What manner of things are the darkness and light?

How did *Yin* and *Yang* come together, and how could they originate and transform  
all things that are by their commingling? (Hawkes 127)

遂古之初，誰傳道之？

上下未形，何由考之？

冥昭瞢闇，誰能極之？

馮翼惟像，何以識之？

明明闇闇，惟時何為？

陰陽三合，何本何化？ (*Chuci buzhu* 85-86)

These are the opening verses of “Heavenly Questions,” which is comprised of as many as 173 inquiries. Ostensibly in these interrogative arguments, the poetic mind seems to be inquiring about the mystical beginning of a primeval universe, which is allegedly transformed from a monolithic “murk” into the binary opposites such as above/below, darkness/light, and *yin/yang*. Despite the seemingly uncompromised voice crying for a pursuit of the ultimate truth, however, these initial questions, as well as the rest of the inquiries in the poem, are apparently unanswerable and thus serve as rhetorical reaffirmations about the inaccessibility of conventional doctrines regarding the sacred nature of the cosmic beginning. Subsequently, by a roughly chronological sequence, the four-syllabic narrative poem traces in its interrogative form the mythical history from the creation of universe through the pre-dynastic Shang’s kingship ordained by the Heaven until contemporary secular turmoil.<sup>33</sup> Instead of a series of catechisms as Birrell puts it (27), “Heavenly Questions” is more like an ingenious rhetorical device designed to foreground the plausibility of a vanished past of sublime divinity.

Besides its rhetorical innovation in representing a plausible divine realm, the *Heavenly Questions*, a transcendental sequel of “Encountering Sorrow,” can be read as an allegorical piece made during the political suppression of the poet. The secular injustices the poet had suffered in political upheavals led him into contemplation about noble and moral excellence which seems to be present only in ancient mythology. At this point, the persistent interrogations regarding a

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<sup>33</sup> According to the postscript attached to the poem by Wang Yi 王逸 (ca. 89-158 AD), the most important compiler and annotator of the *Chuci*, the original text of “Heavenly Questions” was presented in a fragmentary order of 25 chapters, and it was due to generations of scholars’ interpretative work that it came into its current form. See *Chuci buzhu*, 118-9.

mythical and superior world are an allegory of the interrogator's spiritual quest for transcendence from the secular to the divine. While the poetic mind undergoes a sage-like metaphysical meditation on the distinction between the secular and divine, the allegorical transcendence echoes the primordial religious return to divinity from humanity. Instead of indifferent inquiries regarding the creation of the universe, therefore, the initial rhetorical questions allegorize the poetic mind's self-conscious urge for a transcendental return to the original status of the divine creation whence the sacred oneness is beyond any inquisition of secular concerns.

As an integral part of the mythological discourse, the divine creation introduces the structural mode of how humanity is initially alienated from and eventually returns to divinity, which lays the foundation for distinctive conventions of poetry making. This archetypal structural mode has been interpreted by Northrop Frye, in his discussion of the historical displacement from myth to fiction, as featuring a cycle of the rising and falling movements in *mythos*, or archetypal plots ("Displacement" 601). Frye considers the divine cycle, which is of the incarnation and withdrawal of a god, to be associated with the natural cycle, as is further articulated in his general categorization of *mythos* into those of spring, summer, autumn, and winter (*Anatomy* 158-223). For Frye, these archetypal plots that are mimetic of the movements of four seasons fundamentally contribute to the formation of such fictional genres as comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony/satire.

Although universal, Frye's observation on the archetypal mode of *mythos* is mainly based on a demiurge-centric cosmic order which emphasizes the fall of man and the atonement upon his return. Different from the demiurge-centric cosmogony in the Western mythological tradition, Chinese mythical accounts about the divine creation are characterized by a sage-centric cosmogony. Instead of a forcible interruption of the divine to guarantee the return of man, the

eternal return from humanity to divinity is acquired in the Chinese mythological tradition through a self-conscious transcendence exemplified by the archetypal sage of Fu Xi. This discrepancy in the nature of cosmogony gives rise to the distinction between two types of poetic spirit. The demiurgic spirit, with its inherent dialectic of the secular and the divine, foretells the rise of epic poetry, such as the Homeric poems, which are characterized by a realistic narrative advanced by the conflicts of dialectic elements. The sagely spirit, with its mediation of the distinction between divinity and humanity, foresees the transcendental poetry, such as Qu Yuan's "Heavenly Questions," which features a mythical narrative moderately propelled by an everlasting spiritual elevation.

Since the Chinese myths regarding the divine creation lack a decisive tension between the divine and the secular, which is essential to the epic narrative, an archetypal conflict between the dialectic opposites has rarely gained prominence in classical Chinese literature. Although dialectic conceptions, such as *yin* and *yang*, are popular in Chinese creation myths, the original conflicts within a primordial universe are fundamentally reconciled in the intellectual system of Eight Trigrams conceived by the archetypal sage Fu Xi with the divine oneness as the supreme model of harmony. While the religious motif of eternal return is represented in the Olympian and Judeo-Christian mythologies as a return of the human being from one dialectic opposite to the other, the same motif is displayed in the Chinese myths as a return of humanity from an alienated being to a divine oneness. If the Western divine cycle between humanity and divinity is, in Frye's account, associated with the natural cycle of the rising and falling movements, the Chinese divine cycle is more of an intellectual cycle, which emphasizes an everlasting transcendence from earthliness to sageliness. Reflected in literary conventions, the rising and falling mythoi in the Western divine cycle lead to the formation of four classical fictional genres,

whilst the transcendental ethos in the Chinese divine cycle foreshadows such classicist literary precepts as *yuandao* 原道 [to trace the *Dao*], *zhengsheng* 徵聖 [to consult the sage], and *zongjing* 宗經 [to model on the canon].

## Chapter Four

### *Fu, Bi, and Xing: the Chinese Theories of Poetic Interpretation*

Confucius said: “If people behave moderate, gentle, sincere, and graceful, it is the cultivation of the *Classic of Poetry*.”<sup>34</sup>

(*Liji zhengyi* 26.1597)

In the scope of classical Chinese literary thought, the literary work that occupied the same supreme position as the Homeric epic and Greek tragedy did in the West is the *Classic of Poetry*. The Confucian poetics centred on the classic is distinctive, in comparison with the Platonic poetics, for its advocacy of poetry’s significance in moral education and social improvement. As suggested by the foundational precept regarding the expressive nature of poetry—“poetry verbalizing intent” (*shi yanzhi* 詩言志)—there is a supposed immediacy or coincidence between poetry and what is on the poet’s mind. As the poet’s mind is exclusively assumed in the Confucian poetics to be in conformity with moral excellence, the immediacy between poetry and the poet’s mind is further extended to the relationship between the reader’s or reciter’s mind and moral excellence.

#### **Problematic Transparency**

The communicative transparency implied in such expressive theories, however, is problematic given that the poet’s intent within individual poems of the *Classic of Poetry* was later assigned in a far-reaching manner by ancient editors of the classic, and that the assumed transparency frequently came under debate in subsequent commentaries and exegeses. The

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<sup>34</sup> The original reads: “孔子曰：入其國，其教可知也。其為人也溫柔敦厚，詩教也。”



juxtaposition of natural imagery and human situations, for example, which is prevalent in the poems in question, is not instantly “transparent” in its relationship to moral values, especially in the eyes of a modern reader who does not get used to a morally-edifying tradition of the classic.

The inconsistency between primary presumptions about a transparent expression of what is on the poet’s mind and implicit moral significance beyond the verbal meaning of poems was touched upon in the “Great Preface”—a general introduction that tops the Mao’s Edition of the *Classic of Poetry*—in the following brief statement: “(The *feng* poems) advocate patterning so as to euphemistically admonish” (*Maoshi zhengyi* 15).<sup>35</sup> Upon this statement, modern Chinese scholar Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948) pointed out that the critical effect of “euphemistical admonishment” originates from the figurative operations of *bi* 比 [analogy] and *xing* 興 [association] (50). As two prominent modes of expression, in other words, *bi* and *xing* constitute the fundamental patterns that enable the *feng* poems to deal with taboo subjects in an implicit manner. Zhu’s view confirms the dominant attitude held by traditional scholars toward the *Classic of Poetry*: that is, reading poetry is a process of discovering political criticism wrapped by the poet via the two methods of *bi* and *xing*. Contemporary scholars have developed different ideas about the roles played by *bi* and *xing* other than the modes of expression. In particular, Shih-Hsiang Chen regards *xing* as carrying “the ancient integrity, the oneness or the unity of the musical speech and the rhythm of the spontaneous and simultaneous primeval ‘uplifting dance’” (32-33). Applying the Parry-Lord methodology of oral-formulaic composition to his study of the Chinese classic, C. H. Wang sees *xing* as the stock material of specific images or motifs that the singer routinely chooses in order to incite topical sentiments in his audience (108). Adopting cognitive and psycholinguistic approaches, Ming Dong Gu argues that “*bi* and *xing* are

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<sup>35</sup> The original reads: “主文而譎諫。”

essentially one and the same concept depending on the way of *fu* 賦 [description] and on the depth of mental process” and that “together with *fu*, they form a creative matrix which is at the core of image-making and poetry-making” (11).

Instead of following formulaic or cognitive approaches that have been exemplarily conducted in the above researches, I shall attempt to look into the internal, textual constitution of the poems that comes to afford a long tradition of interpretation. In general, this chapter argues that a popular use of *fu*, *bi* and *xing* in the Confucian hermeneutical tradition marked the rise of a critical awareness about the interpretive space between verbal meaning and contemporary significance. In particular, the three modes of “expression” will be investigated under the concepts of “legendary structure” and “historical structure,” two terms used by Erich Auerbach (1892-1957) to classify the textual spaces for interpretation in early Western literature. In the process of pursuing such an argument, first of all, this chapter goes through a few influential contemporary researches concerning the nature of traditional interpretations on the *Classic of Poetry*—especially the contrasting ideas of “historical contextualizaion” and “allegoresis”—to lay down the horizon of the research. Second, major classical presumptions about the expressive nature of poetry and the rhetorical workings of *fu*, *bi* and *xing* will be combed out so that at least we know that there is a persistent inconsistency between the naïve idea about poetic transparency and the pragmatic necessity of undertaking interpretive explication about a supposedly authorial intent. Third, close readings of a series of poems are undertaken, following the historical sequence of *song* 頌 [hymns], *ya* 雅 [odes] and *feng* 風 [airs]—three major categories in the *Classic of Poetry*—to show how the relationship of nature to human conditions evolved in so distinctive a way in early Chinese poetry that Confucian interpreters needed to invoke

presumptions about *fu*, *bi* and *xing* to guide their inference of historical and moral significance from verbal meaning.

### Contemporary Scholarship

The random comments about the *Classic of Poetry* found in the *Analects* constitute an important body of literature in the study of Confucian poetics. Through an extensive survey of relevant comments on individual poems and on the classic in general, Donald Holzman points out that Confucius' readings of poetry are largely based on a strategy of misinterpretation aimed at moral education (32-33). This observation of Confucius' "practical reading" makes Holzman agree rather with pseudo-Kong Anguo's explanation of *xing* as "metaphorical allusions" leading to an extra-literary world of meanings, than with the dominant understanding of the mode as "stimulating people's emotions" (36). The synthetic and anti-analytic methodology held by traditional scholars in the train of Confucius makes Holzman conclude that, even after literature started to gain its independence from socio-political judgement in the end of the Han dynasty, Chinese literary criticism has ever been characterized by a monolithic view of literature and the state (40-41).

Centering her inquiry on the exegetical meanings of the poem "The Ospreys Cry" (guanju 關雎), Pauline Yu traces out a long institutional tradition of poetic interpretation embodied in the continuous development of commentaries and exegeses that generations of Confucian scholars had attached to the *Classic of Poetry*.<sup>36</sup> In comparison with the Western tradition of allegorical

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<sup>36</sup> See Pauline Yu, "Allegory, Allegoresis, and the *Classic of Poetry*," 377-412. According to Yu, this long tradition of interpretation on the *Classic of Poetry* went through three stages. The first stage goes back to the earliest comments made by Confucius (551-479 B.C.) himself, which helped establish the moral orthodoxy of the classic as the ultimate origin of general knowledge, political or diplomatic oratory, and utilities in everyday life. Following this primary tradition of moral establishment, the second stage saw the rise of historicity of interpretation, which was first proposed by the Three-School editors and their followers, who read the poems as political critiques of the declining house of Zhou, and which was then exemplified by the Mao's Edition editors, Zheng Xuan (127-200), and Kong Yingda (574-648), who

interpretation, which has built a relationship between the text and metaphysical or theological truth, the Chinese tradition of interpretation in Yu's view is characterized by the tendency towards a referential correspondence between the text and historical reality ("Allegory" 410). This traditional focus on the historicity of poetic reference is said to reflect the native "stimulus-response" model, or the empirical mode, of poetry-making in the Chinese context, wherein a notion of creation ex nihilo or fictionality is missing because of the original lack of a creator-figure ("Allegory" 411).<sup>37</sup> In her book-length study on the imagery in the Chinese poetic tradition, which outlines various relations of *xing* or stimulative natural imagery to human situations in the *Classic of Poetry*, Yu further argues that none of them—categorical correspondence, empirical objects, or formulaic devices—actually fulfills the allegorical substitution of a fictive realistic order for a transcendental order, either in the text or in the interpretation (*Imagery* 59-65). With a rather strict definition of allegory, as well as her view of Confucian cosmology as an organic, monistic universe, Yu rejects the idea of seeing the traditional interpretation of the *Classic of Poetry* as *allegoresis*. Instead, she finds similarity between Confucian poetics and the romantic theories in the West, wherein the making of poetry conforms to a stimulus-response model and thus the meaning of poetry is all about historical contextualization (*Imagery* 80-83).

Perceiving allegory as an "extended metaphor," however, Zhang Longxi compares the Chinese interpretation of the *Classic of Poetry* to *allegoresis*, or allegorical interpretation, which characterizes the Western interpretation of the Bible. In the light of Quintilian's (35-100 A.D.)

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interpreted the poems as praises dedicated to King Wen of Zhou (1152-1056 B.C.). The third stage was characterized by a more rigid historicity of interpretation, undertaken by the Neo-Confucian scholars such as Zhu Xi (1130-1200), Yan Can (13<sup>th</sup> century), and Yao Jiheng (1647-1715), who proceeded from the Mao prefaces to argue for extensive correspondences between poetic elements and historical incidents.

<sup>37</sup> At this point, Yu argues that classical commentators' readings of the *Classic of Poetry* formed a geo-historical tropological narrative that is equivalent to the Western epics. See Yu, "Allegory," 411.

definition of allegory,<sup>38</sup> which stresses the empirical nature of both the literal and rhetorical meanings in classical texts, Zhang maintains that the tendency of the Confucian interpretation towards historical contextualization surely meets with the condition of *allegoresis* (*Allegoresis* 99-100). Like the symbolic rite of the Eucharist derived from the Biblical interpretation, moreover, the ritual functions played by the *Classic of Poetry* in accordance to the Confucian norms of rites likewise ask for an allegorical transcendence from material references to spiritual truth (*Allegoresis* 101). Out of an effort to reconcile the historical and allegorical reading in the Confucian tradition, Zhang argues that historical contextualization was adopted by Confucian commentators as an interpretive strategy to bridge verbal meanings of poetry and moral doctrines (*Allegoresis* 103).

Likewise, by demonstrating that either Quintilian's grammatical formula of allegory or the Western tradition of allegorical reading "is by no means dependent on the theme of the transcendent," Haun Saussy suggests that the objection to seeing the Chinese tradition of interpretation as *allegoresis* may have resulted from "the way the question was framed" (*Chinese Aesthetic* 27-28). Moving from a thematic survey of cultural differences in cosmology to a semantic investigation of the genesis of meaning in Chinese tropes, Saussy finds that the supposedly Chinese rhetorical appeal to metonymy or synecdoche for a transference of meaning from individual things to a pre-existing category (*lei* 類), which is hinted by Yu as defining the very relationship between the semantic meaning of natural imagery and human situations and the thematic meaning of historical contextualization, promotes a de facto use of metaphor and fiction (*Chinese Aesthetic* 30-31). Invoking the distinct readings undertaken by Jesuit missionary

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<sup>38</sup> Quintilian's definition of allegory reads: "Allegory, which is translated in Latin by *inversio*, either presents one thing in words and another in meaning, or else something absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words. The first type is generally produced by a series of metaphors." See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 3: 327.

Longobardi (1559-1654) and German philosopher Leibniz (1646-1716) about the Chinese idea of *li* 理 (principles; reason), Saussy argues that preoccupied methods of reading—a literal reading carried out by the former and a rhetorical reading by the latter—have led to opposite understandings about the Chinese cosmology (*Chinese Aesthetic* 36-43).<sup>39</sup> Toward the end of his study aimed at outlining a universal poetics of comparative literature, Saussy comes to the conclusion that classical Chinese poetics established by the “Great Preface,” whose nature is rather performative as in a Leibnizian rhetorical reading than expressive as in a literal reading, prescribes for an exemplary reading of the *Classic of Poetry* an hermeneutical continuum that helps to transfer meaning from what is literally represented (i.e., nature), through what is relatedly represented (i.e., history), to what is allegorically represented (i.e., moral doctrines) (*Chinese Aesthetic* 186-188).<sup>40</sup>

### **Classical Presumptions: Confucius and the “Great Preface”**

In order to settle differences between the conflicting ideas held by the above contemporary researches—especially between “historical contextualization” and “allegoresis” regarding the nature of interpretation applied to the *Classic of Poetry*—it is necessary to trace out the classical presumptions about the nature and criteria of poetry which have influenced and even intertwined with the hermeneutical tradition.

As the most prominent preacher of the *Poetry*, Confucius is believed to have put down the earliest literary commentaries about it, which are dispersed in his didactic sayings collected in the *Analects*. Unlike the ample reasoning characteristic of the literary criticism in the *Republic*

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<sup>39</sup> Whereas Longobardi reads the Chinese idea of *li* as referring to prime matter or Being in a materialist sense, Leibniz interprets the idea as being identical with the divine mind of *Logos* in a metaphysical sense. See Saussy, *Chinese Aesthetic*, 40-41.

<sup>40</sup> Saussy describes this process of transference of meaning as “mimesis of mimesis.” See Saussy, *Chinese Aesthetic*, 188.

and *Poetics*, Confucius' remarks on poetry are chiefly intuitive. Besides the discrepancy in intellectual modes of inquiry, Confucius' ideas regarding the relation of poetry to the world focus on elements somewhat different from the Greek philosophers: in terms of the empirical realities presented in poetry, for example, which fall into the Platonic concept of "world of appearances" and the Aristotelian notion of "human actions," Confucius proposed them to be either cultural entities such as political administration (*zheng* 政) (XIII.5.119),<sup>41</sup> kingship (*jun* 君), and fatherhood (*fu* 父), or natural objects such as birds, animals, grasses, and trees (XVII.9.145); regarding the metaphysical truth supposedly wrapped in poetry, which was expected by Plato to be "timeless universals" preordained by divinity, Confucius claimed it to be such ideological values as rituals (*li* 禮) (VIII.8.93) and morals (*de* 德) (XIV.4.125); about the effects of poetry on the audience, which were generalized by Aristotle as the distribution of knowledge and pleasure, Confucius summarized them as to inspire (*xing* 興), to inform (*guan* 觀), to assimilate (*qun* 群), and to criticize (*yuan* 怨) (XVII.9.145). In general, Confucius' ideas regarding the relation of poetry to the world are distinguished by a particular focus on poetry's affirmation and reinforcement of cultural institutions, whereas Plato and Aristotle trace poetry's function further to its potential representation of the original sources of culture, say, divinity and humanity.

As for the verbal nature of poetry, which supposedly enables the *Classic of Poetry* to pass on cultural institutions, Confucius broadly labelled it as "verbal straightforwardness" (*cida* 辭達) (XV.41.137). Its implication of verbal transparency upholds the same ethical assumption as the Greek philosophers expected of verbal representation: good poetry is all that makes true claims

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<sup>41</sup> From here onwards, the translation of individual Chinese expressions regarding Confucius' ideas on poetry is adapted from D. C. Lau's rendering of the *Lunyu* [Analects].

of truth and reality. Confucius devoted a particular term to the ethical ideal of good poetry—“swerving not from the right path” (*si wuxie* 思無邪)—the ultimate designation bestowed by the philosopher to the *Classic of Poetry* (II.2.63).<sup>42</sup> At this point, Confucius’ theory regarding the moral propriety of poetic expression characterizing the *Poetry* counters Plato’s assumption about the Homeric poems, which were blamed for its false representation of moral goodness. By virtue of the verbal nature of poetic expression acclaimed yet not elaborated by Confucius, that is, the metaphysical realm of truth that according to Plato is only accessible through philosophical reasoning becomes accessible through poetry in the Confucian mode.

In contrast to the strong narrative impetus inherent in the Greek epic and tragedy, the *Classic of Poetry* displays a different mode of discourse, which may be described as lyrical exposition and description with limited narrative dimension. Instead of a chronically structured assembly of characters and events, the poems in the *Poetry*—the *Airs of the States* and *Minor Odes* in particular—present poetic utterances about normally immobile images and figures, which were claimed by Confucius to associate with moral motifs. This distinctive nature of the poetic discourse is doubtless rooted in the ancient practice of applying music to folk lyrics for the purpose of custom observation. Consequently, the symbolic art of music (*yue* 樂), rather than the iconic arts of painting and sculpture, was invoked by Confucius as an established analogy for poetry. The contrasting presumptions about the workings of poetry—the iconic reference in the Platonic discussion versus the symbolic reference in the Confucian discussion—suggest the epistemological distinction between the two traditions of poetic practices and theories. At bottom,

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<sup>42</sup> With regard to the subject of “swerving not from the right path,” the Confucian scholars during the Han dynasty considered it to be the poet who exercises his critical mind in accordance with the theory of “poetry verbalizing intent.” The Confucian scholars during the Song dynasty, however, or the so-called Neo-Confucianists represented by Zhu Xi, considered the subject to be the reader.



however, distinct theoretical presumptions can be traced to the same inquiry about the authenticity of poetic discourse which marks the supreme ideal of poetry in both traditions.

In the history of Western poetics, the authenticity of poetic discourse is ever a problematic issue because of the paradox between *mimesis*, an iconic copy of reality, and *poiesis*, the making of an object beyond the reality of its model. With poetic authenticity being strongly endorsed in Confucius' accounts about the *Classic of Poetry*, Chinese literary theories regarding the nature and workings of poetry ensued mainly as the by-product of a long hermeneutical tradition aimed at illuminating the historical realities and moral truth purportedly contained within the poems. Emerging from one of the major threads of this hermeneutical tradition, the "Great Preface" has become one of the foundational documents of literary criticism by virtue of its integration of contemporary theories as well as by its seminal influence upon subsequent literary thought in the Confucian tradition.

The literary supremacy of the *Classic of Poetry* had survived the infamous political measures of "burning of books" (213 B.C.) and "execution of scholars" (212 B.C.) carried out by the First Exalted Emperor of Qin (r. 221-210 B.C.), and continued to inspire literary practices and thought once the reformed Confucianism was re-established in the imperial institution during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141-87 B.C.). A renewed scholarship of the *Poetry* saw the division between four editions: Qi's (齊) Edition, Lu's (魯) Edition, Han's (韓) Edition, and Mao's (毛) Edition. As the dominant edition since the Eastern Han, in the version known as the Old Text (*guwen* 古文), the Mao's Edition is characterized by its prominent prefaces added to the poems in the collection, which purport to illuminate the original historical contexts and moral

significances of individual poems.<sup>43</sup> A passage from the preface to “The Ospreys Cry,” by virtue of its independent and recapitulative discussion on the nature of poetry in general, has been traditionally detached from the original context and entitled the “Great Preface to the Mao’s Edition of the *Classic of Poetry*” (Maoshi daxu 毛詩大序), with all the other prefaces to individual poems known as the “Minor Prefaces” (xiaoxu 小序).

Establishing an orthodox definition about the nature of poetry and a classification of poetic properties into the Six Principles (*liuyi* 六藝), the “Great Preface” marked the beginning of an independent tradition of literary criticism. First of all, by concluding antecedent fragmentary assertions about “poetry verbalizing intent” (*shi yanzhi* 詩言志), the “Great Preface” refurbished the dominant idea regarding the expressive nature of poetry:

The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind goes. In the mind it is “being intent;” coming out in language, it is a poem.<sup>44</sup>

詩者，志之所之也，在心為志，發言為詩。(Maoshi zhengyi 8.7)

Informed by antecedent variants of the notion, “poetry verbalizing intent” in the context of the “Great Preface” implies two sets of relations involving either authorship or readership: on the one hand, it asserts that poetry voices the inner being of the poet, as assumed by Xun Zi 荀子 (312-230 B.C.) who says “It is what is on the poet’s mind that poetry expresses” (*Xunzi jijie* 8.133);<sup>45</sup> on the other, it indicates that poetry can be applied to voice the inner being of the reader, as suggested by the *Zuo Tradition* which says “We use poetry to express what is on our

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<sup>43</sup> As for the authorship of these prefaces, one theory holds them to be a collective work by Mao Heng 毛亨 (?) and Mao Chang 毛萇 (?) in the Western Han, and yet another theory proposes Wei Hong 衛宏 (25-57 A.D.) as the author.

<sup>44</sup> The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> The original reads: “詩言是，其志也。”

minds” (*Chunqiu zuozhuan Zhengyi* 38.1223).<sup>46</sup> Given the oral substance of *yan* 言, the verbal form of poetry at this stage is still considered to be speech, which supposedly sustains immediacy between poetry and intent. As prescribed by Confucius’ idea regarding poetic language—“It is no more than verbal straightforwardness” (*Lunyu* XV.41.137)<sup>47</sup>—poetry is assumed to carry out transparent expression of the inner being of the poet. Because of its communicative transparency, consequently, poetic language ensures that the reader will obtain an authentic idea of what is expressed in poetry. This belief in the transparently expressive nature of poetry has laid the theoretical underpinning of “poetic moralization” (*shijiao* 詩教), one form of cultural cultivation in the Confucian tradition.

Despite its reference to the inner being of the poet, the concept of intent (*zhi* 志) differs from individual concerns and sensations characterizing Romanticism in the West. Similar to the heroic images in classical and medieval Western literature, which are endowed with a universal identity, the poet in the discourse of classical Chinese poetics is an implied cultural hero who, void of individual aspects, self-consciously identifies himself with the universal personality of a sage. Undertaking the moral cause of a sage, as expected by Xun Zi in saying “The sage is the medium of the *Dao*” (*Xunzi jijie* 8.133),<sup>48</sup> the poet is expected to act as a critic of reality in the light of the universal truth of *Dao*, an original Daoist conception that started to be incorporated into the Confucianist scope since Xun Zi. Embodying the inner being of the poet, intent is expected to originate in the poet’s critical mind that judges reality against the superior truth of *Dao*. While reality may vary with the mutation of realistic politics, the ultimate truth of *Dao* in the Confucian tradition was modelled on the institutional perfection of the Western Zhou (1046-

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<sup>46</sup> The original reads: “詩以言志。”

<sup>47</sup> The original reads: “辭達而已矣。”

<sup>48</sup> The original reads: “聖人也者，道之管也。”

771 B.C.), which was considered a revival of the legendary golden ages ruled by ancient sage kings.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the literary merits of poetry largely rest on the immediate coincidence between the affective tones of poetry—an expression of the poet’s intent modelled on political and moral propriety—and contemporary historical realities:

The tones of a well-managed age are at rest and happy; its government is balanced.

The tones of an age of turmoil are bitter and full of anger; its government is perverse. The tones of a ruined state are filled with lament and brooding; its people are in difficulty.<sup>50</sup>

治世之音，安以樂，其政和。亂世之音，怨以怒，其政乖。亡國之音，哀以思，其民困。 (*Maoshi zhengyi* 9)

The affective tones of anger and lament, which characterize the poetic category of “mutated airs” (*bianfeng* 變風), are described by the “Great Preface” as to “originate from affections, but submit themselves to decorum and righteousness” (*Maoshi zhengyi* 18).<sup>51</sup> This norm of affective moderation characteristic of the *Classic of Poetry* has ever since guided an orthodox operation of the poet’s intent in the tradition of Chinese poetry: on the one hand, the affective aspect of intent flows from the poet’s encounter with reality; on the other, the rational aspect of intent puts a check on emotions in accordance with the ultimate truth of moral goodness. So far as poetry expresses the poet’s intent based on a real response to reality and a true resonance of morality, it

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<sup>49</sup> The so-called Three Dynasties, including the Xia 夏 (2000-1650 B.C.), Shang 商 (1650-1046 B.C.), and Western Zhou 西周 (1046-770 B.C.), were revered in the Confucian tradition, in a retrospective way, as the golden ages of an ideal rulership.

<sup>50</sup> The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 43. This excerpt is adapted by the “Great Preface” from *Li ji: Yue ji* [Record of Rites, Record of Music], a contemporary document of the former, to describe the relationship between poetry and political realities. It is common for classical Chinese literary criticism to incorporate the idea of music into that of poetry because of their common origin in the ritual performance of lyrical poems.

<sup>51</sup> The original reads: “故變風發乎情，止乎禮義。”

adheres to poetic properness modelled on the archetypal “music of *ya*” (*yayue* 雅樂), wherein “*ya* denotes ‘properness’ (*Maoshi zhengyi* 20).”<sup>52</sup> Correspondingly, if poetry is neither affectively real to reality nor rationally true to moralities, it falls into the improper category of “music of Zheng” (*zhengsheng* 鄭聲), as recorded in that “(Confucius) abominates the music of Zheng for its discomposing the music of *ya*” (*Lunyu jijie* XVII.18.1225).<sup>53</sup>

Based on a recast of M. H. Abrams’s prominent analytical scheme—a conceptual framework involving the four elements of universe, work, artist, and audience—James J. Y. Liu makes a distinction in early Confucian poetics between the deterministic theories, which consider poetry as “an unconscious and inevitable reflection or revelation of contemporary political and social realities” (*Chinese Theories* 63), and the expressive theories, which regard poetry as “a spontaneous expression of universal human emotions, or personal nature, or individual genius or sensibility, or moral character” (*Chinese Theories* 67). The presumptions in the “Great Preface” about the nature and criteria of poetry reflect an integration of the deterministic and expressive theories.

### ***Fu, Bi, and Xing: Zheng Xuan, Zheng Zhong, and Zhu Xi***

Following a reassertion about the dominant idea of “poetry verbalizing intent,” the “Great Preface” proposes the Six Principles of the *Classic of Poetry* as the authoritative classification of generic and rhetorical modes according to the ways the poetry informs the moral implications of political and social realities. With its exclusive emphasis on the generic modes of *feng* 風 (airs), *ya* 雅 (odes), and *song* 頌 (hymns), however, the “Great Preface” leaves untouched how the

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<sup>52</sup> The original reads: “雅者，正也。”

<sup>53</sup> The original reads: “惡鄭聲之亂雅樂也。” Confucius’ abomination of the music of Zheng is commonly considered the origin of a conventional discrimination against fictional narratives such as *xiaoshuo* and traditional theatres in the history of classical Chinese literature. See Zhang, *Allegoresis*, 22.

rhetorical modes of *fu* 賦, *bi* 比, and *xing* 興 properly work. Classical presumptions about the workings of the latter three modes, while constantly on debate, can only be retrieved from the exegetical texts attached both to the “Great Preface” and to its antecedent.

Explicating on the “Six Poetic-forms (*liushi* 六詩)” recorded in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li* 周禮), the antecedent form of the Six Principles proposed in the “Great Preface,” Eastern Han exegetist Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) explained the workings of the three modes of expression as follows:

In an exposition (*fu*) the words are set out; they display in a straightforward manner the goods and evils of present governmental teachings. With a comparison (*bi*) one sees a present failing, does not dare to castigate directly, and selects a categorical correspondence to speak of it. With a stimulus (*xing*) one sees a present excellence, disdains flattery, and selects a good situation to encourage it by comparison.<sup>54</sup>

賦之言鋪，直鋪陳今之政教善惡。比，見今之失，不敢斥言，取比類以言之。  
興，見今之美，嫌於媚諛，取善事以喻勸之。(Zhouli zhushu 717; Maoshi zhengyi 13)

Zheng Xuan’s definition of the three rhetorical modes was brought into comparison, by Tang scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) in his prominent *Revised Annotation of the Mao’s Edition of the Classic of Poetry* (*Maoshi Zhengyi* 毛詩正義), with the explanation provided by another Eastern Han exegetist Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (?-114 A.D.) about the workings of *bi* and *xing*:

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<sup>54</sup> The translation is made by Pauline Yu, *Imagery*, 58. The italic letters within parentheses are added by me.

*Bi* is to make analogies between things. Those lines containing (the predicate of) “like” (*ru* 如) all belong to the rhetorical language of *bi*. . . . *Xing* is to invest issues into things. *Xing* is to arouse. By adopting rhetorical imagery to make analogies, *xing* arouses and elicits the inner being of the poet. In the *Classic of Poetry* and literary prose, all the words that apply grasses, trees, birds and animals to illuminate the poet’s intent belong to the rhetorical language of *xing*.

比者，比方於物。諸言如者，皆比辭也。興者，託事於物。則興者，起也。取譬引類，起發已心，詩文諸舉草木鳥獸以見意者，皆興辭也。(Maoshi zhengyi 14)

Before the definition proposed by Song Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the understanding held by classical Confucian scholars about *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* had been greatly influenced by Zheng Zhong and Zheng Xuan. From his age onward, Zhu Xi’s definition has become the standard version:

*Fu* is to sufficiently display the event and straightforwardly relate it.

賦者，敷陳其事而直言之者也。(Shi jizhuan 3)

*Bi* is to analogize that thing to this thing.

比者，以彼物比此物也。(Shi jizhuan 4)

*Xing* is to relate something else in advance so as to elicit the speech about what is to be eulogized.

興者，先言他物以引起所詠之詞也。(Shi jizhuan 1)

Except for *fu*, both *bi* and *xing* suggest essentially rhetorical figures of speech as solutions to the classical predicament of “speech’s incapability of illuminating ideas (*yanbu jinyi* 言不盡意)”.<sup>55</sup> In particular, the rhetorical figure of *xing* was equated by Zhu Xi with the method of “setting symbols to illuminate ideas” characterizing the symbolic system in the *Classic of Changes* (“Da He Shujing” 170).<sup>56</sup> Zhu Xi’s definition of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* implies an analogical comparison between two distinct systems of signification: the symbolic signs—trigrams and hexagrams—in the *Classic of Changes* serve as the ultimate system of signification in the realm of philosophy, which surpasses the signifying capability of poetry; nevertheless, the rhetorical figures of *bi* and *xing* in the *Classic of Poetry* introduce an alternative system of signification, wherein poetic imagery is so tropologically applied as to expand the capability of representation in the realm of poetry.

Integrating traditional Chinese presumptions into the modern sense of rhetorical modes and figures of speech, Stephen Owen describes the workings of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing*, in light of the Confucian tradition of exegesis, as follows:

*Fu*, “exposition,” is any unfigured sequence. . . . *Fu* encompasses direct description, narration, and explanation of what is on the speaker’s mind.

*Pi*, “comparison,” means that the central images of the poem are simile or metaphor; the reader anticipates figuration.

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<sup>55</sup> “Text is incapable of illuminating speech; speech is incapable of illumination ideas.” (書不盡言，言不盡意。) See “xici shang 繫辭上” [Appended Discourses the Upper], in *Zhouyi Zhengyi* [Revised Annotation of the *Classic of Changes*], 342.

<sup>56</sup> “Setting symbols to illuminate ideas” (*lixiang yi jinyi* 立象以盡意) is claimed by pseudo-Confucius to be the solution to the predicament of “speech’s incapability of illuminating ideas.” See “xici shang 繫辭上” [Appended Discourses the Upper], in *Zhouyi Zhengyi* [Revised Annotation of the *Classic of Changes*], 343.



*Hsing*, “affective image,” is an image whose primary function is not signification but, rather, the stirring of a particular affection or mood: *hsing* does not “refer to” that mood; it generates it.<sup>57</sup> (*Readings* 46)

Therefore, *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* can be seen a series of what Gadamer calls “the methodology leading to truth.” *Fu* gives direct exposition of things or narration of events. *Bi* suggests metaphorical or allegorical association. *Xing* is the most difficult one to understand: first, it refers to the natural imagery appearing at the beginning of a poem; second, it may suggest figurative comparison with human activities depicted in the poem, like *bi* does, but it specifically refers to the stimulation of the inner being of the poet. At this point, *xing* is the major device that fulfills the expressive theory known as “poetry verbalizing intent.” Generations of commentators worked hard to figure out what was on the poet’s intent mainly based on the natural imagery known as “*xing*.”

### **The Problem of *Wen*: from “Records of Music” to the “Great Preface”**

In his reading of the “Great Preface,” Owen posits an analogy between *wen* 文 [patterning] and *poiesis* in terms of the sheltering effect they both promise to poetry facing political censures. In the Western tradition, *poiesis* is credited for the age-old belief in the “made-up” or fictional nature of poetry-making. But the theory behind the camouflage work of *wen*, as Owen admits, remains unclear, “unless the claim of involuntarism in the production of such poems frees the speaker from the usual requirements of respectful decorum” (*Readings* 46). This “claim of involuntarism” is rooted in the predominant idea of “poetry verbalizing intent,” which assumes an immediacy or coincidence between poetry and what is on the poet’s mind. As

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<sup>57</sup> Owen’s interpretation of *xing* as a kind of affective image that generates particular affection or mood echoes Zhu Xi’s explanation of *xing*, in Confucius’ discourse of “*xing*, *guan*, *qun*, *yuan*” (*Analects*), as “to inspire wills and minds” (*ganfa zhiyi* 感發志意). See Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju*, 178.

likewise prescribed by Confucius' idea regarding poetic language—"verbal straightforwardness"—poetry fulfills a transparent expression of the inner being of the poet. Unless a common acknowledgement of the innocent status of poetry was established in the political or cultural institutions, as Owen's conjecture may be recast, the role played by *wen* in poetry's being exempted from culpability remains unrevealed. The instant context of the sheltering *wen* appears in the following statement taken from the "Great Preface:"

By *feng* those above transform those below; also by *feng* those below criticize those above. When an admonition is given that is governed by patterning (*wen*), the one who speaks it has no culpability, yet it remains adequate to warn those who hear it. In this we have *feng*.<sup>58</sup>

上以風化下，下以風刺上，主文而譎諫，言之者無罪，聞之者足以戒，故曰風。(Maoshi zhengyi 15)

According to this statement, at least two spheres are at work pertaining to the nature of the *feng* mode of poems: the social sphere and the verbal sphere. In the former sphere, the speaker and the listener are involved in a speech act that dedicates itself rather to moral obligation than to knowledge and entertainment. Moreover, the implicit speech act of poetic moralization is reciprocal in the practice of political governance: on the one hand, the *feng* poems serve as political admonitions for the rulers; on the other, they become the didactic tools of social moralization to be carried out in the young. For this reason, it can be said that, rather than suggesting an involuntary expression, the predominant idea of "poetry verbalizing intent" might have been commonly accepted as a voluntary moral undertaking. This voluntarism in the didactic

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<sup>58</sup> The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 46.

use of poetry in the social sphere, as suggested in the above quotation, finds its footing on the allegedly contrived “patterning” (*wen*) in the verbal sphere. The “Great Preface” reads:

(The *feng* poems) advocates patterning so as to euphemistically admonish.”

主文而譎諫 (*Maoshi zhengyi* 15).

Here the concept of *wen* [patterning], it has to be noted, refers to vocal embellishment rather than “intersectant strokes.”<sup>59</sup> According to the “Great Preface,” “affections emerge in sounds; when those sounds have patterning, they are called ‘tones’” (*Maoshi zhengyi* 8).<sup>60</sup> It is by “patterning,” in other words, that sounds (*sheng* 聲) instinctively emerging from affections are properly regulated and thus transformed into what are known as tones (*yin* 音). As for the role that *wen* plays in fulfilling a “euphemistic admonishment,” it is left untouched in the text. To solve this problem, let us go to the primary source of the “Great Preface”—“Records of Music (Yueji 樂記)”, a section in the *Book of Rites (Liji 禮記)*—to trace the affective origin of *wen*.

The miscellaneous, and often repetitious, statements found in “Records of Music” provide accounts about the interactive workings of two moral institutions: rites (*li* 禮), which help to establish distinctions of human relationship through ritual forms, and music (*yue* 樂), which helps to create harmony in human feelings by musical cultivation. A tripartite form comprising lyric (*shi* 詩), song (*ge* 歌), and dance (*wu* 舞), the concept of music in the Confucian tradition represents the highest level of human expression, which rises from one’s affective response to external realities and thus informs the moral status of the rulership. The course in which external realities affect the music in its linguistic, vocal, and choreographic form finds

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<sup>59</sup> “*Wen* consists of intersectant strokes.” See Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi*, 425.

<sup>60</sup> The original reads: “情發於聲，聲成文謂之音。” The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 43.

particular elaborations in the following two statements in “Records of Music,” both of which were incorporated into the “Great Preface:”

No. 1: All tones that arise are generated from the human mind. When the human mind is moved, some external thing has caused it. Stirred by external things into movement, it takes on form in sound. When these sounds respond to one another, mutations arise; and when these mutations constitute a pattern,<sup>61</sup> they are called “tones.” When such tones are set side by side and played on musical instruments, with shield and battle-ax for military dances or with feathered pennons for civil dances, it is called “music.”<sup>62</sup>

凡音之起，由人心生也。人心之動，物使之然也。感於物而動，故形於聲。聲相應，故生變，變成方，謂之音。比音而樂之，及干戚、羽旄，謂之樂。

(*Liji zhengyi* 19.1251)

No. 50: As a kind of verbalization, song makes words last long. While feeling delighted by them, we verbalize them. If words alone are inadequate, we make words last long. If prolonged words are not adequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Instead of *wen* 文, *fang* 方 appears here in the standard text of “Records of Music.” One character might be an ancient typo of the other, as is frequently the case in the early history of canonical transcription. Although *fang* is traditionally established as the standard character, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 and other prominent exegetists have all annotated it in the sense of *wen*. I am following this traditional understanding of the character and, in accordance with Owen’s treatment of the same quotation, use *wen* in the Chinese text.

<sup>62</sup> The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 51.

<sup>63</sup> The translation is adapted from Owen’s rendering of a similar passage in the “Great Preface,” which is a recast of the one quoted here from “Records of Music.” See Owen, *Readings*, 41.

故歌之為言也，長言之也。說之，故言之；言之不足，故長言之；長言之不足，故嗟歎之；嗟歎之不足，故不知手之舞之，足之蹈之也。(Liji zhengyi 19.1338)

These two statements, among others in “Records of Music,” provide a prior version of the description in the “Great Preface” about the genesis of poetry. According to them, the pivotal element in the genesis of music is the human mind. The meaning of *wen*, as indicated in statement No. 1, is the vocal patterning of tones expressive of the human mind stirred by external realities. This vocal patterning known as song, as implied in statement No. 50, is further accompanied by lyric and dance to form music. The euphemistic effect of *wen*, which is compared by Owen to the Western idea of *poiesis* or fictionality, thus originates rather in the listener’s sensibility toward the speaker’s feelings stirred by external realities—say, natural imagery—than in the listener’s consciousness of fictiveness in poetic representation.

The stimulus-response theories regarding the formation of music, as suggested in “Records of Music,” were then adapted into the foundational presumptions about the formation of poetry in the “Great Preface,” which respectively reads:

The affections are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them. If singing them is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them.

情動於中而形於言，言之不足，故嗟嘆之；嗟嘆之不足，故永歌之；永歌之不足，不知手之舞之、足之蹈之也。(Maoshi zhengyi 7)

The affections emerge in sounds; when those sounds have patterning, they are called “tones.”<sup>64</sup>

情發於聲，聲成文謂之音。(Maoshi zhengyi 8)

Confucian poetics stresses recognition of affections. Different from Western mimetic theories focusing on similarities between disparate spheres, Chinese expressive theories consider the poet’s affections to be natural responses to the world and thus to its moral status. This gap between external realities and abstract ideas, which in Plato’s view can hardly be bridged by poetry, is reassured by Aristotel to be bridgeable through similarities. According to Aristotle, “the most important thing is to be good at using metaphor,” and “the successful use of metaphor is a matter of perceiving similarities” (59a, 37). The transference of meaning across various spheres in Chinese poetics, however, is assumed to be gapless mainly because of the “fundamentally monistic view of the universe,” wherein “the seamless connection between the individual and the world enables the poem simultaneously to reveal feelings, provide an index of governmental stability, and serve as a didactic tool” (Yu, *Imagery* 32-33). Instead of impersonal similarities, in other words, affections expressed by the poet are to be read, according to Chinese expressive theories, as the signal of immanent connections between disparate spheres.

Paradoxically, the seemingly smooth connection between material and abstract spheres, which is supposedly secured by affective expression, is expected in Confucian poetics to be checked by a moderate and balanced voice. This criterion of emotional propriety inevitably re-creates a gap between what is said in the poem and what is actually meant by the poet. Consequently, this reopened gap has been acclaimed in traditional interpretations of the *Classic of Poetry* as the result of affective moderation, a self-conscious restraint from direct, unpatterned

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<sup>64</sup> The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 41-43.

expression of emotions. The restrained, indirect expression of the poet's affections necessarily takes on the rhetorical patterning—the displacement of historical realities with natural images—a patterning different from the Western presumption of *poiesis* which presents an unreal representation of reality as an alternative approach to the ideal truth. In this way, the rhetorical modes of *bi* and *xing* are applied to fulfill the displacement between distinct spheres, with *fu* serving the plain interest in direct exposition. In the Chinese tradition of hermeneutics, moreover, the rhetorical modes of *bi* and *xing* have allowed generations of Confucian interpreters the space of pursuing hidden significance of individual poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, a space that has been treated either as historical contextualization by Pauline Yu or as *allegoresis* by Zhang Longxi.

### **Three Structures of Meaning: Auerbach**

*Fu*, *bi*, and *xing* were considered by classical scholars to be the principles of poetics. In fact, they were applied by commentators as the principles of hermeneutics, just like the hermeneutic principles of metaphorical and allegorical modes applied in the Middle Ages to interpret the Bible. Hermeneutics and poetics are surely not separated enterprises. The three concepts of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* as hermeneutic modes cannot help but originate in the same concepts as poetic modes. Then, how the poetic form is transformed into hermeneutic meaning in the case of the *Classic of Poetry*?

Erich Auerbach explains the relationship between poetics and hermeneutics most successfully. In his study on the realistic representation in the Homeric poems and the Bible, Auerbach shows how the space of interpretation gradually opens along with man's gradual detachment from a primitive, unified theology. Auerbach implies three structures that had successively worked throughout this history: (1) the legendary structure (the Homeric Poems),

wherein nature, man, and deities are living in a unified history, and thus no interpretation is necessary; (2) the historical structure (the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac in the Old Testament), wherein a distance between the foreground of human activities and the background of history is formed and therefore seeks interpretation to bridge the gap; and (3) the theological structure (the Old Testament), wherein a gap between the foreground of human activities and the background of religious doctrine is formed and therefore seeks interpretation (the New Testament).

The multiplicity of meaning of literary texts, in its earliest full presentation in the Old Testament, is explained by Auerbach as a consequence of the Biblical style of literary realism in its treatment of “historical becoming” and “multilayeredness of humanity.” From a comparative perspective, he calls on the techniques of “foreground” and “background” to define two different Western epic styles—the Homeric style and the Biblical style—in terms of the ways they represent reality. The technique of “foreground,” as is typified by the Homeric poems, is characterized by “externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena, at a definite time and in a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feeling completely expressed; events taking place in leisurely fashion and with very little of suspense” (11). On the contrary, the technique of “background,” embodied by the Old Testament, features “the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal, remains mysterious and ‘fraught with background’” (11). The distinct epic styles,



according to Auerbach, reflect different cultural understandings of reality. To Homer, a concern of sensory experiences at the present, or “delight in physical existence,” is all that matters to his poems (13). To the Elohist, however, “an absolute claim to historical truth” in the stories works toward the end of substantiating moral and religious ordinances (14). Despite their commonly legendary origins, in other words, Odysseus is so vividly and realistically depicted for secular pleasure that his possibly fictional identity does not matter in the reader’s eyes, whereas the same kind of realistic imagination about Abraham and Isaac is restricted by the author’s pious belief in the historicity of sacred events. As the results of their distinct styles in both understanding and representation of reality, therefore, the Biblical stories from time to time call for further interpretation upon the unrelated background, whereas the Homeric poems do not.

The very reason the Biblical stories are fraught with “background,” Auerbach further explains, is the incarnation into them of the religious doctrine, which alone raises the claim to absolute authority (15). Involving such religious dominance, which is absent in the Homeric poems, the Biblical narratives present a universal frame of history rather than any locally effective reality, with all historical phenomena near and far being automatically subordinated to a single ultimate truth. This magnificent project of religious autocracy can only be accomplished through the work of interpretation based on the highly obscure content of the stories. Speaking of “interpretation,” Auerbach refers to a series of hermeneutic tasks demanded of the reader: a theological enlightenment leading to the manifestation of the religious doctrine, a practical recognition of one’s historical life as an element of the Biblical world, and a prospective incorporation of new historical conditions into the divine plan (15-16). The quintessential example of Biblical interpretation, for Auerbach, is Saint Paul’s work in the interpretive transformation from the Old Testament to the New Testament (16). In comparison with the

purely legendary simplification in the Homeric narratives, the Biblical narratives are distinguished by the simultaneous multiplicity “ranging through three domains: legend, historical reporting, and interpretive historical theology” (21).

Auerbach’s conclusion about the multiplicity of meanings in early Western literature implies three types of structures in human understanding of the relationship between human existence and the universe: the legendary structure, the historical structure, and the theological structure. In the first place, within the legendary structure, the human being conducts a smooth and uniform life as if it were always living in the foreground, the here and now, without an individual perspective toward time and space. Second, within the historical structure, human history is full of contradictions and development along with the changes of situation in time and space, or “horizontal disconnection” in Auerbach’s term, as if there was always a background hidden sometime or somewhere. Third, within the interpretive structure, some highest doctrine is introduced not only to resume the historical integrity in the past but also to prophecy human history that is to come. Auerbach’s framework of the legendary, historical and theological structures helps to illuminate how realistic representation (*mimesis*) of early Western literature diverged into two traditions, one closed to interpretation and the other open for interpretation. In the case of the latter, the significance beyond textual meaning, which is hidden in the historical structure and exposed in the interpretive structure, is neither based on the semantics or the authorial intention of a text. Rather, it is directed toward the ultimate source of truth—e.g., God’s precepts in the Biblical literature—which guides people to understand superficial realities.

Auerbach’s framework of three structures may help to expand our understanding of the Chinese notions of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* from as rhetorical modes to as poetic manners of human existence. Like the legendary structure, *fu*, or direct exposition or narration of the world as it

were, is exempt from interpretation. In the *Classic of Poetry*, moreover, the historical reporting of human existence is likewise abundant, only that the historical discontinuity or “horizontal disconnection” is rather introduced by a common juxtaposition of natural images and human conditions (*bi*) than by an obscure storyline of human actions. The use of natural imagery at the beginning of a poem (*xing*), which is assumed to stimulate the poet’s moral feelings rather than to simply represent external realities, is very much like the theological structure aimed at an articulation of absolute truth.

The seemingly contradictory nature of this comparison, between “*mimesis*” and the expressive theory of “poetry verbalizing intent,” would desolve if we come to realize that realistic representation of the world is the universal ground for man’s contact with a higher truth. We often consider the poems in the *Classic of Poetry* to be lyric poems, thus reading them in the manner of Romanticism, that is, reading natural imagery as categorical correspondents to human feelings. But only the *Airs of the States*, one of the major categories in the *Classic of Poetry*, can actually be read as lyric poems. The other two categories, *Hymns* and *Major and Minor Odes*, are actually fragmentary narratives that, if put together, are likely the Chinese equivalent of epic poems, relating the early lineage of heroic patriarchs with a divine origin. The first patriarch known as Hou Ji, for example, is born by a virgin mother who accidentally treads into the footprint left by God, and he is put to trials in wild nature by the divine will. In this line of stories, realistic images such as the footprint and natural objects are not read as signs of human feelings in the Romantic tradition, but as integral parts of divinity in a mythological tradition, and therefore do not seek interpretation. In the subsequent reading of poems chosen from the *Classic of Poetry*, let us pay particular attention to how the space between realistic representation and its

significance gradually opens for interpretation, along with the historical development of early poetry, as well as along with the poetic stages of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing*.

### The Legendary Structure of *Fu*: Hymns and Major Odes

The first poem in my reading, wherein the space for further interpretation is not open yet, is Poem 275, “Might Are You” (Siwen 思文), the last piece in the “series of Hallowed Temple” (Qingmiao zhishi 清廟之什), of the Zhou Hymns (zhousong 周頌).<sup>65</sup>

Might are you, Hou Ji, 思文后稷,

Full partner in Heaven’s power. 克配彼天,

That we, the thronging peoples, were raised up 立我烝民,

Is all your doing. 莫匪爾極。

You gave us wheat and barley 貽我來牟,

In obedience to God’s command. 帝命率育。

Not to this limit only or to that frontier, 無此疆爾界,

But near, far, and for ever throughout these lands of Xia.<sup>66</sup> 陳常于時夏。 (*Maoshi*

1538-39)

This is a sacrificial hymn dedicated to Hou Ji, the first patriarch in the royal lineage of the Zhou people. Like the other poems in the Zhou Hymns, it is a single-stanza poem that carries ample information. Within as few as eight lines, the poem outlines Hou Ji’s heroic accomplishments in

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<sup>65</sup> Hymns (*song* 頌), including Lu Hymns (*lusong* 魯頌), Shang Hymns (*shangsong* 商頌), and Zhou Hymns, constitute one of the three generic categories in the *Classic of Poetry*. The poems in this category are considered to be the oldest in the *Poetry*. One of many efforts to date the poems in the *Poetry* is made by W. A. C. H. Dobson. Based on linguistic evidences, Dobson’s theory confirms the commonly accepted idea regarding the history of the classic: i.e., the poems in the section of Hymns are dated during the 11<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., Major Odes during the 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., Minor Odes during the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., and Airs of the States during the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. See Dobson, “Linguistic Evidence,” 323.

<sup>66</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 295.

tribal establishment, agricultural cultivation, worship of God, and political envisioning of a united polity. The voice of the poem, wearing the tone of the entire people, expresses no personal feelings other than ceremonial piety. Neither natural and figural images, like those in the *Airs of the States*, nor coherent events, like those in the *Minor and Major Odes*, can be discerned here. It is hard to describe the structure by which the poem is constructed, for there is no explicit order with respect to the temporal, spatial, and logical connection among the matters covered in the verse.

For the reader, the surely graspable aspect of the poem is no other than the powerful assertion of truth, so mighty a claim that every respect of Hou Ji reaches the extreme condition that one may expect in an archaic understanding about the universe. The origin of Hou Ji's magnificent power, according to the poem, goes unquestionably to the divine source of Heaven or God. He alone is the initial grower and giver of wheat and barley, thus establishing the original prosperity of his people. His abidance with the ordinance from Heaven guarantees an influence surpassing the limits of his time and territories. Finally, Hou Ji gains the highest place in the sacrificial order, that is, to be worshiped together with the Heavenly divinity.<sup>67</sup> This poem, based on its view about the position of human beings in the universe, hardly falls under Auerbach's class of legendary structure in that, instead of a realistic fashion, its majestic manner in promulgating an absolute truth leaves no space in the universe for the people to experience their own life yet.

In the referential system of the poem, there can be only one stable meaning, i.e., the expression of the supreme status of Hou Ji in both history and political order. No alternative meaning can possibly be attained other than the significance assigned by the Mao's preface:

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<sup>67</sup> The other four powers to be worshiped in the sacrificial order are land, ancestral temples, mountains and waters, and domestic spirits. See Kong's commentary, in *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1500-01.

“Hou Ji matches with Heaven” (*Maoshi* 1538). The same manner of truth assertion can be observed through the rest of the Zhou Hymns, all dedicated as sacrificial hymns to Heaven and patriarchal rulers of the pre-dynastic Zhou. In the eyes of the Confucian editors and exegetists of the *Classic of Poetry*, who held the Zhou institutions as the exemplar of ideal political governance, the succinct yet authoritative verses in the Zhou Hymns—the earliest collection in the anthology—may serve as the most straightforward exposition of the sacred origin of the values they cherished.

In the Major Odes (*daya* 大雅), which appeared about a century later than the Zhou Hymns, a significant expansion in the size of verses upon the same subject matters, as well as a rhetorical transition from stately exposition to leisurely narrative, suggests the rise of a general concern about the historical aspects of heroic characters who were once too elevated to be humanly represented in previous sacrificial hymns. Poem 245, “Birth to the People” (Shengmin 生民), the first piece in the “series of Birth to the People” (shengmin zhishi 生民之什) in the Major Odes, takes eight stanzas to tell a story about the birth of Hou Ji. The first stanza reads:

She who in the beginning gave birth to the people, 厥初生民，

This was Jiang Yuan. 時維姜嫄。

How did she give birth to the people? 生民如何？

Well she sacrificed and prayed 克禋克祀，

That she might no longer be childless. 以弗無子。

She trod on the big toe of God’s footprint, 履帝武敏歆，

Was accepted and got what she desire. 攸介攸止。

Then in reverence, then in awe 載震載夙，

She gave birth, she nurtured; 載生載育,

And this was Hou Ji.<sup>68</sup> 時維后稷。 (*Maoshi* 1239-40)

What distinguishes “Birth to the People” from “Mighty Are You” is the extensive use of realistic details in an extended retelling of the sacred event. The first stanza of the poem, for example, which tells the story of how Jiang Yuan gave birth to Hou Ji by virtue of the intervention from God, vividly depicts the image of an earnest mother plunging herself into god-fearing conducts and devotional feelings in her yearning for a child. Human activities are for the first time assigned with a position in the framework of historical time—“in the beginning”—in contrast to the oblivious silence of time and space in the Zhou Hymns. Even the intervention from God manifests itself in the sensible image of “God’s footprint,” a realistic object that none of the earlier Hymns would have attributed to the divine realm of Heaven. These realistic breakthroughs in figural representation, despite their import within a mysterious atmosphere, mark an initial poetic fusion between transcendental religious ideas and realistic elements of human existence.

Like most mythical narratives regarding the birth of heroic patriarchs in other traditions, “Birth to the People” is characterized by the universal theme about the tight relation of human history to transcendental divinity. The mysterious elements, such as the image of a barren or virgin mother and the intervention from God, are indeed the universal sources of the religious feeling of awe, instead of rationalistic suspicion, in early people’s imagination about their historical origin. The realistic fashion in the representation of the birth of Hou Ji thus turns to be an alternative method with which to impress the Zhou people with the naturalness of their primary patriarch as the son of God. All the realistic matters, such as the physical and

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<sup>68</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 244.

psychological activities one can intelligibly experience, exclusively hinge upon the pervasive power of divinity. It is from this powerful subordination of humanity to divinity that human subjects originally emerge, willingly making themselves subjects to almighty God as if they were integral elements of a preordained plan. Not only human activities, as the poem proceeds to show, but also natural objects come under the domination of divine supremacy. The 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza of “Birth to the People” reads:

Indeed, they put it in a narrow lane; 誕寘之隘巷,

But oxen and sheep tenderly cherished it. 牛羊腓字之。

Indeed, they put it in a far-off wood; 誕寘之平林,

But it chanced that woodcutters came to this wood. 會伐平林。

Indeed, they put it on the cold ice; 誕寘之寒冰,

But the birds covered it with their wings. 鳥覆翼之。

The birds at last went away, 鳥乃去矣,

And Hou Ji began to wail.<sup>69</sup> 后稷呱矣。(Maoshi 1251)

It is unclear as for who put newly-born Hou Ji at trials, another motif that is common in religious or epic narratives. The natural surroundings meant to endanger Hou Ji’s life—narrow lane, far-off wood, and cold ice—are eventually pacified by prudent animals and men in a way that is compatible with the harmonious workings of nature. Different from the natural images abundant in the *Airs of the States*, the natural objects in the *Major Odes* are not yet independent in themselves but subordinate to a transcendental divine will. The appearance of nature in the text serves rather as one integral part of a religious framework than as either categorical

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<sup>69</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 245.



correspondent or empirical stimulus within a metaphorical mode. The repetitive appearance of crises in the poem produces suspense in the reader's expectation, which is quickly relieved by the same repetitive rhythm in restoration. This mainly legendary account of Hou Ji at trials, in comparison with the historically suspended story of Abraham and Isaac, presents a large range of events all at the foreground; the background of the religious claim, which is never fully revealed in Abraham's sacrifice, is clarified in the Chinese poem as early as in stanza 2 wherein it reads "To make manifest His magic power / God on high gave her ease" (*Maoshi* 1246).<sup>70</sup>

The same legendary structure runs through the rest 5 stanzas of "Birth to the People" expounding Hou Ji's husbandry in planting, house erection, harvesting, and sacrifice creation. Hou Ji's magnificent feat in agriculture, which establishes his status as the "Lord Millet" in the historical memory of the Zhou people, is retold here in a somewhat epic way in comparison with the extremely brief account on the same subject matter in "Mighty Are You." Likewise, an expansion of storytelling based on the Zhou Hymns can be observed throughout the Major Odes, with multiple-stanza verses replacing single-stanza poems and expanding legendary accounts about early patriarchs of the pre-dynastic Zhou. This observation has made Liu Dajie come to the conclusion that a general history of the Zhou civilization prior to King Ping of Zhou (?-720 B.C.) may be delineated through a rearrangement of the epic poems found in the Major and Minor Odes (45). Speaking of "epic poems (*shishi* 史詩)," Liu presumably refers to historical poems rather than heroic poems. Yet still, certain qualities of the historical poems in the Major Odes—prolonged verse narrative, an elevated style, heroic and quasi-divine figures, and a historical destiny of the human race—suggest that at least a rudimentary form of epic in its universal sense is present in the poems dated from the 10<sup>th</sup>- to 8<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. in the *Classic of Poetry*. For some

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<sup>70</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 245.

unknown reason, this primary tendency in epic formation didn't continue itself and would soon give its privilege to the development of folk lyrics.

What is surer than the plausibly epic nature of these particular historical poems is the mystical relationship between realistic experiences and divinity within a united universe, which is shared by the Major Odes, the Homeric poems, and a significant part in the Biblical narratives. The relationship between the secular and the divine, as Auerbach observes with regard to the Biblical stories, is destined for religious autocracy because “[A]ll other scenes, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it” (15). The same observation is doubtless applicable to the legendary world presented in the episode of Hou Ji at trials, wherein natural objects, human deeds, and topical outcomes are all directed toward a preordained divine order.

The relationship between heroes and the human race, meanwhile, as commented by Mikhail Bakhtin regarding the Homeric poems, is characterized by the fusion of individual and collective life, namely that “[I]ndividuums are representatives of the social whole, events of their lives coincide with the events of the life of the social whole, and the significance of such events (on the individual as well as on the social plane) is identical” (218). As can be seen in the second half of “Birth to the People,” Hou Ji’s heroic feat in husbandry and creation of sacrifices is fervently carried out by his people, with national prosperity in farming and rituals lasting till the poetic present. The subordination of natural and social elements to the common interest in a divine plan is so conspicuous and consistent through the category of the Major Odes that there is no individual or historical situation left unattached to an absolute transcendental truth.

Theoretically, the existence of a powerful background such as the universal framework of a divine history would open the space for interpretation, as Auerbach observes it in the case of the Old Testament. Historical reporting—an obscure manner of historical reification and incessant pouring in of new history—which Auerbach claims as the element leading to the interpretive historical theology, however, had not appeared in the textual formation of the Major Odes. When historical reporting eventually came into being, as fulfilled by the Minor Odes and the Airs of the States, no interpretive efforts were so fundamentally made as to piece together disparate materials under the background of a religious unity, as what Saint Paul did to extend the Jewish tradition into the Christian world. When Confucius and his followers stepped in to undertake the interpretive project, moreover, the cosmological system was altered toward a non-dualistic structure and thus initiated an interpretive tradition that aims at a different type of moral significance from religious precepts.

Before all these changes took place, the smooth manner of “Birth to the People” in its representation of an omnipresent unity between the world and Heaven had dominated the poetic language of the Major Odes, establishing a legendary structure calling for no further interpretation than its conspicuous verbal meaning. The significance of “Birth to the People” from the Major Odes, claimed by its Mao’s preface as honoring Hou Ji by matching him with Heaven (*Maoshi zhengyi* 1239), is at one with the literal reference of the text as well as identical with that of the “Mighty Are You” from the Zhou Hymns. This legendary structure, wherein significance overlaps with verbal meaning, has been crystalized into the Chinese critical term *fu* which, as Zhu Xi defines it, serves “to sufficiently display the event and straightforwardly relate it.” The distinction of the Zhou Hymns and Major Odes in their exemption from interpretation goes against the indiscriminative view of the *Classic of Poetry* as being exclusively metaphorical

or allegorical which, as Herbert A. Giles generalizes it, assumes that “[E]very single one of the immortal Three Hundred has thus been forced to yield some hidden meaning and point an appropriate moral” (13). The self-sufficient straightforwardness of *fu* characterizing the earliest poems in the anthology had not yet allowed extra space for interpretation beyond their verbal meanings.

### **The Historical Structure of *Bi*: Minor Odes**

The space for interpretation, or the distinction between verbal meaning and significance, had not been open to reading until the appearance in versification of a comparison between nature and human conditions which is freed from the universal framework of religious unity. This comparative relationship between nature and man corresponds with Auerbach’s expectation of historical reporting in that, in an idiosyncratic way, it invokes natural objects to locate human existence in history. Rather than an obscure development of human destiny along the lapse of time, an abrupt juxtaposition of nature and human experience serves to historically report individual lives across the vast space of the declining Zhou monarchy. Unlike the rise of an empire beyond the old territories of religious dominance, such as the Roman Empire, the collapse of moral unity on the soil of Zhou became the imminent concern expected of historical reporting that kept pouring into versification. Before this historical structure came to its full development in the panoramic views of humanity provided by the *Airs of the States*, Chinese poetry had experienced a transitional stage, namely, through the Minor Odes (*xiaoya* 小雅) from the 9<sup>th</sup>- to 8<sup>th</sup>-century B.C., wherein an individual, critical perspective superseded the collective, eulogistic absoluteness characteristic of the Major Odes. At this stage, a usually artless comparison between nature and human conditions, which has apparently departed from a common subordination to religious unity but not yet fully conceded to a syntactic discontinuity,

often claims a humanly empathetic rediscovery of nature. The 6<sup>th</sup> stanza of Poem 167, “Plucking Bracken” (Caiwei 采薇), the 7<sup>th</sup> piece in the “Series of the Deer Cry” (luming zhishi 鹿鳴之什) in the Minor Odes, reads:

Long ago, when we started, 昔我往矣,

The willows spread their shade. 楊柳依依。

Now that we turn back 今我來思,

The snowflakes fly. 雨雪霏霏。

The march before us is long, 行道遲遲,

We are thirsty and hungry, 載渴載飢。

Our hearts are stricken with sorrow, 我心傷悲,

But no one listens to our plaint.<sup>71</sup> 莫知我哀。 (*Maoshi* 696)

This is a soliloquy of soldiers on campaign. It deals with the military campaigns of the Zhou people against the invading Xian-yun tribes, a subject that would have obtained heroic extolment in the Major Odes. The entire 6-stanza poem, however, is permeated with war-weary sentiment of soldiers on the march, who are returning after year-long battles driven by the king’s business. The last stanza in particular, as quoted above, extends the soliloquist’s sorrow-stricken heart to natural scenes—the weeping willows and gusting snowflakes—which not only illustrate the lapse of time spent in wandering afield but also present the physical setting for memorable activities. As a constituent part of empirical experience, the natural scenes come in upon historical reporting, employing external natural objects to accompany human existence in history as well as to give human psychology a physical form. This naïve juxtaposition of nature and

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<sup>71</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 141.

human conditions, of course, does not constitute a figure or trope in a rhetorical sense, but it doubtless consists of a delicately aesthetic ingenuity that may amount to a preliminary consciousness of perceiving nature as a poetic indicator of man.

From the subordinate participant of a divine plan in the Major Odes to the independent indicator of man in the Minor Odes, natural imagery had by now experienced a major alteration of role alongside changes taking place in various aspects of poetic representation in the Minor Odes. A religious concern about transcendental God and Heaven disappeared, with their representatives in the secular royal house turning against an earthly welfare that had once been associated with their ancestry. The collective assertion of absolute authority was replaced by individual voices singing the woes of people under imperial suppression. The authorship of the odes left royal courts for folk societies, as if the housekeeper Euryclea and the swineherd Eumaeus in the *Odyssey* stepped forward to sing about the lives and history of slaves that would have sounded so unfamiliar to Odysseus the aristocratic ruler. The legendary structure featuring a smooth succession of events in the heroic Hymns now gave its way to the historical structure wherein people stumbled upon obstacles within a real history.

Historical reporting, which according to Auerbach did not appear in Western literature until the Old Testament and was full of “background” calling for interpretation, likewise gave rise to interpretive debates among the Han annotators over the significance of “Plucking Bracken.” Whereas the Mao’s preface claims the poem to be praising King Wen of Zhou for “mobilizing military service” to safeguard the central kingdom (*Maoshi* 687), the Lu’s and Qi’s

interpretations regard it as rebuking the ill administration of King Yi of Zhou for incurring barbarian invasions and consequent military turbulence (*Shi sanjia* 580).<sup>72</sup>

The distinct readings of the poem, one as eulogistic and the other as critical, may result from anachronism that is common to historiography as well as to a method of literal reading. The discrepancy in their historical contextualization, however, is not originated in data error but in a lack of specification about characters and events. Different from the historical poems found in the Major Odes, the historical reporting in the Minor Odes tends to forsake an exposure of the identity of a hero or a heroic feat; rather, natural images are invoked to manifest the inner feelings of human characters, just as the weeping willow and gusting snowflakes in “Plucking Bracken” come to externalize the speaker’s sentiment. Such a displacement of human figures and activities with natural images may not be counted as a literal and thus most appropriate way of representing history, but it marks the aesthetic origin of a purely poetic language. At this historic moment of early Chinese poetry, not only did nature obtain its independence from the universal framework of a divine history, but it started to absorb the attributes of man into its own being.

It is this discovery of the comparative quality of nature that adds to the historical reporting in the *Minor Odes* a dimension that is rarely observed in the Biblical stories. Whereas in the *Old Testament* the individual history of Abraham’s sacrifice is represented within an extended yet often incoherent temporal framework, the year-long campaign carried out by the speaker in “Plucking Bracken” is alternatively covered by a quick switch between natural scenes. What fades into the background in the former is the divine will upon Abraham and Issac’s destiny; in the latter, what disappears from the reader’s eyeshot is the historical happening between the departure and return of the speaker. About this happening, even the Mao annotators

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<sup>72</sup> The interpretations made by the Qi’s, Lu’s, and Han’s Editions, in the hermeneutic tradition of the New Text School, were collected by Qing scholar Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917) from ancient books of historiography.

give different interpretations: Mao Heng sees the stanza as praising that “a gentleman favors human kindness, causing people to ignore lying in the dust;” Zheng Xuan explains it as to “circularly relate the seasons of one’s departure and return so as to pour out the bitterness (of military service)” (*Maoshi* 696). While the meaning of the poem becomes open to an interpretation centred on historical specification, as enabled by the historical reporting with a particular interest in natural imagery, it also turns off the interpretive appeal to the divine ordinance that is not unfamiliar in preceding poetic tradition. Unlike the Old Testament, where the legendary and historical structures are carefully combined, the Minor Odes is distinguished by its historical structure from the legendary world of the Major Odes.

The juxtaposition between nature and man in “Plucking Bracken,” it has to be noted, is based on the status of the natural scenes as an empirical part of historical experience. In this regard, nature functions as an “index” of human history and thus is most close to the metonymical mode of tropology. This empirical or metonymical relationship between the verbal meaning of nature and its historical significance would to a large extent justify the interpretive practice that reads any foregoing natural imagery in a poem as an empirical stimulus, or *xing*, of subsequent human conditions as well as of the general topic of the poem.

Besides the metonymical comparison, meanwhile, the increasing use of natural imagery in the Minor Odes also introduces a typological comparison, which alternatively justifies the interpretive method of seeing *xing* as being suggestive of categorical correspondence between nature and human conditions. The last two stanzas of Poem 203, “The Greater East” (Dadong 大東), the 3<sup>rd</sup> piece in the “Series of Valley Wind” (gufeng zhishi 谷風之什) in the Minor Odes, read:

In Heaven there is a River Han 維天有漢，



Looking down upon us so bright. 監亦有光。  
By it sits the Weaving Lady astride her stool, 跂彼織女,  
Seven times a day she rolls up her sleeves. 終日七襄。  
But though seven times she rolls her sleeves 雖則七襄,  
She never makes wrap or skirt. 不成報章。  
Bright shines that Draught Ox, 睨彼牽牛,  
But can't be used for yoking to a cart. 不以服箱。  
In the east is the Opener of Brightness, 東有啟明,  
In the West, the Long Path. 西有長庚。  
All-curving are the Nets of Heaven, 有捄天畢,  
Spread there in a row. 載施之行。  
  
In the south there is a Winnowing Fan; 維南有箕,  
But it cannot sift, or raise the chaff. 不可以簸揚。  
In the north there is a Ladle, 維北有斗,  
But it cannot scoop wine or sauce. 不可以挹酒漿。  
Yes, in the south is a Winnowing Fan; 維南有箕,  
There it sucks its tongue. 載翕其舌。  
In the North there is a Ladle, 維北有斗,

Sticking out its handle toward the west.<sup>73</sup> 西柄之揭。(Maoshi 919-923)

The topic of these last two stanzas deviates sharply from the earthly concerns in the majority of the poem by a prospect toward heavenly objects. Heaven, a transcendental source of divine authority frequently invoked in the Zhou Hymns and Major Odes, is deprived in this poem of supernal power and falls into the natural domain within a tangible world. On this poetic map of celestial objects, the River Han (Milky Way) marks out great boundaries in the Heaven with its brightness. The Weaving Lady sits at this side of the heavenly river, and the Draught Ox shines at the other. The stars of the Opener of Brightness, the Long Path, the Winnowing Fan, and the Ladle illuminate the four directions within the all-curving Nets of Heaven. It is clear that, by the earthly references of their names, the celestial objects are themselves perceived in a long tradition of figurative comparison between their appearances, either temporal or figural, and an agricultural civilization. The operation of tropology involved in the poem, however, is rooted rather in an innovative focus on the difference between the two domains than in the conventional similarity. Different from their corresponding objects in earthly use, that is, the stars in the sky assume their titles in vain.

The figural operation of the natural imagery is becoming more complex when the reader comes to realize that, far from being a self-sufficient comparison, the difference between the two domains further becomes the basis of the similarity between celestial objects and the historical reality taking place on the Zhou land. Great social disparities, according to the preceding stanzas of the poem, are looming large between the Zhou people in the west and the local people in the Greater East. Whereas “The men of the East, their sons / Get all the work and none of the pay,” as is sung in the poem, “The men of the West, their sons, / Oh, so smart are their clothes”

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<sup>73</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 187-188.

(*Maoshi* 917).<sup>74</sup> Standing out from the historical scope of the verses, the celestial imagery carries obscurity, in terms of its comparative value, calling for interpretation. About the image of the Heavenly River, the Mao's Edition annotator Zheng Xuan interprets the figure as "being compared to that the king unavailingly sets up officials and bureaus without exercising actual administration" (*Maoshi* 919); with regard to the imagery of the Wincrowing Fan and the Ladle, the Han's Edition editor Han Ying 韓嬰 (200-130 B.C.) makes similar comment that the verse "says of one's occupying his position and ignoring his duty" (*Shi sanjia* 734). The celestial objects, in other words, are brought by the poet into an analogy with the Zhou aristocracy by virtue of their common failure in performing official duties as assigned by their titles.

In comparison with "Plucking Bracken," wherein natural scenes function as an empirical constituent of historical experience, "The Greater East" is characterized by a typological analogy between natural imagery and historical reality. In both cases, historical reporting is not dependent on an exclusive representation of a temporal process of human activities, as is carried out in the Biblical story of Abraham and Issac's journey to Mount Moriah, but consists of the dual presence of nature and human conditions. As a consequence of this syntactic distinction between the Chinese and Western texts—one in diachronic narrative and the other in synchronic comparison—the semantic significance in the background of textual references would admit whatever source of hermeneutic meaning is both intellectually convenient and compatible with the syntactic structure. In the Old Testament, the most convenient source of hermeneutic meaning rests on the legendary structure, which has ever gone hand in hand with the diachronic sequence of a historical structure and promptly affords an allegorical, transcendental significance for human affairs. In the Minor Odes, however, the legendary structure characterizing the Zhou

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<sup>74</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 187.

Hymns and the Major Odes had now vanished from the poetic discourse, and therefore the alternative source of hermeneutic meaning had to be found elsewhere.

For the poems with dual presence of nature and human experience, the obscurity of historical reporting calling for interpretation consists in two loci: one in rhetorical comparison, the other in temporal instantaneity. Instead of a comprehensive representation of an extended period of history, human experience in such poems takes on the form of instantaneous historical moments, as if they were the symptoms of a deeper historical truth. In this way, the instantaneous manner of historical reporting opens a space for interpretation aimed at a temporal expansion and contextual specification of historical accounts. The natural imagery, meanwhile, presents a parallel domain to human experience whenever a comparative relationship, either empirical or categorical, becomes available between them. The comparison between nature and human experience, as it becomes a frequent pattern in the Minor Odes, opens another space for interpretation groping for an implicit rationale underlying the formal patterning. With both an expanded historical reality and a rationale for rhetorical comparison lying in the “background” of an obscure historical reporting, Chinese hermeneutics have from this point onward moved toward historical contextualization and social criticism. In the case of “The Greater East,” for instance, the Mao’s preface claims its significance to be “criticizing political chaos;” in particular, “The eastern state (of Tan) was swamped with civil services and paralyzed by finance, and therefore the governor of Tan composed the poem in order to report the problem to the king” (*Maoshi* 911). In this regard, Wang Xianqian agrees with the Mao’s preface and further specifies the historical context of the poem to be connected with the reign of King Li of Zhou (?-828 B.C.) (*Shi sanjia* 727).

Without these exegetical comments, the reader may find that the historical references and nature's role in the comparison are not so transparent as to sustain a smooth, realistic reading. The human conditions in such poems as "Plucking Bracken" and "The Greater East" are indeed concrete enough for an effortless association with their historical context, but the rhetorical comparison between nature and man more and more often thwarts the efforts of reconciling disparate domains. The classical theoretical presumptions aiming to solve this problem center in the concept of *bi*, the definitions of which are relatively consistent in the speculations made by traditional exegetists of the *Classic of Poetry*. In terms of the rhetorical workings of *bi*, Zhu Xi claims that "*bi* is to analogize that thing to this thing" (*Shi jizhuan* 4), echoing Han commentator Zheng Zhong's definition that "*bi* is to make analogies between things" (*Maoshi* 14); with regard to the rhetorical effect of *bi*, Zheng Xuan explains that "*bi* indicates that, seeing mistakes in the present administration and being discouraged from confrontational denouncement, one adopts analogies to illustrate the truth" (*Maoshi* 13). The Chinese set of definitions regarding the nature of *bi* may be reminiscent of Aristotle's classical definition of the Western concept of metaphor: "A metaphor is the application of a noun which properly applies to something else. The transfer may be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy" (57b.34). In contrast with *xing*, wherein natural imagery is considered to be serving as the stimulus of the poet's emotions and implicitly carrying moral significance, *bi* is committed to an explicit comparison between nature and human experience.

Therefore, by the time of the Minor Odes, two tropological modes—metonymical and categorical—had already emerged from the interpretive space produced by *bi*, a comparison between nature and human experience characteristic of the Chinese approach to historical reporting. Either read as an empirical part or a categorical counterpart of human experience,

natural imagery started to carry a significance that is different from its verbal meaning. This historic separation between significance and verbal reference, on the one hand, marked the end of the referential system of the Zhou Hymns and the Major Odes, wherein there is no space for interpretation because of the religious unity of the universe; on the other, it would exert profound influence upon the rules of reading Chinese poetry. It is in the increasing use of comparison between nature and human experience that traditional readers may find the origin of a reading strategy which Owen formulates into the “two forms of expanding the limited text” of Chinese poetry:

One is close to the Western rhetorical tropes of metonymy and synecdoche (not as substitution tropes but as associative relations): here the reader completes the physical relations in the world at hand. The second form of reading the world lies in perceiving its correspondences; these appear in parallelism, poetic structure, and traditional associations. (*Traditional Chinese Poetry* 69)

The Chinese reader’s poetic cultivation based on these two forms of reading is thus aimed at an expansion of limited textual references toward the fullness of a world where both nature and man reside. Both the representation and apprehension of poetry have by now completed the transition from the legendary structure of the Zhou Hymns and the Major Odes to the historical structure of the Minor Odes. While bringing empirical realities to the foreground, this transition in early Chinese poetry had left in the background a vacuum of transcendental truth which is capable of sustaining an overall understanding of the physical world. The religious authority, as discussed earlier, had vanished from the Minor Odes, and the historical contextualization subsequently stepped in as an equivalent source of significance. This historically-oriented concern has indeed never ceased to operate in the hermeneutical history of the *Classic of Poetry*, but it started to be

incorporated into a higher truth, that is, the poet's inner being, which is closely associated with the use of *xing*.

### **The Theological Structure of *Xing*: Minor Odes and Airs of the States**

Among other rhetorical modes, *xing* is most clearly specified in the Mao's Edition of the *Classic of Poetry*. Among the 305 poems in the edition, according to Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898-1948), 116 of them are specified as the *xing* poems, of which 72 are in the category of the Airs of the States (*guofeng* 國風), 38 in the Minor Odes, 4 in the Major Odes, and only 2 in the Hymns (50). Except for two cases, all the *xing* lines, mostly in the second line of the stanza, appear in the first stanzas of such poems (51).

Given that the *xing* lines unexceptionally refer to natural imagery, a fundamental question elicited by the designation of *xing* is about the difference between *bi* and *xing*. The types of natural imagery in either category indeed share the same range of what Confucius generalized as “birds, animals, grasses, and trees.” The standards with which to tell them apart from each other, however, had ever been in the center of theoretical discussions. Zheng Xuan sees *bi* as figurative criticism and *xing* as figurative praise (*Zhouli* 717). Kong Yingda observes that “*bi* works in an explicit way and *xing* in an implicit way” (*Maoshi* 14). Zhu Xi likens *xing* to “setting symbols to illuminate ideas” characteristic of the *Classic of Changes* (“*Da He Shujing*” 170). Zhu Ziqing proposes that the concept of *xing* necessarily comprises analogy and initiation, namely, that it refers to the rhetorical imagery appearing at the beginning of a poem (55). While acknowledging the figurative workings of both terms, Zhu's proposition differentiates *xing* from *bi* by its distinctive position of initiating the poetic utterance. From the introductory status of *xing* follows a question about the “background” of such natural imagery: what is the significance of the *xing* imagery, in comparison with the historical reporting fulfilled by the *bi* imagery? The obscurity of

the *xing* imagery now opens the space for interpretation aimed at an alternative source of significance. The first stanza of Poem 237, “Spreading” (Mian 縣), the 3<sup>rd</sup> piece in the “Series of King Wen” (wenwang zhishi 文王之什) in the Major Odes and one of the earliest *xing* poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, reads:

The young gourds spread and spread. 縣縣瓜瓞。

The people after they were first brought into being 民之初生，

From the River Du went to the Qi. 自土沮漆。

Of old Dan-fu the duke 古公亶父，

Scraped shelters, scraped holes; 陶復陶穴，

As yet they had no houses.<sup>75</sup> 未有家室。 (*Maoshi* 1148)

According to the Mao’s annotation, the third line is specified as the *xing* line. Among the first three lines in the stanza, however, only the first line refers to the natural imagery of “spreading young gourds,” with the next two lines pointing to the human event of early people on migration. The last three lines of the stanza introduce the major character of the entire poem—old Dan-fu the duke—whose days of patriarchal rule postdated the early migration of the Zhou people from the River Du to the Qi. The topical transition from nature to man involved in a regular operation of *xing*, therefore, is most likely taking place between the first line and the rest of the poem. The rhetorical comparison—claimed by Zhu to be fundamental in the working of *xing*—between the natural imagery of “spreading young gourds” and the prosperity of human race is recognizable to a competent Chinese reader. The original use of such a natural imagery in an ancient poem, however, might have carried ground-breaking novelty, especially when it appears prior to human

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<sup>75</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 232.



activities. Based on some native accounts about the mythological origins of man, Arthur Waley assumes the first line to be “an allusion to a forgotten belief that ‘the people after they were first brought into being’ were gourd seeds or young gourds” (231). In that case, the natural imagery would assimilate the whole poem into a legendary structure mainly concerning mythical human history and therefore lose the comparative nature of *xing*.

A different status of the natural imagery in the poem, which accommodates the comparative aspect of *xing*, rests rather on a historical structure than on a legendary structure. The particular image of “spreading young gourds,” that is, carries either empirical relevance or categorical correspondence with regard to the history of the Zhou people. According to “Birth to the People,” which is discussed above with regard to its legendary structure, “His young gourds teemed”—together with other primary crops—as a result of Hou Ji’s heroic feat in husbandry. Despite its original subordination to the legendary history of Lord Millet, the image of “gourds” as an empirical part of the imaginary history of the Zhou people has been established as a kind of evocative imagery remindful of the prosperous past of the nation. Even if the legendary structure vanishes from the poem, the seemingly independent imagery of “spreading young gourds” should still be capable of arousing people’s memory of “The people after they were first brought into being, / From the River Du went to the Qi.” Nevertheless, the Mao annotators apparently read the natural imagery in the thread of categorical correspondence instead of empirical relevance: in the light of the Mao preface which claims that “‘Spreading’ is about that the rise of King Wen was rooted in King Tai (old Dan-fu the duke)”, Zheng Xuan’s commentary justifies the significance by applying a rhetorical reading to the image which says “the new gourds are indeed rooted in the old gourds” (*Maoshi* 1147-48).

In contrast with the largely legendary structure undergirding the historical poems in the Zhou Hymns and the Major Odes, the historical structure supplied by *xing* in “Spreading” is rudimentary and has not evolved into formulated repetition of natural imagery characteristic of the *xing* poems in the Minor Odes and the Airs of the States. The *xing* imagery of “spreading young gourds” within an explicitly historical context performs as comparative a historical reporting as *bi*, a historical structure focused on the empirical or categorical connection between nature and man. Different from *bi*, however, of which the space for interpretation exclusively centres on the historical truth behind the comparison, *xing* also involves an alternative background concerning the poet’s intent underneath the increasing use of introductory natural imagery. While laying down a comparative grounding for external realities, in other words, introductory natural imagery must also suggest the inner being of the poet that induces such syntactic arrangement. At this point, Zheng Zhong expands his definition of *xing*—“*xing* is to invest issues into objects”—by incorporating the intellectual activities of the poet as follows:

*Xing* is to arouse. By adopting rhetorical imagery to make analogy, *xing* arouses and elicits the inner being of the poet. In the *Classic of Poetry* and literary prose, all the words that apply grasses, trees, birds and animals to illuminate the poet’s intent belong to the *xing* speech.

則興者，起也。取譬引類，起發己心，詩文諸舉草木鳥獸以見意者，皆興辭也。(Maoshi zhengyi 14)

Zheng Zhong’s comments enunciate the rarely scanned connection between the rhetorical workings of *xing* and a long tradition of theoretical presumptions about the expressive nature of poetry. In contrast with *fu* and *bi*, which respectively centre on the unfigured exposition and figurative illustration of a historical world, *xing* is distinguished by a transcendence towards a

supreme doctrine recognized by the inner being of the poet. From various pre-Qin assumptions about “poetry verbalizing intent” to its theoretical establishment in the “Great Preface,” the connotation of the poet’s intent underwent a development from generality to specification. In the account of the *Classic of Documents*—“poetry verbalizes intent, and songs prolong speeches”—poetry may be assumed to express whatever appears on the poet’s mind. Confucius’ designation to the *Classic of Poetry*—“swerving not from the right path”—reaffirms an omnipresence of the inner being of the poet, elevating the expressive nature of poetry to a moral height. First proposed in the *Book of Rites* as “poetic moralization promoting the moderate, gentle, sincere, and graceful” (*Liji zhengyi* 1597) and then redefined by the “Great Preface” as “emerging from affections, but going no further than decorum and righteousness,” an affective moderation in agreement with the Confucian doctrine of “the Mean” (*zhongyong* 中庸) has become the most acclaimed significance of the *Classic of Poetry* in the Chinese hermeneutic tradition. With such significance in mind, the interpretations made by traditional exegetists to resume the inner being of the poet became ever closely associated with the *xing* imagery.

As one of the most favourable natural imagery in the *Poetry*, the courteously loving birds in “The Ospreys Cry” (Guanju 關雎) has inspired passions in generations of commentators for unpuzzling its conveyance of the poet’s intent. Poem 1, “The Ospreys Cry,” the first piece in the series of the South of Zhou (zhounan 周南)—the first group of airs in the fifteen Airs of the States—and esteemed by the Mao’s preface as the “beginning of all airs” (*Maoshi* 5), reads:

“Fair, fair,” cry the ospreys 關關雎鳩，

On the island in the river. 在河之洲。

Lovely is this noble lady, 窈窕淑女，

Fit bride for our lord. 君子好逑。

In patches grows the water mallow; 參差荇菜，

To left and right one must seek it. 左右流之。

Shy was this noble lady; 窈窕淑女，

Day and night he sought her. 寤寐求之。

Sought her and could not get her; 求之不得，

Day and night he grieved. 寤寐思服。

Long thoughts, oh, long unhappy thoughts, 悠哉悠哉，

Now on his back, now tossing on to his side. 輾轉反側。

In patches grows the water mallow; 參差荇菜，

To left and right one must gather it. 左右采之。

Shy is this noble lady; 窈窕淑女，

With great zither and lute we hearten her. 琴瑟友之。

In patches grows the water mallow; 參差荇菜，

To left and right one must choose it. 左右芼之。

Shy is this noble lady; 窈窕淑女，

With bells and drums we will gladden her.<sup>76</sup> 鍾鼓樂之。(Maoshi 25-32)

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<sup>76</sup> The translation is made by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 5-6.

Various images in the poem, both natural and social, are stunningly vivid by virtue of repetitious yet supplemental presentations of similar motifs. In the beginning stanza, the island in the river on which random birdcalls can be heard may be recognized as a typical secluded setting where a young gentleman enjoys the meeting with his beloved lady. Without the slightest hint about the role of the natural scenes, however, the correlation between nature and man within the discourse becomes obscure enough to provoke interpretive imagination in the reader's mind. In the following stanzas, wherein natural imagery alters and human activities become more specific, the varied water-plants floating left and right seem just like the projection of mixed feelings held by the young gentleman about his unprocurable romance. Because of the abrupt transition from natural imagery to human conditions, it has to be said, the relationship between the image of "water mallow" and the obsessive young man remains unclear to the reader. If there were no necessity to inquire about the interrelationship between nature and man so as to understand the poem, as is true in the unified legendary world of the Zhou Hymns and Major Odes, "The Ospreys Cry" would simply invite the reader into an idyllic world where natural scenes coexist with human situations without essential obstacles. Nevertheless, the historical reporting provided by introductory natural imagery about an isolated moment of history, which seems nowhere without the background of a historical framework or a divine plan, opens the space for interpretation concerning the possible background of the juxtaposition of elements from disparate spheres.

Based on the verbal meaning of introductory natural imagery, Confucian commentators have added to the poem various significances which share a similar complex of moral and historical concerns. In such interpretation, the moral attitude held by the implied poet toward historical truth is not merely embodied by his critical intent—to praise or to criticize—but also

by an affective moderation in agreement with moral doctrine. The first general commentary about the poem's moral significance was made by Confucius: "In 'Guanju' there is joy without wantonness, and sorrow without self-injury" (*Analects* III.20.70).<sup>77</sup> Instead of a plain description of the mixed feelings haunting the lovesick character, the "joy" and "sorrow" in Confucius' account refer to the powerful poetic moods that are inherent in the poem as a whole and transferable to the reader's mind. The true merit of this interpretation lies in its moral propriety: without excess or indulgence, contrasting emotions do not cause injuries to one's moral wellbeing. It is reputedly the emotional moderation, which permeates the poetic world of the *Classic of Poetry*, that made Confucius highly highly acclaim its didactic value in stimulating one's imagination and equipping one to speak in a morally correct manner.

In light of Confucius' foundational commentary on the moral significance of "The Ospreys Cry," Confucian commentators proceeded to articulate on the relation of the *xing* imagery to moral doctrine, following the distinct directions of "joy" and "sorrow." The earlier Three Schools read the poem as sorrowful, political critique of the queen consort of King Kang of Zhou (cir. 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), who allegedly made the lord rise late and ignore royal duties. In particular, the Lu's commentary claims that "(seeing the king rising late,) the Duke of Bi had deep thoughts about ancient principles and was moved by the ospreys which were instinctively secluded from each other;"<sup>78</sup> the Qi's commentary further expounds that "the lines of 'Lovely is this noble lady, Fit bride for our lord' speak about some lady who can persist in chaste nobility and does not violate high-principled virtues;"<sup>79</sup> the Han's commentary likewise sees the poem as being ironical of reality since "the poet tells of the ospreys which are chastely cautious of mating,

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<sup>77</sup> The original reads: "關雎，樂而不淫，哀而不傷。"

<sup>78</sup> The original reads: "康王晏起，畢公喟然，深思古道，感彼關雎，性不雙侶。"

<sup>79</sup> The original reads: "'窈窕淑女，君子好逑。'言能致其貞潔，不貳其操。"

use their cries to implicitly pursue, and seclude themselves from people” (*Shi sanjia* 4).<sup>80</sup> The powerful emotion of “sorrow” attached by such interpretive readings to the authorial intent of the poem had made Sima Qian (145-90 B.C.), who himself was an adherent to the Lu school, to read “The Ospreys Cry” as an elegy about a magnificent historical period coming to its end: “Alas! When the house of Zhou was in decline, ‘Guanju’ was composed” (*Records of the Historian* 61.3115).<sup>81</sup> Therefore, the moral significance of emotional moderation involved in the poem, which was revealed by Confucius to be “sorrow without self-injury,” was assumed by the above commentators to lie in the wrapping of social criticism into a particular natural imagery: not only does the “crying ospreys” serve as a comparative counterpart of historical reality, but also it provides the poet with an ingenious device of criticism which keeps his critical tone moderate.

The other exegetical tradition, following the dominant Mao school, read “The Ospreys Cry” as a praise of the queen consort of King Wen of Zhou who, unlike the queen consort of King Kang, was regarded as the exemplar of moral excellence. The Mao’s commentary specifies the beginning two lines of the first stanza as “*xing*” and explains that “the queen consort . . . cautiously restricted herself within the secluded place, as is how the birds *guanju* are separated from each other, and therefore could civilize the entire world;”<sup>82</sup> Zheng Xuan’s annotation articulates on Mao’s gloss to “The Ospreys Cry” by saying that “the birds *wangju*, despite their deep affections between the male and female, are courteously separated from each other;”<sup>83</sup> Kong Yingda’s note enunciates that “the birds *jujiu* . . . are to elicit the person who both

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<sup>80</sup> The original reads: “詩人言雉鳩貞潔慎匹，以聲相求，隱蔽於無人之處。”

<sup>81</sup> The original reads: “嗟乎！夫周室衰而關雉作。”

<sup>82</sup> The original reads: “後妃……，慎固幽深，若關雉之有別焉，然後可以風化天下。”

<sup>83</sup> The original reads: “王雉之鳥，雌雄情意至，然而有別。”

conceives deep affections and conducts harmonious disposition and behaviours, namely the queen consort” (*Maoshi* 25-27).<sup>84</sup>

Following the Mao’s practice of specifying the *xing* lines, Song annotator Zhu Xi marked the entire first stanza as *xing*, and pointed out the evocative role played by introductory natural imagery in the composition of the poem: “The ladies in the palace . . . composed the poem to tell that, as long as the birds *jujiu* crying *guan guan* are getting along and singing harmoniously on the island in the river, the secluded chaste lady also deserves a wonderful mate for the lord” (*Shi jizhuan* 1-2).<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Zhu Xi also marked the second and third stanzas respectively as *xing*, and considered the connection between the water-plant *xingcai* and human conditions to be made in the same fashion that the birds *jujiu* are related to courtship. Zhu’s commentary on the second stanza goes: “Just like one must seek to the left and right the water mallow growing in patches, one must seek day and night such a noble lady;”<sup>86</sup> his commentary on the third stanza reads: “Just as one must gather to the left and right and enjoy the water mallow growing in patches, one must endear and please such a noble lady” (*Shi jizhuan* 2).<sup>87</sup> By expanding the use of *xing* from introductory natural imagery of the poem to those of individual stanzas, Zhu Xi reaffirms that natural imagery is extensively used in the poem to incarnate moral doctrine. The interpretive readings in the tradition of the Mao school, as cited above, focus on the “joy” of the poetic tone, as further determined by particular historical contextualization. In accord with Confucius’ comment—“joy without wantonness”—the moral significance of emotional moderation is

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<sup>84</sup> The original reads: “此睢鳩之鳥，……，以興情至，性行和諧者，是後妃也。”

<sup>85</sup> The original reads: “宮中之人，……，故作是詩。言彼關關然之睢鳩，則相與和鳴於河洲之上矣。此窈窕之淑女，則豈非君子之善匹乎。”

<sup>86</sup> The original reads: “彼參差之荇菜，則當左右無方以流之矣。此窈窕之淑女，則當寤寐不忘以求之矣。”

<sup>87</sup> The original reads: “彼參差之荇菜，既得之，則當采擇而亨芼之矣。此窈窕之淑女，即得之，則當親愛而娛樂之矣。”



assumed by the commentators of the Mao School to rest on the poetic structure whereby praise is euphemistically suggested by introductory natural imagery.

The hermeneutic remarks put by the Confucian scholars on the role of introductory natural imagery in the poem diverge toward distinct critical attitudes, either in the spirit of “joy” or “sorrow,” supposedly conceived by the anonymous poet with regard to contemporary political realities. Needless to say, the semantic generality of human conditions involved in the poem likewise contribute to disparate interpretations concerning historical contexts, which further result in conclusions as whether to read the poem as a praise or critique. The focus of literary criticism involved in both hermeneutic traditions, however, lies in a shared acknowledgement of the evocative role played by introductory natural imagery in helping to realize a euphemistical expression of the poet’s intent. Rather than individual feelings, the poet’s intent is obliged with political criticism as well as moral doctrine. Such interpretations about the moral significance in the background of natural imagery are based on an observation not merely about the juxtaposition of natural imagery and human situations, which certainly characterizes the comparative nature of both *bi* and *xing*, but about the syntactic priority of natural imagery, which produces extra space for interpretation concerning not merely history but the morally-elevated inner-being of the poet. Different from *bi*, wherein natural imagery serves to supplement the historical reporting made by prior human conditions, *xing* is characterized by prior natural imagery that helps to initiate and guide a morally proper criticism of historical realities. The space for interpretation sufficed by *xing* is thus more open than that provided by *bi* in that, whereas the latter supplies an empirical or categorical comparison between nature and man, the former moves beyond history towards moral theology. It is through this theological structure of *xing* that the poet’s inner being, which is expected to be the origin of moral perfection in the

Confucian cosmology, manifests itself in an all-inclusive historical truth—a unified world that integrates nature, history, and man’s spiritual destiny.

### **Conclusion**

The *Classic of Poetry* is considered the origin of realistic representation in the history of Chinese literature. Auerbach is well-known for his study of realistic representation in the history of Western literature. Auerbach’s three structures are inspirational to the understanding of the Chinese concepts of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing*. But the foreground of Chinese poems, it has to be noted, is characterized by the juxtaposition of nature and man, rather than a storyline of human activities characterizing the narrative in the Bible. The theological background of Chinese poems, moreover, is related to moral doctrine rather than religious doctrine.

In general, direct exposition or narration known as *fu* originates in the legendary structure of the Hymns and Major odes, the most archaic poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, wherein a unified divine history does not need interpretation. The figurative device known as *bi* is equivalent to the historical structure in the Major Odes and Minor Odes, wherein the empirical relevance or categorical correspondence between nature and man relies on further interpretation to have a background of historical truth. The stimulative natural imagery known as *xing* is equivalent to the theological structure in the Airs of the States, wherein the natural imagery relies on further interpretation to have a background of theological truth, which in the Confucian cosmology is a kind of moral doctrine to be conceived and cultivated by the inner being of the poet. In light of the speech-act theory, we can even see *xing* as a kind of performative or illocutionary act: that is, the interpretation made based on the presumption about the stimulative nature of natural imagery is no more than the reader’s effort to recover what the implied poet purportedly wants to perform on the readership.

About the mysterious rationale behind the canonical sequence of *fu*, *bi* and *xing*, Tang Scholar Kong Yingda made the following comment:

The reason underlying the current sequence of *fu*, *bi* and *xing* is that, since a straightforward exposition is the upright way of relating events, in the *Classic of Poetry* *fu* usually appears before *bi* and *xing*. Although *bi* and *xing* are equally dependent upon external objects, *bi* works in an explicit way and *xing* in an implicit way. Naturally the explicit appears before the implicit, therefore *bi* goes ahead of *xing*. The Mao's commentaries especially point out *xing*, because its meaning is hidden.

賦、比、興如此次者，言事之道，直陳為正，故《詩經》多賦在比、興之先。比之與興，雖同是附託外物，比顯而興隱。當先顯後隱，故比居興先也。毛傳特言興也，為其理隱故也。(Maoshi zhengyi 14)

Kong's comment suggests a synchronic sequence of the three modes, moving from explicit to implicit conveyance of meaning. This synchronic sequence, as we have discussed so far, may have been evolved from a diachronic sequence, wherein *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* mark the historical development of early poetry from closeness to openness for interpretation. Throughout this development, which approximately lasted four centuries in the formation of diverse poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, straightforward exposition (*fu*) initiated the legendary structure of a poetic world, wherein nature and man as an integral part of an early mythological unity of a divine history bear self-sufficient meanings free from interpretation. Later on, explicit comparison (*bi*) introduced the historical structure of a poetic world, wherein the meaning of human experience finds its correspondence in that of nature within a realistic framework of historical truth. Eventually, stimulative imagery (*xing*) came to usher in the theological structure of a poetic

world, wherein the meaning of nature is channelled toward a manifestation of the poet's critical intent within an allegorical framework of moral truth. The latter two structures, *bi* and *xing*, are aimed at an interpretive reconciliation between the verbal meaning of foregrounded realities and the historical or moral significance in the background. At this point, we may further reconcile two aforementioned contrasting researches by suggesting that, whereas Pauline Yu's idea of "historical contextualization" discerns the metaphorical interpretation taking place along the historical structure, Zhang Longxi's conclusion of "allegoresis" reckons the allegorical interpretation along the theological structure.

In contrast with the realistic representation of human actions in early Western literature, the pervasive presentation of natural imagery that is supposedly expressive of the poet's critical intent upon historical realities may partially explain why early Chinese literature did not evolve toward epic or religious literature. Besides the fundamental distinction in cosmological thinking, the early categorical separation between nature and man—an epistemological premise for the rise of the historical structure—put an end to the legendary structure characteristic of the Zhou Hymns and Major Odes, and thus hindered a poetic integration of legendary accounts of early history into an epic form. Meanwhile, the early pragmatic separation between historical writing and theological interpretation, as opposed to the integration of the two structures in the New Testament, has left the "theological structure"—a third concept in a series proposed by Auerbach—forever constrained within the independent tradition of hermeneutic commentaries. Most of all, the Confucian presumption of the poet's inner being as the ultimate source of moral significance gave rise to the persistent understanding of poetry as being expressive, rather than as being revelational of a divine truth.

## Chapter Five

### The Difficulties of Persuasion

#### —The *Shuo* as a Legalist Form of Speech

“The *shuo* is brightly vivid and yet euphemistically illusive.” (Lu Ji, “Wenfu” 137)

Two forms of advisory speech were popularly used in the feudal courts during the Warring-States period. One was to sing or recite the *shi* poems to express one’s moral opinions. By proclaiming that “ignorance of poetry leaves one speechless” (*Lunyu* 33.1168), Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was intent on extending the *shi* 詩 [poetry] to political discourse. Around the same time of Confucius, another prominent form of speech—the *shuo* 說 [talk]<sup>88</sup>—emulated the *shi* in political persuasion. It made what Liu Xie called “colorful talks,” which was characterized by rhetorical language and mainly used by “travelling diplomatists,” to persuade feudal rulers about political ideas. Warring-States Legalist Han Fei was opposed both to the moral appeals of the former and to the rhetorical language of the latter. He considered the “Difficulties of Talks” to be that a speech is subject to unstable interpretation along with the hearer’s changing situations. So he proposed to transform the *shuo* in a few aspects, such as to change the speech from a monologue to a dialogue which can be seen as a dramatization of the speaker and hearer in reality, to replace factual accounts with plausible narratives mainly in the form of historical and anecdotal narratives, and to replace moral truth with utilitarian ideas fitting various situations.

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<sup>88</sup> In its alternative sense of “to persuade,” the term may also be Romanized as *shui*. To distinguish the concept as a form of speech aimed at persuasion, *shuo* is adopted as an equivalent denomination in this and other chapters.

The newly reformed speech of *shuo* became loaded with performative speech acts. Han Fei called this change of advisory speech “expedient transformation.”

### Han Fei

Following the disintegration of the Western Zhou (1046-771 B.C.), intense conflicts among the feudal states, together with a rapid development in political thinking, had led to the rise of a particular intellectual stratum—scholarly advisers (*shi* 士), who were commissioned by feudal lords on political advice. When political struggles intensified during the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.), the *shuo* as a more practical form of speech came to share the power of political discourse with the *shi*, the latter’s application in political advice being exemplified in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), a historical chronicle attributed to Confucius. Travelling among feudal courts to carry out diplomatic missions, whereupon came the name “travelling diplomatists (*zongheng jia* 縱橫家),” scholarly advisers wittily executed specious reasoning and unsound arguments in their stirring talks aimed at persuasion. In the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, Liu Xie 劉勰 (466?-532?) traces the origin of “colorful talks” to ancient diplomatists:

It is observable that colorful talks came to cast shadows upon the *Classic of Poetry*. It can be further concluded that the grotesque senses characteristic of the brightly vivid language (of talks) indeed originated from the fraudulent conduct of the diplomatists.

觀其艷說，則籠罩雅頌，故知曄燁之奇意，出乎縱橫之詭俗也。(45.672)

Both the *shi* and *shuo*, respectively celebrated by Confucianists and diplomatists as ideal forms of speech for political persuasion, were criticized by Han Fei 韓非 (280-233 B.C.), a prominent Legalist and political thinker in the late Warring States period. Labelling “Confucian scholars”

(*xue zhe* 學者) and “speech-makers” (*yantan zhe* 言談者) as two of the “five vermin” (*wudu* 五蠹) of the state (49.456),<sup>89</sup> Han Fei accused the former of ignoring legal institutions in favor of poetic moralization, and blamed the latter for making fallacious talks to solicit political submission. Aspiring to blaze a new path in the use of advisory speech, Han Fei discussed the predicament of contemporary use of speech in two treatises, “Difficulties in Speaking (*nanyan* 難言)” and “Difficulties of Talks (*shuonan* 說難),”<sup>90</sup> collected in the homonymous book titled *Hanfeizi*. The major argument of the treatises is to urge a transition of persuasive focus from the speaker to the hearer. According to the “Difficulties in Speaking,” the predicament of speech-making lies in that the hearer does not necessarily favor the speech despite the high truth involved:

Despite the righteous measures, words are not necessarily heard. Despite the consummate verities, words are not necessarily adopted.

度量雖正，未必聽也；義理雖全，未必用也。(3.49)

From the perspective of a hearer-centric discourse, which makes it “difficult to speak,” Han Fei blamea such Confucian classics as the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Book of History* for “nostalgizing (*song* 誦)” in their self-satisfied worship of an imaginary past (3.49). In “Difficulties of Talks,” he declares that the difficulties in political persuasion do not arise from the expression of the speaker’s intent but from the persuasion of the hearer:

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<sup>89</sup> The other three vermin are knight-errants (帶劍者), privileged minions (患禦者), and people like merchants and artisans (商工之民).

<sup>90</sup> In comparison with the “Difficulties in Speaking,” the “Difficulties of Talks” is a lighter treatise in the sense that it has been considered to be Han Fei’s last petition letter to Ying Zheng 嬴政 (259-210 B.C.), the king of the state of Qin who later became the First Emperor of Qin, before he was put to death by the latter in the year 233 B.C.

As for the difficulties of talks, they neither refer to those of speaking out what I understand, nor those of clarifying what I argue for, nor those of exhausting what I dare to bravely champion. The difficulties of talks, after all, lie in the possibility of fitting my talk well into the mind of whom I try to persuade.

凡說之難：非吾知之，有以說之之難也；又非吾辯之，能明吾意之難也；又非吾敢橫失，而能盡之難也。凡說之難，在知所說之心，可以吾說當之。

(4.221)

Han Fei's focus on the persuasive potential of speech did not lead to an emphasis on rhetoric, which in the eyes of Legalists played a minor part in persuasion. Rather, contemporary social preferences for "learning of rhetoric (*wenxue* 文學)" and "speech-making (*yantan* 言談)" over "farming (*geng* 耕)" and "battling (*zhan* 戰)" were regarded by Han Fei as one of the causes of political turmoil. As a part of his political project aiming to establish a government based on legal institutions, the advisory speech of the *shuo* was urged by Han Fei to transform itself from a speaker-centric monologue preoccupied with moral truth and rhetoric to a hearer-centric dialogue serving utilitarian purposes. By tracing an extensive series of perilous situations facing the speaker, in "Difficulties of Talks," Han Fei argues that the hearer—the ruler of a feudal state in the context—does not hold solid and lasting expectation toward a speech. If a speech fails, it "fails because of its revelation of taboos"<sup>91</sup> (4.221); "The priority of persuasion," says Han Fei, "is to know how to embellish what is prided and remove what is detested by the hearer"<sup>92</sup> (4.222). As illustrated by a few dialogic narratives listed at the end of the treatise, a speech is subject to inconsistent interpretation along with the hearer's changing situations.

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<sup>91</sup> The original reads: "語以泄敗。"

<sup>92</sup> The original reads: "凡說之務，在知飾所說之所矜而滅其所恥。"



The dialogic narratives found at the end of “Difficulties of Talks” stand out from the rest of the text for their essentially tropological nature: not merely do they supply allegorical illustrations of meticulous yet intangible arguments, but also endure varying interpretation by virtue of their irrelevance to present taboos. This tactic use of tropological narratives was greatly expanded and exemplified in the *Jungle of Talks* (*Shuolin* 說林) and *Repertory of Talks* (*Chushuo* 儲說),<sup>93</sup> two collections of miscellaneous narratives compiled by Han Fei.

Featuring a large amount of historical and anecdotal narratives, the *Jungle of Talks* and *Repertory of Talks* are notable for a prevailing use of dialogue. In contrast with the monologic poetic speech embraced by Confucian scholars, the dialogic form of the *shuo*—upon Han Fei’s reformation of its earlier speaker-centric and thus monologic form—invites the speaker and hearer into an invented dialogue, wherein the characters and events from imbedded narratives are of no direct reference to present realities. In the invented dialogue, however, which carries ample historical references, the hearer may become inspired about practical meanings. In this manner, the dialogic form of the *shuo*, embedded with narratives, is justified to share the power of political discourse otherwise dominated by the monologic expressions of the *shi*.

In comparison with the narratives found in other classical sources, the tropological narratives in the *Jungle of Talks* and the *Repertory of Talks* are characterized by an association of plausible history with political ideas. By reference to plausible history, they do not resemble the purely allegorical writing in the *Zhuangzi*; nor are they reminiscent of the self-supporting

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<sup>93</sup> The *Repertory of Talks* comprises six series: *Inner Repertory of Talks, the Upper Series* (內儲說上), *Inner Repertory of Talks, the Lower Series* (內儲說下), *Outer Repertory of Talks, the Upper Left Series* (外儲說左上), *Outer Repertory of Talks, the Lower Left Series* (外儲說左下), *Outer Repertory of Talks, the Upper Right Series* (外儲說右上) and *Outer Repertory of Talks, the Lower Right Series* (外儲說右下), with such modifiers as inner, outer, upper, lower, left and right being sequential indicators of different series. The *Jungle of Talks* contains two series: *Jungle of Talks, the Upper Series* (說林上) and *Jungle of Talks, the Lower Series* (說林下).

historical writings found in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) and the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語). The utilitarian pursuit in the tropological association of history with political ideas reflected the Legalist appeal for ideological reforms in both political and literary realms. In the political realm, contemporary political turmoil and the prospect of a centralized government made Han Fei argue for a more competent form of speech to steer political institutions from Confucian rituals toward practical Legalism;<sup>94</sup> in the literary realm, accordingly, the new ideological cause urged a transition from the monologic speech of the *shi* to the dialogic speech of the *shuo*. In practice, the speaker's dealing with the *shuo* was not necessarily preoccupied with pre-existing moralities, but oriented toward utilitarian ideas fitting into the mind of the hearer. From every aspect—with stories replacing facts, utilitarian ideas substituting absolute truth, and dialogism supplanting monologue—the proposed transition of speech from the *shi* to the *shuo* showed the time spirit of expedient transformation. In the treatise “Eight Talks” (*Bashuo* 八說), Han Fei states:

Some former sage-king made such a speech, saying: “Compasses have become worn, and water has gone wavy. Nothing will prevent me from altering the standards!” This is a speech arguing for flexibility and expediency. For this reason, persuasions bring forth what is necessarily erected at the sacrifice of estranging from facts, and speeches may be insufficient in diction if crying for practical utility. Therefore, neither does a sage-king seek speeches without flaws, nor engage in causes without transformation.

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<sup>94</sup> Legalism was adopted as the ideological basis of the imperial institution of the Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.), with the Burning of Books and Burying of Scholars being the drastic consequences of the ideological rivalry between Legalism and Confucianism. A reformed Confucianism would be revived during the following Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.C.) as a reaction against the Qin absolutism.

先聖有言曰：“規有摩，而水有波，我欲更之，無奈之何！”此通權之言也。是以說有必立而曠於實者，言有辭拙而急於用者，故聖人不求無害之言，而不務無易之事。(47.427)

Here Han Fei proposes to expediently transform the advisory speech by switching its significance from facts and high truth to pragmatic utility, and, in doing so, to demystify the lofty moral principles of his times. It was under this spirit of expedient transformation that the renewed speech of *shuo* came to unveil an unusual literary horizon, wherein moral truth may be replaced by utilitarian meanings and facticity by plausibility.

### Liu Xiang

The Legalist form of *shuo* was further exemplified in the *Garden of Talks* (*Shuoyuan* 說苑), a compilation of dialogic narratives finalized by the great bibliographer Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 B.C.) in the Han dynasty. Despite the re-establishment of a reformed Confucianism during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141-87 B.C.), the *Garden of Talks*, with its anti-Confucian form of *shuo*, was preserved in the post-Qin reinstatement of the royal library by virtue of its potential usefulness to contemporary government. Although they “do not conform to the Confucian verities” (*buzhong yili* 不中義理), claims Liu Xiang in the memorial preface to the *Garden of Talks*, the miscellaneous narratives included in the text are “all worthy of viewing” (*jie keguan* 皆可觀) from the perspective of the ruler (1). The alleged purpose of the text, as indicated by such categories as “Ways of the Ruler (*jundao* 君道)” and “Skills of Courtiers (*chengshu* 臣術),” echoes Han Fei’s ideal about speech’s persuasive illustration of utilitarian ruling ideas. In particular, the skill in persuading the ruler with talks is proposed, in the category of “Well-spoken in Persuasion (*shanshuo* 善說),” as a prerequisite for a qualified courtier.

In the meantime, such works as the *Jungle of Talks*, the *Repertory of Talks*, and the *Garden of Talks* may have constituted part of a repertoire of narratives that came to inform a major historical work compiled by Liu Xiang—the *Intrigues of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策)—with an implied promotion of political ideas beyond historical contingency.<sup>95</sup> “Unlike *ru* classicist discourse,” as Martin Kern observes, “the speeches of the *Intrigues* pull out all the stops of deceit and manipulation, demonstrating not the elegance of virtuous speech but the efficiency of amoral, if not downright immoral, verbal craft” (55).

### Classical Criticism

So long as the *shuo* was entitled to an orthodox form of speech in political persuasion, the merits and faults of its representation of plausible reality became a major concern in classical literary criticism. Xun Kuang 荀況 (313-238 B.C.) described one of the *shuo*'s characteristics as being “metaphorically asserting so as to illustrate” (5.86).<sup>96</sup> In Han Fei's view, an “estrangement from facts (*kuangyu shi* 曠於實)” is expediently necessary for an illustration of political ideas implied in the *shuo* (47.427). In his “Rhapsody on Literature” (*Wenfu* 文賦), Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303 A.D.) lists the *shuo* as one of ten fundamental literary genres and defines its nature as being “brightly vivid and yet euphemistically illusive” (137).<sup>97</sup> Holding mild criticism on Lu Ji's opinion on the illusive nature of the genre, Liu Xie—in the chapter “Discourse on the *Shuo*” (*Lunshuo* 論說) in the *Literary Mind*—argues that it is through “ingenious metaphors and

<sup>95</sup> In the *Jungle of Talks* and the *Repertory of Talks*, the utilitarian political ideas informed by plausible stories were categorized into the ruling skills (術) and minute investigations (微), a systematic series of ruling principles regarding establishing a hierarchical relationship between the ruler of the feudal state and his courtiers. At this point, *shuo* finds in the scope of world literature its closest equivalent in the form of the Haggadah *הגדה* [telling], which tells anecdotal parables to illustrate the laws in the *Talmud*.

<sup>96</sup> The original reads: “譬稱以喻之。”

<sup>97</sup> The original reads: “說煒曄而譎誑。”

essential truths”<sup>98</sup> and “loose happenings and luxuriant wording”<sup>99</sup> that the *shuo* adheres to the Confucian literary principle of political admonishment (18.329).

Although the *shuo*'s tropological nature in association with political persuasion echoes the *shi*'s undertaking of “euphemistically admonishing” (*juejian* 譎諫), Tang historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721), who is noted for his comprehensive commentaries on ancient writings from the viewpoint of orthodox historiography, criticizes Liu Xiang's *Garden of Talks* for “extensively displaying false happenings and excessively compose insincere rhetoric” (Outer 9.302).<sup>100</sup> Within a literary tradition dominated by Confucian poetics, which promoted an ideal assimilation of facts to prior moral truth via the poet's intent, the *shuo* appears to have been a reactionary form of speech caught between accusations of its unreal representation of reality and justifications for its persuasive potential.

### Xiaoshuo

It was most likely that *xiaoshuo* 小說 (petty talks), which would later become the general name for fiction in Chinese literature, was originally an extended practice of the *shuo* in the low folk life. *Xiaoshuo* was listed by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 A.D.) in the *Bibliography of Arts and Letters* (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志), the bibliographical section of the *History of the Former Han*, as one of ten sub-categories under the “Series of Various Philosophers” (zhuzi lue 諸子略):<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The original reads: “喻巧而理至。”

<sup>99</sup> The original reads: “事緩而文繁。”

<sup>100</sup> The original reads: “廣陳虛事，多構偽辭。”

<sup>101</sup> The bibliographical classification in Ban Gu's *Bibliography of Arts and Letters* comprises six categories (六略): Six Classics (六藝), Various Philosophers (諸子), Poetry and Rhymed-prose (詩賦), Military Documents (兵書), Astrology and Divination (數術), and Medicine and Alchemy (方技). It descended from Liu Xin's 劉歆 (46 B.C.-23 A.D.) classificatory system of seven categories (七略), which contains the extra category of General Introduction (輯略). Liu Xin's bibliographical project based on the seven categories is believed to have provided the earliest classificatory system of books and had been lost except a few lines reserved in other sources.

The intellectual current formed by the School of Petty Talks (*xiaoshuo jia* 小說家) finds its currency in the trivial functionaries. They (petty talks) are fabricated by those who gossip in the neighbourhood and spread hearsay far and near.

小說家者流，蓋出於稗官。街談巷語、道聽途說者之所造也。(172)

According to Ru Chun 如淳's (cir. Three Kingdoms) commentary on the above passage, the Trivial Functionaries (*baiguan* 稗官)—like the Poetry Functionaries (*caishi zhiguan* 采詩之官) prominent in the forming process of the *Classic of Poetry*, who were commissioned by ancient rulers with collecting poems from the civilian society—were responsible for gathering folk talks, retelling them in the court, and thus informing the rulers of the folkways (172).<sup>102</sup> Given its informative function in the court, *xiaoshuo* seems to have been endowed with the same advisory capacity as the official speech of *shuo*. It was ranked as petty, however, not only because the folk talks were made out of ill-grounded fabrication, but because, according to Ban Gu's minor preface to the sub-category of the School of Petty Talks (*xiaoshuo jia* 小說家), they carried no more than “small ways (*xiaodao* 小道)” and “small knowings (*xiaozhi* 小知),” which were considered vulnerable in sustaining the noble cause of gentlemanship (172).

The differentiation of *xiaoshuo* from the *shuo* marked the beginning of an established distinction between orthodox and unorthodox forms of speech. As an orthodox form of speech, which was expected of carrying significant ideological concerns, the *shuo* came to be enshrined in the orthodox literary tradition, as proved by the fact that both the *Garden of Talks* and the

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<sup>102</sup> “王者欲知閭巷風俗，故立稗官，使稱說之。” See Ru Chun's 如淳 note on Ban Gu's minor preface to the category of the School of Petty Talks catalogue in the *Bibliography of Arts and Letters*. “古有采詩之官，王者所以觀風俗，知得失，自考正也。” See Ban Gu's minor preface to the *Classic of Poetry* catalogue in the *Treatise of Literature*.

*Worldly Talks* (*Shishuo* 世說)<sup>103</sup>—despite accusations of their unreal representation of reality—were assigned into the sub-category of the School of Confucianism (*rujia* 儒家) in the *Bibliography of Arts and Letters*. As an unorthodox form of speech, *xiaoshuo* would go through suppression throughout the history of classical Chinese literature, ever since it was labeled by Ban Gu as the only intellectual current—among ten in the “Series of Various Philosophers”—that deserves no attention from gentlemen.

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<sup>103</sup> A title listed in the sub-category of the School of Confucianism, under the “Series of Various Philosophers,” in Ban Bu’s *Bibliography of Arts and Letters*. With no text having survived, the title may suggest an early literary tradition of “worldly talks” that came to inform the form of *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語), a 5th-century compilation of literary accounts of conversations and anecdotes of contemporary gentry.

## Chapter Six

### The Mystery of Mysteries

#### —The Paradox between Form and Meaning in Early Chinese Thought on Names

“The *Dao* that may be named *Dao* is not the invariable *Dao*. The names that can be used to name things are not invariable names.” (*Laozi* 1.1)

This chapter investigates the paradoxical relationship between form and meaning inherent in linguistic signs, or what was called “names” in classical Chinese philosophy, as discussed by Lao Zi 老子 (?), Hui Shi 惠施 (cir. 370-310 B.C.), Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (320-250 B.C.), and Zhuang Zi 莊子 (cir. 369-286 B.C.).

#### Lao Zi

Traditionally regarded as one of the early founders of the Chinese philosophical school known as Daoism, Lao Zi—or Lao Dan 老聃 as sometimes called—was a legendary figure without accurate records of existence. The book bearing his name, the *Laozi*, was likely formed sometime during the Warring States period (476-221 B.C.) and helped lay down some primary elements in the Daoist thought. At the beginning of the *Laozi*, it says:

The *Dao* that may be named *Dao* is not the invariable *Dao*. The names that can be used to name things are not invariable names. Non-being is the name given to that from which Heaven and Earth originate. Being is the name given to that which gives birth to myriads of things. Of the invariable Non-being, we wish to see its secret essences. Of the invariable Being, we wish to see its borders. These two



come together but differ in name. The two together may be called the Mystery. It is the Mystery of mysteries, the doorway to all secret essences.<sup>104</sup>

道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名。無名天地之始，有名萬物之母。故常無欲以觀其妙；常有欲以觀其徼。此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，衆妙之門。(1.1-2)

The Chinese conception of *Dao*, like the Western *logos*, is an all-embracing order or principle of the universe. As two fundamental characters of *Dao*, Non-being (*wu* 無) and Being (*you* 有) may be construed in two ways, with regard to the issue of meaning and form in question.

First, just as the Platonic entities of Ideas (*ιδέα*) or Forms (*εἶδος*) suggest the unity of conceptual idea and substantial form in *logos*, the Daoist concepts of Non-being and Being respectively refer to unperceivable meaning and perceivable form that are unified in *Dao*. “*Dao* as an entity,” as the *Laozi* states, “is abstract and dim. Abstract and dim, yet within it are forms; abstract and dim, yet latent in it are entities. Secret and obscure, yet within it are essences; the essences are exceedingly true, as latent in it are trustworthy meanings” (21.52).<sup>105</sup> Therefore it is said, in its beginning chapter, that “Of the invariable Non-being, we wish to see its secret essences. Of the invariable Being, we wish to see its borders.”

Second, unlike *logos*—which, as Derrida criticizes it, assumes determinate meaning—*Dao*, in the Daoist vein of Chinese philosophy, bears indeterminate meaning varying between Non-being and Being. “The *Dao* of brightness,” for example, “looks like darkness; the *Dao* of

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<sup>104</sup> The translation is adapted from that of Derk Bodde in his translation of Fung Yu-lan’s *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. Cf. Fung, *History*, vol.1, 178.

<sup>105</sup> The original reads: “道之為物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有精；其精甚真，其中有信。”

advancing seems like retreating; the *Dao* of plainness feels like knottiness” (41.111-12).<sup>106</sup> One meaning of *Dao*, as specified by Being, is undermined by an opposite meaning, as denoted by Non-being. “A reversal,” therefore, “marks the movement of *Dao*” (40.110).<sup>107</sup> “Straight words,” as the *Lao zi* further declares, “implies reversal” (78.187).<sup>108</sup>

Thus construed either as the dual entities of form and meaning, or indeterminate meanings of *Dao*, Being and Non-being are unified in the situation of a paradox. Whereas Being tends to always assign borders to form and thus limits to meaning, Non-being not only eludes form but also reverses meaning. As the consequence of the fundamental paradox, *Dao* refrains from elaboration by language, which belongs to a horizon independent from metaphysical *Dao*. Without names being forced to it, that is, the eternal paradox between Being and Non-being constitutes the invariable spontaneousness (*ziran* 自然) of *Dao*. This is why it is said that “The *Dao* that may be named *Dao* is not the invariable *Dao*.”

The anti-linguistic gesture of the *Lao zi* rests on the presupposition that, in contrast with the absoluteness of *Dao*, names cannot serve as the source of absolute truth simply because they rely on things to exist. Deriving their existence from *Dao*, myriads of things move a step away from *Dao*; consequently, names that are used to designate things are two steps away from truth. The disdain held by the *Lao zi* toward names is reminiscent of Plato’s condemnation of poetry as being twice removed from Ideas or Forms. The departure from *Dao*, induced first by things and then by names, is thus claimed to prevent people from knowing truth. This is why it is also said that “The names that can be used to name things are not invariable names.”

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<sup>106</sup> The original reads: “明道若昧；進道若退；夷道若類。”

<sup>107</sup> The original reads: “反者，道之動。”

<sup>108</sup> The original reads: “正言若反。”

Although invariable *Dao* denies artificially imposed names, a name is forced to it. Likewise, names are forced to the invariable Non-being and Being of *Dao*. For the *Lao zi*, naming marks the beginning of distinction between things, the origin not only of knowledge but of human institutions. With names, myriads of things assume borders with each other. By staking out the borders of things, names help map out the distinction between all forms of Being. With regard to the essences of things—the ineffable Non-being, like the Leibnizian *je-ne-sais-quoi*—names nevertheless become obscure. This primeval gap—created by names—between form and meaning is termed in the *Lao zi* as the Mystery (*xuan* 玄). Though coming together under *Dao*, Being and Non-being are forcefully separated by the intervention from names.

“It is the Mystery of mysteries.” That is, the primeval gap between Being and Non-being under *Dao* predetermines the gaps between form and meaning of myriads of things designated by names. Here, *Dao*—the all-embracing principle of the universe—is to be understood in association with *De* (*de* 德), the individual principle of each thing. “The great *De*’s efficacy,” on the one hand, “complies with *Dao*” (21.52).<sup>109</sup> “While *Dao* gives birth to things,” on the other, “*De* raises them” (51.136).<sup>110</sup> According to Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249), the great commentator of the *Lao zi*, “*De* is that whereby things gain (*Dao*) and thence get raised” (51.137).<sup>111</sup> As the dwelling place of *Dao* in things, *De* is the individual principle that both makes each thing different from another, and keeps myriads of things harmonious with *Dao*. It is because of *De* that each thing assumes its own form and meaning different from others; it is likewise because of

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<sup>109</sup> The original reads: “孔德之容，惟道是從。”

<sup>110</sup> The original reads: “道生之，德畜之。”

<sup>111</sup> The original reads: “何得而畜？德也。” Wang Bi’s commentary contains the agreed wordplay between *de* 得 [gaining] and *de* 德 [virtue].

*De* that the primeval gap between Being and Non-being of *Dao* applies universally to the gap between form and meaning of each thing.

The Daoist philosophical structure of *Dao De*, which aims to explain the order of the universe, resembles the poetic structure of *discordia concors*, or harmonious disharmony—a Neo-classical term used by Samuel Johnson to describe the elemental form of poetry valued during the European Age of Reason. In the *Laozi*, this predominant structure assures that, while operated by individual principles known as *De*, myriads of things revolve around the universal truth of *Dao*. Rather than proceeding to extend the philosophical structure to a poetic structure, whereby meaning may be coming out of juxtaposing dissimilar things invoked by names, the *Laozi* focuses exclusively on the gap between meaning and form; moreover, the early Daoist thought turns against names. As the “doorway to all secret essences”—a metaphor analogous to Heidegger’s view of language as “the house of being” and yet anti-linguistic per se—the Mystery is treated in the *Laozi* as the archetypal paradox between form and meaning, a critical issue that has entailed much philosophical contemplation over the role of names or language.

On the metaphysical horizon of Daoism, the invariable truth of *Dao* means gapless identification between form and meaning. It is names, nevertheless, that purportedly come to create the undesired gap. The division created by names between form and meaning, as claimed in the *Laozi*, can be understood in the same breath as the Saussurean distinction between the *referent* and the *signified* of a *signifier*. A *signifier* or linguistic sign, according Saussure, may point at an external *referent*, but not at a *signified* or relevant meaning; its meaning is to be determined along with the ever-changing chain of linguistic signs. In the *Laozi*, likewise, names are considered to define the perceivable borders of things, rather than regulating imperceivable meanings. For this reason, names are blamed in Daoism for breaking up the Great Oneness (*taiyi*

太一) of invariable *Dao*. The remedy proposed in the *Laozi* to resume the unity is nameless simplicity, as suggested in the following passage:

*Dao* is eternally nameless. Unadorned simplicity (*pu* 樸), though seemingly of small account, is greater than anything under Heaven. . . . As soon as things are put under regulation, there are names. As soon as there are names, know that it is time to stop.<sup>112</sup>

道常無名，樸雖小，天下莫能臣也。 . . . . 始制有名，名亦既有，夫亦將知止。(32.81)

The concept of unadorned simplicity (*pu* 樸) suggests a Daoist universe where there is neither distinction between things nor representation by names. Without the intervention from names, the primeval entities of form and meaning, as well as myriads of things in the world, are not separated from each other and therefore get united under the truth of *Dao*. In the eyes of the Daoists, the philosophical school—among others—that most favored distinction between things and representation by names was the Confucians, who regulated worldly affairs under the doctrines of benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) and promoted adorned patterns (*wen* 文) in institutions, rituals, and texts. Confucius is recorded in the *Analects* as saying:

Isn't it necessary to set names right? . . . If names are not set right, speech will not flow naturally. If speech does not flow naturally, things will not be established.

子曰：“必也正名乎！ . . . . 名不正，則言不順；言不順，則事不成。” (13.517-21)

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<sup>112</sup> Adapted from Derk Bodde's translation; cf. Fung, *History*, vol.1, 178.

In addition to an emphasis on names, Confucius is also noted in the *Zuo's Tradition of Spring and Autumn Annals* for laying stress on the patterns of words:

Speech without adorned patterns (*wen* 文) will not spread far.

言之無文，行而不遠。(25th year of Duke of Xiang 578)

For the Confucians, therefore, names and patterns are the foundation of a well-wrought order of the world. The truth of this world, as highlighted by the Confucian doctrines of benevolence and righteousness, is to be represented by things established through names, as well as by codes of things codified into patterns. Opposed to the Confucian tendency towards representation, the *Laozi* states:

Abandon wisdom and discard intelligence, . . . Abandon benevolence and banish righteousness, . . . Abandon artfulness and banish behalf, . . . These three doctrines (to be abandoned) tend to apply adorned patterns (*wen* 文) to the insufficient, and thus force things to bear additional accessories. Rather, let the world behold plainness and embrace unadorned simplicity (*pu* 樸). Let them reduce longing and remove desires. Let them abandon knowledge and rid concerns.

絕聖棄智， . . . . . 絕仁棄義， . . . . . 絕巧棄利， . . . . . 此三者，以為文不足，故令有所屬。見素抱樸，少思寡慾，絕學無憂。(19.45)

On the one hand, the distinctive form of life—the Daoist unadorned simplicity, or the Confucian adorned patterns—follows from the form of the cosmos, as speculated by different philosophical schools. The Daoist universe, as viewed in the *Laozi*, centers on the similarity of all things in the invariable *Dao*, and thus rejects representation imposed by names and patterns. The Confucian world, on the contrary, focuses on the difference between all things, and seeks a stable yet

hierarchical structure on the ground of representation. Likewise, the high meaning of life—the Daoist *Dao*, or the Confucian principles of benevolence and righteousness—coincides with the type of cosmic form found in various philosophical speculation.

On the other hand, the distinctive form of life, which holds sway over the attitude towards representation and language, seems greatly influenced by whether, in the center of the philosophical cosmos, there dwells a human self to whom the high meaning becomes meaningful. In the Confucian thought, the human self is regarded not only as the cardinal site of the principles of benevolence and righteousness—which highlight the truth of humanity as such—but also as the utterer of speech and the scribe of texts. In the *Laozi*, on the contrary, the human being is expected to be without self and therefore, like myriads of things in the world, not only free of longing and desires but rid of wisdom and intelligence. Without the human self, the high meaning of *Dao* lapses into the situation of what phenomenology terms being-in-itself, or the mode of being characteristic of things. “Lao Zi cultivated *Dao* and *De*,” as Sima Qian comments in the biography of Lao Zi in the *Records of Grand Historian*, “with his doctrines aimed at self-effacement and namelessness” (58.2141).<sup>113</sup>

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel makes a distinction between two modes of being: being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Unlike the natural being, according to Hegel, which dwells in being-in-itself or a self-sufficient form, the human being strives towards being-for-itself or meaning. This mode of being that is beyond form is what Hegel also calls the “spiritual freedom”—a high meaning that cannot be achieved in the human being himself but in the recognition or representation by others. The form of life in which the meaning of the human

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<sup>113</sup> The original reads: “老子修道德，其學以自隱無名為務。”

being is realized in the representation by others is most succinctly described by Heidegger as “Poetically man dwells.”

Likewise, the conception of *Dao* in the *Lao zi* comprises two modes of being: Being (*you*) and Non-being (*wu*). Whereas the Daoist concept of Being appears equivalent to the Hegelian being-in-itself, however, that of Non-being denies the spiritual mode of being-for-itself, thus eliminating altogether the human self and the representation by others. This helps explain the extent to which Lao Zi’s cultivation of *Dao* and *De* is “aimed at self-effacement and nameless.” But it has to be noted that, in the *Laozi*, the denial of the intellectual participation of the human being, as well as the objection to representation by language, constitutes the means by which one achieves absolute spiritual freedom. For the *Laozi*, the primeval status of *Dao* is the unity of form and meaning; it is names that come to break the unity, separating the perceivable form of things (Being) from their secret essences or unperceivable meaning (Non-being). The only way to restore the unity of form and meaning, therefore, is to remove names, together with human desires that come along with names. Whenever names were present, that is, the relation between form and meaning would remain the Mystery of mysteries in the universe.

### **Hui Shi**

It is the School of Names (*mingjia* 名家) that came to demystify the mysterious relation between form and meaning associated with language.

Also known as the School of Forms and Names (*xingmingjia* 刑名家),<sup>114</sup> the School of Names refers to the group of philosophers who, appearing during the Warring States period, relied on play of words to make paradoxical propositions about the world. Rather than pure sophistry, the philosophy practiced by the School of Names focuses on whether names (*ming* 名)

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<sup>114</sup> In this term, 刑 is interchangeable with 形, the Chinese word for “forms.”



bring about actualities (*shi* 實) of the world. Better described in modern terms as logicians in language, they applied doctrines of relativity in discursive debates, earning themselves the epithet Dialecticians (*bianzhe* 辯者). In the eyes of other classical schools of philosophers, they seemed very much like deconstructionists living in the pre-Qin China, as described in Sima Tan's 司馬談 (?-110 B.C.) account of the school recorded in the *Records of the Historian*:

The School of Names made minute examination of trifling points in complicated and elaborate statements, which make it impossible for others to refute their ideas. They specialized in the definition of names, but lost sight of human feelings. Therefore I say: 'They lead men to a sparing use of words which makes it easy to lose the truth.' Yet to force names to express actualities, and to study logical order so that there will be no error, is a task that must be investigated.<sup>115</sup>

名家苛察繳繞，使人不得反其意，專決於名而失人情，故曰‘使人儉而善失真’。若夫控名責實，參伍不失，此不可不察也。(130.3291)

The above accusations of the Dialecticians, for “losing sight of human feelings” and “losing the truth,” can be false upon a closer look at their theories and practices. In fact, the theoretical investigation made by the School of Names marked the first time Chinese philosophers have undertaken to speculate on the logical order in which language expresses truth and human feelings. Their speculation shed critical light on the gap between form and meaning of things created by names, or the “Mystery of mysteries” as claimed in the *Laozi*.

In the introduction to this dissertation, we have divided the history of Western thought, over the relation between meaning and form of poetry, into three periods: the metaphysical era,

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<sup>115</sup> The English translation is quoted by Derk Bodde, in his translation of Fung Yu-lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy*, from Fund Yu-lan and L. C. Porter's translation of relevant texts in the latter's *Aids to the Study of Chinese Philosophy*. Cf. Fung, 193-94, and *Aids*, 52.

the empirical era, and the linguistic turn. In order to understand the theoretical premises held by the School of Names, it is helpful to likewise divide the universe under philosophical speculation into three spheres: the metaphysical sphere of ideas, the empirical sphere of points of view, and the linguistic sphere of names. Together with the physical sphere of things, such a distinction between various horizons of a philosophical universe helps to make the logic of language more understandable.

The logical order in which names express actualities of the world, as unveiled by the philosophers in the School of Names, is operating based on the interaction among the above four spheres. In short, this logical order can be described as the universal form known as—to adopt a term from one of the philosophers—the “great similarity-and-difference (*da tongyi* 大同異).” The term means that, when called forth by names, the being of things which is absolute in the metaphysical sphere may become relative in reality, as it changes along with time and space in the physical sphere and with points of view in the empirical sphere.

Centered on the universal form of “great similarity-and-difference,” Hui Shi 惠施 (cir. 370-310 B.C.)—an earlier philosopher in the School of Names—emphasized that, because of their changing forms in reality, different things may share the same meaning; Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (320-250 B.C.), a later philosopher in the school, stressed that, by virtue of varying principles in its constitution, one thing may carry a variety of meanings. The two theories came together to reveal that, invoked by names, things in the universe can be represented by each other at certain points of meaning, and that this chain of representation can be endless.

The only extant sayings by Hui Shi are recorded in the chapter “Under the Heavens,” in the *Zhuangzi*, as a series of ten paradoxes. Because each of the paradoxes illuminates the logical

order of names from one particular aspect, it is worthwhile to list all of them in our discussion, each followed by a brief analysis. The first paradox reads:

The absolutely great has nothing beyond itself, and is called the Great Oneness.

The absolutely small has nothing within itself, and is called the Small Oneness.

至大无外，謂之大一；至小无内，謂之小一。(33.1102)

This paradox suggests that, in the metaphysical sphere, the name “great” designates the abstract concept of greatness, which depends on nothing outside; likewise, the name “small” denotes the abstract concept of smallness, which relies on nothing inside. As two metaphysical concepts, the great and the small are absolute and subject to oneness. The second paradox reads:

That which has no thickness cannot be enlarged [in thickness], but its greatness may cover one thousand miles.

无厚，不可積也，其大千里。(33.1102)

In the physical sphere, suppose there exists a perfect plane that has no thickness: though small in the dimension of thickness, it may be considered great in the dimensions of length and width.

This is an example of that, in the physical world, such concepts as the great and the small become relative as things change in space. The third paradox reads:

The heavens and the earth are equally low; mountains and marshes are on the same level.

天與地卑，山與澤平。(33.1102)

From the perspective of someone who looks out to the horizon, the heavens appear to be as low as the earth; likewise, mountains seem to be on the same level as marshes. This is an instance of that, in the empirical sphere, different things may share the same meaning as their appearances vary with points of view. The fourth paradox reads:

The sun at noon is in decline; things just born are dying.

日方中方睨，物方生方死。(33.1102)

Nothing in the universe is not changing in time. At any moment, the being of things bears one meaning compared to the last moment and yet another to the next. The above four paradoxes together lead to the conclusion made in the fifth paradox, which reads:

Great similarities are different from small similarities (between things). This is called the small similarity-and-difference. Myriads of things are all similar in one way, and all different in another. This is called the great similarity-and-difference.

同而與小同異，此之謂小同異；萬物畢同畢異，此之謂大同異。(33.1102)

This paradox brings forth Hui Shi's central idea on the universal form of "great similarity-and-difference." By virtue of the relativity of meaning in the physical and empirical spheres, all things called forth by names appear similar in one way, and different in another. It is the fundamental form underlying representation in that, in spite of difference, one thing may share the same meaning with another and therefore can be represented by it at that point; when meaning alters, whether in reversed or varied manner, one thing may still find its representation in other things, and goes on like this endlessly. This is why it is said that "Myriads of things are all similar in one way, and all different in another." Based on this form, the following paradoxes are becoming more complex and, at certain point, deconstructive. The sixth paradox states:

The south has no limit and yet has a limit.

南方无窮而有窮。(33.1102)

In the metaphysical sphere, the concept of the south is absolute and thus limitless. In actual space, however, the south is relative and bounded to a limit. The seventh paradox states:

Today one starts for the state of Yüe and yet arrived there in the past.

今日適越而昔來。(33.1102)

Time is a type of order in which things change, but it is not necessarily the order in which speech is made about things. One may speak about the same event in a relative time frame, whether as if at the present or not. The eighth paradox states:

Chain of rings can be disconnected.

連環可解也。(33.1102)

Things that are connected in the physical sphere can be independent concepts in the metaphysical sphere. Likewise, the syntactic or textual construction in which names designate things can be deconstructed by regarding names as designations for separate ideas. The ninth paradox states:

I know that the center of the world is north of Yan and south of Yüe.

我知天之中央，燕之北越之南是也。(33.1102)

From the perspective of the Central Kingdom, the center of the world was supposed to be south of Yan (the present province of Hebei) and north of Yüe (the present province of Zhejiang). But this ideological center can be decentered from the point of view held either by the political authority located to the north of Yan or by that to the south of Yüe. The tenth paradox states:

Equally love myriads of things; the heavens and the earth are one.

汎愛萬物，天地一體也。(33.1102)

Despite their difference in form, myriads of things may share similarity in meaning. This meaning can be the all-embracing principle of *Dao*, as maintained by the *Laozi*, or individual principles of *De*, which are relative in reality and thus shared by things in one way or another. The involved “great similarity-and-difference” is the philosophical foundation underlying the universal form whereby one thing can be represented by another, as embodied in the proposition that “the heavens and the earth are one.” It has to be noted that, for the philosophers in the

School of Names, one thing's representation by another is not inherent in Nature, but brought forth by the use of names. The common meaning shared by things, moreover, which makes possible representation in the linguistic sphere, is "meaningful" only in the presence of the intellectual participation of man.

Unlike the *Laozi*, which asserts the unity of all things under the Great Oneness but rejects the intellectual participation of man, Hui Shi stresses man's impartial feelings towards all things in the universe. No sooner than man perceives the universe, that is, do things start to carry meaning, the joint whereby the spiritual being-for-itself of man is connected with the spontaneous being-in-itself of things, via the invocation by names. Man is urged to love all things equally because, in so doing, he is not only able to understand the being of one thing by means of its representation in another, but also, ultimately, to find the representation of his spiritual freedom ubiquitously in myriads of things. Hui Shi's pursuit of spiritual freedom via its representation in myriads of things was echoed by Zhuang Zi who, in the chapter "Discourse on Levelling Things" in the *Zhuangzi*, states: "The heavens and the earth came into being together with me, and myriads of things are one with me together" (2.79).<sup>116</sup>

### **Gongsun Long**

Gongsun Long's ideas have been preserved in the book known as the *Gongsun longzi*. In a series of discussions over particular topics—"Discourse on White Horse," "Discourse on Pointing and Things," "Discourse on Justifying Changes," "Discourse on Hard and White," and "Discourse on Names and Actualities"—the philosopher gives a more systematic account of the logic of language, in terms of its relation with the universe.

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<sup>116</sup> The original reads: "天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。"

Though notoriously obscure, Gongsun Long's comments on the nature of language may become clearer in the light of Saussure's linguistic theory. Saussure divides the linguistic symbol into the signifier, the referent, and the signified. In the process of signifying, a signifier may correspond to a concrete referent, but not to the signified that is hidden and varying. In the same manner, Gongsun Long's concept of *pointing* (*zhi* 指) carries varying senses of the pointer, the thing pointed at, and the actual meaning pointed at. In the process of pointing with names, likewise, a pointer may help to invoke the image of a concrete thing, but not to point out the actual meaning that is concealed and changing.

Gongsun Long's discovery of the gap between *pointing* and the *pointed* in the use of language, ironically, originated in his effort to rectify names so as to designate the actualities of things. In the chapter "Discourse on Names and Actualities," he states:

Heaven, Earth, and all that they produce are things (*wu* 物). A thing occupies what it is and does not exceed: this is called actuality (*shi* 實). . . . To rectify what designates the actuality of a thing, is to rectify its name (*ming* 名). If names are rectified, then actualities can be distinctively designated by (such names as) "that" and "this." If something is designated by "that" and yet its actuality goes beyond "that," then "that" as a designation does not work. If something is designated by "this" and yet its actuality goes beyond "this," then "this" as a designation does not work either. . . . Names are what designate actualities.

天地與其所產者，物也。物以物其所物而不過焉，實也。……正其所實者，正其名也。其名正，則唯乎其彼此焉。謂彼而彼不唯乎彼，則彼謂不行。謂此而行不唯乎此，則此謂不行。……夫名實謂也。(6.87-91)

In the linguistic sense, the distinction made here by Gongsun Long between things and actualities roughly corresponds to that made by Saussure between the referent and the signified, only that the latter recognizes the linguistic referent as a mental image whereas the former considers it to be real existence. Despite his effort to match names with actualities, Gongsun Long comes to find out that, no matter how specifically a thing is specified by means of names, its actuality can never be reached. With regard to this conclusion, the philosopher gives two famous examples: “a white horse is not a horse” and “hard, white, and stone are three.” The first example is taken up in the “Discourse on White Horse,” which reads:

A white horse is not a horse. . . . The name ‘horse’ designates the form; ‘white’ designates the color. What designates the color does not designate the form.

Therefore, I say that a white horse is not a horse.

白馬非馬。……馬者，所以命形也；白者，所以命色也。命色者非名形也。

故曰：白馬非馬。(2.42)

“Horse” is supposed to be the name with which to designate a particular thing in the universe. But a particular horse naturally comes with a color, which the name “horse” does not specify. When the name “white” is added to specify the color of a horse, however, such specification excludes all other possible colors and thus violates the actuality a horse occupies. Paradoxically, the verbal construction of “a white horse” deconstructs the actuality of “a horse” as a species. This is why it is said “a white horse is not a horse.” Colors, moreover, do not encompass all actual qualities a horse may embody. In the “Discourse on Hard and White,” Gongsun Long takes this up in another famous example, which reads:

Hard, white and stone are three: is it possible? . . . Things can be white, but whiteness does not specify what is white. Things can be hard, but hardness does



not specify what is hard. . . . Hardness does not have to manifest (*yu* 與) itself in the stone and thus be hard, . . . but it lies concealed (*cang* 藏). . . . Just as whiteness is white in itself, it does not have to manifest itself in things and thus be white. . . . Therefore, they (hard, white, and stone) are separate concepts. . . . Separation pervades the universe. Therefore, only the actuality that is singular (not separated) can be rectified.

堅白石三，可乎？ . . . . .物白焉，不定其所白；物堅焉，不定其所堅。 . . . . .堅未與石為堅， . . . . .而堅藏。 . . . . .若白者必白，則不白物而白焉。 . . . . .故離也。 . . . . .離也者天下，故獨而正。(5.77-85)

Thus Gongsun Long comes to the conclusion that, because of separation (*li* 離), the actuality of a thing is hardly rectified. In the above discourse, the notion of separation consists of two kinds of distinction: the distinction of ideas, and the distinction between ideas and things. In the first kind of distinction, that is, whiteness and hardness are separate ideas, which derive from human judgement and yet dispense with things. In the second kind of distinction, ideas such as whiteness and hardness, and things such as the stone, belong to separate spheres of the universe, one physical, the other metaphysical. As the consequence of such distinctions inherent in the actuality of a thing, it is hard to rectify actualities with names.

The distinction between ideas and things is best understood in the line of the early Daoist argument, made in the *Laozi*, about the separation between *non-being* and *being*, or that between meaning and form, as created by names. As for the distinction of ideas, it is a contribution made by Gongsun Long to the logic of language. Let us use Gongsun Long's two examples to expound on the notion of separation.

In the case of “a white horse is not a horse,” the name “horse” refers to a *being* or form that exists in the world, and the name “white” a *non-being* or meaning that derives from human judgement. As a name, “horse” may denote the actuality of form, but not that of meaning. When “white” is added to specify the actuality of meaning, however, it comes to exclude other meanings, such as other colors, which the actuality of a horse should include.

In the instance of “hard, white, and stone are three,” the actuality of the stone comprises multiple meanings, as denoted by “white” and “hard,” which the form of “stone” does not denote. This is why Gongsun Long acknowledges that the actuality of hardness “lies concealed” in the designation of “stone.” In addition, the idea of whiteness is separate from that of hardness. This suggests that the meaning denoted by “white” does not specify that denoted by “hard,” and vice versa. Even if both meanings are specified, the specification excludes other meanings that are yet concealed, and thus does not suffice to rectify the actuality of the stone.

At this point, Gongsun Long comes to describe the relation of names to actualities of things, in the “Discourse on Pointing and Things,” as “pointing,” which states:

Of all things, nothing is not pointing, but the pointing is not the pointed. . . . The pointed are what do not exist in the world (i.e., ideas). Things are what exist in the world. It is unimaginable to make what exist in the world become what do not exist in the world. . . . That there are no pointed (ideas) existing in the world, springs from the fact that, though all things have their respective names, they are not themselves the pointed. . . . If there were no things existing in the world, then who could proceed to speak about pointing? If there were pointers (i.e., names) and yet no things pointing in the world, then who could proceed to speak about those which cannot be distinctively pointed to? . . . Moreover, the pointed are in

themselves what cannot be distinctively pointed to. Why shall they rely on things to manifest themselves and then become the pointed?”

物莫非指，而指非指。……指也者，天下之所無也；物也者，天下之所有也。

以天下之所有，為天下之所無，未可。……天下無指者，生於物之各有名，

不為指也。……天下無物，誰徑謂指？天下有指無物指，誰徑謂非指？……

且夫指固自為非指，奚待於物而乃與為指？ (3.48-52)

The original text containing the above passage is extremely obscure, especially because of its repetitive use of the word *zhi*, which carries various senses in the discourse. This repetitive use of *zhi*, however, serves as a metalinguistic illustration of the fact that names do not help to rectify actualities of things, or, in accordance to the argument held in the *Lao zi*, names create rather than remove the separation between meaning (*non-being*) and form (*being*).

The original sense of the word *zhi* is “finger,” which may refer to a pointer or signifier, e.g., a linguistic sign uttered or inscribed. A pointer is to “point at something,” which is a second sense of *zhi*. Known as a name (*ming*) in the lexicon of the School of Names, a linguistic sign points at a thing. As for which actuality of the thing its name points to, it remains unclear. It is in this sense that we can say a thing is not only pointed at by its name, but also pointing further to its actuality. Here comes a third sense of *zhi*: “meaning,” i.e., the pointed or signified. Like the actuality of “hardness” which lies concealed from the designation of “stone,” the meaning that is pointed to by a name—as well as by the thing in designation—is indefinite. At this point, we may come to understand a pair of unspoken presuppositions underlying Western and Chinese poetics revealed by James J. Y. Liu, who comments: “[W]hereas Western critics generally have a mimetic conception of language, Chinese ones influenced by Daoism and Buddhism have what

may be called a deictic conception. The former see language as *representing* reality; the latter see it as *pointing to* reality” (*Paradox* xii-xiii).

The indefiniteness of meaning is decided not only by the multiple meanings of a thing, as Gongsun Long admits, but also by the relativity of any single meaning, as Hui Shi reveals. From “specifying” to “pointing,” Gongsun Long turns to admit the gap between names and actualities of things. To say a “white horse” is to specify, but saying so violates the actuality of a horse, which may come with other colors. Besides, rather than “specifying,” to say a “white horse” is in itself “pointing,” as the actuality of a white horse in turn lies concealed in the form designated by the name “white horse.” As Gongsun Long suggests in the proposition “hard, white, and stone are three,” names designate separate ideas or forms of things, not individual things in the world. On the one hand, a thing designated by a name may bear various ideas as its actualities, just as the stone may bear such qualities as whiteness and hardness. On the other, a single idea designated by a name can manifest itself in various things, just as whiteness may manifest itself either in a horse or a stone.

Like Hui Shi, Gongsun Long also recognizes the relativity of ideas when manifested in things. In the “Discourse on Justifying Changes,” a dialogue reads:

With ‘right’ manifested in things, can it be said that something changes?

“It can.”

“What changes?”

“It is ‘right’ .”

“If ‘right’ changes, how can it still be called ‘right’? If it does not change, how can it be said that something changes?”

曰：右有與，可謂變乎？曰：可。曰：變奚？曰：右。曰：右苟變，安可謂右？苟不變，安可謂變？ (4.60)

Spoken of in the metaphysical sphere, the name “right” refers to an absolute idea that does not change. When manifested in things, however, the idea of “right” becomes relative in the physical and empirical spheres; it is in this sense that “right” changes. Insofar as the manifested idea of “right” changes, the things that appear similar under “right” resume difference at that point.

To sum up, the logic of names or language, as inspected by the School of Names, is represented in the universal form of “great similarity-and-difference.” This universal form operates at three levels. First, different things may share the same meaning. Second, the same thing may carry different meanings. Third, a manifested meaning may change, and, along with this change, the similarity and difference between things go through reshaping. In the above delineation of the three levels, “things” correspond to what Gongsun Long thinks “do exist in the world,” or the *Being* in the *Laozi*, which depend on human imagination (i.e., in the Lacanian sense of image-making) to be perceivable; “meanings” are what Gongsun Long thinks “do not exist in the world” (i.e., ideas), or the *Non-Being* in the *Laozi*, which depend on human judgement to be conceivable.

The universal form of “great similarity-and-difference,” which weaves together extensive interrelations among the metaphysical, physical, and empirical spheres, is ultimately invoked by names in the linguistic sphere. Accordingly, names or linguistic signs can be categorized into two groups based on their references. One group of names refer to ideas or meanings, with *wu* 無

(Non-Being) as the archetype. The other group of names refer to things or forms,<sup>117</sup> with *you* 有 (Being) as the archetype.

Now let us go back to Gongsun Long's initial effort to rectify actualities of things with names. Given the universal form of "great similarity-and-difference," which involves cooperation of names, things, and ideas, is it still possible to rectify actualities with names? At this point, two relevant paradoxes were proposed by anonymous Dialecticians, in the same breath as Gongsun Long, as recorded in the chapter "Under the Heavens" in the *Zhuangzi*. One of the paradoxes reads:

A wheel does not touch the ground.

輪不躡地。(33.1106)

Designated by the name "wheel," the thing of a wheel comprises a system or circle of meanings, none of which is definitely pointed to by the name "wheel." Denoted by the name "ground," likewise, the thing of the ground consists of a system of meanings, none of which is definitely pointed to by the name "ground." A particular meaning in the system can be specified only at the point where the wheel touches the ground. In other words, a wheel can be represented by the ground at the point whereby they share the same meaning. Otherwise, a wheel as a whole does not touch the ground in its entirety. Extending this argument, the other paradox reads:

Pointing does not reach; reaching never comes to an end.

指不至，至不絕。(33.1106)

What the pointer "wheel" does is no more than pointing, without ever reaching a particular meaning in the circle of the wheel. Even if a particular meaning is reached—not by the pointing,

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<sup>117</sup> According to the commentary made by the great commentator Wang Bi (226-249) on the *Book of Changes*, the latter group of names call forth mental images (*xiang* 象), or forms of things, rather than individual things. Cf. Chapter 3, "The Criss-crossing in the Pattern of Wen," 54-55.

but by the touching or representation of the wheel with the ground at a particular point—it is instantly displaced by another meaning whereby the revolving wheel touches the extending ground. This process of reaching is endless.

The above two paradoxes come together to put down a conclusion to the question whether actualities of things can be rectified by names. That is, the form of a thing—as designated by its name—is only pointing at, rather than reaching, its concealed meanings; a particular meaning, however, can be revealed by the representation (i.e., the touching) of the form of one thing with the form of another, at the point where they touch each other, although the representation is simultaneously displaced by another in the mechanism of names. This conclusion partly solves the gap between form and meaning, which is described in the *Lao zi* as the Mystery of mysteries. In the meantime, it entails another question: if individual forms of things do not help to reach but merely to point at meanings, does the universal form of “great similarity-and-difference” reach any meaning? This question was solved by Zhuang Zi.

### **Zhuang Zi**

Zhuang Zi (cir. 369-286 B.C.) was another important founder, after legendary Lao Zi, of the classical School of Daoism. His philosophy, as purportedly recorded in the book known as the *Zhuangzi*, is eclectic, incorporating elements from Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, and, in particular, the School of Names. He moved a step further than Lao Zi in that, rather than proposing to abandon intelligence and discard knowledge, the philosopher introduced into the Daoist thought a universal Self, or the absolute spiritual freedom of the human being. In Western philosophy, “spiritual freedom” was regarded by Hegel as the meaning or being-for-itself of the human being, in contrast with the form or being-in-itself of things. In this way, we can see that Zhuang Zi came to reveal the universal Self, or the absolute spiritual freedom of a sage identical

with the *Dao*, as the universal meaning to be reached by the universal form of “great similarity-and-difference.” In the chapter “Discourse on Equalizing Things,” in the *Zhuangzi*, the philosopher states:

The heavens, the earth, and I together came into being; myriads of things and I are one.

天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。(2.79)

This statement made by Zhuang Zi is reminiscent of one of Hui Shi’s paradoxes, which reads “Equally love myriads of things; the heavens and the earth are one.” Yet it clearly affirms “I”—the universal Self—to be a being that is identical with, rather than distinctive from, all things in the universe. The statement is followed by the passage below:

Inasmuch as all things are one, why should there be speech? Inasmuch as all things are spoken of as one, why should not there be speech? One plus speech are two; two plus one are three. From this onwards, even a skillful mathematician cannot work out the number, let alone those ordinary men! If, by proceeding from nothing to reach something, we have three, how much more can we reach by proceeding from something to reach something! Reach nowhere, as here it is.

既已為一矣，且得有言乎？既已謂之一矣，且得无言乎？一與言為二，二與一為三。自此以往，巧曆不能得，而況其凡乎！故自无適有以至於三，而況自有適有乎！无適焉，因是已。(2.79)

This obscure passage can be understood in light both of Lao Zi’s accusation of names for creating the gap between meaning and form of things, and of Hui Shi’s universal form of “great similarity-and-difference.” According to Hui Shi’s universal form, all things differ in forms, but coincide at meanings; along with the changing of meanings, all things are different in one way,



and similar in another. This universal form, in the opinion of the School of Names, is invoked by names. In the *Laozi*, names are blamed for the separation between meaning (*non-being*) and form (*being*) of *Dao*. As the Mystery of mysteries, the gap between meaning and form of *Dao* further causes the separation between meaning and form of things, as confirmed by Gongsun Long's theory of names. According to Gongsun Long, "pointing is not the pointed"—that is, the form of a thing invoked by its name is ever pointing at, but never reaching, a definite meaning.

As we can see here, the argument in the *Laozi* and the theories held by the School of Names with regard to language constitute a paradox: on the one hand, names are considered to be the cause of the gap between form and meaning; on the other, it is by means of names that the gap between form and meaning can be partly resumed. This paradox may serve as the key to understanding Zhuang Zi's statement about speech. In addition, we need to import Hegel's distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself to highlight the essences of meaning and form.

As the two modes of being, being-in-itself is characteristic of the being of things, and being-for-itself of the human being. Before spoken of by man, all things are one in the sense of being-in-itself, equivalent to *Dao*, out of the questions of form in man's eyes and meaning in man's mind. Therefore, the absolute *Dao* is in the state of being-in-itself, without being gazed by man. It is in this sense that *Dao* may be considered the primitive unity of meaning and form.

Meaning is meaningful to the human being. This is the essence of the Hegelian concept of being-for-itself or man's spiritual freedom. As Hegel suggests, man's spiritual freedom (i.e., meaning) cannot be realized by itself, but have to be acknowledged or represented by others. Speech is one fundamental way of representation.

Once spoken of, the *Dao* becomes meaningful to man who uttered the speech; at this moment, *Dao* alienates from being-in-itself of things to being-for-itself of the human being. This marks the beginning of the separation between meaning and form of things. When Zhuang Zi says “One plus speech are two,” he tries to point out the distinction between the *Dao* as being-in-itself and the *Dao* as a complex of form and meaning invoked by speech. According to the School of Names, however, form and meaning are separate, with meaning concealed in form. The form of *Dao* invoked by speech is ever pointing to, but never reaching, its concealed meaning. To reach the concealed meaning, another speech—which corresponds to the form and meaning of something else—is necessarily uttered so as to represent (i.e., touch) the first speech. It is in this sense that Zhuang Zi also says that “two plus one are three,” as well as that “by proceeding from nothing to reach something, we have three.”

Nevertheless, because the once revealed meaning is simultaneously displaced—either by another concealed meaning in the cycle of *Dao*, or by its inherent relativity under varying points of view—more names or speeches are needed to supplement it, with the ultimate purpose of reaching one absolute meaning of *Dao*. This progress can be endless, as Zhuang Zi confirms by saying that “From this onwards, even a skilful mathematician cannot work out the number,” and that “how much more can we reach by proceeding from something to reach something!” Facing the paradoxical situation, Zhuang Zi put down his resolution as “Reach nowhere, as here it is.”

Zhuang Zi’s resolution to “Reach nowhere, as here it is” is not mysterious, but implies two related, pragmatic methods: one is to raise the awareness about the boundary of speech, the other to cultivate the spiritual transcendence characteristic of a universal self. The method of spiritual transcendence is for one to transcend beyond an individual self, who depends upon things to achieve relative freedom, to a universal Self, who attains to absolute spiritual freedom.

To accomplish such ultimate meaning by means of language, one needs to rely on the boundary of speech to make all things meaningful representations of a universal Self. A skilful engagement with the boundary of speech conforms to the logic of language revealed by the School of Names; that is, without ever reaching, pointing is circumscriptive here and now.

Zhuang Zi's philosophical insight into the boundary of speech has led to his use of "cup-like words (*zhiyan* 卮言)," a metaphorical phrase for indefinite speech. An anonymous comment on Zhuang Zi's writing style, as recorded in the chapter "Under the Heavens" in the *Zhuangzi*, reads:

Zhuang Zhou heard the sounds of the wind and then enjoyed them. With absurd and obscure talks, fantastic and exaggerative words, and unbounded expressions, he set his ideas free without restraints or partiality. . . . He expressed his ideas with cup-like words for indefinite meanings, ascribing them to ancients for authority, and illustrating them with tales for variety. . . . His writings, though magnificent in imagination, are balanced and thus do no harms to one's mind. His expressions, though diverse in ideas, are yet extraordinary and attractive.

莊周聞其風而悅之，以謬悠之說，荒唐之言，無端崖之辭，時恣縱而不儻，不以觴見之也。 . . . . .以卮言為曼衍，以重言為真，以寓言為廣。 . . . . .其書雖瓌璋而連犴无傷也。其辭雖參差而諷詭可觀。(33.1098-99)

The term "cup-like words" can be traced in Zhuang Zi's statement that "Cup-like words run in cycles (as the sun); they accord with the birth of the universe" (27.949).<sup>118</sup> In Tang scholar Lu Deming's 陆德明 (550-630) *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 [Collected Annotation of Canonical

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<sup>118</sup> "卮言日出，和以天倪。"

Texts], Wang Shuzhi 王叔之 (cir. Early 5<sup>th</sup> century) is quoted to explain the meaning of “cup-like words” as below:

A cup is overwhelmed when filled (with wine), and yet wanting when empty. It keeps changing along with what is within, and thus does not stick to one way or the old ways. Applying this to the nature of uttered words, one may keep changing along with others, with the self not occupied by any norms.

夫卮器，滿即傾，空則仰，隨物而變，非執一守故者也。施之于言，而隨人從變，己無常主者也。(397)

In light of the philosophy held by the School of Names, we may investigate the nature of “cup-like words” by reference to the concept of “pointing.” Cup-like words serve as a pointer, pointing to but never reaching any pointed meaning, which is ever changing. When empty—that is, lacking any specified meaning—cup-like words are wanting and thus can be filled with any meaning. When full—that is, filled with one solid meaning—cuplike-words are overwhelmed and thence lose freedom. The ideal state of cup-like words is to stop where it has been said, without wanting of meaning, nor filled with any solid meaning. In terms of the logic of names, cup-like words do not help to reach, but to point. This may be one of the meanings Zhuang Zi wanted to point to by saying “Reach nowhere, as here it is.”

Zhuang Zi likewise says something about the use of words that appears similar to “cup-like words.” In the chapter “Discourse on Equalizing Things,” in the *Zhuangzi*, the philosopher says:

Now I have had uttered words about “this.” I do not know whether my words are similar with it, or dissimilar with it. Whether similar or dissimilar, they can be similar in one way or another. At this point, there is no difference between

speaking of “this” and speaking of “that.” Yet still, I have uttered words about it. . . . Now I have just said something; but I do not know whether what I have said really refers to something, or really does not refer to anything.

今且有言於此，不知其與是類乎？其與是不類乎？類與不類，相與為類，則與彼无以異矣。雖然，請嘗言之。 . . . . . 今我則已有謂矣，而未知吾所謂之其果有謂乎，其果无謂乎？ (2.79)

Zhuang Zi’s “cup-like words” are indeed poetic speech uttered to transform things. Referred to by speech, something proceeds to point to some concealed meaning, which can be shared by something else that is not referred to. It is in this sense that Zhuang Zi says “I do not know whether what I have said really refers to something, or really does not refer to anything.” On the chain of names that may spread anywhere because of changing meanings and things, it had better for speech to try reaching nowhere, merely staying where it is. As Zhuang Zi claims, “the universe is a pointer; myriads of things are a horse” (2.66).<sup>119</sup> Spoken of with proper speech, all things can be transformed into something particular, say, a horse, and vice versa; in the same manner, the universe can be at the same time pointing to, and pointed at by, anything within it. Such poetic speech of transformation as “cup-like words,” in Zhuang Zi’s opinion, would serve the purpose of making myriads of things meaningful representations of a universal Self in the image of a sage. In the chapter “Great Master,” Zhuang Zi is recorded as saying:

As for the human form, it can be transformed into myriads of things, without even a limit. What an incomparable bliss it is to undergo these countless transformations! Therefore, the sage is about to wander amidst the Way things cannot escape but all remain.

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<sup>119</sup> The original reads: “天地一指也，萬物一馬也。”

若人之形者，萬化而未始有極也，其為樂可勝計邪！故聖人將遊於物之所不得遯而皆存。(6.243-44)

Each form corresponds to its own system of meanings. Sharing the same meaning at certain point, one form can be transformed into another. According to Zhuang Zi, the transformation from the human form to myriads of things corresponds to the spiritual transcendence from relative spiritual freedom (i.e., relative meaning or being-for-itself) of an individual self to absolute spiritual freedom (i.e., absolute meaning or being-for-itself) of a universal Self. At this point, we may say that transformation is a universal form, which corresponds to the ultimate meaning of a universal Self. As a universal form, transformation has another name—in terms of the logic of names—“great similarity-and-difference.” It is in the form of language underlying transformation of things that various meanings representing relative spiritual freedoms may assimilate into one universal meaning of absolute spiritual freedom.

In the spirit of transformation, Zhuang Zi asks: “If my thighs should be transformed into wheels, and my spirit into a horse, for me to ride in it, why should I switch to a real chariot?” (6.260)<sup>120</sup> A real chariot may provide one with finite freedom; the chariot of transformation, however, which is assembled with language, roams in absolute freedom. Taking on the form of transformation, one may then attain to the ultimate meaning known as the universal Self. Zhuang Zi also says: “If one rides in the center of the universe, reins the transformation of various phenomena, and thus wanders in the infinite, what does he still have to rest on? Therefore, it is said that the Perfect Man (*zhiren* 至人) has no self; the Spiritual Man (*shenren* 神

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<sup>120</sup> The original reads: “浸假而化予之尻以為輪，以神為馬，予因以乘之，豈更駕哉！”

人) has no achievement; the Sage (*sheng* 聖) has no name” (1.17).<sup>121</sup> As the personifications of the universal Self, the Perfect Man has effaced the individual self, the Spiritual Man has renounced achievements in external things, and the Sage has removed obsession with names in the light of the boundary of speech. Altogether they remind us not of the legendary primitive man Pan Gu, but of Fu Xi, the archetypal Sage in Chinese creation myths.

As Zhuang Zi states in the following passage, the universal Self—with the Sage as its personification—is found located in the center of *Dao*, thus denying the distinction between things, and that between meanings:

Nothing is not “that;” nothing is not “this.” From the viewpoint of “that,” “that” is not seen; from the viewpoint of “this,” “that” starts to be known. Therefore, it can be said that “that” derives from “this,” and “this” results from “that.” “That” and “this” are what are said to give birth to each other. . . . “This” is also “that;” “that” is also “this.” “That” has a system of right and wrong. “This” also has a system of right and wrong. Is there really a distinction between “that” and “this”? Or is there really no distinction between “that” and “this”? The position where “that” and “this” are not distinctive from each other is the axis of *Dao*. This axis is like the center of the circle, agreeing with endless transformations. The right is an endless transformation. The wrong is also an endless transformation. Therefore, it is said that there nothing is superior than the wisdom (of knowing this).

物无非彼，物无非是。自彼則不見，自是則知之。故曰彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是方生之說也。……是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果

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<sup>121</sup> The original reads: “若夫乘天地之正，而御六氣之變，以遊無窮者，彼且惡乎待哉！故曰，至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。”

且有彼是乎哉？果且无彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應无窮。是亦一无窮，非亦一无窮也。故曰莫若以明。(2.66)

In comparison with Daoism, Confucianism maintained its own universal form, such as rituals and music, which was aimed to help reach the universal meaning of benevolence and righteousness. The difference between Confucianism and Daoism lies in that, whereas the former based its universal form and meaning on the distinctions not only between things but also between the self and others, the latter transcended all distinctions so as to transform things and others into representations of the absolute spiritual freedom of a universal Self.

Zhuang Zi's philosophical doctrine for man is known as *xiaoyao* 逍遙 or absolute spiritual freedom. His method with which to reach this goal is known as *qiwu* 齊物 or "equalizing all things." Zhuang Zi did not trust language or speech, but paradoxically relied on speech to illuminate ideas. His ideal form of speech is "cup-like words," a wonderful metaphor of poetic pattern. An empty cup means that one rejects language as a way to invoke things. A full cup means that one uses language in an overwhelming way to circumscribe meaning. Only when the cup is not full, language is used in a way that transformation of things can be forever sustained, and thus the absolute spiritual freedom can be sustained by the transformation among myriads of things in the universe.

### Conclusion

Roman Jakobson pointed out two related axes in the working of *la langue*: the paradigmatic or metaphoric axis based on equivalence, and the syntagmatic or metonymic axis based on contiguity. On the former axis, the subject in its syntactic sense seeks representation in equivalent objects. On the latter axis, the subject is transformed into the selected object, or the representation is performed at it were. As a linguist, Jakobson didn't define the identity of the



syntactic subject from a philosophical perspective. At this point, we may propose to see the subject as what Hegel calls the being-for-itself, or meaning as such, which is also known as the “spiritual freedom” of the human being.

To attain to spiritual freedom, the human being seeks representation in things and people. Represented by people, one sees the ties between the self and others. Represented by things, one becomes conscious of gain and loss. Represented by fleeing events in time and space, one finds himself caught between life and death. When things and people are not at hand, language is called on to invoke them, entailing speech and text. From the most meaning-enriched speech and text poetry emerges. The abstract, general image of a poet, or that of a reader, is the personification of eventful spiritual freedom.

In classical Chinese thought, the human self is urged to align himself with the Sage. The Sage in the Daoist thought embodies spiritual transcendence, equalizing himself with things and others, thus endorsing representation of all kinds to reach a transcendental unity between form and meaning. The opposite may be found in the Buddhist thought, which stresses detachment from things and people, thus rejecting representation. The Sage in the Confucian thought, on the contrary, is more of a pragmatic one, emphasizing the right form leading to the right meaning, thus favoring representation in established rituals and patterns.

Upon the confluence of Daoist transcendentalism and Confucian pragmatism during the Warring States period and post-Qin era, “sageliness within and kingliness without (*neisheng waiwang* 内聖外王)” had ever become the highest spiritual freedom a gentleman was expected to attain to in the traditional society of China. Such a dominant meaning was necessarily to be carried out by forms as comprehensive as institutions, morals, culture, literature, etc. Among various literary forms, the *shi* and the *wen* came to the dominance in the Han era. Because of the

inherent gap between form and meaning, however, as revealed in the philosophy of early Daoism and the School of Names, the two literary forms started to feature supplemental representation in two domains, one beyond the boundary of form, the other within the boundary.

In the case of the *shi*, supplementation—with regard to alternative meanings of verses in the *Classic of Poetry*—was made in the hermeneutical domain, or beyond the boundary of form, as exemplified by the hermeneutical practices of the Old and New Text Schools. In the case of the *wen*, supplementation is made within the boundary of form; that is, exhaustive enumeration (*fu*) is performed in an effort to encompass all things sharing the same meaning, leading to the discovery of parallelism as a poetic form resembling the parallel relationship between human patterns and heavenly patterns. In either case, the poet behind the literary form takes on the image of a cosmic interpreter as described in the Chinese sage-centric myths, rather than that of a creator as represented in the Western demiurge-centric myths.

## Chapter Seven

### The Criss-crossing in the Pattern of *Wen*

#### —The Rhetoric of Meaning in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Literary Thought

Literature is that by which we display the images above and below, illuminate the order of human relationships, exhaust principles, and fathom human nature, in order to investigate the suitabilities of myriad things. (*YWLJ* 56.1018)

In the traditional classification of Chinese literature, as well as in the pre-modern tradition of Chinese literary criticism, *wen* 文 ranks as the second most catholic category, only after *shi* 詩, designating pure literature or *belles-letters*. In the ontological studies of literature, however, *wen* has played a more vigorous role than *shi*. Along with the rise of genre studies in early medieval times—a period roughly from the Eastern Han (25-220) through the Six Dynasties (220-589)—*wen* ascended to an all-inclusive category, with *shi* being one of its major genres. Unlike the relatively simple semantic origin of *shi*, moreover, *wen* had evolved from its earlier multiple references to things as diverse as nature, culture, and writing.

The multiplicity of meanings of *wen* is disturbing to literary studies. The term is polysemous, with many meanings: natural markings, cultural practices, civil institutions, writing, literature, etc. There is a history behind the development of various meanings of *wen*. Roughly speaking, the ideographic form of *wen* suggests that it might originally refer to natural markings, such as bird and animal markings. Later on, *wen* started to carry a more abstract meaning, in early antiquity, of refined pattern in both natural and cultural senses. In the pre-Qin era, it started

to be used to refer to writing, but there was no distinction yet between the writing of scripts and literary writing. It was not until the Han and Six Dynasties that *wen* was used to designate various forms of literary writing.

### ***Wen: from the Linguistic to Literary Sign***

Chow Tse-Tsung traces the semantic origins of *wen* and *dao* 道 to their early uses in the Shang (1600-1050 B.C.) and Zhou (1050-221 B.C.) periods. Among other semantic variations, according to Chow, the early development of the meaning of *wen* was characterized by a semantic extension from its original reference to the fundamental phenomena of nature, such as “bird and animal markings” in particular and “refined patterns” in general, to its later denotation of abstract ideas such as culture and civilization, with literature being included in the conception of culture (4-12). In the same manner of semantic extension, the meaning of *dao* developed from such concrete experiences as “to lead” and “a main roadway” to the abstract ideas of “the main principle” and “the primary knowledge” (13-21). After a long history of intellectual and linguistic evolution, the interaction between the two concepts was crystalized by Northern Song (960-1127) Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073) into the celebrated guiding principle that “*wen* is a vehicle for conveying the *Dao*” (*wen yi zai dao* 文以載道);<sup>122</sup> the term with which to join the two concepts in this phrase is *zai* 載, which acquired its metaphorical meaning “to convey” later than its early reference to “to carry or to load on a vehicle.” From a philological point of view, Chow suggests that “[N]ew notions of literature and new theories of literature often emerge from etymological associations and semantic changes as intricate and as complex” as the ancient Chinese ideas on the relationship between *wen* and the

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<sup>122</sup> The original reads: “文所以載道也。” See Zhou, *Zhouzi tongshu*, 28.39. It is quoted in Chow, “Chinese Views on Literature,” 4.

*Dao* (29). In his comprehensive survey of the early semantic transition of *wen* from concrete references to abstract ideas, it has to be noted, Chow treats *wen* as a linguistic sign that had gradually acquired a variety of meanings in the pre-Qin antiquity, rather than as a literary discourse which is among the various meanings of *wen*.

Because of the diversity of early meanings of *wen*, it has somehow become prerequisite for scholars in Chinese literary thought to pay philological tribute to the etymology of the term, pinning down the central meaning of “literature” on the one hand, and calling the correlation between its various references on the other. At the beginning of his monumental study *Chinese Theories of literature*, James J. Y. Liu gives a succinct outline of the semantic development of *wen*, noting that it was only from the second century B.C., i.e. the first half of the early Western Han, that the term started to carry a meaning equivalent to “literature” in its modern sense (7-9). Before that time, *wen* had designated miscellaneous things ranging from natural markings like those on a tiger skin to civil institutions that exerted civilizing influence upon the society, with such more literarily relevant meanings as “written words” and “writings” being established during the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (7-8); after that time, its denotation of a literary discourse has gained more and more subtlety, with its connotations sometimes relying on disyllabic compounds, such as *wenzhang* 文章 (literary compositions), to manifest (8-9).

In an essay reinvestigating Ernest Fenollosa’s (1858-1908) controversial theory of reading Chinese literature, which is encapsulated in his *Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*,<sup>123</sup> Haun Saussy also starts with a handy list of miscellaneous references that the linguistic symbol *wen* bears: “*Wen* is markings; patterns; stripes, streaks, lines, veins; whorls;

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<sup>123</sup> Fenollosa’s theory regarding Chinese literature lies in his identification between the somewhat exaggerated ideographic nature of Chinese characters and the allegedly visual experience of reading Chinese poetry. For an epitome of Fenollosa’s major ideas and suggested readings about the issue, see Saussy, “The Prestige of Writing,” 38-44, and notes 10, 11, and 14.

bands; writing, graph, expression, composition; ceremony, culture, refinement, education, ornament, elegance, civility; civil as opposed to military; literature (specifically belletristic prose in its distinction from poetry)” (36). The fervent analogy made between *wen* in the sense of literature and any of the other senses in the spectrum, as suggested by Saussy to feature in a great deal of writing about Chinese literature, is put forward here as an illustration of the mindset in which Fenollosa asserts the identity between an allegedly ideogrammatic mode of literary representation in Chinese literature and the ideographic writing system of the Chinese language, which serves for Fenollosa as the foundation of the contrast between “Chinese” literature and “Western” literature (36-37).

While exerting a great influence on the ideographic poetics of Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and other American modernist poets, Fenollosa’s fascination about the Chinese writing system has been at the centre of disputes over the nature of literary representation in its Chinese experience, as well as its inspiration for literary studies worldwide. A formidable endorsement for Fenollosa’s view, on the one hand, is from Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), who commends that “the meaning of the work of Fen[e]llosa whose influence upon Ezra Pound and his poetics is well-known: this irreducibly graphic poetics was . . . the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound’s writing may thus be given all its historical significance” (92).<sup>124</sup> Opposition to assumptions about the ideographic nature of Chinese writing, on the other, has come from some sinologists. Objecting to Fenollosa’s fallacy that “all Chinese characters are pictograms or ideograms,” James J. Y. Liu argues that, even based on the classical theory of Six Graphic Principles (*liushu* 六書) regarding Chinese character composition, it is clear that the majority of Chinese characters are not

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<sup>124</sup> It is partly quoted in Zhang, “What is *Wen*,” 21.

pictographic but “contain a phonetic element” (*Chinese Poetry* 3-6).<sup>125</sup> Departing from the common distinction between Western alphabetic-syntactic writing, which “breaks down into letters without intrinsic meaning,” and Chinese pictorial-semantic writing, which can “be split or traced to . . . inherently meaning-bearing units,” Saussy points out that “the level where . . . Chinese writing breaks down into mere strokes is the level at which writing appears as pure syntax, as figures about which it is appropriate to ask how they are put together, not what they stand for” (37). Joining Fenollosa’s view together with Matteo Ricci’s (1552-1610) identification of Chinese ideographs with Egyptian hieroglyphics at the missionary beginning of European sinology, Zhang Longxi traces the Western bias on the ideographic nature of Chinese language and literature to the enduring Christian tradition—from the medieval symbolism represented by Hugh of St. Victor, to the Italian Renaissance by Giambattista Vico, and to the American Renaissance by Ralph Waldo Emerson—which has ever held a metaphysical notion of the hieroglyphics as a form of the prelapsarian language full of natural signs; underlying this passion for a language of nature is the Christian hermeneutical adherence to allegorical reading, which regards nature as the universal symbolic vocabulary of God (“What is *Wen*” 18-21).

The sometimes ideographic nature of Chinese writing had led Fenollosa and Pound to see Chinese poetry as visual representation of nature, which was refuted by scholars. But at the same time, the phenomenon that *wen* has multiple meanings has offered an opportunity to literary studies. This opportunity was seized by Liu Xie 劉勰 (cir. 465-520), a great Chinese literary critic in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Various meanings of *wen* share something in common: pattern. This pattern, in Liu Xie’s mind, is like the metalanguage of not only literature but cosmology. With the idea of pattern, Liu Xie was able to make analogies between various realms of things.

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<sup>125</sup> It is quoted in Zhang, “What is *Wen*,” 21.

He sees literary writing as a form of human patterns, which together with natural patterns come to manifest cosmic patterns which in turn manifest the ultimate truth of *Dao*. In this way, as we can see, Liu Xie came to build up a continuum from form to meaning, that is, the connection between pattern and the *Dao*.

Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 [Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons] has provided the most systematic account, in the Chinese history of literary criticism, of literature in terms of its nature, genres and elements.<sup>126</sup> Among other prominent analogies centered on *wen*, *renwen* 人文 [human patterns, literature] is juxtaposed by Liu Xie with *tianwen* 天文 [heavenly patterns, astronomy] and *diwen* 地文 [earthly patterns, topography] to unfold a tripartite structure of the phenomenal universe; it is based on this analogy that literature comes to be endowed with the same quality as Nature possesses in manifesting the ultimate truth of the *Dao* 道 [the Way, *logos*]. The mode of understanding underlying this analogical practice, as Stephen Owen observes, is that “[F]or Liu Xie the historical provenance of a word is a single semantic centre; and all modern usages are extensions, elaborations, limitations, or, at worst, deviations. Thus the shifting frames of reference of *wen* serve to reveal the secret and primordial unity that lies behind the apparent diversity in its usage” (186).<sup>127</sup>

As the implicit foundation of the semantic association of the Chinese language, which features in some of the abovementioned studies regarding the nature of Chinese literature, “the historical provenance of a word as a single semantic centre”—the seemingly Chinese origin of

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<sup>126</sup> Vincent Shih's English translation of the Chinese title is adopted in this study, by virtue of its lucid rendering of the subtle integration between creative subjectivity and aesthetic modalities which threads through Liu Xie's magnum opus. For alternative translations and careful comparisons concerning their distinctions, see Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, 146, No. 24; Owen, *Readings*, 185.

<sup>127</sup> Owen also points out that this method of “tracing the origins of a term or genre, developing each element of a compound, drawing analogies from other uses of the term” represents “conventional rules of exposition” that Liu Xie simply follows. See Owen, *Readings*, 184.



linguistic meaning that strikingly consists of a cluster of prominent instances of *logos* in its Western connotations—may deserve a little more elaboration by taking up a measurement against Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1857-1913) concept of language, with *wen* as the desired sample of linguistic signs. At the first place, in contrast with the Saussurean observation of the irrelevance between the spoken phonemes or written marks of any natural language (in its Western experience) and the concepts they signify, the pictographic form of the Chinese ancient script 𠄎—derived from its oracle bone inscription version 𠄎—does hold positive features corresponding to those of the physical phenomena it signifies.<sup>128</sup> Second, however, in agreement with Saussure’s view that meanings arise out of the differences between linguistic signs (sounds, written forms, and conceptual referents), any specific meaning of *wen*—among its various meanings—can only be specified within a verbal discourse or an even larger linguistic discourse that makes such differences available. Third, moreover, in light of Derrida’s idea crystallized in *différance*, a poststructuralist parlance owing its structuralist heritage to Saussure’s theory about the differences between linguistic signs, it can be said that a determinate meaning of *wen* is facilitated on the one hand by the variety of significations that the linguistic symbol *wen* bears, and forever deferred on the other by the ambiguity likewise caused by the incessant shift among various significations.

In the above brief investigation of the semantic workings of *wen* against the backdrop of contemporary theories, the vigorous operation of *differences*—in its Saussurean sense as the origin of meaning, and in its Derridean sense as the origin of meaninglessness—overshadows the persistent workings of what Aristotle called “the similarity in dissimilars,” the rule that defines a good metaphor for the Greek philosopher, which is likewise acknowledged by Derrida as the

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<sup>128</sup> For a brilliant discussion on the “positive features” that connect the form of the script with its references to natural things and relevant abstract ideas, see Chow, “Ancient Chinese Views,” 4-12.

“code” or “rhetoric” in any discourse about metaphor.<sup>129</sup> In the etymological approach to the nature of literature in its Chinese experience, that is to say, the insightful initiative to treat the nature of literature as resting on the polysemy in *wen*’s signification may be simultaneously blinded to the similarity that gives the original drive to the dynamic play of its various significations. The similarity underlying *wen*’s different meanings cannot be more clearly revealed than by Xu Shen’s 許慎 (58-147) definition of the term, in his *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 [Explaining Scripts and Analysing Characters], the first systematic etymological dictionary of Chinese scripts, which succinctly goes: “*Wen* [consists of] intersectant strokes, representing a criss-cross pattern (*wen*)” (435).<sup>130</sup> The seeming tautology in the format of “*wen* representing *wen*” does not really suggest the identity between one meaning of *wen* and another, but implies the meeting point of all its meanings at the abstract image of “a criss-cross pattern.” At this point, it may be said that literature does not represent things in the same pictographic or ideogrammatic way as the “intersectant strokes” of *wen* come to draw “bird and animal markings,” but invoke things in the same symbolic manner as other references of *wen*—natural markings, cultural institutions, ritual ceremonies, etc.—convey meanings with their distinctive yet abstractly common “patterns.”

The purely philological or etymological approach to postulating the nature of literature, therefore, blurs the distinction between the signifying system of *wen* as literature with that of *wen* as writing or language. The “pattern” of literature is derived and yet different from that of

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<sup>129</sup> For Aristotle’s discussion on the subject of metaphor, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, 255. For Derrida’s echo on the same definition, see Derrida, “White Mythology,” 30. These two sources are quoted in Yu, *Reading of Imagery*, 12-13. According to Yu’s preliminary discourse on the Western ideas about “imagery,” as conducted to set the terms for a study of the same subject in the Chinese poetic tradition, Aristotle’s concept of “similarity in dissimilars” finds its resonance in Samuel Johnson’s “occult resemblances in things apparently unlike” (Yu 14), Wordsworth’s “affinities in objects where no brotherhood exists” (Yu 16), etc.

<sup>130</sup> “文，錯劃也，象交文。” The translation is made by Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, 7.

language as such in terms of the types of sign they respectively appropriate. When “literature” is taken as the significant meaning or significance of *wen* as a linguistic sign, for example, the literature-ridden *wen* may proceed to become a new signifier in a larger discourse, say literature, seeking to combine with other linguistic signs, to signify new meanings, and finally to transform into literary or rhetorical signs. The signifying system of literature consisting of the differential and complex play of literary signs is what Roland Barthes (1915-1980) called the “second-order semiological system,” or the “mythical system” of myth—any discourse or text that employs a system of communication and signification, such as speech, writing, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.—which uses as its signifiers the signs derived yet distinguished from the “first semiological system” or the linguistic system (93-100). “Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writing,” as Barthes points out, “myth wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain” (99-100). What a reader reads and interprets in the second-order semiological system of literature, in other words, is precisely the interplay of objects, ideas and meanings distinguished from the linguistic signs in the first semiological system. But because the two systems are closely interrelated and simultaneously present in literature, such paradoxes as imagery/language, content/form, figuration/rhetoric, semantics/syntax, and the poetic/aesthetic can hardly be separated from each other. The ambiguity of “pattern,” the pivotal meaning of *wen* that reveals the similarity shared by its different significations, applies at both levels of semiological system: is it the pattern of things, leading to some pre-existing truth? Or is it the pattern of text, artificially constructed and serving as superficial embellishment?

The pattern of “criss-crossing” of *wen* works at all levels. First, disparate things come to criss-cross where they share the same principle. Second, linguistic signs are combined to criss-

cross at the point where a literary sign forms. Third, literary signs are further combined and criss-cross at the point where literary imagery forms. Throughout the history of poetics and hermeneutics, lastly, we can even see the global sign of poetry or literature desperate to seek meanings all over the various spheres of philosophy. When these meanings come to criss-cross with man, man obtains the pattern of his poetic existence. It is in this sense that the Chinese idea of *wen* can be likened to Vico's "master key" with which man opens the door to poetic theology, and to Heidegger's "philosophical threshold" where the world is "called into being" by the house of language.

### ***Fu*: a Quintessential Type of *Wen***

It was not until the "Middle Ages" of Chinese literature<sup>131</sup>—roughly from the Eastern Han (25-220), through the Three Kingdoms (220-265) and the Western and Eastern Jin (265-420), to the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-581)—that the established meaning of *wen* as "literature" embraced its heyday. During this time, a practical consciousness about the distinction between linguistic and literary signs was on its rise, while a series of theoretical endeavors strived to settle down a significance or ultimate meaning for *wen* as a global sign. In between of *wen* as a linguistic sign and *wen* as a global sign, there is a vast territory of actual literary composition, which corresponds to Barthes's "second-order semiological system" or to Derrida's *textuality*, wherein abundant literary signs are produced in various types of discourse (genres)

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<sup>131</sup> The period of disunity in Chinese history between the end of the Han (220 A.D.) and the reunification of the Sui (589) is sometimes likened by Sinologists to the European "Middle Ages." The external chaos and confusion in political and social matters during this period, it has to be noted, somehow gave rise to vigorous internal explorations of spirituality, as reflected in the prosperous development in the realms of poetry, painting, philosophy and religion. In particular, the Chinese "Middle Ages" is used by Stephen Owen, in his *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, to refer to the period covering the Eastern Han (25-220), Wei (220-265), Jin (265-420), and Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589). For a period introduction of the Chinese "Middle Ages," see Owen, *An Anthology*, 221-226. The roughly same period in Chinese literary history—from the late Han dynasty to the founding of the Tang dynasty—is referred to by Paul W. Kroll and David R. Knechtges as the "early medieval." See Kroll and Knechtges, *Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, "Preface."

and attributed to the totality of literature. During the historic expansion of the literary discourse from “poetry” (*shi*) to “literature” (*wen*), a particular literary genre known as the *fu* 賦<sup>132</sup> came to connect the two discourses by its dual role as a derived form of classical verse and as a preliminary form of medieval prose. While the *fu* dominated the literary scene during Han and Jin times, with its subsequent form *pianwen* 駢文 (parallel prose) being popular through the Southern Dynasties, its inherent paradox between moral didacticism and ornate excessiveness had provoked heated discussions on the distinct way literature accesses truth. A large production of pioneering treatises on the subject ensued, with Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind* serving as the monumental conclusion to early Chinese literary criticism.

In addition to its historical prevalence in medieval Chinese literature, a tacit acknowledgement of the *fu* as an exemplary form of *wen* is reflected in the organization of the *Wen xuan* 文選 [Selections of *Wen*], the first extant comprehensive anthology of literary writings under the notion of *wen*, compiled by the Liang prince Xiong Tong 蕭統 (501-531). The *Wen xuan* contains 761 literary pieces under 37 generic categories, dating from the late Zhou (1046-256 B.C.) till the Liang dynasty (502-587). Among the 60 scrolls of the anthology, the first 19 scrolls are allotted to the category of *fu*, with the next 13 scrolls to the *shi*—an arrangement that stands out by its unusual violation of the conventional priority that the *shi* had enjoyed over other categories. If the sequence of generic categories, as well as the number of scrolls allocated to each category, reveals the compiler’s concern about a reasonable arrangement of materials in accordance with the weightiness and representativeness of various categories, it may be said that,

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<sup>132</sup> There are various English translations of this term, such as “rhymed-poems” used by Burton Watson, “poetic exposition” by Stephen Owen, “rhapsody” by David R. Knechtges, etc. In this chapter, the romanized version of the term (the *fu*) is used to designate the distinctive literary genre.

at least by the medieval age of Chinese literature, the *fu* occupied more exemplary a status than the *shi* in the field of *wen*.

Among the rest categories listed in the *Selections*, moreover, as the leading scholar of the *fu* David R. Knechtges points out, such belles-lettres categories as Elegy (*sao* 騷), Sevens (*qi* 七) and Hypothetical Discourse (*shelun* 設論) are “virtually indistinguishable from many of the works in the *fu* section” (*Selections* 33-34). Even more categories of the prose style—Memorial (*biao* 表), Letter (*shu* 書), Memorandum (*jian* 牋), Treatise (*lun* 論), Dirge (*lei* 誄), Lament (*ai* 哀), Epitaph (*bei* 碑), Grave Memoir (*muzhi* 墓誌), Condolence (*diaowen* 弔文), Offering (*ji* 祭), etc.—share with the *fu* such formal features as alteration between verse and prose, ornamental style, and extended parallelism (*ibid.* 45-46). The *fu*'s significance to *wen*, therefore, not only derives from its historical popularity in medieval Chinese literature, but lies in its tendencies towards having a comprehensive, exhaustive representation of things in the world on the one hand, and towards making a highly refined, ornamental form of the text on the other. It is the latter two aspects of the *fu* that seem especially comparable with the indivisible paradox contained in the “pattern” of *wen*.

The significance of the Han *fu* lies in the argument for imperial legitimacy, which obtains its authority from such sources as the Mandate of Heaven newly instituted in the Han empire, an adherence to the ritual order established in the Confucian tradition, and a representation of realistic expansion of geographic and cultural territories of the empire. In correspondence with such significance, the Han *fu* adopted such rhetorical forms as parallelism which turns to be an economic way of encompassing things, hyperbole, the dialogic mode which is an allegorical form of the speech act, enumeration of things, verbal extravagance, etc. In particular,

enumeration shows the tendency to list all things sharing one common principle under the same category.

In an attempt to unravel the poetic pattern of *wen*, this chapter involves a reading of the initial three works in the *Selections*—Ban Gu’s 班固 (32-92) “*Fu* on the Two Capitals” (*Liangdu fu* 兩都賦), Zhang Heng’s 張衡 (78-139) “*Fu* on the Two Metropolises” (*Liangjing fu* 兩京賦), and Zuo Si’s 左思 (250-305) “*Fu* on the Three Capitals” (*Sandu fu* 三都賦)—for two reasons. First, as a distinctive genre, the *fu* plays a pivotal role both in the continuity of a literary tradition from *shi* to *wen*, and in the diversity of literary topics, forms, and styles under the notion of *wen*. Second, as the representatives of the grand *fu* (*dafu* 大賦), the most epideictic and panegyric type of the *fu*, these “*fus* on capitals” both present subjects and rhetoric characteristic of the *fu* in particular, and mattered much to medieval critical discourses on the nature of language and literature in general.

### Parallelism

It is no accident that Ban Gu’s “*Fu* on the Two Capitals” (*Liangdu fu* 兩都賦) tops the monumental *Selections of Wen*, for it uttered the utmost cultural dream of an aspiring branch of Confucian scholars at a moment when the Han empire, broken by Wang Mang’s 王莽 interregnum (9-23 A.D.), was restored. Historically labelled as the Old Text (*guwen* 古文) school, this branch of Han Confucianists started to blame the New Text (*jinwen* 今文) school—the other branch of Confucian scholars with Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.) as their most prominent representative—for the failure of the former (Western) Han administration.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Following Dong Zhongshu’s memorial around the year 136 B.C., Emperor Wu of Han (r. 140-87 B.C.) decreed Confucianism, with the Six Classics as its canon, to be the official state teaching. Han Confucianists, however, formed two groups which would exert immense influence on two corresponding

According to Ban Gu's preface to it, "Two Capitals" was composed as a refutation of the conservative adherents of the past Han regime, who privileged Chang'an over Luoyang as the capital of the newly restored (Eastern) Han. Therefore, the fictional dialogue in "Two Capitals," set between the Guest of Western Capital and the Master of Eastern Capital, is indeed an allegory of the political debate between the New Text school and the Old Text school. Toward the end of "Two Capitals," the fictive Master of Eastern Capital talks down to the Guest of Western Capital, with regard to the institutional disparities between Chang'an and Luoyang, as follows:

Now, those who argue for Chang'an only know how to recite the

*Documents* of Yu and Xia, 今論者但知誦虞夏之書,

Sing the *Songs* of the Yin and Zhou, 詠殷周之詩。

Discuss the *Changes* of Fu Xi and King Wen, 講羲文之易,

Discourse on the *Annals* of Master Kong, 論孔氏之春秋。

305 But few are conversant with the purities and impurities of

Past and present, 罕能精古今之清濁,

Or thoroughly understand the source of Han's virtue. 究漢德之所由。

Only you are well acquainted with the old canons, 唯子頗識舊典,

But you also aimlessly gallop after "secondary currents." 又徒馳騁乎末流。

"Reviewing the old to discover the new" is hard enough, 溫故知新已難,

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trends in the history of canonical learning (*jingxue* 經學). Relying on the scriptures in the current form of script, the New Text scholars held idealistic, apocryphal interpretations of Confucian canon; allegedly having resurrected scriptures in the archaic form of script, the Old Text scholars developed realistic, rationalistic interpretations of Confucian canon. For a detailed discussion on the distinction between the two schools, see Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 7-11, 88-91, 133-136.



- 310 And “those who understand virtue are few.” 而知德者鮮矣！  
 Moreover, to dwell in a remote area bordering the Western Rong, 且夫僻界西戎，  
 Blocked by steep barriers in all directions, 險阻四塞，  
 And maintain “defense and resistance,” 脩其防禦。  
 How can this compare with dwelling in the center of the country, 孰與處乎土中，
- 315 Which is level and flat, open and accessible, 平夷洞達，  
 Where a myriad places converge like the spokes of a wheel? 萬方輻湊？  
 The Qinling [Ridges] and Nine Peaks, 秦嶺九嶷，  
 The Rivers Jing and Wei, 涇渭之川。  
 How can they compare with the Four Waterways and the  
     Five Peaks, 曷若四瀆五嶽，
- 320 The girdling He, the coursing Luo, 帶河泝洛，  
 These sources of diagrams and documents? 圖書之淵？  
 [The] Jianzhang [Palace] and Sweet Springs [Complex], 建章甘泉，  
 Which lodge and minister to divine immortals, 館御列仙。  
 How can they match the Divine Tower and Luminous Hall, 孰與靈臺明堂，
- 325 Which integrate and harmonize Heaven and Man? 統和天人？  
 The Grand Fluid and Kunming [Lakes], 太液昆明，  
 The enclosures of birds and beasts, 鳥獸之囿。  
 How can they compare with the Circular Moat flowing as the sea, 曷若辟雍海流，  
 Replete with the wealth of the Way and Virtue? 道德之富？

- 330 Knight-errantry and excessive extravagance, 游俠踰侈,  
 That violate propriety, transgress the rites, 犯義侵禮。  
 How can they compare with our uniform conformity to rules and  
 Standards, 孰與同履法度,  
 Our respectful and reverent attitude, dignified and stately demeanor? 翼翼濟濟也?  
 You know only the Qin Ebang Palace that reaches to the  
 Heavens, 子徒習秦阿房之造天,
- 335 And are unaware that the Capital Luo conforms to  
 Set regulations. 而不知京洛之有制也;  
 You recognize that Han Valley may serve as a protective pass, 識函谷之可關,  
 But you do not realize that the true King sets  
 No external boundaries.<sup>134</sup> 而不知王者之無外也。(WX 1.218-24)

Before this point, in “Western Capital” and “Eastern Capital” respectively, the Guest of Western Capital and the Master of Eastern Capital vie with each other to glorify their home cities with lavish descriptions of countless merits. Drawing to a close of their patriotic competition, the above speech made by the Master strews the last words about Luoyang’s supremacy over Chang’an in the aspects of geography, cultural legacy, cosmology, social ethics, and ideological institutions. All in all, the eastern capital excels its western counterpart’s material obsession and political conservatism in both institutional superiority and spiritual openness.

The metrical lines in the original Chinese text, as inaccurately suggested by the English translation punctuated accordingly, are composed with orderly line lengths varying in a range

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<sup>134</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 171-73.

from the four-syllable line to the seven-syllable line. While additional graphs are occasionally added to the beginning of certain lines to specify subjects, the assembly of tetrasyllabic, pentasyllabic, hexasyllabic, and heptasyllabic lines adheres either to the grouping of lines with the same length, such as a tetrameter followed by another tetrameter, or to the grouping of lines with various lengths, such as a tetrameter followed by a hexameter. At the bottom of larger forms of combination, these two kinds of grouping exemplify the repetitive metrical patterns of the Han *fu*. The regular assembly of such metrical patterns further facilitates a more complicated type of verbal pattern—parallelism—which found its rudimentary uses in the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing* 詩經) and came into full bloom in the medieval genre of parallel prose. As the preliminary form of parallel prose, the Han *fu* saw the original growth of a prominent use of parallelism.

The formal pattern of parallelism bases itself on both syntactical and semantic correspondences: that is, lines in pairs are parallel with each other at the levels of diction and syntax. The beginning four lines in the abover excerpt, for example, which contains a description of the canonical learning characteristic of the New Text School, are composed with parallelism, delineating how the New Text scholars are engaged in the Confucian canon. The approaches, origins and titles related to the Confucian canon are lucidly presented through the parallel structure. The sonorous style of the Han *fu* can be said to originate in part from this indigenous architecture of words and phrases being arrayed in accord with strict symmetry, besides the device of rhyming used in the text.<sup>135</sup>

The concrete references to the New Text scholarship, woven with the verbal pattern of parallelism, are subsequently put in contrast with the abstract idea of wisdom which is required

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<sup>135</sup> In his glosses on Li Shan's 李善 (630-689) annotations of the *Wen xuan*, modern scholar Gao Buying 高步瀛 (1873-1940) makes comprehensive notes about the use of rhyming whenever it applies. For the rhyming patterns applied in the excerpt quoted here, cf. *Wen xuan Lizhu yishu* 文選李註義疏 [Glosses to Li Shan's Annotations of the Selections of *Wen*], 218-224.

to discern moral virtues. In the eyes of the progressive Master of Eastern Capital, few of the New Text scholars engaged in canonical learning bears the wisdom to tell the truth behind historical turmoil and, consequently, to understand the virtuous cause of the renewed Han institution. Regarded as a representative of such scholastic pedants, the conservative Guest of Western Capital is criticized for being blinded to genuine virtues. The irony between learning and wisdom—a tacit contrast between the New Text school and the Old Text school—is presented in a group of six lines 305-310, still in loosely parallel comparison. In the form of parallelism, various allusions to Confucius’ well-known saying—“Reviewing the old to discover the new”—come together to expose how the New Text scholars deviate from the Confucian doctrine in all aspects. With an implication of the exegetical limpidness added by the Old Text school to the Confucian canon, the parallel structure subtly substitutes a continuum from learning to wisdom for the irony between learning and wisdom.

In the next group of lines 311-333, the Master puts forward a series of five rhetorical questions, making specific comparisons between Chang’an and Luoyang, with regard to their qualities in the realms of geography, cultural legacy, cosmology, ethics, and, in particular, the centralised standard of “patterns and institutions” (*fadu* 法度). With the help from a rhetorical pattern effected by syntactical parallelism, concrete things from the two capitals—territories, mountains and rivers, royal architectures, imperial parks, and human demeanor—are displayed and compared under various categories. It is this pattern of parallelism, marked by the criss-crossing of horizontal syntax and vertical semantics, that enables both a contrast between opponent phenomena and an enumeration of component elements. From this well-knit pattern follow not only the superiority of one capital over the other, but the continuum from the old to

the new, that is, from classical learning to modern wisdom. At this point, the verbal scheme of parallelism facilitates the mechanics of a trope.<sup>136</sup>

### **Polemics on the *Fu*: Yang Xiong and Ban Gu**

After this preliminary examination of one elementary “pattern” of the *fu*, to the topic of which we will come back, let us move on to take a look at the general image of the *fu* in the eyes of Han scholars, starting from Ban Gu’s account. In his “Preface to ‘Two Capitals’,” Ban Gu states:

Someone has said, “The rhapsody is a genre of the ancient *Songs*.” In the past, when Kings Cheng and Kang died, the music of the *Eulogia* ceased. When the royal grace was exhausted, the *Songs* no longer flourished. When the great Han dynasty was first established, day after day the emperor was afforded no leisure. By the eras of emperors Wu and Xuan they finally honored the ritual officers and examined literature. Within the palace, they set up the offices of the Bronze Horse Gate and the Stone Canal Pavilion. Outside the palace, they revived the tasks of the Music Repository and the Harmonizing of Pitch Pipes. . . . Therefore, officers who attended and served the emperor by virtue of their skill with words, . . . day and night deliberated and thought, monthly and daily presented and offered compositions, while high ministers and great statesmen . . . from time to time wrote compositions. Sometimes it was for the purpose of expressing the feelings of the emperor’s subjects and conveying subtle criticism and advice. Sometimes it was for the purpose of proclaiming the superior’s virtue and demonstrating utmost

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<sup>136</sup> A distinction is made here between schemes, which involve variations of verbal forms at a syntactic level, and tropes, which involve transference of meanings at a conceptual level. The term *rhetoric* is used to comprise both tropes and schemes. For an elaborate explanation on the distinction between the two notions, see Abrams, *A Glossary*, 130.

loyalty and filial obedience. Compliant and accommodating, they praised and extolled, and their compositions became known to posterity. They were second only to the *Elegantiae* and the *Eulogia*. Therefore, in the era of the Filial Emperor Cheng they edited and catalogued them. Those pieces presented to the emperor numbered over a thousand, and henceforth the literature of the great Han was brilliant and conformed to the style of the Three Dynasties.<sup>137</sup>

或曰：賦者，古詩之流也。昔成康沒而頌聲寢，王澤竭而詩不作。大漢初定，日不暇給。至於武宣之世，乃崇禮官，考文章，內設金馬石渠之署，外興樂府協律之事，……故言語侍從之臣，……朝夕論思，日月獻納；而公卿大臣，……時時間作。或以抒下情而通諷諭，或以宣上德而盡忠孝，雍容揄揚，著於後嗣，抑亦雅頌之亞也。故孝成之世，論而錄之，蓋奏御者千有餘篇，而後大漢之文章，炳焉與三代同風。(WX 1.4-15)

According to the anonymous source to which Ban Gu is agreeable, the origin of the *fu* can be traced to a branch of the *Songs*—i.e., the *shi*—the orthodox poetic tradition established by the *Classic of Poetry*. The “Great Preface” to the Mao’s edition of the *Classic of Poetry* puts forward the following six principles of the *shi*: *feng* 風 (airs), *fu* 賦 (exposition), *bi* 比 (comparison), *xing* 興 (evocation), *ya* 雅 (odes), and *song* 頌 (eulogies) (*Maoshi* 1.13). In the sense of a rhetorical mode that generally indicates “direct narration” or “expository elaboration,” *fu* as one of the six principles of the *shi* agrees with the *fu* as a Han literary genre in their common interest in representing natural objects and historical events. Ban Gu’s chief argument here, however, by

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<sup>137</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 93-97.

aligning the *fu* with the *shi*, is laudatory: the revival of literary brilliance manifests that of good rulership.

The foremost literary brilliance of the *shi*, in Ban Gu's view, had come to a standstill along with the decline of good rulership, following the demises of King Cheng 成 (r. 1042-1021 B.C.) and King Kang 康 (r. 1020-996 B.C.), presumably the last sage sovereigns of the Western Zhou (1046-771 B.C.). It was not until after the establishment of the Han Dynasty, almost a millennium later, that Emperor Wu 武 (r. 180-157 B.C.) and Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 91-49 B.C.) purportedly started to reinstate the institutions of rituals and literature, as glorified by Ban Gu to be reminiscent of archaic glories. Along with other cultural projects of the Han empire—the founding of an imperial library in the Bronze Horse Gate, the undertaking of canonical lectureship in the Stone Canal Pavilion, and the collection and composition of sacrificial hymns presided over by the Music Repository—the *fu* came to be popularly produced by courtiers with literary merits. The literary function of the *fu*, either admonitory to or eulogistic of the ruler, was so brilliantly resonant of the discontinued tradition of the *shi* that Ban Gu proclaims the *fu* as “second only to the *odes* and the *Eulogies*.” It was during the reign of Emperor Cheng 成 (r. 33-7 B.C.), according to Ban Gu, that more than a thousand pieces of the *fu* were catalogued and presented to the emperor,<sup>138</sup> heralding the literary brilliance of the *wenzhang* 文章 (patterned literature) of Han times rivalling the *shi* of antiquity.

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<sup>138</sup> It was during the reign of Emperor Cheng, according to the “Bibliography of Arts and Letters (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志)” in Ban Gu's *History of the Former Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), that Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 B.C.) was assigned with the task of collating canonical, philosophical and literary writings (經傳諸子詩賦), which were further classified respectively by Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 B.C.-23 A.D.) into three categories in his “seven-category (*qilüe* 七略)” catalogue system: the six canon category (*liuyi lüe* 六藝略), the various scholars category (*zhuzi lüe* 諸子略), and the poetry and rhapsody category (*shifu lüe* 詩賦略). See *Han shu* 30.1701. Ban Gu's “Bibliography of Arts and Letters” kept 6 categories from Liu Xin's “seven-category” catalogue, with the editorial category (*jilüe* 輯略) removed, and listed 1318 titles by 106 writers

A belief in the institutional superiority of antiquity, be it imaginary or factual, has ever constituted a major characteristic of the views of history held by Confucian classicists. Ban Gu's observation of the Han *wenzhang* [literary composition], no doubt, is subject to his classicist preoccupation that the rise of the Han empire is guaranteed by its return to the institutions of the Three Dynasties.<sup>139</sup> As the emblem of revived institutional supremacy, the *wenzhang* is thus elevated by Ban Gu to the same supreme status as the *shi* occupied in antiquity. The genealogy from the *shi* to the *wenzhang*, according to Ban Gu, was realized by the *fu*, which outflowed from archaic poetry and flourished in the hands of Han writers. This affiliation between literary traditions via the concept of *fu*, serving as an integral part of Ban Gu's overall project singing of the political legitimacy of the Han regime, prescribes the literary practice of the Han with utmost literary ideals from the past: that is, the *wenzhang* adheres to the tradition of the *shi* in terms of its combination of a restrained manner in admonition and abiding references to high morals.

A smooth equation between distinct literary conventions notwithstanding, Ban Gu leaves unexamined diachronic discrepancies between literary phenomena, which may be described by the following two questions. First, does the *wenzhang*, taking on the form of writing, present a form of literary representation distinct from the *shi*, which is defined as speech expressive of the poet's intent? Second, despite their philological affinities, does the *fu* as a literary genre, in which Ban Gu composed "Two Capitals," bear meanings beyond *fu* as one of the rhetorical principles of the *shi*?

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in the "poetry and rhapsody category." In addition to 314 poems, there are 1304 rhapsodies left, matching the number of the *fu* Ban Gu indicates in his *Preface to the Two Capitals Rhapsody*. Cf. *Wen xuan Lizhu yishu* 文選李注義疏, 1.15, for Gao Buyang's 高步瀛 (1873-1940) gloss regarding He Zhuo's 何焯 (1661-1722) explanation on the issue.

<sup>139</sup> The Three Dynasties highly acclaimed by Confucian classicists are the Xia 夏 (cir. 2100-1600 B.C.), the Shang 商 (cir. 1600-1046 B.C.), and the Western Zhou 周 (1046-771 B.C.).



In his “Summary of Poetry and Rhapsody” (Shifu lüe 詩賦略) in the *Seven Summaries* (*Qilüe* 七略), a bibliographical catalogue of the Han imperial library later adapted by Ban Gu into “Bibliography of Arts and Letters (Yiwen zhi 藝文志)” in the *History of the Former Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 B.C.-23 A.D.) outlines the historical development of the notion of *fu* from a contemporary perspective, as follows:

The commentary says: “To recite without singing is called *fu*. He who ascends high and can *fu* may be appointed as a chancellor.” . . . In ancient times, when feudal princes, ministers and chancellors associated with neighbouring states, they tended to affect each other with subtle words. In the occasion of addressing each other, they necessarily cited poems to illustrate their intents. In this way they could tell apart the worthy and unworthy as well as observing the rise and fall of a state. . . . After the Spring and Autumn, the great course of the Zhou was corrupted. Imperial inquiries and poetic counseling were not conducted in any of the states. Scholars of the *Odes* sequestered themselves in the common people, and consequently the *fu* of the worthy upon political frustration were created. The great *ru* scholar Sun [Xun] Qing and the Chu Minister Qu Yuan, when encountering slanders and bemoaning their states, both created *fu* to express criticism, all bearing the significance reminiscent of the ancient *Odes*. . . . When the Han rose, Mei Sheng, Sima Xiangru, and Yang Xiong the latest, all vied to compose diction excessively ornate and greatly superfluous, eclipsing the principles of indirect criticism and moral illustration. Because of this, Yang Xiong regretted it, saying: “The *fu* of the *shi* poets are ornate by moral principles, whereas the *fu* of the epideictic poets are ornate by verbal excessiveness. If the

followers of Confucius had adopted the *fu*, Jia Yi would have mounted the hall and Sima Xiangru would have entered the chamber. Yet they did not adopt it, so what about it?”<sup>140</sup>

傳曰：“不歌而誦謂之賦，登高能賦，可以為大夫。”……古者諸侯卿大夫交接鄰國，以微言相感。當揖讓之時，必稱詩以諭其志，蓋以別賢不肖而觀盛衰焉。……春秋之後，周道寤壞，聘問歌詠，不行於列國，學詩之士，逸在布衣，而賢人失志之賦作矣。大儒孫卿、及楚臣屈原，離讒憂國，皆作賦以風，咸有惻隱古詩之義。……漢興，枚乘、司馬相如，下及揚子雲，競為侈麗閎衍之詞，沒其風諭之義。是以揚子悔之，曰：“詩人之賦麗以則，辭人之賦麗以淫。如孔氏之門人用賦也，則賈誼登堂，相如入室矣，如其不用何！” (HS 30.1755-56)

Based on the commentary adapted from the Mao's edition of the *Classic of Poetry*—"To recite without singing is called *fu*. He who ascends high and can *fu* may be appointed as a chancellor"<sup>141</sup>—Liu Xin suggests the recitative origin of *fu*: that is, different from "singing the *shi* poems to music" (*ge* 歌), *fu* indicates a recitation of poems without tuning them to melodies. The capability of reciting poems in a noble surrounding, according to the commentary, is considered a necessary attribute of a Confucian gentleman eligible for holding office in the royal court. This practice of poetic recitation, according to Liu Xin, was most closely associated with

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<sup>140</sup> Translation adapted from David R. Knechtges's and Martin Kern's partial renderings of the original text. Cf. Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, 12-13, and Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics," 391-93.

<sup>141</sup> The original commentary found in the Mao's edition of the *Classic of Poetry* lists "to ascend high and compose (*fu*)" as one of nine skills that make a Confucian gentleman qualified as a chancellor. The original reads: "建國必卜之，故建邦能命龜，田能施命，作器能銘，使能造命，升高能賦，師旅能誓，山川能說，喪紀能誄，祭祀能語，君子能此九者，可謂有德音，可以為大夫。" See *Maoshi zhengyi*, 3.236a.

early political and diplomatic activities, wherein one relied on ready-made poems to communicate ideas. In pace with the decline of the highly acclaimed principle of poetic communication, which is condensed in such core terms as *feng* 風 [indirect criticism] or *fengyu* 風諭 [indirect criticism and illustration], the historical development of *fu* is said to have undergone three stages: in ancient times, mainly from the early Zhou through the Spring and Autumn period, poetic recitation (*fu*) was widely used in the court to inform the moral qualities of rulership and state affairs; in the aftermath of the Spring and Autumn, when the moral course of the early Zhou collapsed, banished poets in their deep grievance of a world upside-down created the poetic form known as the *fu*, whose implied criticism echoed the moral significance of ancient poems; ever since the rise of the Han, royal rhapsodists have transformed the *fu* into a display of verbal extravagance, with the spirit of political criticism somehow ignored.

Liu Xin's account of the three stages in the development of *fu* covers three distinct literary conventions: the pre-Warring-States *shi*, the Warring-States *Verses of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭), and the Han *fu*. He did not base his evaluation of the three traditions on their inherent literary features, but on the presence of *feng* or indirect criticism of the ruler with regard to good rulership. Referring to the practice of reciting poems in the court, which was associated with the literary convention of the *shi*, the literary activity of *fu* has nothing to do with poetic creation in general; rather, it indicates a form of poetic performance aimed at a proper conveyance of intended meaning. Given the popularity of poetic performance in pre-Warring-States times, a primary corpus of poems—with its well-accepted hermeneutical system—must already have been available before its purported abridgement into the *Classic of Poetry* in the hand of Confucius, which would undergo another hermeneutical tradition in Han times. Thus, the sanctified principle of indirect criticism could have been the attribute of a preceding tradition of

hermeneutical association involved in the poetic performance of ancient poems, in addition to the pragmatic explanation that, as David R. Knechtges holds, a compliance with the court decorum required an oblique manner in admonishing the ruler (*Han Rhapsody* 25). As a result from the largely political orientation characterizing the interpretation of poetry during this period, moreover, the restrained or indirect manner in poetic suasion had gradually become the master key of poetic representation, both because its canonization in the tradition of the *shi* played a performative function upon subsequent literary creation, and because it revealed the poetic nature of literary representation, i.e., the inherent gap between literary signs and their significance.

The attribution to Xun Qing 荀卿 (312-230 B.C.) and Qu Yuan 屈原 (340-278 B.C.) with the inauguration of the *fu* was probably a historical bias made by Liu Xin based on his knowledge inherited from contemporary sources. The title of “*fu*” to chapter eighteen in the *Xun zi* 荀子, as Knechtges suggests, was probably affixed by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 B.C.), the Han compiler of Xun Qing’s philosophical texts (*Han Rhapsody* 18); Qu Yuan’s “Encountering Sorrow” (Lisao 離騷) shows no sign of a generic composition under the notion of the *fu*, except that Sima Qian 司馬遷 (135-90 B.C.) states that “Qu Yuan was banished and then composed (*fu*) ‘Li sao’” in his “Letter to Ren An” (Bao Ren An shu 報任安書) (*HS* 62.2735).<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, both literary works, according to Knechtges, display the prosodic pattern known as the “Sao-style,” which was apparently designed for poetic recitation rather than singing (*Han Rhapsody* 17-20). It is in this sense that they could be regarded as following the recitative tradition indicated by the early notion of *fu*.

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsode*, 124, No. 27.

In the meantime, according to Knechtges, the poetic principle of indirect criticism (*feng*) characterizing ancient poems was carried forward by Xun Qing and Qu Yuan in a new type of poetry that worthy poets created to express personal resentments about political frustration. As recited poetry of political criticism, this type of “frustration *fu*”—with Qu Yuan’s “Li sao” as its example—consists of such motifs as the *topos* of a world upside-down, the *itineraria* of a magical flight from a corrupt world, and the *tristia* of personal resentments against cruel realities (*Han Rhapsody* 17-18). Narrated in the voice of a poetic persona associated with the poet himself, the fictional world is allegorical of the political disorder, and thus the mythical journey symbolic of a spiritual withdrawal from the disorder. The indirect criticism achieved through a conscious transformation of poetic representation—i.e., fictionalization in this case—corresponds to the poetic principles of *bianfeng* 變風 [transformed *feng*] and *bianya* 變雅 [transformed *ya*], which are affirmed in the “Great Preface” to be appearing whenever rulership decays.<sup>143</sup>

The strong personal appeal characterizing “Encountering Sorrow” was echoed by the early Han *fu* writer Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-169 B.C.) in his “*Fu* on the Lament for Qu Yuan” (Diao Qu Yuan *fu* 弔屈原賦) and “*Fu* on the Owl” (Funiao *fu* 鵞鳥賦), which contain the same motifs as a world topsy-turvy and an expression of personal misery. Along with the political stability accomplished by the reign of Emperor Wu, the personal sentiments of the “frustration *fu*” were quickly replaced by the extravagant verbal construction of the *dafu* 大賦 [epideictic *fu*], with Mei Sheng 枚乘 (?-140 B.C.) and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 B.C.) as its representative writers. Largely adopting persuasive rhetoric and eloquence reminiscent of the ancient practice

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. “When the royal Way declined, rites and moral principles were abandoned; the power of government to teach failed; the government of the states changed; the customs of the family were altered. And at this point the mutated *feng* and the mutated *ya* were written (至于王道衰，禮義廢，政教失，國異政，家殊俗，而變風變雅作矣),” in *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.16. The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 47.

of itinerant persuasion during the Warring States period, the epideictic *fu* presents such distinctive rhetorical devices as dialogic framework, enumerative catalogue, lexical ornamentation, parallelism, and hyperbole. The indulgence in verbal excessiveness, either in the practice of composition or reception, led to criticism about the deviation of the *fu* from the suasive function of the *shi* aimed at moral edification. Sima Xiangru's "Fu on the Great Man" (Daren fu 大人賦), for example, fabricates an immortal world in so ornate a fashion that Emperor Wu was reported to conjure up an ethereal ascension into heavenly clouds.<sup>144</sup> It was based on a critical reflection upon the encouraging effect of the *fu* that Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.-18 A.D.), a prominent Old Text scholar and the last great *fu* writer in the late Western Han, regretted that "the *fu* encourages rather than restrains" (HS 87B.3575). Following Yang Xiong's statement, Liu Xin made the judgement that the epideictic *fu* up until his days had "eclipsed the principles of indirect criticism and moral illustration" (HS 30.1756).

The above discussions over Ban Gu's "Preface to 'Two Capitals'" and Liu Xin's "Summary of Poetry and Rhapsody" show that, separated by the historical threshold between the Western Han and Eastern Han, Yang Xiong, whose opinion regarding the Han *fu* was adopted by Liu Xin, and Ban Gu held different views about the epideictic form of the *fu* in terms of its relationship with the poetic principle of indirect criticism in the *shi* tradition. Yang Xiong criticizes Sima Xiangru's *fu* writings for being "indulgently ornate rhapsodies, which encourage one hundred deeds while admonishing just one" (HS 57B.2609); on the contrary, Ban Gu acknowledges Sima Xiangru's works as "wearing excessively ornate words and containing indirect admonishment throughout" (HS 70B.4255). This contrast in their views over literary

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<sup>144</sup> This historical account about Emperor Wu's response to Sima Xiangru's "Great Man Rhapsody" can be found both in the "Biography of Sima Xiangru" in Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian*, 117.3063, and in the "Biography of Yang Xiong" in Ban Gu's *History of the Former Han*, 87.3575.

ideals can also be seen in relevant evaluations of Qu Yuan's "Encountering Sorrow," the putative precursor of the *fu*. Lord Huainan 淮南王 Liu An 劉安 (179-122 B.C.) praised the poem for "combining both *feng* and *ya* of the *shi* and thus rivalling the sun and the moon in terms of its brilliance" (*Chuci buzhu* 1.49), the idea of which was reaffirmed by Yang Xiong's ascription of the poem into "the *fu* of the *shi* poets"; yet Ban Gu depreciated it because "its unreliable words frequently claiming such mystic things as Mount Kunlun, infernal matrimony and the Luo River Goddess Concubine Mi are neither administered by moral standards nor ever recorded in canonical principles" (*Chuci buzhu* 1.49-50). An occasional consensus reached by both is their acknowledgement of the literary principle of "factual accounts" (*shilu* 實錄) embodied by Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian*. Agreeing upon Yang Xiong's designation of "factual accounts" to Sima Qian's work (*Fa yan* 15.413), Ban Gu commended that "with its writing straightforward and content accurate, the *Records of the Historian* neither makes up goodness nor hides away badness" (*HS* 62.2738).

Despite the historiographical nature of the *Records of the Historian*, the agreement held by both Yang Xiong and Ban Gu on the literary merit of "factual accounts" reflects the influence of literary realism characteristic of Sima Qian's historical writing on Confucian scholars of Han times. As a distinctive literary genre during the Han, the *fu* was once notorious for "its lack of genuine emotion and realism" and "the ambiguity of its moral message," two inevitable consequences out of its epideictic style (Knechtges, "Introduction" 5). As one of the six principles of the *shi*, however, the early notion of *fu* as unfigured exposition of things in reality, which Ban Gu claimed as the origin of the Han *fu*, at least affirms that the *fu* was originally

consigned with a literary focus on realistic representation.<sup>145</sup> It was probably due to varying interpretation of the text's significance, in spite of their common adherence to the Confucian doctrine of moral didacticism, that Yang Xiong and Ban Gu developed contrasting ideas as for whether the *fu*'s language is fully qualified in representing reality. That is, the mythical journey in Qu Yuan's "Encountering Sorrow," which was criticized by Ban Gu for its unreliable accounts in the light of canonical tenets, was appreciated by Yang Xiong for its genuine expression of the poet's sorrows about the fate of his nation; alternately, the ornate language of Sima Xiangru's *fu* writings, which caused Yang Xiong to question the monitory function of the genre, was in Ban Gu's eyes suitable for a proper display of the Han empire's grandeur.

The theoretical presupposition of realistic representation, as inherited from the orthodox poetics derived from the *Classic of Poetry*, was not incompatible with the practical overflow of literary aestheticism accused of the *fu*. The aesthetic exuberance characteristic of the *fu*, as a matter of fact, grew from a contemporary urge to represent reality with an enlarged scope. The natural objects in the scope of poetry had evolved from the petty things of birds, beasts, plants and trees, as Confucius summarizes with regard to the natural world depicted in the *Classic of Poetry* (*Lunyu* 17.145), to greater complexes such as parks, palaces and metropolises, as well as to complicated events like hunts, royal excursions and tours of inspection. An expanded scope of reality held by Han poets naturally called for equivalent innovations of rhetorical devices—enumeration, cataloguing and extended description, to name a few. The implied themes of

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<sup>145</sup> Expounding the meanings of the six principles of the *Classic of Poetry*, in his commentary on the *Zhou li* 周禮 [Rituals of the Zhou Dynasty], the Western Han scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) defines *fu* as "straightforwardly displaying and exhibiting the good and bad things about contemporary policies and teachings (賦之言鋪，直鋪陳今之政教得失)." See Zheng, *Zhou li zhengyi*, 23.717b. It was not until three centuries later that Liu Xie, in his *Literary Mind*, defines *fu* as "displaying literary ornament and stretching literary patterns, to give forms to objects and give expressions to intent (賦者，鋪也，鋪采攤文，體物寫志也)." See Liu, *Wenxin diaolong*, 2.134. For a detailed discussion on the referential operation of *fu*, see the preceding chapter "Fu, Bi, and Xing: The Chinese Theories of Interpretation."



morality had also broadened from the once simplified codes of good rulership, as purportedly conveyed in the *Classic of Poetry*, to comprehensive institutions established by imperial rulers. The rivalry between political ideas concerning ideal government likewise invited corresponding design of literary form, e.g., the dialogue framework largely adopted by the Han *fu* to display opposite standpoints in dispute.

The grand style of the Han *fu* came to its zenith, as Burton Watson pictures it, at a time “when the [Former] Han dynasty, already firmly established as the ruler of a broad and prosperous China, was spreading its influence, through warfare and diplomatic missions, abroad in all directions” and “[N]ew provinces were added to the empire, new lands opened up, and a stream of foreign envoys began pouring into the Han court, bringing gifts of exotic plants and animals and strange tales of their distant homelands” (272). The expansion of a geographic world, along with the military conquest and cultural exploration launched by the Han empire, inevitably brought significant impacts upon contemporary literary language, the lexicon of which in representing reality had hitherto been confined to ancient texts. Reflecting this great transition in historical experiences, the outpouring of catalogues of exotic names and descriptive binomial compounds—a major characteristic of the grand *fu*, such as Sima Xiangru’s 司馬相如 (179-127 B.C.) “*Fu* on the Shanglin Park” (Shanglin fu 上林賦)—was the outcome of the zeitgeist to embrace outlandish experiences and vocabulary, rather than of ungrounded fabrication of the strange and supernatural. All in all, unrecorded spectacles emerging on the horizon of the Han worldview, either in the territories of the intellectual world or of the empirical world, called for equivalent literary representation, in size and in depth. In a literary tradition that was fundamentally anti-fictional, no other type of verbal contrivance could suffice for a genuine representation of a much broadened reality than verbal extravagance that based itself on a high

refinement of language. As the consequence of literary endeavors aimed at comprehensive representations, exuberant verbiage or extravagant language constituted the general quality of literary aestheticism which had been frequently considered a setback in a poetic tradition that weighed moral instruction over sensuous pleasures.

Although it was common for Han poets to attach moral messages at the end of their *fu* writings, the dim afterglow of ethical principles concerning good rulership was likely to be overshadowed by preceding exhaustive descriptions of worldly experiences. The decline of the highly acclaimed poetic principle of “indirect criticism,” which was still regarded by Han literati as the supreme criterion of poetry-making, led Yang Xiong to abandon writing of the *fu* and devote himself to the composition of the *Great Mystery* (*Tai xuan* 太玄) and *Exemplary Sayings* (*Fa yan* 法言), two philosophical writings respectively modelled on the *Classic of Changes* and *Analects*. Known for his classicist disdain both of “the sounds of Zheng (鄭聲)”—new popular forms of poetry—and of supplementary moralism analogically known as “playing *ya* at the end of the music (*quzhong zouya* 曲終奏雅),” Yang Xiong’s radical gesture of breaking away from literary composition can be seen as an extreme example of the increasing conflict between literary extravagancy, which reputedly found its origins in the extravagant manner of the Western Han ritual order, and literary decorum inherited from the *Classic of Poetry*.

Yang Xiong’s pessimistic view about the *fu* was soon dispelled by Ban Gu’s pragmatic application of the genre. Following the Eastern Han’s restoration in 25 A.D., which ended Wang Mang’s brief usurpation of the Han throne, there was a debate over whether the capital should be moved from Chang’an to Luoyang, an issue symbolic of the necessity of implementing an ideological reformation. In his “Two Capitals,” the best-known literary defence arguing for a relocation of the capital, Ban Gu refuted his opponents by advocating a reestablishment of

classical rituals, the ignorance of which was believed to have led to the material extravagance and thus the fall of the Western Han. In the preface to “Two Capitals,” Ban Gu states that he has written it “in order to present an exhaustive account of things that will daze and dazzle the Chang’an multitudes, and to rebut them by means of the ‘patterns and institutions’ of the present” (*WX* 1.21)<sup>146</sup>

The “patterns and institutions” (*fadu* 法度) is clearly stated by Ban Gu as the theme of “Two Capitals” with which to overcome the voices in favor of the old values of the Western Han. Specifically, it refers to the “patterns and institutions,” or “rules and standards” as Knechtges alternatively renders the same term in “Eastern Capital,” of classical rituals (*li* 禮), an overarching moral system prescribing comprehensive practical norms—from behavioral etiquettes to sacrificial rites—to affairs in both individual and public spheres for the goal of building a stable socio-political order. Since the Western Han’s ritual practices reputedly stray from the right course by a tendency toward material extravagancy, as lavishly represented in “Western Capital” from the perspective of the fictive Guest of Western Capital, the modest and proper “patterns and institutions” of classical rituals need to be re-established, as argued in “Eastern Capital” by the Master of Eastern Capital.

Instead of taking on a modest pattern of verbal representation, however, which may be considered to be corresponding to the modest pattern of classical rituals, “Eastern Capital” displays the same extravagant language and extended descriptions as in “Western Capital.” In a prolonged, impassioned speech, for instance, the Master of Eastern Capital recounts the historical and ritual splendors related to the new capital Luoyang: the rise of Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25-57) under the Mandate of Heaven, the predestined establishment of the new capital,

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<sup>146</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 99.

military feats, civil accomplishments, the restoration of classical rituals and music, the construction of palaces and gardens, imperial excursions and hunts, royal sacrifices and banquets, the implementation of a series of edicts promoting modesty over extravagance, etc. By displaying comprehensive realms and exhibiting verbal extravagance, which can likewise be found in “Western Capital,” “Eastern Capital” claims itself to celebrate ritual modesty, the genuine moral truth that is said to accord with the Confucian canon and thus justify the imperial legitimacy of the Eastern Han rulership.

Ban Gu’s “Two Capitals” was most probably written as a refutation of Du Du’s 杜篤 (?-78) “*Fu* on Discoursing the Capital” (Lundu fu 論都賦), which argued for the preservation of Chang’an as the capital of the newly restored regime.<sup>147</sup> Both writings were the first ones, among the Han grand *fu*, to elaborate on a topic as large as the “capital,” an object that understandably demands far more complicated accounts than prior writings either focusing on a brilliant palace or on a splendid hunting. To subdue an ideology that is said to mainly concern itself with material extravagance, as espoused by the *fu* writings in the Western Han and by his contemporary opponents in the Eastern Han, Ban Gu declares at the beginning of “Two Capitals” the “patterns and institutions”—i.e., the modest patterns of classical rituals—as the significance of his writing, a more articulated and dignified meaning than the “canonical learning” that is usually exposed toward the end of a *fu* in such Western Han writings as Mei Sheng’s “Seven Stimuli” and Sima Xiangru’s “Shanglin Park.”

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<sup>147</sup> This relationship of the two works was pointed out by He Zhuo 何焯 (1661-1722), as quoted by Gao Buyang 高步瀛 (1873-1940) in the *Wenxuan Lizhu yishu*, 1.21. Du Du’s “Lundu fu” can be found in “Biographies of the Literary Garden” (Wenyuan liezhuan 文苑列傳), the *History of the Latter Han* (*Houhan shu* 後漢書), 80A.2595.

The polemics on the *fu*, as well as on imperial institutions, was a war fought between two hermeneutical schools for distinct meanings with virtually identical signs. Ever since the canonical learning centred on the Confucian canon was established as the state teaching during the reign of Emperor Wu, interpretations of canonical writings had gradually forked in Han times into two branches: the more idealistic New Text school that valued ritual extravagancy, and the more rationalistic Old Text school that emphasized ritual modesty. In the case of “Two Capitals,” the *fu*—a controversial poetic genre that deviated from the orthodox tradition of the *shi* and was adapted to suit court entertainment in the Western Han—came to be promoted by Ban Gu not only as an eligible poetic expression of moral truth, but as a polemical discourse elaborating on administration in practice.

### **Han Horizons of Truth and Pattern**

The aesthetic of the Han grand *fu*, as Knechtges points out, centers on the “beauty of the large,” which manifests itself through the “fullness, all-inclusiveness, abundance, and amplitude” in its display both of things and linguistic style (“*Fu* Poetry” 76). The significance behind this aesthetic of mundane extravagance lies in the celebration of the Han imperial power which helped expand the scope of a material world. Composed likewise as a poetic eulogy of the newly restored Han throne, Ban Gu’s “Two Capitals” makes a lift of significance from the mundane to the sublime by its appeal to classical rituals. Without abandoning the “beauty of the large,” the significance of ritual modesty adds to the aesthetic of the *fu* a new dimension—the “beauty of the sublime.” Whereas the grand *fu* composed by Western Han poets often display the imperial power at the expense of ritual propriety, as mimicked in “Western Capital,” the imperial government in Ban Gu’s “Eastern Capital” seems more powerful by virtue of its abundance by the sublime order of classical rituals. At this point, Ban Gu’s “Two Capitals” secures the status of

the *fu* as the descendent of ancient poetry by making the transition, in Yang Xiong's terms, from being "ornate by verbal excessiveness" to being "ornate by moral principles."

Aside from the classical ritual order, the aesthetic of "beauty of the sublime" may have found another source in the divine order. Despite his inclination toward the Old Text school, Ban Gu was more flexible or eclectic than Yang Xiong, in terms of his endorsement of the Mandate of Heaven, a principle mainly held by the New Text school. The hermeneutical tradition known as *chenwei* 讖緯 [prognostic and apocryphal texts]—an exegetical practice of the New Text school that tended to combine divine providence and imperial legitimacy in the interpretation of Confucian canon—made a definitive showcase in the year of 79 at a scholarly gathering held in the White Tiger Hall. It was Ban Gu, the most prominent scholar of the day, who was in charge of compiling the proceedings of this conference into the *Comprehensive Meaning of the White Tiger Hall Discussions* (*Baihu tongyi* 白虎通義). The time spirit of accomplishing a combination of the divine order and the ritual order, the purpose of which was no other than endorsing the imperial legitimacy, might have constituted the intellectual circumstance for Ban Gu's display of "beauty of the sublime" in "Two Capitals."<sup>148</sup>

In contrast with the "beauty of the large," the aesthetic of "beauty of the sublime" broadens the scope of the world in two directions: one is toward heaven, which ordains the divine order; the other is toward the archaic, which prescribes the ritual order. The imperial power celebrated in "Two Capitals" has thus stretched over the largest territories man could aspire to, that is, not only in material reality, but also in history and divinity. Except for epic narrative which is absent in Chinese literature, no other type of poetic composition seems to be capable of sufficing so comprehensive a coverage of matters than the grand *fu*, the rhetoric of

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<sup>148</sup> According to Li Shan's 李善 (630-689) note, "Two Capitals" was composed during the reign of Emperor He 和 (r. 88-105). See Xiao, *WX*, 1.21a.

which had been successively developed by Western Han poets and reached a new height in the hand of Ban Gu. In “Eastern Capital,” for example, the use of hyperbole presents so catastrophic a historical turmoil that the restored Han throne would seem predestined to undertake the salvation of the entire world and humanity, as follows:

The gullies had no whole corpses; 壑無完柩，

The outer walls had not a house remaining. 郭罔遺室。

The plains and fields were filled with human flesh; 原野厭人之肉，

The rivers and valleys ran with human blood.<sup>149</sup> 川穀流人之血。(WX 157)

Personification, for another example, provides the origin of the Mandate of Heaven—otherwise represented as a formless mystical force—with the human appeal of handing down compassionate responses to human cries:

Thus, the common people cried out and made their plaint above; 故下人號而上訴，

The Supreme Lord, full of compassion, turned his gaze downward, 上帝懷而降監。

And conferred the mandate on the Sage Emperor.<sup>150</sup> 乃致命乎聖皇。(WX 158)

By the vintage pattern of parallelism, for yet another example, the imperial government is depicted as accomplishing comprehensive virtues and feats in accordance with Confucian canon and archaic rulership:

With the Six Classics as his reference, he reflected on virtue; 案六經而校德，

He scrutinized the ancient past and discussed meritorious deeds.<sup>151</sup> 眇古昔而論功。

(WX 172)

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<sup>149</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 147.

<sup>150</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 147.

<sup>151</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 153.

Time and again, parallelism is applied to put to extreme the reach and impact of the imperial power, as in the following lines:

Westward he sends tremors to the source of the He; 西盪河源,

Eastward he shakes the strands of the sea. 東澹海澹。

Northward he stirs the Dark Cliff; 北動幽崖,

Southward he illumines the Vermeil Boundary.<sup>152</sup> 南耀朱垠。(WX 197)

Among the rhetorical devices exemplified in the above excerpts, parallelism is most frequently used to serve varying persuasive purposes, including contrasting, supplementing, and encompassing. In comparison with the Western Han epideictic *fu*, Ban Gu's "Two Capitals" shows a distinct decrease in the use of cataloguing, repetition, and extended display of descriptive binomes; rather, more refined manners of "display rhetoric" such as hyperbole and parallelism are exploited to maintain the effect of persuasion. This slightly restrained use of rhetorical language might have resulted from Ban Gu's promotion of ritual propriety. In accordance with the reorientation of significance from material extravagance to ritual modesty, that is, the *fu* was necessarily subject to changes in its display of things and language. In the hand of Ban Gu, the *fu* renewed itself, in the type of truth to be reintroduced, as well as in the use of rhetorical patterns to be reconfigured. In contrast with the raw manners—cataloguing, repetition, and enumeration—of an extended display of "beauty of the large," the more concise and refined patterns—hyperbole and parallelism—are more efficient to the display of "beauty of the sublime" by their figurative fusion of things and meaning.

The figurative operation of poetic language, however, was often criticized as being illusory: i.e., it rarely entails a genuine representation of reality, let alone an immediate

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<sup>152</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 165.



signification of truth. Dominated by a poetic tradition closely related to the *shi*, the critical criteria in Han times imaginably was restrained to the metaphorical association, as the principles of *bi* 比 and *xing* 興 denotes in the Mao's edition of the *Classic of Poetry*, between poetic imagery and morals concerning good government.<sup>153</sup> Although the moral significance of the *shi* was itself a hermeneutical construct, which is made possible solely by the figurative nature of poetic language, the entire system of meaning assigned to the *Classic of Poetry* had been so firmly entrenched, along with the establishment of canonical learning in the Western Han, that poetic language became "transparent" enough in terms of the immediacy between references to nature and their moral significance. That is to say, the seeming transparency of the poetic language modelled on the *Classic of Poetry* is not natural but conventional; it was even paradoxically labelled as "indirect criticism" (*feng*), the golden rule for poetic composition, which had indeed evolved from a tacit rule for interpretation.

In the tradition of early hermeneutics, therefore, the pre-Qin diplomatic practice of "reciting *shi* to express one's intent," as *fu* indicates in the sense of poetic recitation, was to a large extent a performance of "indirect criticism" as a hermeneutical rule; correspondingly, the Han formulation of ritual-related lyrics, as conducted by the Han imperial music bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) in the model of the *Classic of Poetry*, was a performance of "indirect criticism" as a compositional rule. Under such circumstances, any unconventional pattern of poetic language was likely to be censored as inferior or even hostile to a proper conveyance of truth. When the stereotyped poetic imagery in the *shi* started to be overshadowed by the unconventional, extended assembly of things and events, first in the majestic narrative of the *Verses of Chu* and then in the flamboyant language of the Han *fu*, the metaphorical mode of interpretation would

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<sup>153</sup> For a detailed discussion on the metaphorical operations of *bi* and *xing*, see the preceding chapter "*Fu*, *Bi*, and *Xing*: The Chinese Theories of Interpretation."

surely procure confusions. Faced with a vacuum of meaning, as we see earlier, Yang Xiong blamed the *fu* for breaking from the orthodox tradition of the *shi* by its verbal excessiveness; yet Ban Gu enthusiastically praised the *fu* not only for succeeding the monitory function of the *shi*, but also for winning literary excellence for the Han *wenzhang*.

It was thus the ambiguity of meaning created by language that evoked different attitudes held by Ban Gu and Yang Xiong toward the ornate language of the Han *fu*. While Yang Xiong regretted that his elaborate display of a material world might have encouraged the ruler to indulge in mundane pleasures, Ban Gu chose to add a preface to “Two Capitals,” as a Han commentator would do to the poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, so as to assign a self-asserted significance to it. The figurative or rhetorical pattern underlying the pre-determined meaning of “Two Capitals,” however, is characterized rather by the synecdochical correspondence between a multitude of literary imagery and truth, than by the metaphorical association between individual poetic image and meaning. Hence, heralding “patterns and institutions” as the significant meaning of his speech, which is embodied by every single element in the realm of Luoyang, the Master of Eastern Capital subdues the shallow boasts made by the Guest of Western Capital about the superficial materiality of Chang’an. At this point, the dialogic mode of Ban Gu’s “Two Capitals” can be read as an allegory, not only of the political debate on the choice of capital, but also of the ongoing literary debate on the poetic legitimacy of the *fu*.

### **Anti-rhetorical Voice: Wang Chong**

Ban Gu’s self-imposed interpretation of his writing shows a personal effort to resume the status of the Han *fu* to that of the “*fu* of the *shi* poets” which, in Yang Xiong’s words, is “ornate by moral principles.” A classicist precaution against rhetorical abuse of language, however, with the ornate language of the *fu* as the imminent example, had from time to time provoked radical

distinction between rhetorical writing and philosophical writing. In addition to Yang Xiong's resolute conversion from a *fu* composer to a philosophical writer, Wang Chong 王充 (27-97), the most prominent philosopher in the early Eastern Han and Ban Gu's contemporary, candidly despised the linguistic ornateness and referential obliqueness of the *fu*:

Densely loaded with flowery words, with its intended meaning hardly perceived, is all that the *fu* panegyric features.

深覆典雅，指意難睹，唯賦頌耳！”(LH 30.1196)

Out of a purist ambition to “turn against falsities and delusions” (疾虛妄) by his composition of the *Discourse on Balance* (*Lunheng* 論衡), his only extant philosophical discourse, Wang Chong makes sweeping criticism of the use of rhetorical language in the received commentaries on the Confucian classics, which he classifies into 9 categories of “falsification” (*xu* 虛) and 3 categories of “amplification” (*zeng* 增). Relentlessly attacking the oracular statements and apocryphal assertions flooding in the New Text school's interpretations of Confucian canon, which allegedly ensued the vogue of deceptive rhetoric in scholarly writing, Wang Chong calls for a sort of transparent writing that is purged of illusive words. While affiliating his philosophical writing with the criteria of “trueness and truthfulness” (*shicheng* 實誠) pioneered by Sima Qian and Yang Xiong, Wang Chong contemplates on the cause of rhetorical writing, attributing it to the pragmatic end of swaying an audience by appealing to the emotions:

It is natural for the vulgar populace to favor bizarre words and commend delusive texts. Why is it so? It is because, whereas factual accounts do not satiate one's expectations, outrageous falsities may startle one's ears and motivate one's heart.

For this reason, those abled scholars who are adept in speech-making tend to

overstate facts and devise words of excessive praises; and those who go for writing set out to create hollow texts and fabricate deceitful accounts.

世俗之性，好奇怪之語，說虛妄之文。何則？實事不能快意，而華虛驚耳動心也。是故才能之士，好談論者，增益實事，為美盛之語；用筆墨者，造生空文，為虛妄之傳。(LH 29.1179)

As one of the popular forms of illusive rhetoric, in particular, hyperbole or figurative amplification is criticized by Wang Chong for being inordinately exploited in contemporary writings to cater for base psychology:

While composing texts and laying out words, one is used to displaying words in a way that overflows the reality, to praising beauties in a sense that surpasses fairness, and to bringing out evils in a manner that rises beyond actual crimes.

Why is it so? It is because the vulgar populace favor the bizarre. Unless they are bizarre will not words be spread. Therefore, if one was praised without his merits overstated, spectators wouldn't have their expectations satisfied; likewise, if one was denounced without his evils aggravated, hearers wouldn't keep their hearts satiated.

著文垂辭，辭出溢其真，稱美過其善，進惡沒其罪。何則？俗人好奇。不奇，言不用也。故譽人不增其美，則聞者不快其意；毀人不益其惡，則聽者不愜於心。(LH 8.381)

From Wang Chong's perspective, the contemporary enterprise of writing—with the *fu* as its prominent form—favored false representations of reality for the purpose of persuasion. The ensuing abuse of language, in the philosopher's eyes, strayed from the goal of writing to inform

of the real and true. Invoking the figurative image of scales (*heng* 衡) as the ideal of his philosophical writing, Wang Chong declares the purpose of his *Discoursing Balance* to be “weighing superficial and substantial words, and setting up distinctions between the true and false” (*LH* 29.1179).<sup>154</sup> As for the use of language with which to meet this goal, he specifies that “what is uttered must be clear words, and what is penned should be transparent texts” (*LH* 30.1196).<sup>155</sup> It would seem that Wang Chong’s ideal of philosophical writing tacitly approves pre-existent perfection of various agents involved in the process of writing and reading of a text: with a clear self-identity as a philosopher, the writer perceives the world with impartial precision; readily prepared for exposure to truth, the reader embraces a text without interference from emotions; as the raw material of the verbal pattern, most of all, language is capable of carrying out identical representations of reality and truth. At this point, Wang Chong’s anti-rhetorical discourse continued the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy most recently provoked by Yang Xiong.

### **Pro-rhetorical Practice: Zhang Heng**

The rhetorical approach to truth, however, was safeguarded by its practitioners. In the “*Fu* on the Two Metropolises” (*Erjing fu* 二京賦) composed by Zhang Heng 張衡 (78-139), for example, the flamboyant accounts about the supreme ritual order of the Eastern Metropolis are acknowledged by the subdued fictional debater as being “true and based on evidence” (*xiner youzhen* 信而有臻).

Zhang Heng, a renowned astronomer, statesman, and literary figure during the Eastern Han, purportedly spent 10 years composing “Two Metropolises” in imitation of Ban Gu’s “Two

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<sup>154</sup> The original reads: “故《論衡》者，所以銓輕重之言，立真偽之平。”

<sup>155</sup> The original reads: “《论衡》者，论之平也。口则务在明言，笔则务在露文。”

Capitals,” based on his travels and studies in the political centres at his young age (*HHS* 59.1897). Taking on the formidable form of “*fu* on capitals” which had by far become the touchstone of a scholar-poet’s literary talent, classical learning and political insight, the aspiring “Two Metropolises” rehearses the distinctive formal features of its predecessor, only so much more prolonged that it “established the pattern for the long *fu*” (Gong 276). It adopts the polemic structure of two men engaged in a fictional debate, with Sir Based-on-nothing being the first to dilate upon the advantages of the Western Metropolis (Chang’an) and Master Where-to-live subsequently counterarguing with a likewise extravagant elaboration on the merits of the Eastern Metropolis (Luoyang). The two separate speeches made in the debate are alternatively known as, in the *Wen xuan*, the 840-line “*Fu* on the Western Metropolis” and the 781-line “*Fu* on the Eastern Metropolis.” The representation of either metropolis is highly refined with effusive verbal embellishment, full of vigor to persuade. But the messages conveyed are different: wearing the “beauty of the large,” “Western Metropolis” gives the impression of the city’s material extravagance, whereas “Eastern Metropolis” triumphs with its ritual modesty, by displaying the “beauty of the sublime.”

The outcome of the fictive debate, of course, does not result from any realistic reading conducted by an unbiased reader, but from the rhetorical performance staged in the text. From the start of the debate, Sir Based-on-nothing—representative of the Western Metropolis—is intentionally presented as an unreliable speaker, as informed by the claim that “his mind was bent on extravagance and his bearing was arrogant” (*WX* 2.246-247).<sup>156</sup> By contrast, Master Where-to-live—mouthpiece of the Eastern Metropolis—carries so authoritative a disposition that he is able to accuse his opponent, right after his otherwise affecting eloquence about the Western

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<sup>156</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 181.

Metropolis, of being “a person who is referred to as having acquired nonessential knowledge and learning, and who values hearsay, but disdains viewing something firsthand” (*WX* 2.492).<sup>157</sup> No matter how similarly patterned and equally eloquent their speeches may sound, the partiality of the rhetorical performance is present throughout the text: that is, the debate is designed to conclude with the Eastern Metropolis winning out. At the textual level, this rhetorical suppression is enabled by the predetermined hierarchy of meanings, as explicitly suggested in the statement that “[T]he guest (of the Western Metropolis) was intoxicated with grand doctrines, sated with elegant principles” (*WX* 3.754).<sup>158</sup> In spite of the “grand doctrines” and “elegant principles” both referring to the desired truth of classical rituals, the rhetorical display of material extravagance in “Western Metropolis” is retrospectively admitted by Sir Based-on-nothing himself as “all blossom and no fruit,” and that of ritual modesty in “Eastern Metropolis” as “true and based on evidence” (*WX* 3.756-757).<sup>159</sup>

The rhetorical engagement between the two speeches in “Two Metropolises,” as shown above, is performed in the text as a speech act, by virtue of the embedded dialogic structure that subdues one utterance with the other. It would seem that, unlike the tradition of the *shi*, the *fu* in the hands of Ban Gu and Zhang Heng hardly relies on subsequent interpretations to enunciate its hidden meanings. Unlike the Western Han epideictic *fu* criticized by Yang Xiong for being “ornate by verbal excessiveness,” moreover, the Eastern Han “*fu* on capitals” applies the dialogic structure and ornate language to perform the triumph of moral principles, rather than to display the competition of mundane experiences. Given its extensive illustrations of moral principles of Confucian canon through an exhaustive rhetorical display of things and events, the Han *fu* by

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<sup>157</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 243.

<sup>158</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 309.

<sup>159</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 309.

now seemed to undertake to play the same role as *zhuan* 傳 [exegetical texts] played in interpreting *jing* 經 [canonical texts], by recourse to empirical issues. Rhetorical performance or mock persuasion notwithstanding, the truth value of writing of either kind—rhetorical or philosophical—depends on two presumptions, one regarding a stable semantic operation of language, the other concerned with some pre-existent truth.

As the state teaching of the Han, however, even Confucianism itself was not a stable source of truth, as verified by the varying interpretations of Confucian canon ever caught in power relationship, without mentioning the diverse pre-Qin philosophical schools. Debates over a dominant version of truth, supposedly hidden in Confucian classics, had been keen throughout Han times. Whereas the New Text school resorted to heavenly providence for imperial legitimacy, the Old Text school invoked purported ritual supremacy of antiquity as the model of contemporary government. As the conflicts of truths in realistic politics were cast into literary representation, as in the series of “*fu* on capitals,” conservatives tried to preserve a form of ritual extravagance based on the material abundance achieved by earlier imperial expansion, whereas reformists urged a pattern of ritual modesty in accord with moral propriety upheld by the reinstated throne.

As long as ritual modesty was winning the favor from the throne, the meaning of “Two Metropolises” as “to restrain one’s mind with Ritual” (*jiezhi yili* 節之以禮)—as proclaimed by Master Where-to-live at the beginning of his speech—was in agreement with the state-promoted truth; hence no ambiguity regarding the text’s significance would entail. Even if the authorial intention concerned with a solid meaning is missing—as is the case in Zhang Heng’s “Two Metropolises” which, unlike Ban Gu’s “Two Capitals,” lacks an introductory preface—the text’s significance in the eyes of readers would not stray from that of an explicit promotion of certain



political ideal. A subsequent historical account about Zhang Heng's intention to compose the *fu*, for instance—"Since at the time the entire world had been peaceful for a long period of time and everyone from princes and marquises downwards started to exceed limits to live an extravagant life, Zhang Heng composed 'Two Metropolises' in imitation of Ban Gu's 'Two Capitals' to indirectly criticize and admonish" (*HHS* 59.1897)<sup>160</sup>—exactly followed the text's explicit significance to recover the historical context of "Two Metropolises."

Allegedly representing the true spirit of Confucianism, however, which was largely adapted for contemporary politics, ritual modesty was not universal enough a moral pattern by which imperial rulers could regulate the world without controversies. Like any political innovation, the implementation of ritual modesty tended to seek justification from metaphysics as well as from history. Historical restorationism, on the one hand, or a retrospective emphasis on the foundational institutions purportedly established in antiquity, had ever dominated the mode of thinking in the Old Text school of Confucianism. Whenever applicable, on the other, the hermeneutical tradition of Confucian canon scarcely refused to explicate and supplement its principles with sources from heterogeneous thought, such as Daoist ideas. In Zhang Heng's "Eastern Metropolis," for example, we can find a smooth blend of Confucianist and Daoist thought, as reads:

625 When we speak of transferring the capital, changing the

Metropolis, 是以論其遷邑易京，

We are following the tracks of Pangeng. 則同規乎殷盤。

By changing from extravagance to frugality 改奢即儉，

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<sup>160</sup> The original reads: "時天下承平日久，自王侯以下，莫不踰侈。衡乃擬班固兩都，作二京賦，因以諷諫。"

We match the goodness praised in the “Si Gan” ode. 則合美乎斯干。

Ascending for the *feng*, descending for the *shan* 登封降禪，

630 Equals the deeds of Yellow Xuan. 則齊德乎黃軒。

Acting by nonaction, 為無為，

Doing by not-doing, 事無事，

The emperor then perpetually sustains the people in great peace. 永有民以孔安。

He observes moderation and frugality, 遵節儉，

635 Honors plainness and simplicity, 尚素樸，

Ponders Confucius’ “controlling the self,” 思仲尼之克己，

Follows Laozi’s “constant contentment.” 履老氏之常足。

He will not allow his mind to be distracted by

Things around him; 將使心不亂其所在，

His eyes do not gaze on objects of desire.<sup>161</sup> 目不見其可欲。(WX 3.728-730)

In the above excerpt, a variety of noble relations—the historical correspondence between the present and antiquity, the transference of meaning from poetry to human conduct, and the mutual supplementation of Confucianist and Daoist principles—are displayed, through the rhetorical pattern of parallelism, to justify the imperial legitimacy. Insofar as it integrates so extensive a series of subjects as philosophy, poetry, and history, this passage can be said to epitomize the ideal capacity that Han poets had increasingly expected of the *fu*: that is, given a full exercise of its rhetorical potential, the *fu* may triumph in a variety of tasks, including a comprehensive representation of reality in the realm of history, an ultimate illumination of truth in the realm of

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<sup>161</sup> The translation is made by Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 301.

philosophy, and a hermeneutical self-efficiency in the realm of poetry. At this point, the inherent poetic pattern characteristic of the *fu*, with “Two Capitals” and “Two Metropolises” as extraordinary exemplars, would be surely of superior importance than the prosodic features that usually come to distinguish the *fu* from other dynastic literatures.

Before we make a further step to investigate some more essential issues concerned with the conception of *wen* both as elemental literary pattern and as a global sign, we may now settle two preliminary conclusions regarding the poetic pattern of the *fu*, a genre that Ban Gu proclaims as undergirding the literary excellence of *wenzhang* (literary composition). First, bearing its poetic lineage deriving from the *shi*, the *fu* saw an expansion from unfigured representation of things as such to extensive display of things on the levels of macro- or micro-worlds, and an extension from the recitative practice of “reciting poetry to express one’s intent” to a polemical structure that performs the speech act of persuasion. Second, in contrast with the *shi* in the Confucianist discourse and the *shuo* in the legalist discourse, the literary pattern of the *fu* in the Han classicist discourse is not characterized by poetic imagery, nor by plot, but by rhetoric—both in its sense of a dialogic structure aimed at persuasion and in that of figurative language devoted to extended display. While figurative language helps to reassemble an empirical world in accordance with prior aesthetics, e.g., the “beauty of the large” and “beauty of the sublime” in the case of the “*fu* on capitals,” the dialogic structure performs a speech act that enforces an ethical sublimation in light of truth.

### **Neo-Daoist Continuum of Significance: Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Wang Bi**

The genre theory that flourished in literary thought during the post-Han era—from the imperial Wei dynasty (220-265) through the Jin (265-420) to the Southern Dynasties (420-589)—saw the definitive independence of the *fu* from the once unitary conception of the *shi*. The

categorical juxtaposition of the two literary forms not only germinated an increasing critical interest in cataloguing writings in accordance with their particularity, but also initiated a process of theoretical reflections upon the nature of *wen*, a new unitary notion that came to designate all types of writing by virtue of a scope more comprehensive than that of *shi*.<sup>162</sup> One early critical account to collocate the *fu* with the *shi* can be found in “Discourse on Literature” (Lunwen 論文), the only extant complete chapter in the *Normative Discourses* (*Dianlun* 典論)—a collection of administrative programmes composed by Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) in his role as the crown prince (217-218) of the pre-imperial state of Wei,<sup>163</sup> which reads:

Writing is the same at the root, but differs in its branches. Generally speaking, memorials and presentations should have courtliness; letters and discourses should be based on natural principle; inscriptions and dirges value the facts; poetry and poetic exposition aspire to ornateness. Each of these four categories is different, so that a writer’s ability will favor some over others. Only a comprehensive talent can achieve the full complement of these forms.<sup>164</sup>

夫文本同而末異。蓋奏議宜雅，書論宜理，銘誄尚實，詩賦欲麗。此四科不同，故能之者偏也；唯通才能備其體。(WX 52.967b)

According to the above quotation, the *shi* and *fu* are classified into the same category not for the common assertion of moral significance, but for their shared interest in verbal ornateness (*li* 麗), a quality that Yang Xiong despised of the *fu*. In contrast with Yang Xiong’s distinction between

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<sup>162</sup> Although the term *wen* had already been used as a general designator for textual compositions by Han times, it was not until in Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind* and Xiao Tong’s *Selections of Wen* that the nature and scope of *wen* were considerably surveyed.

<sup>163</sup> In the year of 220, Cao Pi forced the abdication of Emperor Xian 獻帝 (r. 189-220), the last ruler of the Eastern Han, and ascended to the imperial throne as Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 220-226) of Wei, officially marking the end of the Han and the beginning of the Three Kingdoms (220-280) period.

<sup>164</sup> The translation is adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 64.

“being ornate by moral principles” and “being ornate by verbal excessiveness,” Cao Pi’s account concerning “verbal ornateness” attends to the significance of rhetoric, which helps to distinguish the *shi* and *fu* from other generic categories under *wen*. This reorientation of significance regarding the two vintage literary forms deviates from classical poetics which exclusively focuses on the moral end of poetry, and thus marks the beginning of an expansion of alternative significances: memorials and presentations are valued for elegant mannerism, letters and discourses for manifestation of lofty principles, and inscriptions and dirges for fidelity to actualities. Bearing different significances, suggests Cao Pi, the four categories under *wen* can hardly be mastered by a single writer. In a further attempt to justify his observation of the distinct qualities possessed by various types of writing, Cao Pi attributes the variety of significances to that of configuration of *qi* 氣 (ether):

In writing, *qi* is the dominant factor. *Qi* has its normative forms—clear and murky. It is not to be brought by force. Compare it to music: though melodies be equal and though the rhythms follow the rules, when it comes to an inequality in drawing on a reserve of breaths, we have grounds to distinguish skill and clumsiness. Although it may reside in a father, he cannot transfer it to his son; nor can elder brother transfer it to the younger.<sup>165</sup>

文以氣為主；氣之清濁有體，不可力強而致。譬諸音樂，曲度雖均，節奏同檢；至於引氣不齊，巧拙有素，雖在父兄，不能以移子弟。(WX 52.967b)

In this account, *qi* is claimed to be the fundamental element in the material composition of writing. Various forms (*ti* 體) of writing, as implied here, originate in diverse configurations (*ti* 體) of clear and murky ether, which are free from artificial intervention. By an analogy with the

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<sup>165</sup> The translation is made by Owen, *Readings*, 65.

wind music, of which the quality depends on the application of breaths (*qi* 氣), Cao Pi indicates that the quality of writing varies with the innate constitution of the writer. Despite its ambiguous uses in this account—one artless and the other artificial—*qi* carries a cosmological reference to the cosmic substance of *ether*, a commonly accepted concept in the philosophical discourses of the pre-Qin *Yin-yang* school, Daoism, and the reformed Confucianism during the Han.

According to the *Laozi* 老子, one of the primary classics of Daoism alternatively known as the *Tao Te Ching* 道德經, *qi*—the etherial form of *yin* and *yang*<sup>166</sup>—emerges along with the creation of the universe, as claimed in this famous account: “The *Dao* gives birth to oneness. Oneness gives birth to duality. Duality gives birth to trinity. Trinity gives birth to myriad things. Myriad things carry the *yin* and embrace the *yang*, reconciling the *qi* (of *yin* and *yang*) to reach harmony” (LZ 42.175).<sup>167</sup> An alternative Daoist account about *qi* can be found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a miscellaneous compendium of various schools of thought completed in the early Western Han under the patronage of Liu An 劉安 (179-122 B.C.), Prince of Huainan. According to the *Huainanzi*, which retains some of the earliest metaphysical speculations about the origin of the universe, *qi* is the primal substance of the cosmos, of which the clear form ascends to become heaven and the murky form descends to be earth (HNZ 3.79); thereafter, the *qi* of heaven proceeds to descend, while the *qi* of earth proceeds to ascend, intermingling with each other and prompting the workings of *yin* and *yang* (HNZ 2.44). This sort of mysterious view regarding the cosmic nature and function of *qi* appears likewise in the thought of Dong Zhongshu, the

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<sup>166</sup> Originally two concepts belonging to the pre-Qin *Yin-yang* school, which were later incorporated into early Daoist thought, *yin* refers to the female principle of darkness, coldness, moisture, quietness, etc., and *yang* refers to the male principle of brightness, warmth, dryness, movement, etc., the interactions of which are said to give rise to all natural phenomena of the universe. Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 159, 383.

<sup>167</sup> The original reads: “道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以為和。”

dominant Confucian scholar in the Western Han, whose incorporation of the theories of *Yin-yang* (陰陽) and Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行) into his reinterpretation of Confucian canon greatly influenced the formation of prognostic and apocryphal texts (*chenwei* 讖緯) in the hermeneutical tradition of the New Text school. According to his *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露), just as fish are constantly immersed in water, so men are constantly immersed in the turbulent mass of ethers (*qi*) of *yin* and *yang* (CQFL 81.467).

Given its cosmological reference which became commonplace by Han times, the concept of *qi* in Cao Pi's "Discourse on Literature" not merely denotes some transmissive medium that helps transport personal characteristics from the writer to his writing, but connotes a cosmological origin that *wen* comes to manifest. This association of *wen* with *qi*, as succinctly made in Cao Pi's account, marked the beginning of the Neo-Daoist transformation of the Confucian poetics, which would eventually extend the meaning of literature from the moral significance to the cosmological significance. It is noteworthy that Neo-Daoism, or Mysterious Learning (*xuanxue* 玄學),<sup>168</sup> which got substantial development in Han times and came to dominance during the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420), was not a competing parallel to but an eclectic reincarnation of Confucianism. The Neo-Daoists at this time, as Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990) points out, "accepted from Confucianism the theory that Confucius is the one great sage, but at the same time used Taoist philosophy to reinterpret the sayings of

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<sup>168</sup> In the philosophical discourse of Neo-Daoism, Mystery (*xuan* 玄) refers specifically to the mysterious, paradoxical combination of Non-being (*wu* 無) and Being (*you* 有) within the *Dao*, the all-embracing first principle of the universe. Cf. "These two (i.e., the Non-being and Being) share the same origin and yet are different in name. They together are called the Mystery. It is the Mystery of all mysteries, and the gateway to all miraculous essences (此兩者同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，眾妙之門)" (LZ 1.7).

Confucius”(2.173).<sup>169</sup> Although the Neo-Daoist integration of Confucianism and Daoism had already made substantial progress in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) and the “Appendices to the *Changes*” (*Yizhuan* 易傳),<sup>170</sup> two fundamental texts formed and synthesized into the Confucian canon during the Western Han, it was not until the post-Han era that the Confucian poetics started to undergo reinvestigations under Daoist norms. Aside from Cao Pi’s metaphysical theory, which sees the verbal ornateness of the *shi* and *fu* as originating in certain configuration of the primal cosmic substance of *qi*, Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303), a distinguished poet and literary critic in the Eastern Wu (229-280), relates in his “*Fu* on Literature” (*Wen fu* 文賦) the significance of the two literary forms respectively to human feelings and nature:

The *shi* follows from emotions and is sensuously ornate;

The *fu* gives normative forms to things and is clear and limpid.<sup>171</sup>

詩緣情而綺靡，

賦體物而瀏亮。(WX 17.312a)

In contrast with Cao Pi’s assertion that “the *shi* and *fu* aspire to ornateness,” which puts the two literary forms under the same category by virtue of their shared significance in rhetorical ornateness, Lu Ji differentiates them based on a divergence of significance: the *shi* excels at

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<sup>169</sup> In his *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, a revised and much shortened version of his previous *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Fung Yu-lan divides Neo-Daoists into two groups: the rationalists represented by such philosophers as Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (252-312), and the sentimentalists represented by the “Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove” (*zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢). The Neo-Daoist sentimentalists tended to abandon external forms by engaging in “pure conversation” (*qingtan* 清談), and thus showed distrust in the written form of *wen*. The following discussion will focus on the rationalistic thought of Neo-Daoism.

<sup>170</sup> In the *Liji*, for example, the Confucian principle of ritual (*li* 禮) starts to be associated with the Daoist cosmology regarding the origin of the universe. Cf. “*Li* must be rooted in the great Oneness, which divides to form Heaven and Earth, and revolves to make *yin* and *yang* (夫禮，必本於大一，分而為天地，轉而為陰陽)” (*LJ* 22.616). As for the “Appendices to the *Changes*”, or the “Ten Wings” legendarily ascribed to Confucius, its synthesis of Confucian and Daoist doctrines is much more comprehensive.

<sup>171</sup> The translation is adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 130.



expressing emotions (*qing* 情), while the *fu* specializes in representing things (*wu* 物). In the discourse of Neo-Daoism, both emotions and things are not independent phenomena but integral parts of a continuum of cosmic operations in the universe. Retrospectively, *qing* is not a central concept in the original Confucianism, which focuses on the moral order in the sphere of human affairs rather than on the cosmological order of the universe. As a part of human conduct, rather, which is expected in the discourse of Confucianism to possess moral righteousness (*ren* 仁) and display ritual norms (*li* 禮), emotions are seen from time to time as indicators of one's moral status, as shown in Confucius' comment on his favorite disciple, Yan Hui 顏回 (521-481 B.C.), in the *Analects*: "A bowlful of meal, a ladleful of water, and a humble dwelling in the broken walls, wherein most people cannot but feel sorrowful, do not prevent Hui from feeling joy" (*LY* 6.226).<sup>172</sup> Upon the same material circumstance, that is to say, emotions could vary with one's moral consciousness. Nevertheless, according to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, another primary classic of Daoism, emotions are artificial manners that can be annihilated by intuition, if one intuitively identifies his being with the "spontaneous course of nature" (*ziran* 自然), as described in the following account: "Those who are content with the current situation and rest themselves in the natural course of things cannot be moved by sorrow and joy" (*ZZ* 6.260).<sup>173</sup>

In terms of modern philosophical concepts derived from phenomenology, the human being in Confucianism is a being-for-itself, or a being consciously striving for an intellectual or moral identity, with emotions being the affective symptoms of its spiritual progress; whereas the human being in Daoism is a being-in-itself, or a being abandoning itself to the rules of all indifferent objects in the natural world, with emotions being obstruction of self-abandonment. In

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<sup>172</sup> The original reads: "一簞食，一瓢飲，在陋巷，人不堪其憂，回也不改其樂。"

<sup>173</sup> The original reads: "安時而處順，哀樂不能入也。"

either case, emotions would seem to be independent of the realm of material things. This observation temporarily incurs a paradox in the understanding of Lu Ji's account that "the *shi* follows from emotions"—a paradox between poetic imagery necessarily derived from a tangible world and the poet's emotions purportedly independent of material things. The contradiction can neither be reconciled in the philosophical vein of Daoism, which resembles classical Platonism in terms of its anti-poetry or anti-speech standpoint, nor in that of Confucianism, the poetics of which centers on morally-oriented intent (*zhi* 志) rather than on emotions.<sup>174</sup>

Lu Ji's emphasis on emotions as the significance of poetry can only be understood against the backdrop of Neo-Daoism, wherein emotions come to be associated with material things. In a debate about whether the sage is of emotions, as recorded in Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372-451) commentary on the *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志), Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249)—a Neo-Daoist philosopher in the Wei noted for his great commentaries on the *Classic of Changes* and *Laozi*—argues that "the sage, similar to normal people in terms of his possession of five emotions, cannot but harbour sorrow or joy as responses to things," and that "the emotions of the sage as responses to things are not enslaved by them" (SGZ 28.795).<sup>175</sup> What reconciles emotions and things—or Confucianism and Daoism at large—lies in Wang Bi's eclectic assertions that human nature belongs to the nature of all things and that emotions as a part of human nature are likewise "natural to the spontaneous course of Nature" (*ziran zhixing* 自然之性) (SGZ 28.796). In the discourse of Neo-Daoism, therefore, the ideal human being modelled on the sage reaches a synthesis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The Neo-Daoist

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<sup>174</sup> This is the major reason that Lu Ji's unorthodox account regarding the nature of the *shi* had provoked controversies among subsequent literary minds that committed themselves to Confucian poetics.

<sup>175</sup> The original reads: "聖人.....五情同故不能無哀樂以應物。.....聖人之情，應物而無累於物者也。" It is quoted by Fung Yu-lan. Cf. Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 2:187-189, for a detailed account about Wang Bi's ideas on the emotions of the sage.

modification of the conception of emotions improves our understanding of Lu Ji's account in that, in light of the fusion of the difference between emotions and things, it would seem natural for the intangible emotions of the poet to be expressed via a representation of the things that stimulate them at the first place, with sensuous ornateness (*qimi* 綺靡) referring to the much refined rhetorical pattern of poetry that helps to realize the fusion.

While the Neo-Daoist fusion of the difference between emotions and things sheds light on Lu Ji's assertion that the *shi* expresses emotions with an ornate representation of things, a deeper difference lingers between things and verbal representation, a discrepancy that seems to be bridgeable according to Lu Ji's account that "the *fu* gives normative forms to things and is clear and bright." With regard to things, the *Laozi* posits two levels of them: (1) the metaphysical thing of the *Dao*, as described in the account that "There is a thing (*wu* 物), formless yet complete. Before Heaven and Earth it occurred. . . . We do not know its name, so we designate it as the *Dao*" (LZ 25.100-101);<sup>176</sup> (2) physical things derived from the *Dao*, as explained in the account that "Myriad things (*wu* 物) depend on it (the *Dao*) for occurrence, and it never fails them. Its achievements are completed, and yet it never takes on the form of being" (LZ 34.137).<sup>177</sup> As it is metaphysical, according to the first account regarding *wu*, the formless thing of the *Dao* can hardly be represented except by an added name (*ming* 名); in the second account, however, other than an emphasis on the *Dao* as the origin of the phenomenal variety of myriad things, little is specified as for what constitutes the difference between things and how they are represented.

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<sup>176</sup> The original reads: "有物混成，先天地生。……吾不知其名，字之曰道。"

<sup>177</sup> The original reads: "萬物恃之以生而不辭，功成而不有。"

In its elaboration on the relationship between the *Dao* and phenomenal things, a chapter titled “Explicating the *Laozi*” (jielao 解老) in the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, a book written by the Warring-States Legalist philosopher Han Fei 韓非 (280-233 B.C.), invokes the concept of principles (*li* 理) to illustrate the patterns (*wen* 文) of things, as follows:

The *Dao* is that by which myriad things become so, and to which myriad principles may resort. Principles (*li* 理) are the patterns (*wen* 文) of completed things. The *Dao* is that by which myriad things are completed. Therefore it can be said that the *Dao* is the primal principle. While things have their individual principles, they are not about to be confused with each other. Therefore principles serve as the regulations of things. Myriad things respectively have different principles, and the *Dao* comes to reduce different principles of myriad things into one singular uniformity.

道者，萬物之所然也，萬理之所稽也。理者，成物之文也；道者，萬物之所以成也。故曰：‘道，理之者也。’物有理，不可以相薄；物有理不可以相薄，故理之為物之制。萬物各異理，萬物各異理而道盡。(HFZ 20.146-147)

The introduction of individual principles into the philosophical investigation of things is significant to representation of things in that, while providing measures to differentiate between myriad things, principles of phenomenal things also make it possible to fuse between disparate things with the help of names.<sup>178</sup>

Wang Bi went a step further to illuminate the connection between individual principles of things and human understanding, with the aid of the three concepts of meaning (*yi* 義), ideas (*yi*

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<sup>178</sup> On the linguistic level, a trope can be seen as the juxtaposition of disparate things, as invoked by names, based on shared principles. For a study of early Chinese thought on the workings of names, see the preceding chapter “The Mystery of Mysteries: The Paradox between Form and Meaning in Early Chinese Thought on Names.”

意), and principles (*li* 理). In his commentary on Appendix IV (on hexagram 1) of “Appendices to the Changes,” Wang Bi states that “By understanding the movements of things, we may develop ideas about the principles by which they become so” (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 1.22b);<sup>179</sup> in the same commentary (on hexagram 40), he claims that “Meaning (*yi* 義) designates what we call principles (*li* 理)” (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 4.198a).<sup>180</sup> The philosophical references of the three concepts are fairly enunciated by Fung Yu-lan, in his analysis of Wang Bi’s Neo-Daoist thought, as follows: “Both terms (*yi* 義 and *li* 理) . . . would seem to be his designations for the primary principles which underlie the phenomenal world, whereas by ‘ideas’ (*yi* 意) he would seem to mean these same objective principles as they are mentally imprinted in men’s minds” (*A History* 2: 186). Referring to meanings (*yi* 義), that is, the individual principles of myriad things can be observed by men and thereafter formed into ideas (*yi* 意). This explains why the Neo-Daoist notion of the sage as an observer of the universe tends to position the ideal man, in a philosophical imagination, at the centre of the cosmos, as echoed in Lu Ji’s prospect of the ideal poet, in his “*Fu* on Literature:”

One stands in the centre of the universe to observe the mysteries of myriad things,  
And nourishes his emotions and intent in ancient canons.<sup>181</sup>

佇中區以玄覽，

頤情志於典墳。(WX 17.310a)

In the above account, Lu Ji proposes two preliminary steps the poet needs to take before proceeding to his composition of *wen*: the first line calls for an all-seeing gaze whereby the poet

<sup>179</sup> The original reads: “夫識物之動，則其所以然之理，皆可知也。”

<sup>180</sup> The original reads: “義，猶理也。” The above two accounts made by Wang Bi are quoted by Fung Yu-lan. Cf. Fung, *A History*, 2: 186.

<sup>181</sup> The translation is adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 86.

gains his ideas about truth, while the second line demands a cultivation of the poet in literary and cultural canon, which helps to regulate expressions of his ideas. Both steps are proposed by Lu Ji, indeed, as the resolutions to the two predicaments he outlines in his preface to “*Fu on Literature*:”

(Whenever writing,) I am constantly worried that my ideas do not agree with things, and that my writing does not conform to my ideas.<sup>182</sup>

恒患意不稱物，文不逮意。(WX 17.309b)

Lu Ji’s outline of the predicaments involved in literary creation—with regard respectively to the gap between things and ideas, and to the gap between ideas and writing—is reminiscent of the classical account, in Appendix V of “Appendices to the *Changes*,” regarding the discrepancy between ideas and speech/writing, which reads: “Confucius said: ‘Writing is incapable of illuminating speech; speech is incapable of illuminating ideas’” (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 7.342b).<sup>183</sup> By extending the Confucian spectrum to the relationship between ideas and things, on the one hand, Lu Ji adopts the Neo-Daoist doctrine that things are the locale of meaning that ideas strive for and, accordingly, proposes an all-seeing gaze as the philosophical way in which ideas may be united with things; by retaining the original spectrum, on the other, Lu Ji revisits the discontinuity between ideas and writing, and suggests as the resolution a nourishment of the poet’s mind in ancient canon. As for why a cultivation in canonical writings would resolve the predicament, as well as for what constitutes the significant meaning to be conveyed by writing, Lu Ji gives his overall conclusion toward the end of “*Fu on Literature*,” which says:

The functioning of writing lies in being

The means for all natural principles.

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<sup>182</sup> The translation is adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 80.

<sup>183</sup> The original reads: “子曰：‘書不盡言，言不盡意。’”

Looking ahead, writing grants models to coming generations;

Looking back, it contemplates symbols made by the ancients.<sup>184</sup>

伊茲文之為用，

固衆理之所因。

.....

俯貽則於來葉，

仰觀象乎古人。(WX 17.316a)

According to this conclusion, what the poet is expected to attain from ancient canon is no other than symbols (*xiang* 象), a concept derived from the Neo-Daoist discourse on the *Classic of Changes*. In Appendix V of “Appendices to the *Changes*”, the term *xiang* refers specifically to the graphic symbols of trigrams and hexagrams in the *Classic of Changes*, as shown in this account: “Confucius said: ‘The sage (Fu Xi 伏羲) established symbols to illuminate his ideas. He set out trigrams and hexagrams to illuminate the true and false about things’” (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 7.343a).<sup>185</sup> Regarding the nature of *xiang*, Appendix V continues to expound: “As for the symbols, the sage had perceived the mysteries of the universe, and drawn analogues based on similarity to symbolize things appropriately. For this reason, we call them ‘symbols’” (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 7.344b).<sup>186</sup> As the symbols for things, that is to say, *xiang* are derived from the sage’s ideas about myriad things, and formed based on an analogy with things. In this sense, symbols are not things themselves, but carry similarity toward things; consequently, symbols necessarily

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<sup>184</sup> The translation is adapted from Owen, *Readings*, 179.

<sup>185</sup> The original reads: “子曰：‘聖人立象以盡意，設卦以盡情偽。’” For an alternative translation, cf. Lynn, *Classic of Changes*, 67.

<sup>186</sup> The original reads: “夫象，聖人有以見天下之賾，而擬諸其形容，象其物宜，是故謂之象。” For an alternative translation, cf. Lynn, *Classic of Changes*, 68.

take on illusive forms so that they keep resorting to ordinary language for elaboration of meanings.

It was Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249), the great commentator on the *Laozi* and *classic of Changes*, that came to reconcile the difference between the *shi* and 文, arguing that expression of feelings relies on transformation of things, thus giving a more eclectic account for the poetic pattern of *wen*. Based on his commentary on the symbolic workings of trigrams and hexagrams in the *Classic of Changes*, in particular, Wang Bi worked out a continuum of representation from things through imagery to the *Dao*. That is, first of all, things have individual principles (*li* 理), which not only tell things apart, but also fuse things together sharing the same principle. Second, the principles of things can be recognized by man in the form of ideas (*yi* 意); the human mind develops imagery (*xiang* 象) to convey his ideas about principles of things. Third, imagery further takes on plastic forms, such as graphic signs (trigrams and hexagrams) and verbal signs (text) to manifest. This process of representation, it has to be noted, is not fundamentally visual, but conceptual: that is, it is a continuous representation of the fusion between disparate things, and between the self and the other, with the *Dao* as the ultimate form or meaning (*yi* 義) of the fusion. The involved continuum from ideas through symbols to words is most clearly described by Wang Bi, in “Explicating Symbols” in his *Outlined Concepts in the Classic of Changes* (*Zhouyi lüeli* 周易略例), in the following well-known account:

Symbols serve to express ideas. Words serve to explain symbols. For the complete expression of ideas there is nothing rivalling symbols, and for the complete explanation of symbols there is nothing rivalling words. Words are intended for



symbols. Hence by examining words one may perceive symbols. Symbols are intended for ideas. Hence by examining symbols one may perceive ideas.<sup>187</sup>

夫象者，出意者也；言者，明象者也。盡意莫若象，盡象莫若言。言生於象，故可尋言以觀象；象生於意，故可尋象以觀意。(Zhouyi lüeli 609)

In Wang Bi's paradigm, it has to be noted, the concept of "symbols" refers specifically to the graphic signs of trigrams and hexagrams in the *Classic of Changes*, and that of "words" to the canonical commentaries known as the "Appendices to the *Changes*." It would be an inappropriate imposition to equal the two concepts with literary imagery and literary language in question. Nevertheless, given the currency Neo-Daoism held in post-Han literary thought, Wang Bi's metaphysical paradigm might have laid the epistemological ground for ideas concerning the operation of literary language and imagery; in particular, *xiang* (symbols) had thence been frequently invoked by subsequent literary critics as a pivotal element in the workings of *wen*, as initiated by Lu Ji in his expectation of the poet's acquisition of ready-made symbols from ancient canon, and as culminated in Liu Xie's extensive exposition on literary imagery in the *Literary Mind*.<sup>188</sup>

In addition to the correspondence between symbols and ideas, moreover, Wang Bi's propositions of "in keeping with the category" (*chulei* 觸類) and "in agreement with the meaning" (*heyi* 合義) as the criteria of symbols seem especially inspirational to post-Han literary thought in terms of their affinity with the poetic operation of literary symbols, as shown in the following account:

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<sup>187</sup> The translation is adapted from Derk Bodde rendering; cf. Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 2: 184.

<sup>188</sup> For a subtle comparison between shared concepts in Wang Bi's writings and those in Liu Xie's theoretical system, see Lynn, "Wang Bi and Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong*," 83-98.

Therefore in keeping with the category, the symbol thereof may be made; in agreement with the meaning, the sign thereof may be made. If the meaning consists of vigor, what need is there for a stallion (to explain its meaning)? If the category consists of compliance, what need is there for a cow (to explain its meaning)? If a line (of the hexagram) accords with compliance, what need is there for *kun* to be supplemented by a cow? If the meaning corresponds to vigor, what need is there for *qian* to be supplemented by a stallion?<sup>189</sup>

是故觸類可為其象，合義可為其徵。義苟在健，何必馬乎？類苟在順，何必牛乎？爻苟合順，何必坤乃為牛？義苟應健，何必乾乃為馬？(*Zhouyi lüeli* 609)

According to this statement, an efficient symbol is qualified by its pertaining to certain category as well as by its correspondence with the categorical meaning. In the light of the Neo-Daoist continuum of relevant concepts, as discussed earlier, a symbol can thus be described as a sign that falls under a particular category of things (*wu* 物) by virtue of their partaking of the same principle (*li* 理) or meaning (*yi* 義) captured by human ideas (*yi* 意). When the principle or meaning shared by a category of things is captured by the human idea regarding vigor, for example, as Wang Bi points out with regard to the early hermeneutics of the *Classic of Changes*, two kinds of symbol—the original graphic hexagram of ☰ (*qian* 乾) and the alternative concrete image of a horse—are commonly invoked as signs; when the meaning has something to do with compliance, in contrast, the hexagram of ☷ (*kun* 坤) and the image of a cow are used as corresponding symbols. Elaborating on the ideal correspondence between symbols and meanings, here Wang Bi apparently prefers the orthodox signs of hexagrams to the expedient images of

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<sup>189</sup> The translation is adapted from Derk Bodde's rendering; cf. Fung, *Chinese Philosophy*, 2: 184.

animals, the latter being applied by Han commentators as concrete signs supplemental to hexagrams. According to his description of the semiological operation of symbols, however, concrete images are as legitimate as hexagrams to serve as signs, so far as they remain “in keeping with the category” and “in agreement with the meaning.” In contrast with the highly abstract form of hexagrams, moreover, the metaphorical or figurative manner in which concrete images correspond to abstract meanings would throw extra light on the poetic pattern of literary writing that had occupied much of early medieval literary thought.

It was thus through the spectacles of Neo-Daoist views, mainly regarding the acquisition and transmission of human knowledge about the universe, that Lu Ji gained his vision of the mysterious process of literary writing. Serving as the solution to the classical dilemmas of “ideas not agreeing with things” and “writing not conforming to ideas,” that is, the poet’s contemplation upon the universe modelled on the sage’s all-seeing gaze is to be invoked so as to bridge the gap between things and ideas, and the use of symbols in the manner of hexagrams is to be applied so as to mediate between ideas and writing. As for the latter, of course, symbols to be acquired allegedly from ancient canon are not hexagrams but literary imagery—concrete images in their imaginary forms, as well as in verbal forms, which come to manifest the principles of things under the same category. With such Neo-Daoist import, Lu Ji’s definitions of the *shi* and *fu*—“The *shi* follows from emotions and is sensuously ornate; the *fu* gives normative forms to things and is clear and limpid”—would seem to carry metaphysical significances beyond the expressive and mimetic theories they superficially indicate.

In the case of the *shi*, as the existence of man is classified by Neo-Daoism into the realm of myriad things (nature), and as man’s emotions consequently become an object to be affected by things under the same category, it is natural for the poet to develop an ideal imagery based his

empirical feelings of things and proceed to resort to the *shi* for verbal representation of the imagery, with “sensuous ornateness” characterizing the subtle principles whereby the human being coincides with things. In the case of the *fu*, it is not through any single imagery, but through the sum of literary images, that the *fu* not merely “gives normative forms to” but unites external things under a shared categorical principle, with “clarity and limpidness” characterizing a clear-cut universal truth. Whether “sensuously ornate” or “clear and limpid,” the principles of things manifest themselves in literary imagery brought into verbal form by poetic language. What come to conjoin things and verbal forms (text), most of all, are imagery that takes on its ideal forms based on the poet’s ideas regarding the principles of things on the one hand, and puts on its verbal forms by virtue of the poet’s creative use of poetic language inherited from ancient canon on the other.

Centered on the formation of imagery, the Neo-Daoist continuum from external things to symbols may be divided into two stages: the preceding stage wherein the poet-philosopher reaches a fusion of the human being with things by means of imagery, and the succeeding stage wherein he reaches a fusion between imagery and verbal symbols by means of language. These two stages bear affinities with the *imaginary* and the *symbolic*, two orders considered by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981)—together with the third order of the real—to be fundamental in structuring human existence. The relevance of Lacan’s theory regarding the three orders of human existence to early medieval Chinese literary thought lies in their common concern with the relationship between “I” and “things.” In the pre-linguistic stage of the imaginary, that is, both traditions agree on that the human subject learns of his relation with reality by identifying with a particular image emerging from the external world, though this image is illusory on the grounds that it is a mixture of the self and the real. In the linguistic stage of the symbolic, when the human subject

acquires language, the illusory image associated with both the self and the real is further constituted by the inherited regulations involved in language. The difference between the two traditions, however, is twofold: (1) whereas Lacan considers *phallus* to be the privileged signifier of the ultimate meaning of the-name-of-the-father, the early medieval Chinese literary thought increasingly saw *wen* as the global signifier of the ultimate principle of the *Dao*; (2) the Chinese tradition, moreover, acknowledges the consistency in the continuum from things through imagery and language to the *Dao*, whereas Lacan insists that, whenever man carries out expression and interpretation in the form of language, what he actually conducts is no other than operating an endless chain of signifiers, with the signified or the ultimate meaning being forever unreached.

With the help from Neo-Daoist critical terms, let us re-investigate the “*fu* on capitals” on the following three levels.

On the level of things (*wu*), the “capital” does not designate some abstract idea, but a category of things sharing the same principle. In Ban Gu’s “Eastern Capital,” this principle shared by all the things in the category of Luoyang is “patterns and institutions” (*fadu*), equivalent to “ritual modesty” of the same city in Zhang Heng’s “Eastern Metropolis.” The principle of “ritual modesty” is held to subdue “material extravagance,” the ill principle shared by all the things in the category of Chang’an in Ban Gu’s “Western Capital,” as well as in Zhang Heng’s “Western Metropolis.”

On the level of imagery (*xiang*), the sum of things under the category of “capital”—ranging from natural objects to historico-political events—is indeed a sum of ideal images. The imaginary nature of “things” in literature is inherent in the notion of literary creation as the intellectual participation of the writer, as is the reason why such artificial principles as “ritual

modesty” and “material extravagance” can be added onto otherwise autonomous things-in-themselves. Rather than invoking much concentrated imagery, as is the case with the *shi*, the *fu* has the tendency to display the entire range of images in an exhaustive fashion.

On the level of language (*yan*), lastly, the fusion of things and principles into ideal images is eventually made possible by miscellaneous semiological patterns—such as hyperbole, parallelism, and other distinctive figurative devices—derived from the remarkable poetic use of language in preceding literature. The speech act of persuasion is likewise based on the eloquent use of rhetorical language, with the dialogic mode as its dramatized form. Figurative language and rhetorical eloquence come together to form the literary pattern of the “*fu* on capitals” in particular, and the *fu* in general, which may be disagreeably dubbed effusive verbiage and overwhelming ornateness.

#### **Jin Discussions on the *Fu*: Zuo Si, Huangfu Mi, and Zhi Yu**

In light of the Neo-Daoist rules of symbolism—being in “keeping with the category” and “agreement with the principle”—it can be said that the literary pattern of the *fu* simultaneously operates in two dimensions: the vertical, metaphorical formation of elemental images, and the horizontal, metonymic enumeration of the sum of images. A question that instantly rises is whether a made-up literary image, so implausibly fabricated as to be in agreement with the principle of the category, should be counted as true or false representation. In the preface to his “*Fu* on the Three Capitals” (Sandu fu 三都賦), the last prominent text in the tradition of the “*fu* on capitals,” the Western Jin poet Zuo Si 左思 (250-305) makes a distinction between his pursuit of verisimilitude and the artificiality of his predecessors:

Ban Gu in his “*Fu* on the Western Capital” marvelled at the appearance of “paired-eye fish.” Zhang Heng in his “*Fu* on the Western Metropolitan” described

the swimming of the sea creature known as *Hairuo*. These two writers contrived rarities and wonders in order to embellish their writings. . . . In terms of rhetoric, they tended to produce ornate adornment; with regard to meaning, their claims are fictitious and lacking veracity. . . . Insofar as it is in imitation of the “*Fu* on the Two Metropolitans” that I compose my “*Fu* on the Three Capitals,” for the mountains, rivers, cities and towns, I have consulted maps; birds, beasts, grass and trees, I have verified in local chronicles. . . . Writings that represent things highly value adhering to their nature; those that relate events ought to base themselves on facts.<sup>190</sup>

班固賦西都而歎以出比目，張衡賦西京而述以遊海若。假稱珍怪，以為潤色。……於辭則易為藻飾，於義則虛而無徵。……余既思摹二京而賦三都，其山川城邑則稽之地圖，其鳥獸草木則驗之方誌。……美物者貴依其本，讚事者宜本其實。(WX 4.90b-91a)

Modelling on Zhang Heng’s “Two Metropolises,” Zuo Si spent ten years composing his “Three Capitals”—“Shu Capital” (Shudu fu 蜀都賦), “Wu Capital” (Wudu fu 吳都賦), and “Wei Capital” (Weidu fu 魏都賦). Set in a fictitious debate, a stock structure in earlier exemplars, the mouthpieces from the greatest cities of the Three Kingdoms argue over the merits of their domestic capitals. Despite the overwhelming rhetorical eloquence shared by all three speeches, the debate ends up with the principle of “virtuous harmonies” of the Wei capital subduing the “material richness” of the Shu capital and the “magnificent beauty” of the Wu capital. Although “Three Capitals” was the product of a literary imitation of Ban Gu’s “Two Capitals” and Zhang Heng’s “Two Metropolitans”, Zuo Si boasted about his accurate record of reality, which was

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<sup>190</sup> The translation is adapted from Knechtges, *Selections*, 1: 337-339.

allegedly unrivalled by his predecessors. In Zuo Si's views, the fantastic objects or events made up by Ban Gu and Zhang Heng in their writings—e.g., sea creatures appearing in inland palace ponds—not only offend against the nature of things but also impair the purity of language and the solidity of meanings.

The same opinion was expressed by Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282), a prestigious Western Jin scholar-poet, who honored Zuo Si's "Three Capitals" with a preface and remarked that "(The Han writers of the *fu*) overstepped the bounds of propriety by transplanting foreign things to local terrains, and by making so empty a show of fantastic categories as to fabricate the real from the false" (*WX* 45.859a).<sup>191</sup> At this point, both Huangfu Mi and Zuo Si upheld a strict, literal sense of coincidence between things and words; little heed did they take of the imaginary nature of literary images, the significance of which often goes beyond the signification of words. The placement of sea creatures into palace ponds, as claimed in Ban Gu's "Western Capital" and Zhang Heng's "Western Metropolitan," may be historically false, but it operates as a true image in that it helps to reveal the ill principle of "material extravagance" accused of the western capital Chang'an. Aware of the productive capability of things in constructing ideas or meanings, as well as of the role played by literary pattern in the fusion between things and meanings, Huangfu Mi makes in the same preface an insightful comment about the poetic nature of the *fu*, as reads:

The *fu* is that by which one produces primal meanings from things, and by which one lays out rhetorical forms to elaborate natural principles, to such an extent that no one can put addition to it. Drawing upon things to convey meanings, literary patterns tend to be extremely ravishing; in keeping with categories to extend their

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<sup>191</sup> The original reads: "過以非方之物，寄以中域，虛張異類，託有於無。"



principles, literary language turns out to be extraordinarily gorgeous. The *wen* that is formally ravishing and rhetorically gorgeous, therefore, is the creation by the *fu*. 賦也者，所以因物造端，敷弘體理，欲人不能加也。引而申之，故文必極美；觸類而長之，故辭必盡麗。然則美麗之文，賦之作也。(WX 45.858b)

Huangfu Mi's notion of verbal ornateness of the *fu* as inevitable aesthetic effects, as caused by the productive use of things to convey meanings, adds a counterweight to Zuo Si's preoccupation with the exclusively referential relation of words to things. Their polarized assumptions about the significance of the *fu*—one referential and the other rhetorical—is reconciled by Zhi Yu 摯虞 (?-311), a Western Jin literary critic and anthologist whose *Collection of the Currents and Divisions of Literature* (*Wenzhang liubie ji* 文章流別集) (now lost) was presumably the first anthology of literary writings compiled under genres in Chinese literary history. In his general comment about the *fu*, which is available in his extant yet fragmented “Notes and Discourses on the Currents and Divisions of Literature” (*Wenzhang liubie zhilun* 文章流別志論), Zhi Yu lists four types of excessiveness that are to be avoided in the relation between the *fu* and the external world, as quoted below:

Implied images that are excessively exaggerated depart from primary categories.  
Frivolous language that is overly magnified errs from original events. Polemic words that are excessively methodical deviate from primary meanings. Ornate embellishment that is overly gorgeous goes counter to original feelings.

夫假象過大，則於類相遠；逸辭過壯，則與事相違；辯言過理，則與義相失；麗靡過美，則與情相悖。(YWLJ 56.1018)

From Zhi Yu's point of view, only when the nature of literary imagery and language coincide with that of empirical things and events, as perceived through human sensibility, can the meaning of the *fu* be said to remain transparent. The inherent association of literary imagery with the meaning of the *fu*, finds an almost identical expression in Zhi Yu's definition of literature (*wenzhang*) as a whole, which reads:

Literature is that by which we display the images above and below, illuminate the order of human relationships, exhaust principles, and fathom human nature, in order to investigate the suitabilities of myriad things.<sup>192</sup>

文章者，所以宣上下之象，明人倫之敘，窮理盡性，以究萬物之宜者也。

(*YWLJ* 56.1018)

### ***Wen* as the Global Sign: Liu Xie and Xiao Tong**

Roland Barthe's "global sign," or the "second-order semiological system" or "myth"—like Derrida's "textuality," de Man's "rhetoricity," and Saussure's "la langue,"—does not refer to particular literary utterances and texts, but to the underlying system and convention of the use of literary signs. This underlying system and convention of literary forms and meanings is called *wen* or "pattern" in Liu Xie's *Literary Mind*.

The independence of the *fu* from the *shi*, along with an increasingly extensive classification of literary genres, broadened the spectrum of literature which had been dominated by the *shi*.<sup>193</sup> The expansion of literary forms in turn called for a transition in literary thought that would provide a more comprehensive theory of literature than the classical model of "poetry verbalizing intent." Centering on the vintage notion of *wen*, which had recently been re-

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<sup>192</sup> The translation is adapted from Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, 20.

<sup>193</sup> With the *shi* and *fu* being held as two primary literary genres, Cao Pi listed 8 genres in the "Discourse on Literature," Lu Ji listed 10 in his "*Fu* on Literature," and Liu Xie 劉勰 extended the number to 34 in his *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*.

examined by Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and other pioneering critics,<sup>194</sup> Liu Xie's 劉勰 (cir. 465-520)

*Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍) decisively extended the material means of literary representation from speech to writing. One of Liu Xie's most prominent assumptions in this regard reads:

With the occurrence of mind, speech is formed; with the formation of speech, writing manifests. This is true of the natural course.

心生而言立，言立而文明，自然之道也。(WXDL 1.1)

Here Liu Xie proceeds from the classical model of the Confucian poetics, which sees poetry as the verbal expression of the poet's intent, to proclaim writing as the textual manifestation of speech and human mind. In Liu Xie's discourse, the adequacy of writing in manifesting speech and the human mind is likened, and indeed subordinated, to the immediacy of *wen* in manifesting the pervasive cosmic truth of *Dao*. Derived from its primordial reference to natural markings, the classical notion of *wen* had obtained its figurative meaning of refined patterns in both natural and cultural senses, in the antiquity prior to the Spring and Autumn period;<sup>195</sup> having gained the meaning of writing in the pre-Qin era, the *wen* started to be commonly applied to various forms of prose writing during the Han dynasty and Six Dynasties.<sup>196</sup> Invoking the multiple references of *wen*, Liu Xie was able to make his essential analogy between human patterns (*renwen* 人文)

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<sup>194</sup> In the history of Chinese literary criticism, Cao Pi's "Discourse on Literature" has been considered the first monograph on literature, and Lu Ji's "Fu on Literature" marked the earliest systematic study on literature. See Guo Shaoyu's 郭紹虞 notes on the two treatises in his *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選 [Readings of Chinese Literary Criticism], 128, 154.

<sup>195</sup> For a survey of early meanings of *wen*, see Chow, "Ancient Chinese Views on Literature, the *Tao*, and their relationship," 3-29.

<sup>196</sup> As a general literary category, the *wen* 文 was exemplified by the *fu* during the Han dynasty and by the highly artistic form of *pianwen* 駢文 (rhythmic parallel prose), a refined variant of *fu*, during the Six Dynasties.

and cosmic patterns (*tianwen* 天文): that is, writing as a form of human patterns manifests the human mind in the same way cosmic objects manifest the ultimate truth of *Dao* (*WXDL* 1.1-3).

Despite his religious devotion to Buddhism, Liu Xie's literary thought shows a great influence from Neo-Daoism, or from the confluence of classical Daoism and Confucianism.<sup>197</sup> As the ultimate source of the universe, the *Dao* in Liu Xie's terminology is of the cosmic significance in the Daoist discourse rather than the moral significance in the Confucian tradition. By incorporating the Confucian focus on human conditions into the Daoist cosmology, however, Liu Xie was able to expand the realms of his inquiry from the Daoist dualistic categories of heaven and earth to the Great Trinity of heaven, earth and man. Yet still, in contrast with the Confucian emphasis on man's moral status associated with the established hierarchy in human relation, the Neo-Daoist advocacy of man's spiritual transcendence made it possible for Liu Xie to elevate man to the supreme position of "the heart of heaven and earth (*tiandi zhixin* 天地之心)" (*WXDL* 1.1). Inasmuch as man is distinguished from heaven and earth by his spirituality, literary writing as a form of human patterns is distinguished from cosmic patterns by its spiritual access to divine principles (*shenli* 神理). In the meantime, in contrast with the Daoist doctrine that the *Dao* exists as the absolute truth, which urges "rejection of sages (*juesheng* 絕聖)" and "abandonment of intelligence (*qizhi* 棄智)" (*LZ* 19.74), Liu Xie's Neo-Daoist approach argues for the pivotal role played by both the spiritual participation of sage-writers and literary writing in the illumination of *Dao*:

The *Dao* depends on sages to hand down writing, and sages rely on writing to manifest the *Dao*.

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<sup>197</sup> For a discussion on Buddhism's influence on Liu Xie's literary thought, see Mair, "Buddhism in the *Literary Mind and Ornate Rhetoric*," 63-81.

道沿聖以垂文，聖因文而明道。(WXDL 1.3)

In comparison with the *shi*, which allegedly expresses the poet's intent in accordance with the moral truth, the *wen* is now endowed with the cosmic truth, namely, the divine principles of *Dao* that can only be transmitted via the spiritual supremacy of sage-writers. This cosmic significance of the *wen* allows Liu Xie to trace the earliest forms of writing back to the sacred signs of trigrams and hexagrams in the *Classic of Changes*. The early history of writing prior to Confucius, according to Liu Xie, can be outlined by the magnificent development of the scripture of *Changes*:

Pao Xi initiated the effort (of manifesting *taiji*) by drawing the eight trigrams, and Confucius consummated it by writing the *Ten Wings*. . . . (In between,) when King Wen of Zhou suffered from sorrows, he attached explanations to and thus illuminated the signs of *Changes*.

庖犧畫其始，仲尼翼其終。……文王患憂，繇辭炳曜。(WXDL 1.2)

From legendary Pao Xi's (cir. 29<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) eight trigrams through King Wen of Zhou's (11<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) attached explanations (*xici* 繫辭) to Confucius' commentaries (*zhuan* 傳) commonly known as the Ten Wings (*shiyi* 十翼), in Liu Xie's view, the early history of writing prior to Confucius was distinguished by persistent efforts to transcribe the cosmic truth of the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji* 太極) first with the symbols of Changes (*yixiang* 易象) and then with language (*ci* 辭; *wen* 文).<sup>198</sup> As the most revered sage-writer, subsequently, Confucius allegedly

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<sup>198</sup> Liu Xie's idea regarding the development of the *Classic of Changes* was typical in classical scholarship about the origin of the book: the legendary sage Pao Xi 庖犧, or Fu Xi 伏羲, created the eight trigrams, King Wen of Zhou issued two chapters of attached explanations to the 64 hexagrams (*gua* 卦) and their horizontal lines (*yao* 爻), and Confucius eventually put down the Ten Wings of commentaries. For a more reliable explanation of the textual formation of the *Classic of Changes*, as provided by modern scholarship, see Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 379-82.

compiled both the scripture of *Changes* and other significant writings from various periods, and recast them into the Six Classics, the established scriptures of ancient culture that would thenceforth “transcribe the brilliant light of the universe and inform the ears and eyes of all living people” (*WXDL* 1.2).<sup>199</sup> Being thus reaffirmed as the most brilliant manifestations of *Dao* wrought out by ancient sages, the Six Classics were sanctified by Liu Xie as the archetypes of *wen*.

As an all-inclusive notion that privileges writing over speech, the *wen* in Liu Xie’s critical system essentially expanded the significant form of literature from “poetic expression,” which helped lay the cornerstone of Confucian poetics, to “textual manifestation” (*wenming* 文明), or literary illumination, of *Dao* via human spirituality. In the light of this fundamental transition in the understanding of literature, such primary issues as “tracing the ultimate truth” (*yuandao* 原道), “consulting the sage-writers” (*zhengsheng* 徵聖) and “modelling on the classics” (*zongjing* 宗經), which top the opening discussion in Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind*, have thenceforth become the golden rules of literary writing in the orthodox stream of classical Chinese literature. After the manner of the six principles of the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing liuyi* 詩經六藝), Liu Xie fashions the six principles of *wen* based on the exemplary writings in the Six Classics:

Therefore, writing shall be modeled on the Classics, with its essence sustaining the six principles as follows: feelings being soulful instead of deceitful; temperament being lightsome instead of tanglesome; events being believable instead of incredible; meanings being obvious instead of tortuous; forms being pithy instead of messy; language being rhetorical instead of excessive.

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<sup>199</sup> The original reads: “寫天地之輝光，曉生民之耳目。”

故文能宗經，體有六義：一則情深而不詭，二則風清而不雜，三則事信而不誕，四則義直而不回，五則體約而不蕪，六則文麗而不淫。(WXDL 1.23)

In comparison with the six principles of the *Classic of Poetry*, which describe the classificatory and tropological features of the *Poetry*, the six principles of the *wen* prescribe the rules for achieving unsophisticated naturalness in three categories: the writer's subjectivity, the external world, and the literary text. The first two principles, with regard to feelings (*qing* 情) and temperament (*feng* 風), echo the expressive theory of Confucian poetics in their emphasis on the transmission of the writer's subjectivity into the text; the third principle regarding events (*shi* 事) calls for the text's faithful representation of empirical realities; the fourth principle concerning meanings (*yi* 義), carrying its Neo-Daoist senses, refer to both natural and cosmic verities that can manifest themselves in literary texts; the last two principles, related with forms (*ti* 體) and language (*wen* 文), show an aesthetic interest in reaching a careful balance between the formal and rhetorical artfulness of the text and an artless expression of the human subject or an authentic representation of the world. While the six principles respectively assign criteria for varying significance of *wen* as a global sign, it is the last principle, regarding *wen* as rhetorical language, that touches on the rhetorical underpinning of the poetic pattern of literature.

Attending to the rhetorical artfulness of literary language, the conception of *li* 麗 [being rhetorical] had better be understood as an undivided integration, on the level of literary signs, of tropes (figures of thought) and schemes (figures of speech), which in turn derives from the blending of referential and formal values on the level of linguistic signs.<sup>200</sup> It highlights, on the one hand, the aesthetic or formal aspect of literary signs, which has hitherto been masked by

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<sup>200</sup> That is, tropes and schemes on the level of literary signs are equivalent, respectively, to signifieds and signifiers on the level of linguistic signs.

their tropological or conceptual aspect in the orthodox tradition of Confucian poetics that promotes *bi* and *xing* as tropological devices for indirect criticism. The tropological aspect of literary signs, on the other, is reaffirmed by Liu Xie as the fundamental attribute of literature. Disappointed by the abusive use of *bi* and the decline of *xing* in contemporary literature, Liu Xie calls for a revival of careful investigations into the interrelated nature of things, as well as into the subtle connection between things and human conditions (*WXDL* 8.601-3). According to Liu Xie, it is the *Dao*, the cosmic truth that regulates all things and human conditions, that is to be manifested by the rhetorical pattern made of language:

The reason that language may stimulate the world is because it serves as the pattern of the *Dao*.

辭之所以能鼓天下者，迺道之文也。(WXDL 1.3)

The persuasive power of literary language, in other words, stems rather from its conceptual coincidence with the *Dao* than from its aesthetic nature of being ornamental. In light of Liu Xie's assumption about the manifestative nature of *wen*, the principle of rhetoricity (*li* 麗) is invested with conceptual significance, as exemplified by two distinctive rhetorical devices—"couplet of verse" (*lici* 麗辭) and "hyperbolic embellishment" (*kuashi* 誇飾). According to Liu Xie, the "couplet of verse," the use of which originated in the Six Classics and culminated in the *fu* and parallel prose, is the textual pattern of cosmic parallelism that can be found operating in both natural forms, as shaped by the common "shaping and transforming powers of Nature" (*zaohua* 造化), and in human affairs abiding by "divine principles" (*shenli* 神理) (*WXDL* 7.588). Unlike the Western structuralist construct of binary opposites, it has to be noted, the pattern of parallelism does not restrict itself to the mode of opposition; nor does it assume one element's dominance over the other. Applied in the textual pattern of "couplet of verse," parallelism is



devoted to “encompassing truths and detailing affairs (*liyuan shimi* 理圓事密)” through “pairing gems in the text (*lianbi qizhang* 聯璧其章)” (*WXDL* 7.589).<sup>201</sup>

Liu Xie’s discussion of “hyperbolic embellishment,” in the spirit of rhetoricity, is based on his observation of the paradoxical relationship between the world and its verbal representation:

What is beyond form is called the *Dao*, and what is behind form is called object.

Insofar as the divine *Dao* is difficult to copy, exact words cannot trace the utmost of it. Whereas the material object is easy to depict, splendid language may convey the essence of it.

夫形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器。神道難摹，精言不能追其極；形器易寫，壯辭可得喻其真。（*WXDL* 8.608）

As Liu Xie observes it, a hyperbolic statement may contribute to an accurate representation of reality. By performing an overstatement of reality, that is, literary embellishment may achieved desired effects through wonderment at a conceptual level. While the transference of meanings by the tropological devices of *bi* and *xing* is based on analogies between disparate things, hyperbole informs truth on the basis of comparison between disparate degrees. From the perspective of the writer, an ideal application of hyperbole is characterized by “overstated language doing no harm to truth ”;<sup>202</sup> from the viewpoint of the reader, a proper interpretation of hyperbole is expected to be “neither discrediting rhetorical language for verbal literalness, nor discrediting implied ideas

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<sup>201</sup> In addition to its common application in the *fu* and parallel prose during the Six Dynasties, and in lyric poems in the Tang and Song dynasties, this conceptual association between the rhetorical form of “couplet of verse” and an elaborate representation of the world would even inform the parallel structure characteristic of *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 [full-length vernacular fiction] during the Ming and Qing dynasties, wherein chapter headings take the form of couplet of verse and the episodic narrative within each chapter is antithetically structured.

<sup>202</sup> The original reads: “辭雖已甚，其義無害。”

for rhetorical language” (*WXDL* 8.608).<sup>203</sup> Despite its emphasis on the manifestative nature of literature, therefore, Liu Xie’s notion of *wen* does not confine literary representation to literal correspondence between names and the world, but endorses a belief in the conceptual correlation between rhetoric and truth.<sup>204</sup>

In his “Preface to the *Selections of Wen*,” an explanatory prose on the scope and selective criteria of the monumental anthology, Xiao Tong (501-531) brought out his observations that the conception of *wen* always changed with time, and that, subject to the same progressive transformation characterizing the external world, the current understanding of *wen* went beyond its old references. Different from the archaic symbols of Eight Trigrams created by Fu Xi, for instance, as well as different from the metaphysical concepts of “heavenly patterns” and “human patterns” derived from the *Classic of Changes*, an updated conception of *wen* started to bear unusual significances:

Subject matters rise from thoughtful composition, and meanings originate in rhetorical language.

事出於沈思，義歸乎翰藻。(WX 2)

The parallel structure of this line illustrates the high style of parallelism characteristic of the prevailing literary form of the *fu*. The first half of the line conveys an idea similar to the expressive theory of literature, yet focusing on the role played by the intellectual participation of the writer in the fabrication of subject matters; the second half shows the critic’s concern with

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<sup>203</sup> The original reads: “不以文害辭，不以辭害意。” Here Liu Xie’s argument is partly derived from Mencius’ comment on achieving a proper interpretation of the *Classic of Poetry*: “An interpreter of the *Poetry*, therefore, may neither discredit rhetorical language for verbal literalness, nor discredit the implied ideas for rhetorical language. To meet the implied ideas with one’s sympathetic knowledge is the proper way to understanding poetry. (故說詩者，不以文害辭，不以辭害志，以意逆志，是為得之。)” See Jiao, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 18.638.

<sup>204</sup> This rhetorical tendency to refine representation of reality with the marvellous would lay the ground for the combination of history and myth in the fictional genre of *yanyi* 演義 [historical romance].

the rhetoricity of literary language, which is said to constitute the origin of meaning. Given the commonplace of interchangeable diction in the reading of parallel writing—that is, the syntactic positions of “subject matters” and “meanings” in the line can be switched—the entire line comprehends a general understanding of how the *wen* operates. According to this account, both subject matters and meanings are not external objects to be represented, but made-up products to be created by the writer and his language. With its ontological focus on “thoughtful composition” and “rhetorical language,” Xiao Tong’s conception of *wen* suggests unconventional significances of literature that would lead to reorganization of literary canon.

With the *wen* serving as the overarching category of literary writing, Xiao Tong incorporated into the 60-scroll *Selections of Wen* 37 generic categories, including the *fu*, poetry (*shi*), southern verses (*sao*), and a great variety of practical writings. Arranged in a sequence according to a hierarchy of generic significance, the anthology apparently privileges the *fu*, which tops the collection with as many as 19 scrolls, over poetry (12 scrolls) and southern verses (2 scrolls). Whereas the precedence assigned to the *fu* showed a major concern with contemporary writings, the all-inclusive nature of the anthology under the concept of *wen* posed to the anthologist the question of how classical texts would be dealt with. At this point, Xiao Tong, either out of practical purposes or of a commitment to literary values, gave general remarks on the reason classical texts were excluded from the anthology: the Confucian canon (*jing* 經) is too fundamental to be excerpted; philosophies (*zi* 子) are rooted in ideas instead of in verbal patterns; and histories (*shi* 史) are focused on historical figures and events that overshadow literary forms (*WX* 2). The only exception is that, if the practical writings involved in histories meet the selective criteria of “thoughtful composition” and “rhetorical,” they can surely be collected as the quintessential examples of *wen* (*WX* 2). As a consequence of the

above-mentioned criteria, even the *Classic of Poetry* was excluded from the *Selections of Wen*, whose collection of poetry starts with the *Nineteen Old Poems* (*Gushi shijiushou* 古诗十九首) composed by anonymous poets during the Han dynasty.

The exclusion of classical texts from a catholic literary anthology not only resulted from the priority given to contemporary literature, but turned out to be necessary because of the transition in the conception of literary writing. At the end of his proposed listing of various genres to be included in the anthology, Xiao Tong makes a pair of analogies with regard to the nature that all writings from different genres are expected to present:

The different musical instruments made of clay and gourd both contribute to the pleasure of ears; the various embroideries with different colors and patterns all satisfy the delight of eyes.

陶匏異器，並為入耳之娛；黼黻不同，俱為悅目之玩。(WX 2)

The associations with musical and visual arts, as made in these analogies, convey Xiao Tong's preoccupation with the aesthetic and sensuous effects that literary writing is expected to produce on the reader. The significance of *wen*, in Xiao Tong's paradigm, has switched from representation of pre-existing truth and reality to the inherent nature of text, as marked by "thoughtful composition" and "rhetorical language." The literary thought wrapped in the "Preface to the *Selections of Wen*," indeed, seems to argue for the autonomous nature of literature from the perspective of a modern structuralist. With the significance of *wen* being relocated to its formal qualities, the reading process is in turn aimed at an experience of the aesthetic potentials of a text, which is rather related to the effects of "pleasure" than "instruction" upon the reader.

## Conclusion

The history of seeking a clear-cut definition of *wen*, or else of reaching a conclusion about the nature of literature, turned out to be an odyssey of securing a signified for *wen* as a signifier. The diverse, continuous quests for the meaning of *wen*, in early medieval times, can be outlined as advancing at three levels, respectively with *wen* taking on distinctive roles of a linguistic sign, a literary or rhetorical sign, and a global sign.

(1) The multiple references acquired by *wen* as a linguistic symbol in pre-Qin antiquity shed both light and shadow on subsequent philosophical speculations over the nature of *wen* as literature, in classical Chinese literary thought as well as in contemporary sinological studies. On the positive side, the abstract meaning of “pattern” held by *wen* as a linguistic symbol reveals the locus where all its concrete references—natural markings, ritual codes, cultural institutions, human writing, literature, etc.—criss-cross with one another; “pattern” indicates the abstract image of a significant form at which distinctive rules and codes of various spheres in the cosmos come to converge. It is from this common locus that *wen* in the sense of “pattern” proceeds to become the *topos* that has frequently been taken up by classical discourses on the nature of literature. On the negative side, instead of being distinguished from each other, the pattern of literature has commonly been likened to that of nature, thanks to the prominent analogies made by Liu Xie in the *Literary Mind*; this critical mannerism in analogism has gradually become a norm in classical Chinese literary thought, and eventually given rise to the presupposition of Chinese literature to be read or even “watched” as an integral part of nature, as contended by Fenollosa.

(2) As the most distinguished form of *wen* in early medieval Chinese literature, the *fu* supplied remarkable illustrations, by its unmatched exploitation of topics regarding objects as

well as of rhetorical language, of how the “pattern” of literature could differ from that of nature. Unlike nature, the world in the *fu* was constructed by language. Aware of the distortion of truth in the *fu*, scholar-poets during Han times diverged in accordance with their attitudes toward rhetorical language: Yang Xiong, for example, set out to seek a kind of supposedly transparent, discursive language, whereas Ban Gu proclaimed “moral standard” as the true principle of things, which can likewise be delivered by rhetorical language.

It was not until the post-Han development of Neo-Daoist thought, which culminated at Wang Bi’s commentary on the semiology in the *Classic of Changes*, that the coincidence between meaning and language was confirmed as resulting from an underlying cognitive continuum. This continuum comprises two stages: the imaginary and the symbolic. At the imaginary part, the sage-writer identifies the principle or meaning shared by things in question, and proceeds to conceive of images through imagination, which reorganizes things to highlight the principle. At the symbolic part, the sage-writer brings the images into their literary forms with rhetorical language, thus completing the formation of literary signs or symbols. Although the signification of such literary signs may seem to superficially refer to disparate things in the form of imagery, their shared principle or meaning doubtless stands out as significance. The literary signs, therefore, simultaneously signify natural things criss-crossing at their shared principle and images criss-crossing at their shared meaning. The involved pattern of conceptual “criss-crossing” is indeed realized by the rhetorical “criss-crossing” of literary signs.

Hyperbole and parallelism—two figures that Liu Xie singled out as the distinctive devices of rhetorical language—can be seen as two elemental patterns that help to formalize the conceptual criss-crossing which is essential in arriving at meaning. The prominent use of hyperbole and parallelism in the *fu* is illustrative of how individual literary signs are commonly

constructed, in what Roman Jakobson called the “metaphorical relation,” in early medieval Chinese literature; and the use of enumeration and cataloguing in the *fu* can thus be regarded as performing an extended display of the entire range of individual literary signs under the same category, in what Jakobson called the “metonymic relation.” Consequently, excessive ornateness seems to be no other than the textual manifestation of highly complex rhetorical combinations of literary signs that are aimed at illuminating a single truth by displaying component signs in an accumulative and exhaustive manner.

(3) In the same manner as linguistic signs are transformed into literary signs which proceed to seek new meanings, in the “second-order semiological system” of literature, the sum of literary signs across various literary genres is transformed into a global signifier which proceed to seek some ultimate meaning at a philosophical level. About this meaning of the global sign of *wen*, Cao Pi regards it as the innate genius of writers, as constituted by the primal ethers (*qi*) in the universe; Lu Ji considers it to be the individual principles of myriad things; Liu Xie, like the Platonists, refers it to the transcendental truth—the *Dao*; and Xiao Tong, like modern New Critics, proposes it to be the aesthetic effects that rhetorical uses of language may have produced upon the reader. Again, the meaning of *wen*, as a global sign this time, slides from one signification to another, with its significance ever changing in the eyes of reader. The “criss-crossing” of these significations—like the image of “master key” invoked by Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) to describe poetic theology that bridges natural theology and civil theology, as well as that of “philosophical threshold” suggested by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) as the moment when the world is “called into being” by the house of language—has constituted the essential pattern that early medieval Chinese literature and literary thought contributed to an overall understanding of the nature of poetics.

## Chapter Eight

### Conclusion

#### The Chinese Poetics of Transformation

Confucius said: “Writing is incapable of illuminating speech; speech is incapable of illuminating ideas.”

(*Classic of Changes* 7.342)

This chapter concludes the dissertation by integrating prominent Chinese literary and critical ideas so far discussed—with regard to the relationship between form and meaning of poetry—under the classical concept of transformation (*bian* 變). The concept of transformation may mean “to give form to,” just like Aristotle considers poetry to be giving form to things not as they are but as they should be. In other words, poet comes to give a golden form to the brazen world; poet *transforms* the world. Transformation may also mean “to deconstruct,” in the semantic tradition named by Derrida as *textuality*, or by de Man as *Rhetoricity*.

In the chapter on Names, we’ve seen how the philosophical idea of transformation is infused by Zhuang Zi into “cup-like words” to invoke myriads of things as transient vehicles of the philosopher’s absolute spiritual freedom. Now, as we are about to see, transformation is singled out by Liu Xie as an independent literary idea, distinctively addressed in the chapter on “Sustaining Transformation” (*tongbian* 通變) and commonly scattered in other chapters, in the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*.

The connotation of transformation in Liu Xie’s discourse is both philosophical and historical. By tracing out some major accounts on the concept in the *Literary Mind*, we may gain



a step-stone contributing to two estimations about Chinese poetics: (1) Chinese literary and critical minds bear a synthetic understanding of literary history as a coherent progress, driven by the anxiety of significance, i.e., the abiding interrelationship between the significant form and the significant meaning of poetry; (2) Chinese poetics show an eclectic attitude toward the phenomena of mutable meanings, changeable forms, and, most of all, the tropological significance of poetry in growing the spiritual freedom of man out of empirical seeds offered by Nature.

### The Literary Idea of Transformation in Liu Xie's Account

Under the credo of “poetry verbalizing intent,” the *shi* in classical Chinese poetics was esteemed as the ideal discourse, which purported to convey truth via the intellectual participation of the poet. In the Daoist tradition, wherein the universal order of *Dao* was characterized by its non-being (*wu* 無) that “can neither be argued by speech nor be perceived by mind”<sup>205</sup> (*Zhuangzi* 17.572), literary representation and intellectual participation were blamed for artificiality. Paradoxically indeed, it is through speech (*yan* 言) that Zhuang Zi was able to illuminate the importance of non-speech (*buyan* 不言) in “equalizing all things.”<sup>206</sup>

In the meantime, the *shuo* (說) came to share the power of speech with the *shi*. In particular, Warring-States Legalist Han Fei proposed to expediently transform the advisory speech from its traditional focus on facts and rhetoric to that on pragmatic utility, and, in doing

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<sup>205</sup> The original reads: “言之所不能論，意之所不能察致。”

<sup>206</sup> As purportedly admitted by Zhuang Zi, the type of speech known as “allegorical speeches (*yuyan* 寓言)” amounts to nine tenth in proportion of the *Zhuangzi*, and that of “authoritative speeches (*chongyan* 重言)” seven tenth (27.947). Authoritative speeches refer to those made by sage predecessors, which may overlap with allegorical speeches in the allegedly proportional constitution of the *Zhuangzi*. Although a less artificial form of speech is claimed to be modelled on the idealized “cup-like speeches (*zhiyan* 卮言),” the overall tropological manner has made the *Zhuangzi* the forerunner of allegorical writing in classical Chinese literature.

so, to demystify the lofty moral principles of his times. It was in the spirit of expedient transformation that the renewed speech of *shuo* came to unveil an unusual literary horizon, wherein moral doctrine may be replaced by utilitarian meanings, and facticity by plausibility.

The spirit of expedient transformation, which had characterized the rivalry between the *shuo* and *shi*, was inherent in the development of poetic forms. Despite the optimism held by Confucian poetics about poetry's moral admonition upon government, the use of the poetic speech modelled on the *Classic of Poetry* came to be shadowed by the utilitarian speech of the *shuo* during the Warring States period and Qin dynasty. From Emperor Wu of Han onwards, when the reformed Confucianism was re-established as the ideological foundation of the imperial order, the literary undertaking of social and political criticism was revived in the poetic form of the *cifu* (辭賦), which was acclaimed by Ban Gu 班固 as the “offspring of classical poetry” (*gushi zhiliu* 古詩之流) and “secondary to Odes and Hymns” (*yasong zhiya* 雅頌之亞) (*Wenxuan* 1.21-22). Incorporating the descriptive principle known as “*fu* 賦” of the *Classic of Poetry* and the euphuistic style of the *Verses of Chu* (*chuci* 楚辭), the *cifu* renewed classical poetic tradition with its extravagant form of rhymed-prose, and became the most prominent type of literary composition during the Han dynasty.

The generic expansion of literary composition, along with aesthetic transitions, called for a new system of poetics other than the classical model of “poetry verbalizing intent.” Centering on the idea of *wen* 文 [pattern], an age-old notion that had recently been re-examined by Cao Pi and Lu Ji in their pioneering treatises, Liu Xie's monumental *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* extended the form of literature from speech to writing:

With the occurrence of mind, speech is formed; with the formation of speech, writing manifests. This is true of the natural course.

心生而言立，言立而文明，自然之道也。(1.1)

In comparison with the earlier tradition dominated by speech, with the *shi* and *shuo* as its two distinctive forms in secular use, writing was endowed with sacred significance attuned to the all-embracing principle of *Dao* and to the spiritual supremacy of sage-writers.

As an all-inclusive notion that privileges writing over speech, the *wen* came to expand the significance of literature from “poetry verbalizing intent,” which had been laid as the cornerstone of Confucian poetics, to “textual manifestation” (*wenming* 文明), or literary illumination of the *Dao* via sagely spirituality. A series of three primary doctrines crowning the opening discussion in the *Literary Mind*—“to trace the *Dao*” (*yuandao* 原道), “to consult the sages” (*zhengsheng* 徵聖), and “to model on the classics” (*zongjing* 宗經)—have since become the golden rules of literary writing in the mainstream of classical Chinese literature.

The above three doctrines, it has to be noted, concern the meaning rather than the form of writing. Liu Xie disapproved of defining the *wen* on the basis of formality, by arguing that “the Six Classics are esteemed to be supreme by virtue of their exemplary profundity instead of by means of superficial formality” (44.655).<sup>207</sup> For him, the nature of *wen* cannot be confined to formal qualities by virtue of its everlasting transformation:

Although the forms in which texts are formulated are of common application, the amount to which texts may be transformed is without regular measurement.

夫設文之體有常，變文之數無方。(29.519)

The transformation of *wen* in Liu Xie’s ideal, however, was not the one he witnessed in literary history. With the *Classic of Poetry* as the watershed, Liu Xie divided the history of *wen* into two periods: the preceding period saw the transformation of ancient songs, which were notable for

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<sup>207</sup> The original reads: “六經以典奧為不刊，非以言筆為優劣也。”

their plainness (*zhi* 質) and truthfulness (*ya* 雅); the following period passed through the transformation of various types of writing, which were marked by their artificiality (*chi* 侈) and falseness (*e* 訛) (29.520). Against the backdrop of literary history, the transformation of *wen* seems to have steered away from a truthful representation of the *Dao* toward an excessive exploitation of forms, going against the primary doctrine of “to trace the *Dao*.” In light of the other two primary doctrines of—to consult the sages” and “to model on the classics”—Liu Xie found that contemporary transformation of *wen* departed from the classical tradition established by ancient sages, who set out to “observe the cosmic patterns to master transformation, and examine the human patterns to foster transference” (1.3).<sup>208</sup> Facing the aberrancy of contemporary literature, Liu Xie came to envision an ideal transformation of the *wen*:

Insofar as the text is polished between plainness and literariness, and refined within elegance and popularity, it can be said to sustain transformation.

斟酌乎質文之間，而隱括乎雅俗之際，可與言通變矣。(29.520)

In Liu Xie’s view, the idealized transformation of *wen* was a synthesis of the established classics, revered for their plainness and elegance, and the increasing tendency toward belletristic language and fantastic imagination, as suggested by “literariness” (*wen* 文) and “popularity” (*su* 俗). By introducing aesthetic and popular elements into literary representation, therefore, Liu Xie’s advocacy of transformation of *wen* connoted the distinction of pure literature from canonical studies (*jingxue* 經學).

As suggested by the appeal to “transform texts in the manner of *Sao* (*bianhu sao* 變乎騷),” one of the five concluding tenets in the *Literary Mind*, Qu Yuan’s “Encountering Sorrow”

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<sup>208</sup> The original reads: “觀天文以極變，察人文以成化。”

(*Lisao* 離騷) was acknowledged by Liu Xie as the archetype of the transformation of *wen* (50.727).<sup>209</sup> Marking a transitional stage of literature between the *Classic of Poetry* and the *cifu* in the Han dynasty, “Encountering Sorrow” is said to have succeeded in transforming the *wen* with its “arguments as sublime and venerable as those in the Classics,”<sup>210</sup> and its “wording as magnificent and fantastic as such in its text” (5.47).<sup>211</sup> With its ornate language and fantastic imagery, that is, “Encountering Sorrow” accomplished the same cause of a truthful representation of the *Dao* as the Six Classics did, albeit in a transformed form of the *wen*. In the following comment about the literary merits of “Encountering Sorrow,” Liu Xie touches upon the paradox between the fantastic and the real, as well as that between words and facts, which together inform the essence of transformation in its literary sense:

Intoxicated in fantasies, the text does not miss its truthfulness; indulged in euphuism, the text does not collapse its factuality.

酌奇而不失其真，翫華而不墜其實。(5.48)

Here the fantastic (*qi* 奇) indicates a conceptual break from a conventionally recognizable world established by the classical tradition, say, the world in the *Classic of Poetry*. This conceptual break from literary establishment, suggests Liu Xie, is well attuned to a rhetorical break from classical norms, as indicated by literary euphuism (*hua* 華). While the transformation of rhetorical patterns—an integral part of human patterns in Liu Xie’s discourse—can be justified by the *wen*’s manifestation of the transformation of heavenly patterns, the fantastic performs a

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<sup>209</sup> According to Liu Xie’s epilogue to the *Literary Mind*, an excellent operation of literary mind is comprised of five vital elements: “to root texts in the *Dao* (本乎道), to learn writing from the sages (師乎聖), to build texts after the canon (體乎經), to guard writing against divination (酌乎緯), and to transform texts in the manner of the “*Lisao*” (變乎騷).” These five elements constitute the subjects of the five chapters at the beginning of the *Literary Mind*.

<sup>210</sup> The original reads: “論其典誥則如彼。”

<sup>211</sup> The original reads: “語其夸誕則如此。”

transformation of the artless world as the consequence of Liu Xie's intuitive (i.e., Neo-Daoist) perception of all things as representations of the absolute spiritual freedom of a universal Self.<sup>212</sup>

In Liu Xie's view, the fantastic and literary euphuism in "Encountering Sorrow" come together to signal a historic break in literary history. In modern critical terms, we may say that the transformation of the *wen*—as expected by Liu Xie to be modelled on the *Woes of Departure*—"deconstructs" established referential and rhetorical norms, and simultaneously "reconstructs" new paradigms. Whatever new paradigms, they may further go through subsequent surges of transformation. The vitality of the literary cause, according to Liu Xie, lies indeed in the everlasting transformation that perpetually reconciles establishment with novelty:

With their designations and principles being of regularity, literary genres are necessarily endorsed by consolidated facts; with its assimilation and transformation lacking measurements, literary vitality is inevitably nourished by newly-fashioned melodies.

名理有常，體必資于故實；通變無方，數必酌于新聲。(29.519)

In contrast with Confucius who disparaged the popular melodies from the state of Zheng (*zhengsheng* 鄭聲) for its alleged detriment to the orthodox music (*yayue* 雅樂), Liu Xie embraced newly-fashioned melodies for their nourishment of literary vitality. The transformative nature obtained by the *wen* from *Dao* made Liu Xie believe that "literary references and rhetoric vary with the vicissitude of times" (45.671).<sup>213</sup> The idea of "transformation" thus served as the central theme in his account of the history of the *wen*: in the development of the primary category of "verse and rhymed-prose (*shifu* 詩賦)," "Encountering Sorrow" is said to not only

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<sup>212</sup> For the relationship between the absolute spiritual freedom of a universal Self and the transformation between things, refer to the chapter "Mystery of Mysteries: the Paradox between Form and Meaning in Early Chinese Thought on Names."

<sup>213</sup> The original reads: "時運交移，質文代變。"

culminate the poetic tradition of the *Classic of Poetry* by accomplishing a monumental transformation of classical norms, but also inaugurate “various transformations undertaken by subsequent poets” during the Han dynasty (45.672);<sup>214</sup> in terms of the general history of the *wen*, the entire corpus of human writing “colorfully illuminates various epochs while enduring numerous transformations of rhetorical patterns” (45.675).<sup>215</sup>

Under the common spirit of transformation, whereas the *shi* and the *wen* represent two orthodox views seeing poetry either in the means of speech or writing, the *shuo* and the transformation of the *wen* mark two deconstructive reactions against the orthodoxy.<sup>216</sup> It has to be noted that Liu Xie’s historical sense about the transformation of the *wen* was moderated by a balance between absolute truth and relative changes. On the one hand, the transformation of the *wen* is said to revolve around the axis of *Dao*:

Whenever the pivotal axis of *Dao* is motivated, the surrounding currents of the *wen* will ceaselessly flow. (45.675)

樞中所動，環流無倦。

On the other, the transformation of the *wen* is subject to earthly mutations:

The transformation of texts is infected by worldly sentiments; the rise and fall of texts is tied to temporal sequence. (45.675)

文變染乎世情，興廢系乎時序。

Liu Xie’s vision about the transformation of the *wen* was reaffirmed in the next three centuries both by the renaissance of classical prose (*guwen* 古文) in the orthodox literary tradition, and by

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<sup>214</sup> The original reads: “辭人九變。”

<sup>215</sup> The original reads: “蔚映十代，辭采九變。”

<sup>216</sup> In the terminology of the *Literary Mind*, the “transformation of the *wen*” designates the historical phenomenon of textual mutation and, therefore, is semantically different from the literary genre of “transformation texts,” whose naming is of late coinage and still debatable.

the rise of transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文) in the popular practice of public storytelling. The so-called renaissance of classical prose was a reactionary movement against the literary euphuism characteristic of the pre-Tang parallel prose (*pianwen* 駢文) in particular, as well as against the intrusions of Buddhism and Daoism upon the imperial institutions at large. The movement was originally undertaken by scholar-historians in the early Tang (618-907) in their efforts to restore classical learning and Confucian poetics. It was not until the participation of Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) that a free style of prose writing reminiscent of the classical prose became the banner of the renaissance movement, marking a significant literary break that would extend into the Song dynasty (960-1279).

Devoted to restoring Confucianism in the imperial institutions, Han Yu's advocacy of the classical prose called for a "common speech of the world (*tianxia zhi gongyan* 天下之公言)" that incorporates the Confucian doctrines of benevolence and righteousness and the Daoist principles of *Dao* and *De* (13).<sup>217</sup> Focusing his theory on the *wen*'s approaches to the now eclectic truth of *Dao*, Liu Zongyuan further proposed "two ways of the *wen*" that were either "based on the modes of argumentation and exposition" or "based on the modes of *bi* and *xing*" (579).<sup>218</sup> As a literary movement aimed at transforming the *wen* for a revival of poetic moralization, the renaissance of classical prose in the Tang and Song dynasties came to reinforce the orthodox status of Confucian poetics, which would oversee the literary scenes for the rest of the imperial history of China.

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<sup>217</sup> According to Han Yu, the universal truth held by Daoism, and arguably by Buddhism, was devoid of such practical doctrines as benevolence and righteousness and therefore diverted spiritual concerns from earthly realities.

<sup>218</sup> The original reads: "本乎著述者；" "本乎比興者。" Like the distinction between the *wen* (文) and the *bi* (筆), which is based on whether rhyme is used, Liu Zongyuan's distinction between the philosophical and literary writing, which is based on the rhetorical modes applied in writing, marked another effort to distinguish literary texts from non-literary texts.



Meanwhile, in such civilian spaces as temples in populous cities during the Tang dynasty, religious workers started to use public storytelling as an effective way to preach Buddhist teachings. The transcripts based on which the storytellers told religious tales are now known as the transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文), a debatable modern designation to the entire corpus of the Dunhuang manuscripts uncovered during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From the beginning of the study of the *bianwen*, a great deal of efforts has been invested in the decipherment of “*bian* 變 [transformation],” an indicative character commonly appearing in the titles of a considerable amount of excavated manuscripts. Based on a thorough survey of competent explanations on the issue, which range from philological to religious approaches, Victor H. Mair tends to settle down the designation of *bian* as referring to “the appearance, manifestation, or realization of a deity in a narrative context,” or the transformation of deities (*shenbian* 神變), as characteristic of the Buddhist belief in the variation of divine figures (*T'ang Transformation Texts* 60). By defining fiction as a representation of illusion, a fundamental Buddhist notion associated with the transformation of deities, Mair further suggests that the *bianwen* used in Buddhist preaching marked the origin of Chinese fiction (“Narrative Revolution” 23-26). In his discussion about the *bianwen*, likewise, Liu Dajie 劉大傑 (1904-1977) points out that the fantastic imagination about numerous worlds, heavens and earths in Buddhist literature broadened the horizon of Chinese literature that had traditionally favored the real over the imaginary (397).

The point of view shared by Liu and Mair, however, which focuses on “the fictional in representation,” may mask “the fictional representation” inherent in poetics. The extra-textual motif of the transformation of deities, that is, does not account for the tropological transformation inherent in literary representation. Just like the imaginary world in “Encountering

Sorrow,” the fantastic imagination about numerous worlds, heavens and earths in Buddhist literature is understandable to the Chinese audience not because of the transformation of deities, but because of the transformation of all things into expressions of desired spiritual freedom (i.e., meaning).

In terms of its form, moreover, the *bianwen* marked a transformational synthesis of the classical traditions of speech and writing, in the following three aspects. (1) The juxtaposition of verse and prose, which informs the combination of ballad-singing and plain storytelling during the oral performance, made the *bianwen* the precursor of such storytelling forms as the storytelling transcripts (*huaben* 話本), fiddle ballads (*tanci* 彈詞), drum ballads (*guci* 鼓詞), sacred scrolls (*baojuan* 寶卷), etc. (Zheng 180-181). (2) The stylistic mixture of literary and vernacular language in the *bianwen* showed increasing interactions between elite and low literary societies.<sup>219</sup> (3) The unusual length of narratives in the *bianwen* had an impact on literati writer’s composition of the marvel tales (*chuanqi* 傳奇), which would further influence sizable writings found in traditional Chinese drama on the one hand, and traditional Chinese novels in chapters (*zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說) on the other.

### Transformation as Trope

In comparison with the metaphysical tradition in the West, which according to Derrida has privileged speech over writing,<sup>220</sup> the Chinese literary tradition saw the joint work of speech and writing. On the one hand, the expressive theory about poetic speech, as formulated in the

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<sup>219</sup> While claiming the plain storytelling (*pinghua* 平話) of the Song dynasty as the beginning of Chinese vernacular fiction, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) traced the history of vernacular writing back to the *bianwen* of the Tang Dynasty. Cf. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, 113.

<sup>220</sup> In his monumental 1967 series, *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida traced the structural principle of logocentrism in the history of Western metaphysics, which allegedly privileged speech over writing.

classical model of “poetry verbalizing intent,” stresses the epistemological significance of poetry, which is associated with the intellectual participation of a sagely poet. On the other, the manifestative theory about writing, as prescribed by the Neo-Daoist ideal of “textual patterns manifesting cosmic patterns,” emphasizes the ontological significance of literature, which concerns with the universal truth of *Dao* characterized by its spontaneous form of “transformation.” Despite their distinctive presumptions about the nature of poetry, speech and writing work together to close up the gap between form and meaning, or that between literary imagery (*xiang* 象) and spiritual freedom (*shen* 神). By performing the transformation of literary imagery—to be invoked by the names of things (i.e., linguistic signs)—a poet may attain to relative spiritual freedom as it were. Accordingly, the mythological image of a sagely poet (i.e., Fu Xi) as the archetype of poets serves as the personification of the innate pursuit of absolute spiritual freedom underpinning the human being. With double references either to the transformative variety of literary imagery or to absolute spiritual freedom rooted in unbound excursions among various forms of things, the Chinese conception of “transformation” is the essential expression of the tropological nature of poetry.

In classical Western poetics, on the contrary, the conception of *poiesis* predetermines poetry as artificial creation, which allegedly is neither authorized by the divine nor possibly accomplished by the poet usurping a godly name. As a consequence, the gap between earthly forms and a prior divine truth—be it the *mimesis* found in Nature, craftsmanship, or poetry—cannot be closed.

On the surface, the tropological nature of poetry appears to go contrary to the poetic transparency assumed by both the expressive theory of speech and the manifestative theory of writing. Nevertheless, according to the chapter titled “Appended Discourses the Upper (*xici*

*shang* 繫辭上)” in the *Classic of Changes*, Confucius purportedly admitted that “Writing does not fully reach speech; speech does not fully reach intent” (*Zhouyi* 7.342);<sup>221</sup> that is, the gap between speech/writing and intent is unbridgeable. We may regard this as a Confucian expression of the gap between form and meaning that likewise concerns Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. It was out of his despair about the same gap that Plato proposed to abandon poetry for philosophical reasoning. As the Chinese equivalent of Platonic philosophical reasoning, the symbolic system of Eight Trigrams was commonly undertaken, alternatively with poetry, by traditional scholars in an attempt to approach the metaphysical truth.

In contrast with philosophical reasoning, poetry relies on tropes, which indeed underlie the workings of language, to close the gap between form and meaning. In the tradition of the *shi*, it was based on the tropological devices of *bi* and *xing* that meaning—though varying among different schools of interpretation—was assigned to the natural or factual references of the poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, before poetic moralization could be further imposed. In the experience of the *wen*, as discussed in Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind*, the parallelism between textual and cosmic patterns, as well as the parallelism between analogical references in the text, served as an aesthetic or formalistic device that translates tropological relations pervasive among things within a Neo-Daoist universe. Whatever tropes, however, just as early philosophers in the School of Names argued—in such paradoxes as “Pointing is not the pointed,” and “Pointing does not reach; reaching never comes to an end”—the gap between form and meaning is ever in the process of closing up, but never truly closed, because of the deconstructive logic inherent in language. Whereas the Western conception of *poiesis* bears profound discomfort with the gap between poetic *mimesis* and the divine Ideas and Forms, the Chinese conception of

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<sup>221</sup> The original reads: “書不盡言，言不盡意。”

transformation endorses flexible gap between form and meaning, which is simultaneously constructed and deconstructed by the tropological nature of poetry.

The seminal idea of transformation, as illustrated in “To observe the cosmic patterns to master transformation; to examine the human patterns to foster transference” (*Literary Mind* 1.3), consists of double significances in terms of its references: it both refers to transformation as the ultimate form of the universe, and to transformation as the ultimate meaning to be transferred to human patterns such as knowledge, institutions, and cultural norms. As the medium to close the gap between the cosmic form and human meaning as such, poetry needs to acquire the transformative form of the universe on the one hand, and proceeds to transfer it to the human being on the other.

Thus referring both to the transformative form of the universe and to the spiritual freedom of the human being, the conception of transformation can be found running through the three rhetorical principles of the *Classic of Poetry*. First, under the principle of *fu*, or direct description, the transformation in Nature is acquired by poetic imagery. Second, under the principle of *bi*, or simile/metaphor, the transformation in Nature is transferred to Man via poetic imagery. Last, under the principle of *xing*, or intuitive inspiration, Man achieves transcendence from Nature to spiritual freedom. “In this mode (of *xing*),” as the French sinologist François Jullien comments, “under the effects of emotion, the *here* of the word and the *there* of the meaning are farthest apart: because of the intensity of the motivation, the words produce an endless beyond, which is why this incitement is also allusive” (155).<sup>222</sup> It is through this entire process of transference that transformation in Nature eventually turns into the spiritual freedom of Man.

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<sup>222</sup> Quoted and translated by Zhang Longxi. Cf. Zhang, *Allegoresis*, 31.

The conception of transformation in Chinese poetics further justifies the poetic unification of the real and the fictional, which is always problematic in the light of the Western paradox between *mimesis* and *poiesis*. Whereas *mimesis* and *poiesis* in Western poetics respectively stress the qualities of the real and the fictional, the Chinese idea of transformation comes to blur the distinction. The debate over reliability of poetic representation running through the history of Western literary thought gave way in Chinese experiences to the dispute about orthodoxy of poetic composition. As the Chinese equivalent of the Western notion of fiction, for example, *xiaoshuo* was traditionally belittled because of its unorthodox authorship usurping the composition of the *shuo*, an orthodox form of speech to be practiced in royal courts. As for the quality of the fantastic, which is assumed to be responsible for conventional degradation of the genre, it neither originated from *xiaoshuo* as such, nor traditionally got despised. As we have seen, the fantastic world in Qu Yuan's "Encountering Sorrow" signalled so fundamental a conceptual break from the tradition of the *shi* that the poem was proclaimed by Liu Xie as the archetype of "transformation of texts." Likewise, the historical coincidence during the Tang Dynasty between the rise of elite authorship in composing *xiaoshuo*<sup>223</sup> and the popularity of *bianwen* in low societies, rather than proving the start of fictional literature in Chinese history, suggests the advent of an open social milieu for diverse authorship in literary composition. That is, the unorthodox speech of *xiaoshuo* could now be composed by elite literati, and the orthodox writing of the *wen* by religious storytellers.

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<sup>223</sup> According to Ming scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602), "It was not until the Tang that writers deliberately indulged themselves in the fantastic, relying on the *xiaoshuo* to convey the intricate sense (至唐人乃作意好奇, 假小說以寄筆端)." Cf. Hu, 36. In his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) maintains that "The writers in Tang started to be conscious of composing the *xiaoshuo* (唐人始有意為小說)." Cf. Lu, 75.

While informing the tropological nature of speech and writing, the conception of transformation also sustains a critical gesture of what postmodern criticism calls deconstruction of discourses in power. It predetermines a resistance to the dominance of one established discourse over another. In the deconstructive spirit of transformation, for example, the *shuo*—with its dialogical form—came to undermine the monological form of *shi* in the discourse of speech. In the discourse of writing, accordingly, “transformation of the *wen*” was revealed by Liu Xie to have been countering the formal establishment of the *wen*. In terms of the historical situation stimulating such transformation, the former came out of a pre-Qin Legalist’s political design of utilitarian persuasion aimed at subverting Confucian poetic moralization, and the latter owed much to a literary critic’s self-conscious deconstruction of his own theoretical system while facing abundant flux of literary ideas and practices. Endowed with the power to break from literary establishment, the tropological system of literary representation was about to undergo another succession of transformation, shedding new light on human knowledge about form and meaning.

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