

The Poetics of X: The Xing Controversy in the Chinese Literary Tradition

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ABSTRACT

Xing is one of the most debated and elusive terms in the Chinese critical vocabulary. It is often associated with *The Odes*, which is widely considered the earliest anthology of songs in the Chinese literary tradition. This article discusses the ways xing, whether as a concept, a genre, a literary trope or a mode of literary thought, assimilates with the Chinese literary and cultural tradition, and at the same time unsettles the convention of meaning and signification. A conceptual definition of xing and the specific meanings of xings in *The Odes* may remain unknown. But that does not really matter. It is in its mobility across different signifying and conceptual schemes that xing continues to exist. The more or less 2000-year history of the xing controversy reveals that xing is not only about excavating things to be known, but also about postulating the unknown. Thus xing is constantly an X in terms of signification.

KEY WORDS

Xing, *The Odes*, genre, stimulus, signification, trope, Chinese poetics, Chinese literary history



1. A Pre-History of the Trope: Shi 詩 and Xing 興

Xing is one of the most debated and elusive terms in the Chinese critical vocabulary. It can be more concisely translated as X, whether as a literary trope, a genre or just a concept. It is often associated with Shijing 詩經 (also known as *The Classic of Odes*, *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of Odes*, etc.; hereafter, *The Odes*), a collection generally considered the earliest anthology of songs/odes/poems in the Chinese Literary Tradition. The association between shi and xing is immensely equivocating, owing to the ambiguity of the characters 詩¹ and xing both in themselves and in their connections. The character shi in the title Shijing designates both the collection itself specifically, and poetry in general in later literary practices. *The Odes* to a very large extent lays out and founds the potentialities of poetry in later understandings of Chinese poetry and poetics. Xing is far more difficult to locate in a particular era, genre or text. Among its other meanings, xing is taken as a specific rhetorical trope in *The Odes*, a kind of poetic expression in general in the Chinese literary tradition, an equivalence of motif,² a fundamental mode of poetic thought (Wang, “Bixing” 224), a hermeneutic mode, a means to create new artistic conception and so on.³ It often appears together with its counterparts, fu 賦 and bi 比. The Yuan poet Yang Zai’s 楊載 (1271–1323) appraised the triad as “the proper origin of poetics, the criterion of laws” 詩學之正源, 法度之準則 (727)—expressing a conventional perception in traditional Chinese poetics.⁴ Shi and xing are often held to clarify each other. But in fact placing the two terms side by side multiplies their respective ambiguity, as is shown in the studies on the

elusiveness.⁵

The ambiguity of xing is derived from its meandering across several statuses. The first problem is that it is between a word and a trope, like any other tropes. One of the early and suggestive appearances of xing is in *Confucius's* (Kongzi 孔子) (551–479 BC) *The Analects* (Lun yu 論語). Confucius's mentioning of xing in relation to *The Odes* evinces the borderline between a word and a trope. Contexts that would pin down the meaning of the word are scarce at this early time (the combination of xing with fu and bi, conventional since the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), was half a millennium in the future). Is xing a thing, a concept, a meaning, or rather a trope? Even if we simply look at xing as a trope, the meaning of the word itself is still crucial to the formation of the trope. As the historical record does not permit us to locate any single originator or originating context of xing, a primitive or literal meaning from which its tropological meaning might be derived, or any single point in time after which xing became a trope, xing can by no means be purified as either a word or a trope from the hindsight of the subsequent tradition. In this sense, Confucius teases out the succulence of the borderline in ancient Chinese, which is also the second problem concerning the word xing being used as a verb:

The Master said, “Be stimulated [xing] by *The Odes*, established by ritual, and perfected by music.”⁶ 子曰：「興於《詩》，立於禮，成於樂。」

Steven Jay Van Zoeren construes that in this passage, “as elsewhere in *The Analects*, xing seems to mean ‘to stimulate or be stimulated by.’”⁷ The passage could also be translated as “The Master said, ‘Stimulate *The Odes*, establish (the R/)ritual, and perfect (the M/)music.’”⁸ The stimulating verb xing in this passage enhances the open affinities and interactions among all *The Odes*, the hearer of them and understanding itself. We can stimulate and be stimulated by *The Odes*. Adopting an active or passive voice is open to us. After discussing Confucius' comments on shi in *The Analects*, Van Zoeren further elucidates:

The striking and apposite quotation of a few lines of *The Odes* was intended to stimulate the hearer, thereby initiating the process of moral cultivation that was consolidated by ritual and perfected by music. Confucius must surely be referring here to the practice we have just been discussing, whereby *The Odes* were to help to stimulate the understanding (without themselves embodying moral teachings) (Van Zoeren 37).

The openness of such affinities and interactions lies in Confucius' practice in initiating moral cultivation via xing and shi without presupposing a stable quality of a certain "moral truth" in *The Odes* to be accessed amid xing. Xing thus implies Confucius's practice as an educator: poetry, as Van Zoeren sees it, was meant to "stimulate" but not directly to "embody" moral teaching.

The openness of *The Odes* allows the reader to participate in the process of signification. But this also creates the third problem with regard to the over-powered reader's garbling of the text. That is a big "problem" and a very common "practice" in the period. Apart from the character xing, Van Zoeren also analyzes another passage in the *Analects* to make his point about mutation of meaning: "The Master said, 'As for the three hundred Odes: if one saying can cover them, it would be si wu xie' (思無邪)." Here "si wu xie" possibly means both "think always of not swerving" and "as for your thoughts [your focus]: let there be no swerving." Confucius' formulation here is pertinently analogous to the perverse nexus between xing and its supposed object of signification as well, but by opposition. Xing always swerves, and is itself swerved. In this sense, xing works like (but antithetically to) the normative definition of thinking (si 思), or should I say as perversely as thinking. Van Zoeren's seminal reading reveals the connection between si and xing, thinking and stimulus, in such a way that both of them are involved in defying thinking and meaning as stable, and are interacting with provisional thinking and meaning that are inevitably stabilized at some points.

While saying si wu xie, Confucius is in fact quoting *The Odes*, referring to a line in the ode "Stout" (jiong 駟) (#297).

...	
Stout and strong our stallions	駟駟牡馬
In the paddock meadows;	在垆之野
Look what strong ones!	薄言駟者
Gray and white, ruddy and white,	有駟有騾
White shank, wall-eye,	有驪有魚
Powerful horses for the chariot.	以車祛祛
O without slip	思無邪
May these horses sire!	思馬斯徂

The line designates horses going straight ahead without swerving left and right, or as Arthur Waley (1889–1969) translates, “O without slip.” The character *si* here is probably a particle that need not be translated—an “O.” At least, the textual context here is irrelevant to “thinking.” Confucius’ appropriation of this line in making his point on *The Odes* in general takes up the abstract array of the horses and then transfers it to the realm of thinking, treating the erstwhile exclamation as a noun with the full meaning “thought.” It is an obvious garbling of the text. The *si* itself becomes “thinking” in his citation—“think always of not swerving” and/or “as for your thoughts [your focus]: let there be no swerving.” This is at least the case in the eyes of later commentators. Such transplanting of the line is not at all clandestine, in the sense that traditional commentators know and accept the two meanings in “Stout” and *The Analects* respectively (Zhu Xi, *Shi ji zhuan* 330–331),⁹ recognizing that their meanings are obviously distinct whilst they also try to bridge the two. Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200) gloss of “Stout” is a very revealing example. He mentions both the meaning of the line in “Stout” and Confucius’ citation of it while making his point on *The Odes* in general. Furthermore, he quotes Su Che’s 蘇轍 (1039–1112) accusation of Confucius garbling the text (*duan zhang yun er* 斷章云爾) and ignoring the author’s intent (Su 188). Zhu Dongrun 朱東潤 observes: “In the spring and autumn period, ‘expressing the intent’ simply designates the intent of singing and citing *The Odes*. People at that time did not interrogate the intent of the author at all” 春秋之世，

所謂「言志」者，自指賦詩引詩之志而言，至於作者之志可若，當時所不問也 (87).¹⁰ Zhu distinguishes “the intent of composition” (zuo shi zhi zhi 作詩之志) from “the intent of reading and citation” (yin shi du shi zhi zhi 引詩讀詩之志) in terms of *The Odes*’s expression of “the” intent (shi yan zhi 詩言志). The distinction is particularly insinuating in view of the lack of information about *The Odes*’ authorship, irrespective of the controversy about authorial intention in twentieth century literary theories.

Confucius’ mutation of a particle si (an O) into thinking endows a twist of the question of intent into a question of thinking. Beyond the confinement within the privileged writing subject, it is a question of thinking pertaining to spontaneous incitation across the author, the text, and the reader.¹¹ Van Zoeren puts the nexus between si and xing thus:

Whatever particular nuance Confucius attached to this phrase, it was not in my opinion a claim about the thoughts of the authors of *The Odes* (like the Han claim that all *The Odes* inscribed zhi, or aims, that were paradigmatically normative), or indeed “about” *The Odes* at all. Rather, Confucius used the phrase (si wu xie) as a xing, or “stimulus,” employing it as the vehicle by which a moral truth (on the order of “ritual comes after” in 3.8) could be articulated, but without claiming or implying that *The Odes* themselves embodied this particular quality (38).

Confucius did not merely use the phrase (si wu xie) as a xing. His use of xing itself is also a xing that stimulates further responses. To say that Confucius only “used” the phrase to express his own meaning implies that the phrase had an original meaning of its own, available for use by others, but the division of intention and citation drawn by Zhu Dongrun and others suggests that there is no such thing as a certain stable content to be signified by a particular xing. Xing is merely a name for dynamic processes which stimulate and are stimulated by the multiplication of meanings in *The Odes*, shi.

The fourth problem arises between xing as a verb with or without object (whether in an active or passive voice) in Confucius’ sayings. In

addition to the saying “Be stimulated by *The Odes*/Stimulating *The Odes*,” Confucius’ pragmatic remark in “Yang huo” 陽貨 of the *Analects* is another observation on the hermeneutic multiplication in which shi (*The Odes*) stimulates:

...[T]he *Odes* may serve to stimulate the imagination, to show one’s breeding, to smooth over difficulties in a group and to give expression to complaints. (Trans. D.C. Lau 145)¹²
 詩可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨。

Whether Confucius was talking about xing as an idea in itself or as a literary trope relating to *The Odes* is indefinite.¹³ D.C. Lau’s translation here assigns a primary agent to the verbs—“people” or “the gentleman”—and makes *The Odes* a tool in the hands of this agent. What follows the “*The Odes* may serve to...” structure make the passage more definite about the uses of *The Odes*, whereas the Chinese original could be understood as without them—imagination, breeding, difficulties in a group, expression to complaints—too. The words xing 興, guan 觀, qun 群 and yuan 怨 can all be verbs. Translating the “*The Odes* may serve to...” structure in ways that are more literal and more syntactically identical, it can be: “*The Odes* can stimulate (xing 興) [people or things], [help one] observe (guan 觀), [help one] socialize (qun 群), [be used to] blame (yuan 怨).” It is through the absence of exact objects of reference that the utilization of *The Odes* is not limited to specific purposes.

But if that is still not stimulating enough, there is yet another understanding, one that originates the fifth problem, that takes the words xing 興, guan 觀, qun 群 and yuan 怨 as nouns. Simon Leys’ translation reads:

The Poems can provide you with stimulation (xing 興) and with observation (guan 觀), with a capacity for communion (qun 群), and with a vehicle for grief (yuan 怨) (Confucius, *The Analects* 87).

In this translation, the four words become something to be provided for the “you,” Confucius’s students/listeners, to whom Confucius interrogates: “Little ones, why don’t you study *The Odes*”? (小子何莫學夫詩?) Although Confucius does not use the word “you,” this second understanding does point to the listeners, readers, and users of *The Odes*. While the former understanding looks for different objects of the activities provoked by *The Odes*, the latter bridges *The Odes* and its listeners, readers and users.

Confucius’ stimulative use of the character *xing* exemplarily articulates *xing*’s multifarious affinity with *shi* further in which the agent’s intention is not the benchmark of meaning. Thus, while saying “If you do not learn *The Odes*, you have no way to speak” (bu xue shi, wu yi yan 不學《詩》, 無以言), Confucius deploys at least two possibilities. Since *The Odes* is a way of speaking, there is indeed no way to tell, when an ode is recited, whether it is *The Odes* speaking through people’s mouths within the paradigm of speaking at that time, like the diplomats in *The Zuo Tradition* (Zuozhuan 左傳) who needed *The Odes* to substantiate their arguments, or whether it is the speaking subject who feels free to appropriate *The Odes* while speaking, also like the diplomats in the Zuo Tradition who garble *The Odes* very freely. Such acts of appropriation initiate interventions in which tropes in *The Odes* are defined in such a way that enhances as well as delimits the meanings of *The Odes* at the same time. Enhancement and delimitation themselves constitute not only the meaning, but also the meaninglessness of the formal features and *The Odes* in contexts that demand further contexts and acts of meaning production further. The becoming of *xing* is a responsive process that stimulates constant renegotiations among morality, form and meaning. Two trajectories are prominent in these renegotiations. One is the tropological history of *fu*, *bi* and *xing* as a triadic set of tropes, the other is the expanding presence of *xing*’s reincarnations in history and literary scholars’ and critics’ depositions of meanings. In the light of the two trajectories, controversies about the elusiveness of *xing* substantially illuminate intersections of meanings that extend the meaning of *The Odes* even further, into new situations and applications. It is via such intersections

that *The Odes*'s "classic" status, as the premier among the five ancient Chinese classics (jing 經), is confirmed and perpetuated. The two possible meanings of what Confucius says about xing in effect do not have to exclude each other. Rather, if we look into the later interactions between shi and xing, we can see how closely the parallel possibilities cooperate or collude.

2. A Tropological History: Fu 賦, Bi 比, Xing 興

Xing as a Trope

Regarding the tropological origin of xing, the cited passage in the *Analects* needs to be re-cited.

The Master said, Little ones, Why is it that none of you study the Songs? For the Songs will help you to incite people's emotions, to observe their feelings, to keep company, to express your grievances. They may be used at home in the service of one's father; abroad, in the service of one's prince. Moreover, they will widen your acquaintance with the names of birds, beasts, plants and trees (Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Waley 212).

小子何莫學夫詩？詩可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨，邇之事父，遠之事君，多識於鳥獸草木之名。

Commentators recognize that it is unclear whether Confucius was employing the word xing here simply as verb, meaning "inciting, stimulating or inspiring,"¹⁴ as a noun, meaning "stimulation, inspiration," or even using metaphors, etc.¹⁵; it might be that he was grasping xing as a literary trope. Kong Anguo 孔安國 (ca. 156-ca. 174), one of Confucius' descendants, glosses Confucius' use of the character xing (as a verb, meaning "to stimulate") in the passage with this phrase: "using analogies to connect categories" 引譬連類 in "Yang Huo" 陽貨 (Confucius, in *The Analects*, annotated by He Yan 何晏 I: 81). Kong's annotation sets forth the basic obliqueness of xing in the eyes of literary scholars and critics, particularly when such obliqueness is contrasted with the very straightforward aim of "acquaintance with the names of

birds, beasts, plants and trees.” He apparently does not use xing together with its counterparts fu and bi as in later literary criticisms. Nevertheless, looking through Kong Anguo’s eyes, there seems to be here an early sense of the oblique xing as a literary trope here, contrasted with the straightforward approach (perhaps that is fu in terms of the later fu-bi-xing triad) that simply confers “acquaintance with the names of birds, beasts, plants and trees.” Yet it is argued that Kong Anguo’s annotation, together with Zhu Xi’s elucidation of the line from *The Analects* as “moving and triggering intent and idea” 感發志意 (Zhu, Lunyu jizhu), just reflects a retroactive tropological-linguistic understanding of xing current since the Han dynasty. It is also argued that, in pre-Qin writings, the word xing did not yet have the tropological senses implied in Kong’s and Zhu’s annotations (Lu). Whether this is the case requires further scrutiny. At the very least, xing in *The Analects* and its presence in Kong’s and Zhu’s annotations of *The Analects* indicate an important point of convergence, between a word and a trope, in the tropological history of xing. The convergence is part of the sedimentary history of the word xing. And such a history did influence the meaning of xing as a trope even if one grants that the xing trope is a Han product.

It is in xing’s co-operation with its counterparts that a more definite tropological set stands out, though tropes do not have to be in a set. In “Chungong dashi” 春宮大師 of *The Ritual of Zhou* (Zhou li 周禮), xing is one of the six poetic features. The Master of Music has the responsibility of:

Teaching the six features, namely: feng (air), fu (exposition), bi (comparison), xing (stimulation), ya (elegance), song (hymn).
教六詩：曰風、曰賦、曰比、曰興、曰雅、曰頌。(366)

These “six features” are doubly relational. On the one hand they are almost always defined in relation to *The Odes*, or even considered to have originated from *The Odes*, and on the other hand they are characterized in relation to each other. This double relationship continues to function in later literary theories and practices.¹⁶ Later in

“The Great Preface to the Mao Edition of *The Odes*” (Maoshi da xu 毛詩大序), the very authoritative statement on the nature and function of poetry in traditional China from the Later Han dynasty (25–220) on, these “six features” are still placed in the same order, yet called “principles” (yi 義):

Shi has six principles¹⁷: first, feng; second, fu; third, bi; fourth, xing; fifth, ya; sixth, song.

詩有六義焉：一曰風，二曰賦，三曰比，四曰興，五曰雅，六曰頌。(Shi mao shi zhuan shu I: 12)

The terms “six features” in *The Ritual of Zhou* and “six principles” in “The Great Mao Preface” might mean different things, but they have the same order. The authoritative Tang dynasty (618–907) commentator Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (ca. 574–648), another descendent of Confucius, argues that “features” and “principles” are in fact one, depending on the different textual contexts in *The Ritual of Zhou* and “The Great Mao Preface” respectively.¹⁸ Apart from that, Kong Yingda clarifies:

The six principles’ order is this because the four origins of shi [*The Odes*] commence with air, so that “feng” is in the first place. The applications of air are verbalizations by fu, bi and xing, hence feng is followed by fu, bi and xing, and then ya and song. Ya and song are also composed via fu, bi and xing. Since people can see that fu, bi and xing follow feng, they can also understand that ya and song have the same applications. ... The order of fu, bi and xing is thus because direct exposition is the normal way of saying things. Thus mostly, *The Odes* has fu before bi and xing. Whilst both bi and xing draw on external references, bi is relatively obvious and xing is latent. The obvious should come earlier, so that bi comes before xing.

六義次第如此者，以詩之四始，以風為先，故曰「風」。風之所用，以賦、比、興為之辭，故於風之下即次賦、比、興，然後次以雅、頌。雅、頌亦以賦、比、興為之，既見賦、比、興於風之下，明雅、頌亦同之。...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，雖同是附托外物，比顯而興隱。當先顯而後隱，故此居興先也。(I: 12)¹⁹

Kong Yingda's speculation of the "six principles" precludes his definition of feng, ya, and song as forms or subgenres (*shi zhi cheng xing* 詩之成形), and fu, bi, and xing as usages, applications or techniques (*shi zhi suo yong* 詩之所用). Later scholars also tend to use this three-three categorization, a doubly triadic categorization, classifying feng, ya, and song as one and fu, bi, and xing as another, though sometimes with different explanations.²⁰ Besides, Kong's ordering continues the literary theorist Liu Xie's 劉勰 (ca. 466-ca. 522) obvious-latent demarcation between bi and xing in his systematic treatise of literature *Literary Mind and the Carved Dragon* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍). His continuation is further reverberated by modern scholars and rhetoricians' attempts in translating them as simile and metaphor respectively.²¹ But all these attempts only turn xing into a formal-linguistic trope, leaving aside xing's thematic-functional aspects, for instance, xing as a stimulus of emotions, moods, sensations, and so on.²²

Although the order in which it lays out the "six principles" mixes the three-three categorization, "The Great Mao Preface" already employs one triadic categorization, placing feng, ya and song together and explaining what they are.

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. ... Thus the affairs of a single state, rooted in [the experience of] a single person are called Feng 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。... 以一國之事業繫一人之本謂之風。(Owen, Reading 46, 48-49)

To speak of the affairs of the whole world and to describe customs

(feng) common to all places is called Ya. Ya means “proper” (zheng). These show the source of either flourishing or ruin in the royal government. Government has its greater and lesser aspects; thus we have a “Greater Ya” and a “Lesser Ya” 言天下之事，形四方之風，謂之雅。雅者，正也，言王政之所由廢興也。政有小大，故有小雅焉有大雅焉。

The “Hymns” (Song) give the outward shapes of praising full virtue, and they inform the spirits about the accomplishment of great deeds 頌者，美盛德之形容，以其成功告於神明者也。(48–49)

The triad manifests itself only indirectly, via the absent elucidation of fu, bi and xing in “The Great Mao Preface.” Unlike the other three schools of Odes interpretation (Qi 齊, Lu 魯 and Han 韓²³), “The Great Mao Preface” highlights xing in its commentary on individual odes, though it does not give it a clear definition. For example, after the first two lines of the ode “‘Guan,’ the Ospreys” (Guan ju 關雎) (#1):

“Guan, guan,” cry the ospreys	關關雎鳩
On the island in the river	在河之洲

After the first three lines of “The Cloth-plant Spreads” (Ge tan 葛覃) (#2):

How the cloth-plant spreads	葛之覃兮
Across the midst of the valley!	施于中谷
Thick grows its leaves	維葉萋萋.

After the first four lines of “The Broad Han” (Han guang 漢廣) (#9):

In the south is an upturning tree;	南有喬木
One cannot shelter under it.	不可休息
Beyond the Han a lady walks;	漢有游女
One cannot seek her	不可求思.

“The Great Mao Preface” says that all these are xings. Without indicating fu and bi in specific odes, “The Great Mao Preface’s” emphasis of xing, Kong Yingda speculates, seems to imply that xing really needs more elucidation because of its obscurity.²⁴ Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 (1791–1855) argues that fu and bi are included in xing already. And not indicating fu and bi is consistent with Confucius’ highlighting of xing in *The Analects*. Since xing contains fu and bi, there is no need to mention them one by one.²⁵ Xing does need unpacking, no doubt. But the logic that leads to the unpackings remains a question. Is xing to be unpacked owing to its obscurity, or is it because of its inclusive nature that xing (unlike fu and bi) needs to be unpacked?

Xing in terms of content

The lack of a clear explication of xing in “The Great Mao Preface” casts in an ironic light, while it also affirms these two possibilities. As xing is often mentioned together with fu and bi among scholars and critics, the difficulty of defining xing derives from two disjunctions: one between the concept of xing and applications of it as shown in the controversial examples regarded as xing in different annotations; the other about xing’s relational definition in connection with fu and bi. In his annotations of *The Ritual of Zhou*, the authoritative Han annotator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) gives a politico-formal definition of fu, bi and xing, incorporating their mutually-defining connections and political functions:

In a fu (exposition) the words spread out; they exhibit the goods and evils of present governmental policies and teachings in a straightforward manner. In a bi (comparison) one sees present failings yet does not dare to castigate directly, thus selects an analogical correspondence to speak of it. With a xing (stimulus) one sees a present excellence, but disdains flattery, thus selects something good to encourage it indirectly.

賦之言鋪，直鋪陳今之政教善惡也。比，見今之失，不敢斥言，取比類以言之。興見今之善，嫌於媚諛，取善事以喻勸之。²⁶

Zheng's definition of fu, bi and xing as expressions respondent to the goods and evils of "governmental policies and teachings" (zheng jiao 政教) reveals a surface-depth, or direct-indirect opposition, in which he was followed by Kong Yingda. The "straightforward" (zhi 直) fu and the bi that speaks of "present failings" that one "does not dare to castigate directly" articulate a distinction between direct and indirect expressions. According to Zheng's understanding of xing as based upon disdain of flattery (that is to say, things are not supposed to be expressed in a straightforward manner), xing is so to speak indirect. But on another level, Zheng's use of the characters yu quan 喻勸 deflects such indirectness. Yu as a verb can mean all "to explain, to inform, to report," as well as more twistingly, "to analogize." The character quan is no less twisting. It can mean "to persuade, to advise, to urge" and "to encourage." But in the context of what Zheng provides, there is no opposition between the existing situation and what one aspires to in her expression, as there is in the opposition between failings and castigating failings in comparison (bi). In a xing, the present situation is good (shan 善), so the poet just intends to continue the present situation. Hence, if xing is supposed to be indirect, such indirectness is not based on the difference between the actual situation ("the governmental policies and teachings") and its expression (the ode), but merely on the practice of expressing in a twisted way, an essentially twisting form that expresses untwisting content. It is a kind of ingenuous "persuasion," "advice" or "urging" (all meanings of the character quan) that does not involve oppositional affinity. Via his association of fu, bi and xing with government policies and teachings, Zheng's notion of xing already commences an unwitting traversal of the direct-indirect and the form-content dichotomies. Continuing the disjuncture between xing's conceptual definition and the application of it in textual analysis, the conceptual differences of xing in his explanation of the xings indicated in the "Mao Preface" in comparison with the mentioned characterization in his annotation of *The Ritual of Zhou* amplify nuances in collision of definition and application.²⁷ The traversal and collision also problematize the didactic link among

Confucianism, its supreme classic and the tropes closely associated with this supreme classic work.

Xing in terms of Form

From a purely formal perspective, the Song-dynasty (960–1279) scholar Zhu Xi, “Shi ji zhuan xu” 詩集傳序, specifies xing as “talking about other things in order to draw out what one wants to chant” 先言他物以引起所詠之詞也 (Shi ji zhuan, I: 52); fu as “laying out the issue and speaking it out directly” 敷陳其事而直言之者也 (I: 55); bi as “using that thing to compare with this thing” 以彼物比此物也 (I: 60). In Collected Annotations of “The Songs of the South” (Chu ci ji zhu 楚辭集注), Zhu Xi also explicates that “bi uses things to make comparisons, xing consigns [meaning] to things in order to stimulate words” 比則取物為比，興則托物興詞 (Chu ci ji zhu 2). Zhu Xi’s formal definitions of fu, bi and xing as literary tropes also touch upon the direct-indirect dichotomy together with a problematization of such a dichotomy. The exclusionary implications among the three “tropes” also point to their own insinuating elusiveness. Since fu refers to exposition and bi comparison between two things, xing problematizes both. In contrast to fu and bi, xing on the one hand cannot simply expose directly, and on the other hand cannot compare what is to be chanted with other things. Otherwise, the boundaries of the three concepts would be collapsed. Zhu Xi uses “‘Guan’ Cry the Ospreys” to elucidate xing:

“Guan, guan,” cry the ospreys, on the island in the river.

關關雎鳩，在河之洲

Lovely is this noble lady, fit bride for our lord.

窈窕淑女，君子好逑。

In patches grows the water mallow; to left and right one seeks it.

參差荇菜，左右流之。

Shy was this noble lady; Day and night he sought her.

窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。

Sought her and could not get her; miss her day and night.

求之不得，寤寐思服。

Long long thoughts! Now on his back, now tossing on to his side.

悠哉悠哉！輾轉反側。

In patches grows the water mallow; to left and right one gathers it.

參差荇菜，左右采之。

Shy is this noble lady; please/befriend her through lute and zither!

窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之。

In patches grows the water mallow; to left and right one chooses it.

參差荇菜，左右芼之。

Shy is this noble lady, delight her through bell and drum!

窈窕淑女，鍾鼓樂之。

Zhu Xi identifies the osprey as a kind of bird “loyal to its given companions without being indiscriminate, [the mating pair] always accompany each other without being improperly familiar with each other” 生有定偶而不相亂，偶常並遊而不相狎 (Shi ji zhuan I: 60). He construes this as meaning that this ode is about the noble King Wen of Zhou 周文王 (d. 1027 B.C.) having a good queen Si 妣. “The ode talks about them by way of saying that the ospreys crying ‘guan, guan’ harmoniously respond to each other on the island in the river. Is not this good and beautiful lady a gentleman’s good companion!” 言彼關關然之雉鳩，則相與和鳴於河洲之上矣。此窈窕之淑女，則豈非君之善匹乎！(I: 52)

Xing as Comparison

Let us presume that Zhu Xi’s claims are pertinent. But if there is an identifiable analogous relationship in the ode, are not his claims in effect arguing against grasping the ospreys as the xing that brings out the lady-gentleman relationship? If Zhu Xi’s identification of the ospreys is right, and such identification can convincingly correspond to the lady-gentleman relationship, it becomes a bi, a comparison based on an intrinsic or analogous relationship between the two, not xing. This is also the case in other odes Zhu Xi characterizes as written with xing. In “Buxom peach-tree” (Tao yao 桃夭) (#6), is there any relationship between the “buxom peach-tree” in the lines “Buxom is the peach-tree;/ How its flowers blaze!” 桃之夭夭，灼灼其華 and the

connotation of marriage in the line “Our lady going home” 之子于歸 or at least the literal meaning of going home [i.e. settling down in marriage]? If, as Zhu Xi says in his annotations, “when the peach-tree has flowers, it is the right time for marriage” 桃之有花，正婚姻之時也 (Shi ji zhuan I: 61), would a peach-tree having flowers become a comparison which uses one thing to talk about another in an analogical way? According to Zhu Xi’s own characterization, xing only talks about “other things” (ta wu) in order to stimulate what one wants to chant or bring out (suo yong). It does not expose the issue directly, as it needs to talk about some other things first in order to bring out the issue. In view of the collapse of xing into bi, of indirect reference into straightforward comparison, the modern writer and scholar Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898–1948) observes that after Zhu Xi’s Shi ji zhuan 詩集傳 the meanings of bi and xing got jumbled even more seriously (235). Nonetheless, early in the Han dynasty and perhaps even earlier, Zheng Zhong’s 鄭眾 (d. 114) confusing comparison of bi and xing in fact uncovers the very problematics of comparison already. If “bi means making a rule (fang) through analogy” 比者，比方於物也 and “xing means consigning affairs to things” 興者，托事於物，²⁸ then it is logical to conclude that bi can be just equivalent to xing, since “consigning affairs to things” is a way to analogize through things as well. Zheng Zhong’s comparison does not articulate a difference between the two tropes, but only collapses the two tropes’ supposedly different utilizations of other things into a kind of interchangeable practice of analogy.

Xing as Irrelevance

Moreover, Zheng Zhong’s confusing comparison seems to imply that the things in xing cannot be analogical to or have any essential link with the thing or affair one wants to refer to. Otherwise, the xing would become bi. As Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162) circumscribes it in “Du Shi yi fa” 讀詩易法:

All examples of stimulus (xing) involve seeing something here and obtaining something there: there is no relationship of categorical

correspondence between the two situations, nor is there a recognized, instituted meaning to be sought.

凡興者所見在此，所得在彼，不可以事類推，不可以禮義求也。(Liu jing ao lun 26)

With fu and bi, there is a category (lei) or a ritual precedent (li) that provides a basis for presenting a comparison as common sense, as already accepted language. But xing is creative or untraditional: it announces a parallel between two things for which there is as yet no existing linguistic relationship. Although as time goes on all xings become traditional and canonical, and citing them is a case of bi. The Qing scholar Yao Jiheng 姚際恆 (1647-ca. 1715) also thinks that “stimulus (xing) only involves borrowing an object to arouse; it need not have any connection to the proper meaning itself” 興者，但借物以起興，不必與正意相關也 (1). Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), actually following Zheng Qiao’s²⁹ and Xu Wei’s 徐渭 (1521–1593) aural understandings of xing, even argues that xing has nothing to do with meaning at all. It is only about the practice of rhyming and ornamenting in folk songs. Gu thinks that the authors use xing because there are some occasions that are “too monotonous” and “too straightforward” (672–677).

Xing as Stimulus

In response to Gu Jiegang’s proposal about xing’s irrelevancy, Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1902–1982) asked, if xing is just a trope as for placing together irrelevant clauses, phrases or sentences that rhyme, how then can one tell the difference between bad poetry comprising mere irrelevancies (assuming that *The Odes* is not just an anachronistic variety of [post-]modernist poetry) and poetry written with the appraised trope xing (unless it is an appraised trope that serves to indicate flaws)?³⁰ Apart from Xu’s objection, the fact that xing itself is comprised of meaningful sentences is undeniable. In what sense are we justified to say that the rhyming and ornamental aspects of an ode must exist at the expense of the semantic connection in meaning between the xing and the other parts of the ode? In “Repetition, Rhyme, and

Exchange in the Book of Odes,” Haun Saussy analyzes how “the material, phonetic level of the text communicates with the thematic level and directs the judgments and attitudes” through “rhyme, a physical property of most of the poems in the Shi Jing corpus” (542) already. This is the case especially in view of, firstly, the possible coexistences and interactions between form and content in poetry, or should I say text in general; and secondly and more importantly, the stimulative nexus of meaning, or the “exchanges” and “communications” pointed out by Saussy, between rhetoric and hermeneutics, among the author, the text, and the reader.

Xing is a stimulus that functions among the author, the reader and the text, “stimulating” among different frames of reference. It shows us that the meaning of a text does not merely lie in the actualization of authorial intention in the text, let alone the ineluctable fluctuations and prevarications in the process of actualization itself and the reader’s participation. Xu Fuguan resorts to the sixth-century literary treatise *The Literary Mind* and the *Carved Dragon* for a definition of bi and xing in relation to “attachment to reason” 附理 and “triggering of sentiment” 起情³¹ respectively, and refers to the interactions between reason and sentiment to illustrate the conflict between conception and creation. Xu thinks that bi and xing might be conceptually distinguished, but they get mixed up in practice. To him, “fu, bi and xing are techniques for creating poetry. However, it is not at all the case that these three techniques were first nailed down and then used by poets to write the odes in ‘The Classic of Odes.’ It is after the odes in *The Classic of Odes* are anthologized that people studying ‘The Classic of Odes’ deduced from it the three types of poetry ‘feng,’ ‘ya’ and ‘song’ and the three techniques ‘fu,’ ‘bi’ and ‘xing’” (original emphasis) (95). As Georges Margouliès puts forth, fu, bi, and xing “indicate rather the method of interpretation of these poems by the literatures which studied them” (24). According to Xu, although fu, bi and xing are notions derived from *The Odes*, the poets did not have these concepts in their minds. Therefore these concepts could not limit their minds when they created the odes. This is the gap between conception and creation, corresponding to the interactions between sentiment and

reason in the poets' minds. Xu also thinks that the "techniques" and "contingency" of expression make "the basic form of fu, bi and xing very often appear through different forms that are interchangeable. Furthermore, owing to the different attitudes and skills of the readers of poetry, it is possible to have different understandings of the same ode" (106). Xu amplifies on the ambiguity of poetry and the unstable forms of fu, bi and xing as literary forms by pointing out the problematics among conception, creation and interpretation. Xing is the outcome of such instability that keeps refreshing conceptions, creations and interpretations of *The Odes*. The more *The Odes*'s "classic" status obliges people to read *The Odes*, the more conceptions, creations and interpretations of *The Odes* are instituted, even though some of them were instituted with the aim of consolidating a consensus of interpretation under the label "classic."

Xing as Trigger

Contrasted to fu and bi, xing reveals its function of problematizing and its own problematic status. Although xing problematizes the direct-indirect dichotomy seen in fu and bi, xing itself is also a problematic literary trope or just a problematic concept. If, according to Zhu Xi, xing talks about something first before it triggers what it wants to bring out, this "something" at the beginning has to be unrelated to the exposition of what the ode wants to bring out. But the problem is that one must be certain about what the ode wants to bring out before one can judge whether that "something" at the very beginning is really non-expository. If this is the case, xing can by no means function as that which stimulates at the very beginning, but that which is to be explained after the reader understands the rest of the ode. By the same token, the presences of xing in the middle (medial xing 中興) and the end (final xing 尾興) of some odes³² have to encounter the same problem—if the xing is regarded as that which stimulates in the middle or the end of an ode, we are in fact using our comprehension of the rest of the ode to judge whether it is a xing or not, not using the xing to stimulate the rest of the ode.

If xing is to draw on the lack of relationship between xing and

what comes after it, then once the reader can explain any analogical affinity between the two, they become bi, not xing. Yao Jiheng further discerns between xing and bi by dissecting xing into two: one is “xing-bi” 興而比; another is merely “xing.” He utilizes “‘Guan’ the Ospreys” to explicate “xing-bi”: “‘Guan, guan,’ cry the ospreys” seems to be a bi about something, but “on the island in the river” seems like a xing that simply forms an imagery without pointing to anything else. This is what he means by “xing-bi.” In xing, the stimulus need not have any connection with the “proper meaning” at all. His example is the thunder in the ode “‘Yin’ sounds the thunder” (Yin qi lei 殷其雷) (#19). The line “‘Yin’ sounds the thunder” only performs the function of drawing out the forthcoming ‘proper meaning’ in the ode. It itself does not analogize the “proper meaning.” Whilst Yao regards his further classification as clarifying, he in fact further demonstrates the overlapping of xing and bi by, as he himself puts it, “making bi not entirely bi, xing not entirely xing, xing maybe like bi, bi may be like xing” 使比非全比, 興非全興, 興或類比, 比或類興者. This is exactly the opposite of his clarifying aim of clarifying by “increasing one more category so that there can be no confusion between xing and bi” 增其一途焉, 則興、比可以無滯亂矣 (1). Rather he shows how confused the two tropes are in such a way that xing is always under the threat of becoming comparison, as well as stimulating further comparison.

Xing as Exposition

Apart from this, xing is also always becoming fu, that is to say, becoming direct exposition. One other explication of xing is realist.³³ Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112) advances that xing is merely concerned with what the author saw. Su quotes the ode “‘Yin’ sounds the thunder”: “‘Yin’ sounds the thunder/On the southern side of the Southern Mountain” 殷其雷/在南山之陽 and explains that

there is nothing to be taken from the thunder here; it must be what was seen at the time and what stimulated the meaning, so that later people have no way to understand the relation between the thunder and the meaning. This is why it is called a stimulus.... In looking at

The Classic of Odes, everyone must first understand that a stimulus cannot be the same as a comparison.

...此非有所取乎雷也，蓋必其當時之所見而有動乎其意，故後之人不可以求得其說，此其所以為興也。...天下之人欲觀於詩，其必先知夫興之不可以與比同... (“Shi lun” 1612)

According to Su, the connection between the thunder and the meaning to be expressed in the latter lines of the ode does not lie in any intrinsic metaphorical link between the two, but in the real situation. The next three lines, voicing a desire for the gentleman's return—“Why is it, why must you always be away/Dare not to get leave?/My true gentleman/Come back to me, come back!” 何斯違斯？莫敢或違。振振君子，歸哉歸哉！——have no relationship with the thunder at all in terms of meaning. The thunder is just what the author saw, together with other things the author appropriates as images for the ode in his/her expression. Though the thunder has no analogous relationship to the ode's meaning, the author's depiction of the situation that she draws upon still includes it as the beginning of her realist recovery of the picture. But if this is the case, such an honest record of what happened is in fact a direct exposition, a fu simply laying out what was there and what the author wanted to say. The thunder imagery is just real and the coming-back theme is just the meaning to be expressed, having nothing disingenuous. Both of them are just real, just there, in this account; their relation is coincidental. In what sense then, can one say that the thunder can stimulate the coming-back theme?

Xing as Comparison

In addition to Su's realist explanation of xing by way of “Yin' sounds the thunder,” which turns out to sound like an explanation of “exposition,” Zhu Xi's characterization of the ode “Cloth-plant” as written by means of “expositions” also sounds like an explanation of “comparison.”

How the cloth-plant spreads, across the midst of the valley! Thick grows its leaves.

葛之覃兮，施于中谷，維葉萋萋。

The oriole in its flight, perches on that copse, "jie jie" it cries.

黃鳥于飛，集于灌木，其鳴喈喈。

How the cloth-plant spreads, across the middle of the valley! Close
grow its leaves.

葛之覃兮，施于中谷，維葉莫莫。

I cut them and steam them, make cloth fine and coarse, for clothes
that will not irk me.

是刈是濩，為絺為綌，服之無斃。

I will go to my nurse, I will tell her I am going home.

言告師氏，言告言歸。

Here I sud my shift, here I wash my dress.

薄汗我私，薄澣我衣。

Which things are clean and which not? I am going to comfort my
parents.

害澣害否？歸寧父母。

In the first stanza, there are only depictions of the cloth-plant and the oriole. Without proposing any allegorical meaning to these depictions, Zhu uses it to explicate that it is exactly "what later people call 'exposition'" 後凡言賦者放此. To Zhu, this stanza is merely about "the queen and maids of honor of different ranks describing their making of fine linen and coarse kudzu cloth, recollecting the flourishing of kudzu leaves and the cry of oriole during early summer" 蓋后妃既成絺綌而賦其事，追敘初夏之時，葛葉方盛，而有黃鳥鳴於其上也 (Shi ji zhuan, I: 5). To Zhu, this is the perfect example of "exposition" through which one "lays out the issue and speaks it out directly." Before Zhu further associates the first two stanzas with any allegorical meaning, they seem to be just what happened, as Su's realist explanation suggests. Nevertheless, relating all the three stanzas together, Zhu turns out to agree with "The Lesser Preface's" (Mao shi xiao xu 毛詩小序) moralizing conclusion concerning "the principle(s) of Queen and concubines" 后妃之本, as well as "filial piety" (xiao 孝),

“diligence” (qin 勤), and “frugality” (jian 儉). What makes Zhu’s reading allegorical is that nowhere in the ode mentions queen and concubines. Notwithstanding that Zhu sets out to be direct, he ends up with a moralizing conclusion that praises something beyond the literal meaning. The depictions of kudzu, yellow birds, cloth-making and clothes-making become objects of comparison relating to virtues and his illustration of “exposition” turns out to be a surreptitious illustration of “comparison.” It is in this sense that “exposition” itself is grounded on a comparative logic leaving exposition no way to expose what things really are. Zhu is so to speak making a comparative (bi) reading. While Su’s observation reveals the “becoming-fu” tendency of xing, Zhu’s reveals its “becoming-bi” on the other hand.

Xing as Pseudo-Realism

To reconfigure xing in the face of becoming fu (exposition) and bi (comparison), xing can also be taken on in terms of a pseudo-realist speculation. If we simplistically comprehend xing as a realist collection of irrelevant details, we would have to resolve the problem concerning selection of details. Something must be left out in every picture. Then why does the author include certain irrelevant images that are not symbolic, while not including other things that are equally irrelevant (if degrees of irrelevancy can be established)? Apart from this, Shih-Hsiang Chen and C. H. Wang also argue that xing lines “had stemmed from a common source of old generic convention, and not ‘what the poet saw’ at the moment of individual inspiration” (13). But even if all the xings in *The Odes* were really “stock phrases,” the question remains in every case the connection between these “stock phrases” (which are supposed to be xings) and the rest of the ode, especially when these xings are, according to Shih-Hsiang Chen, equated with motifs. Why are certain “stock phrases” that are also “motifs,” used as the xings in relation to the rest of a certain ode, but not some other “stock phrases”? It remains a question concerning thematic-technical affinities between the xing and the rest of the ode. To resolve the problem of realism as for xing, if we do not simply reject Su’s realist proposal, one could postulate that the thunder might have

appeared in that situation and grasped the poet's attention in that situation. Hence, when the poet wants to recall that situation, she intuitively picks out the thunder as the starting point of her recollection. The thunder in "'Yin' sounds the thunder" is just a correlative for the poet to bring out the signified, that is to say, the concept of the situation. The thunder is included in the above ode not because it is just what the author saw at a particular space and time, but because the thunder appeared together with the situation the poet wants to represent. Being a part of the picture, the thunder is, like any "honest" representation of what happened, a part that recalls the whole issue or situation in a non-analogous and non-expository way. In a sense, it becomes a synecdoche in the poet's mind. It is a part of the organic whole of the picture, though only the poet herself knows the organicity and thus there is no way for us to verify. This kind of realism is in effect pseudo-realist, but actually solipsistic in the sense that no one can have access to any reality via the text, except the author herself. Even if the author were still alive to explain the "real" situation, it would still be an arbitrary synecdoche between the imagery and the meaning in the poet's mind. The poet just puts them together in his arbitrary way. His explanation cannot explain anything more than that. The "real" here is something like a private language behind the text. Any analogous or symbolic explanation between the two, or any "reason" telling why a certain thing among many others in that situation is chosen, would turn the imagery into a *bi*.

Xing as Something Else

Being non-analogous and non-expository, or being analogous to and expository of the arbitrary nature of signification, *xing* occupies a negative black hole. It is an empty trope that, on the one hand, questions realism and direct expression in fashioning and construing narratives, and on the other hand mutates existent interpretations that are based upon fabricating so-called "essential" or "intrinsic" connections in comparison. *Xing* is a trope that is always under the threat of becoming direct exposition and indirect comparison, as well as embodying the potentialities of mutating direct exposition and indirect comparison.

Once a provisional formulation of meaning appears, whether denotative or connotative, xing traverses such formulation in order to stimulate an-other interpretation. This is to say, xing is a trope of “meaning otherwise” in the abyss of meaning if it is at all a literary trope. Xing is not a literary trope that functions in any single mode, as we can see in the different attempts in pinpointing what it is. It dwells upon meaning not as anything specific to be looked at, but as something constantly to be looked for. Through the very process of seeking, xing furthers the mutability of *The Odes*’s (as well as of other texts’) meanings and establishes new rules of reading against prevailing readings of the text. Since xing is that which stimulates, it should be pushed further as a multifarious practice of stimulation rather than as a specific kind of literary technique. Such multifarious stimulation must also be self-stimulating if it is supposed to be thorough. Hence xing has to face up to its own ontological transformations amid both stimulating reading otherwise and in turn being stimulated otherwise in different readings.

Xing as Co-Operation

This demonstrates the very self-referential nature of xing, which constantly mutates in response to meta-descriptions of it. While xing functions as a traversal literary trope, one that debunks and dismisses prevalent meaning and points to somewhere else, it inevitably means something at some points, and is mutating what it means at the same time. This responsive nexus, it may be suggested, is also illuminated in the ancient pictorial form of the character xing itself in shell and bone inscriptions (jia gu wen 甲骨文) and bronze inscriptions (jin wen 金文) (fig.), meaning gong ju 共舉 (holding up together, uplifting), qi li er zuo 齊力而作 (doing things together).³⁴ Xing merely stands for potentialities of renegotiation and sparking-off in which all the participants are doomed to being defied, and it is also via being defied that further participations are possible. Xing’s meaning and mutating always create further stimulations between the reader and the text. It is, one might say, directed toward the future, even though Chinese does not have verb conjugation in relation to time. And such

future-orientation has its standing in ethnology too, according to Shizuka Shirakawa, in which xing's rhetorical function about stimulation of thinking contains matters and behaviors concerning congratulation and divination beforehand.

3. A Trope in History: Reincarnations of Xing

Xing & the Superficial Classic

The depositions of meaning in and through *The Odes* and xing are engaged in both rhetoric and hermeneutics as two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, xing is rhetorical without presuming a definite agent and source. "Of course, lines from *The Odes* had been used as the starting points (the pretexts) for doctrinal exposition in the xing practice as well, but insofar as that way of using *The Odes* neither made nor presupposed any claims about the original, historical 'meaning' of the texts, it was not necessary to speculate on the characters of their authors" (Van Zoeren 76). On the other hand, xing is hermeneutical through constantly renegotiating with or even being decontextualized by the reader, as exemplified in Confucius' stimulative use of stimulus mentioned before, not to mention the diplomats' distortions of *The Odes's* meanings in justifying their own claims in the Zuo Tradition, as well as later commentators' use of *The Odes* for didactic purposes.

With regard to traditional commentators' didactic readings, C. H. Wang remarks that with "such an allegorical tradition so dominating Shijing (*The Odes*) studies that aesthetics seldom has been considered, to read the poems anew would be difficult if we confined ourselves to the traditional 'fu-bi-xing' approach" (6). Nonetheless, such an approach itself indeed has led to new understandings in the history of *The Odes* studies. The fu-bi-xing approach does have a relationship with Confucian didacticism, as shown in the appropriation of it in classic Confucian texts, annotations and commentaries. But the embodied stimulating potentialities of subverting, or at least going beyond the Confucian didacticism in this approach is not to be ignored as well. This is especially the case with xing and its constant

reappearances in the eyes of later scholars and critics beyond *The Odes* itself. Indeed, stimulation is multifarious. Confucian didacticism is just one among others, no matter how dominating it may have been in the Chinese Tradition. Moreover, as Waley puts it in “The allegorical Interpretation,” the “preservation of the Songs [*The Odes*] is due to the fact that they were used for a variety of social and educational purposes which had nothing to do with their original intention” (335). This is true with regard to the discordances not only between the appropriations and the “original intention” of *The Odes*, but also the sundry “original intentions” of the appropriations in sundry spaces and times. Appropriations themselves are open to further appropriations as well. Apart from breaking the spell of didacticism, entering such domination-preservation dynamics can also reveal the side-effects of anti-didacticism. In the case of *The Odes*, the ideology of anti-didacticism is itself a didactic story to be told.

One of the bases of the anti-didactic reactions is a “common sense” speculation about whether ancient folksong authors (especially the authors of the odes in the Guo feng 國風 [Airs of the states]) section could think of sophisticated ideas, whether didactic or not, which are elaborated in the later allegorical readings in far-fetched ways. Because of such speculation, Marcel Granet (1884–1940), among many other Chinese scholars and critics, is inclined to exclude “all interpretations which are symbolic or which imply subtlety in the poems” (Festivals 27).³⁵ There is no doubt that one can discover a lot of far-fetched allegorical and didactic readings in the history of *The Odes* studies. But this does not mean that it is necessary to presuppose that *The Odes* is just a collection of superficial (or at least more simple-minded) works in order to shake off didacticism, no matter however much we dislike the word “Classic.” Granet’s anti-allegorical reading is particularly suggestive. If we relate Granet’s preference of non-allegory to May Fourth intellectuals like Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891–1962), Gu Jiegang’s 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), and Zhu Ziqing’s parallel rejections of traditional allegorical readings, we can indeed see a modern coincidence in questing for “superficial” texts. Hu Shi, together with his anti-allegorical tendency in his evidential studies of

the Dream of the Red Chamber and Journey to the West, also positions *The Odes* on the side of simple folksongs as opposed to the Han Confucians didactic reading.³⁶ Gu Jiegang speculates that xing has nothing to do with meaning at all. It is only to do with the practice of rhyming and ornamenting in folk songs. Zhu Ziqing believes that ancient people are simple-minded so that their use of xing is to do with sensibility (e.g. visual and aural arousal) rather than sense (coherent meaning) (“Guanyu xing shi de yijian”). As Edward L. Shaughnessy puts it, Granet’s “disavowal of any symbolism or subtlety within the poems was surely an over-reaction to the traditional allegorical interpretation” (222). Shaughnessy’s critique applies to the May Fourth reaction too. The assumption that only literati can think of profound and complicated ideas and peasants can do only simple self-expressions is utterly a myth. Even if one takes this myth for granted, one still cannot ignore the collective depositing of meanings in the circulation of folksongs, as well as the circulation of *The Odes* in general in the aristocratic world (if one does not simply speculate that *The Odes* was in fact written by literati and aristocrats³⁷). Once a person hears a song and then changes a word of it (perhaps because she does not remember the exact lyrics, or because she wants to modify it) when she sings it herself, the song has already taken on new meanings in relation to different contexts, let alone the new meanings created every time the odes are recited and sung in a different occasion. It is not surprising at all that *The Odes* the odes can be very complicated and sophisticated after a few hundred years of circulation and recompositions. From this perspective, some of the odes can and should be construed in a more dynamic way. For example, the meanings of the 3-stanza ode “She was to wait” (Sang zhong 桑中) (#48) and its first stanza alone could be responsive:

I am going to gather the dodder
 In the village of Mei.
 Of whom do I think?
 Of lovely Meng Jiang.
 She was to wait for me at Sang-zhong,

爰采唐矣
 沫之鄉矣
 云誰之思
 美孟姜矣
 期我乎桑中

But she went all the way to Shang-gong	要我乎上宮
And came with me to the banks of the Qi.	送我乎淇之上矣

I am going to gather goosefoot	爰采麥矣
To the north of Mei.	沫之北矣
Of whom do I think?	云誰之思
Of lovely Meng Yi.	美孟弋矣
She was to wait for me at Sang-zhong,	期我乎桑中
But she went all the way to Shang-gong	要我乎上宮
And came with me to the banks of the Qi.	送我乎淇之上矣

I am going to gather charlock	爰采葑矣
To the east of Mei.	沫之東矣
Of whom do I think?	云誰之思
Of lovely Meng Yong.	美孟庸矣
She was to wait for me at Sang-zhong,	期我乎桑中
But she went all the way to Shang-gong,	要我乎上宮
And came with me to the banks of the Qi.	送我乎淇之上矣

The first stanza is simply about a man who loves a woman, and that woman loves him too. Apparently a perfect match! But the next two stanzas turn the ode into an irony. This man courts different women and the women are all very welcoming. That makes “The Mao Preface” comprehend the ode as “an irony pertaining to elopement” (ci ben 刺奔) in the state Wei 衛 whose folkways are said to be wanton and degenerating. The gap between the first stanza’s perfect match and the 3-stanza irony lies in the repetition and the change of three words in each stanza. One speculative explanation of such a gap is in terms of the circulation of the ode. The first stanza itself might be an ode about a perfect match. But when later people repeat it, wittingly or unwittingly, it means something different. Repetition and word change extend the meaning of the one-stanza ode, turning it (regarding the match of a lady and a gentlemen) into the first stanza of a 3-stanza irony.

It is in this sense that xing is neither just a rhetorical trope utilized by the author, nor just a kind of hermeneutic for the reader to impose

meaning upon classic texts while claiming authority (as in Confucian didacticism). Rhetoric and hermeneutics always work in tandem. Xing provokes the interactive and self-referential negotiations of such functioning in different domains.

While *The Odes* is regarded as (one of) the most important classic(s) or even the origin of the Chinese literary and even cultural tradition, xing is a traversal “trope” that destabilizes the establishment of *The Odes* as the origin and basis of authority in the Chinese tradition.³⁸ In his study on writing and authority in early China, Mark Edward Lewis perceives that

[a]dministrative documents, projection of language across time and space, the invention of new models of authority in the voice generated in texts, the formation of new groups who claim authority through mastery of languages and lore preserved in their documents, the reading of ever new meanings into writings that were declared sacred—were fundamental to the transformation of authority in the Warring States period. However, the culminating role of writing in the period, and the key to its importance in imperial China, was the creation of parallel realities within texts that claimed to depict the entire world. (3–4)

In addition to Lewis’ concentration on the Warring States period, “the transformation of authority” and “the creation of parallel realities” in texts point to ongoing processes that stimulate prevailing meanings of *The Odes* as well. Xing is one of the points of intervention in these transformative processes, be they rewriting of literary history, annotating and commenting on classics, or advocating literary or even political movements by re-channeling literary, historical, and ritual texts. In reaction to the employment of xing as if its definition can be taken for granted, another train of thought keeps mourning its loss in later Chinese literary theories and criticisms.

Xing and the Loss of Profundity

The mourning of the loss of xing in later Chinese literature and

literary criticism is also the mourning of the loss of stimulation in meaning, or the dissatisfaction of prevalent meanings. Xing has been mourned in a variety of ways in the light of different conditions and agendas. This is Liu Xie's critique of superficiality in the literature of the Han dynasty:

King Xiang of Chu trusted slanderers, yet Qu Yuan was fiercely loyal [even though banished by the king]. Qu Yuan constructed his *Li Sao* along the lines of the *Book of Songs*; and in his indirect criticism (*feng*), he combines both *bi* and *xing*. When the Han was in the heights of its glory, the rhetors were servile; the works criticized in superficial ways, and as a result the principle of *xing* was lost. Then poetic expositions (*fu*) and odes (*song*) had primacy, and the form of *bi* constructed profuse and disorderly cloud-shapes, turning their back on the former statutes. (Owen, *Readings* 259, with my alterations)

楚襄信讒，而三閭忠烈，依詩製騷，諷兼「比」「興」。炎漢雖盛，而辭人夸毗，詩刺道表，故興義銷亡。於是賦頌先鳴，比體雲構，分紜雜選，信/倍³⁹舊章矣。(Owen, *Readings* 259)

Apart from his mourning of actual reference in literature—in Liu's discursive context, the King Xiang's trusting of slanderers and Qu Yuan's 屈原 (ca. 339-ca. 278 BC) fierce loyalty—Liu is also mourning the stimulation that directs meaning beyond the "superficial" (*biao* 表). Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂 (661–702) also mourns the annihilation of *xing*, together with the extermination of the potentialities of meaning something not-there:

The Way of literature has been falling for five hundred years already! The vigor of style in Han and Wei literatures was not continued to Jin and Song, yet some of the literary works were still remarkable. I read the poems of Qi and Liang in my leisure time. They just compete in being ornate and complex, do not have stimulation and deposition in meaning at all, and intone and lament all the time. When I think of our forefathers' fear of being winding

and crestfallen, as well as of the extermination of literary pursuits, I really take it to heart.

文章道弊五百年矣。漢魏風骨，晉宋莫傳，然而文獻有可徵者。僕嘗暇時觀齊梁間詩，彩麗競繁，而興寄都絕，每以永嘆。思古人常恐逶迤頹靡、風雅不作，以耿耿也。(Chen Zianguang 163)

In addition to *xing*, *ji* 寄 also perished, another means of transmitting, entrusting and depositing meaning beyond the “superficial” and aspiring toward certain “real” conditions. Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) also follows such realist aspiration, yet with an additional questioning of the reversed logic of *xing*. He writes:

Ah! At the very beginning, did the three hundred poems (*The Classic of Odes*) give up wind, snow, flower and grass? It just depends on how you use them. For example, “The northern wind is so cool” uses wind to satirize might and cruelty; “rain and snow are falling thick and fast” utilizes snow to pity military service... All of these take a stimulus from here, yet meaning points over there. Is the reverse of this possible? Lines like “The remaining evening glow scatters into damask, the clear river is quiet like white silk,” “The returning flower first bequeaths its lot to dew, the departing leaf suddenly says farewell to wind” are indeed beautiful, but I do not see what they are satirizing about. This is what I call nothing but “ridiculing wind and moon, trifling with flower and grass.”

噫！風雪花草之初，三百篇豈捨之乎？顧所用何如耳。設如「北風其涼」，假風以刺威虐也；雨雪霏霏，因雪以愍征役也。...皆興發於此而義歸於彼，反是者可乎哉？然則「餘霞散成綺，澄江靜如練」，「歸花先委露，別葉驟辭風」之什，麗則麗矣，吾不知其所諷焉，故僕所謂「嘲風月，弄花草」而已。(Bai V: 2791)

If it is possible that “*xing* commences here (the text) but meaning belongs there (something or somewhere beyond the text),” is the reversal of this logic possible as well? It certainly has more than one

possible reversal. One is this: xing does not commence in the text and meaning does not go beyond the text. This is the worst-case scenario in which we do not have both xing and stimulated meaning, as Liu says: “the principle of xing was lost” 興義銷亡. Another possible reversal is this: xing commences beyond the text yet meaning lies in the text. Bai does not think this good at all because texts concentrating on the xing (i.e. the imagery that does not have stable and specific meaning) is merely beautiful and simultaneously, superficial. It is just “ridiculing wind and moon, trifling with flower and grass” 嘲風月，弄花草, a superficial depiction without any real reference. Last but not least, xing is in the text but meaning commences beyond the text. This is utterly Bai’s ideal: through it, the xing initiates the expansion of meaning beyond the text, like Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 (483–513) loose and therefore loosely accurate circumscription of xing, in which “the literal is exhausted but the meaningful goes on to disseminate” 文已盡而意有餘 (309), among many other attempts (of course including some notorious for their vagueness⁴⁰) in getting meaning beyond the literal, as well as in entailing both the spell and benediction of allegorism.

4. Coda

Looking at and Looking for Xing’s Afterlives

It is through *The Odes*, canonization of it as a “classic,” and through the history of *The Odes* studies that xing stimulates “unknown” interactions further. Xing, whether as a concept, a genre, a literary trope or a mode of literary thought, functions in-between *The Odes* tradition and the Chinese literary and cultural tradition in general, and unsettles the convention of meaning. The definition of the xing, as well as the specific meanings of xings in the different odes may remain unknown. But that does not really matter. Not that I can infer such double nothingness from the entangled explorations of xing in the last two thousand years. Logically speaking, a long unsettled controversy, no matter how long, does not necessitate the conclusion that there is no “true” answer or no possibility of having the controversy settled.

Nevertheless, from the entangled explorations of xings, the search for xing's definition and the meanings underlying the specific xings reveal the role of xing in these entanglements. It is in its mobility across different signifying and conceptual schemes that xing continues to exist. The double nothingness of xing does not lie in any single person's knowledge of the truth about xing's truthlessness. Saying that xing has no definition and meaning is itself an act of defining xing, and at the same time giving new meanings to the xings in the specific odes. But the more or less 2000-year history of the xing controversy evidences that xing can work multifariously within different appropriations. Although appropriators of xing do have the idea that xing is a problematic X on their minds, xing's elusiveness energizes rather than hinders the dilative presences of xing. At least they did not just ignore such a problematic X, as there are lots of other tropes that they can be utilized or talked about. In this sense, the duration of the xing controversy does manifest something about the volatility of xing, the "truth" about xing remaining unknown all the while. As an ontologically bracketed stimulus, xing can go on swerving in the realm of meaning. Xing does not simply initiate negotiations amid specific verses in *The Odes*. It also creates an abyss of meaning otherwise within signification itself, though this abyss had only the limited space of this essay on the X in classical Chinese poetics to be looked into, like the infinite unsurpassable space between Achilles and the tortoise⁴¹, and, as mentioned in Zhuangzi, the Chinese Sophists' stick which is only one foot long yet "if you take away a half every day, will not be exhausted for a myriad ages."⁴²

NOTES

¹ For a discussion of the Chinese character shi 詩 in ancient Chinese texts, see Chen, "The Shih-ching"; Chow, "The Early History of the Chinese Word Shih (Poetry)."

² C. H. Wang follows Chen Shih-Hsiang's equation of xing and motif and suggests: "What is variously called 'theme,' 'type-scene,' 'motif in this mode of traditional composition of the poem, is almost identifiable with the

xing element in the Chinese aesthetics of the lyric" (101). See also Chen, "The Shih-ching."

³ Tian Zhaoyuan scrutinizes the development of xing by re-categorizing classical Chinese literary criticisms and philosophical writings into four main trajectories: xing as a hermeneutic mode for the reader, an expressive mode for the author, a mode of questing for profound meaning, and a mode of questing for new artistic conception (257–271).

⁴ For a study on the triad in modern Chinese literatures and criticisms, see Chen Lihong.

⁵ See Hu, "Shijing zhong de fu bi xing."

⁶ Confucius, "Tai bo" 泰伯, in *The Analects*. Quoted from Van Zoeren 36.

⁷ Van Zoeren makes his point by comparing this passage to *The Analects* 8.2, "which contains the grammatically parallel expression xing yu ren 'to be stimulated by humaneness'" (261). I continue to translate xing as "to stimulate," "stimulus," and "stimulation" depending on different contexts for the sake of consistency, though there are other translations like, to incite, to begin, to arouse...etc., reflecting different facets of xing. For a brief discussion of the different translations, see Kao.

⁸ In this translation, I leave it open about whether li 禮 simply refers to ritual or particularly *The Book of Ritual*, and yue 樂 simple refers to music or particularly *The Book of Music*. For example, Chichung Huang (Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* (Lun Yu) 97) translates li and yue as the two books but Waley (Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* 134) takes them to be just ritual and music.

⁹ Wang Xianqian also notes: "si wu xie means the right track of thinking without wickedness and swerve" 思無邪者，思之真正無有邪曲 (1607).

¹⁰ There are studies on the authorship of *The Odes*, or at least the authorship of some of the odes. An extreme case is Li Chendong, who tries to prove that all the 305 odes were written by the same person Yin Jifu 尹吉甫. But it is not a widely accepted thesis.

¹¹ Jullien hierarchical understanding of fu, bi, and xing (xing is the highest) is problematic but his discussion of xing across the author, the text, and the reader is inspiring.

¹² For a brief discussion of the ideas xing, guan, qun, yuan, see also Hu

Yongchao.

¹³ Holzman follows Kong Anguo and takes xing, guan, qun, and yuan as technical terms. He translates xing as “metaphorical allusion”.

¹⁴ See Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. Lau 145; Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. Hinton 198; Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Waley 212.

¹⁵ See Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)* trans. Huang 168; Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Leys 87.

¹⁶ For example, Guo Shaoyu (1893–1984) discusses Bai Juyi’s (772–846) thesis concerning the need to write essays, poems and songs for the service of particular historical moments. In “Yu Yuan Jiu shu” 與元九書 (A Letter to Yuan Jiu), Bai formulates literary history from Zhou dynasty to Tang dynasty by way of the idea of the “six principles” (liu yi 六義) (V: 2789–2806). Guo’s essay “Liuyi shuo kao bian” 六義說考辨 is on the similarities and differences between the “six features” (first appeared in Zhou li) and the “six principles” (in “The Great Mao Preface”) (355–389). I will further discuss this point later on. On (examinations of) the appropriations of the “six features/principles” in later literary theory and practices, see also Chou and Cai. For a brief survey of traditional Chinese scholars’ discussions on xing, see also Yu, *The Reading* 54–67; Chen, “The Shih-ching.”

¹⁷ Here I take Owen’s translation of “liu yi” as “the six principles.” See Owen, Readings 45.

¹⁸ “Since the great merit of *The Classic of Odes* is said earlier [in ‘The Great Mao Preface’], it is understood that such merit cannot be thoroughly covered by just one principle. Hence it [‘The Great Mao Preface’] also says that ‘*The Classic of Odes* has six principles.’ The early part of ‘Da shi’ [in *The Ritual of Zhou*] does not have the word ‘shi’ [*The Classic of Odes*] so that it cannot jump to the ‘six principles’ yet. They [the ‘six features’ and the ‘six principles’] function respectively in two different contexts but are in fact one” 上言詩功既大，明非一義能周，故又言「詩有六義」。《大師》上文未有「詩」字，不得逕云「六義」，故言「六詩」。各自成文，其實一也 (Kong Yingda I: 11).

¹⁹ For a modern discussion of the difference between the “six features” and the “six principles,” see Guo, “Liuyi shuo kao bian.”

²⁰ Gu Mingdong argues that fu, bi, and xing cannot be taken as “three disparate modes of expression but instead are three organic components of a

holistic process of poetry-making.” In spite of my perception of xing beyond the fu-bi-xing triad, I find Gu’s essay insightful and creative in proposing a relational understanding of the triad in terms of modern literary theories.

²¹ See Xie Wuliang. Jiang Shanguo, and Li Jinxi.

²² Ye Jiaying compares xing to tropes like metaphor, simile, metonymy, symbol, personification, synecdoche, allegory, objective correlative...etc. Ye disputes that they are just related to bi. And none of them is really equal to xing in Chinese poetics. See also Owen, Readings 46 and Gu Mingdong 4–5.

²³ The three schools are those of Shen Pei 申培 of the state of Lu 魯, Yuan Gu 轅固 of Qi 齊 and Han Ying 韓嬰 of Yan 燕. They are known as the schools of Lu, Qi and Han, and disappeared by the Song dynasty. See Wang Xianqian and Hightower.

²⁴ Kong Yingda writes: “‘The Mao Preface’ specifically talks about xing because it works in a latent way” 毛傳特言興也，為其理隱故也 (12).

²⁵ “The meaning of fu and bi are all included in xing. That is why Confucius only talks about xing, and the “Great Mao Preface” indicates one hundred and sixteen xing, yet fu and bi are absent” 賦比之義，皆包於興。故夫子只言興，毛詩傳言興百十有六，而不及賦比，亦此意也 (Liu Baonan II: 690). See also Huang Songyi.

²⁶ Zheng Xuan’s annotation of “Da Shi” 大師 (Zhou li zhu shu 355).

²⁷ Yuan Changjiang contests that Kong Yingda confused Zheng Xuan’s characterization of the “six features” in the Ritual of Zhou and the “six principles” in the “Mao Preface.” The former is to do with using *The Odes*, the latter creating *The Odes*. Yuan speculates that Zheng has a very clear division between the two in mind.

²⁸ Zheng Xuan quotes Zheng Zhong in “Chungong dashi” 春宮大師 in Zhouli zhushu.

²⁹ Both Zheng and Xu argue that xing is to do with sounds. To Zheng, in “Yuelüe zhengsheng xulun” 樂略，正聲序論, xing is derived from the sounds of nature, be they cuckoos, grunts, or the whizzes of wind (Tongzhi 通志, vol. 49); to Xu in “Feng shi ji xiansheng shu” 奉師季先生書, it is a very common feature in folksongs in which people are just “moved by objects (觸物發聲)...without profound meaning (絕無意味)” to be expressed (XVI: 458).

³⁰ I do not share some of Xu’s terminologies and assumptions while he reconfigures the issues regarding literary production and reception in *The Ode*

studies. But his discussion does cope with the issues directly. He Dingsheng amplifies the equivalence of xing and flaws very explicitly: Xing stands for “the confusing sounds that have no connection between the songs and the original intent, anything perceivable, popping up on one’s mind, or agitating to one’s ears, encountering the interest in creating poetry. Then one puts them together.... This is the secret of the so-called xing poetry” (3792).

³¹ Liu Xie writes: “Bi is based on contiguity; xing rouses. That which has contiguity in some principle (li) cleaves to some shared category (lei) and thereby indicates some matter (shi). On the other hand, that which rouses the affections depends on something subtle for the sake of reflective consideration. The affection was roused, and thus the normative form of xing is established. When there is contiguity in some principle, an exemplary case of bi appears” (Owen, Readings 256).

³² For example, the fowls, sheep, and cows as xings in the middle of “My Lord is on Service” (Junzi yu yi) 君子於役 (#66) in “The Airs of The Kingly Domain” (wang feng 王風), the pepper-plant as xing at the end of “The Pepper-plant” (Jiao liao) 椒聊 (#117) in “The Air of Tang” (tang feng 唐風), the arbor tree, girl, Han, and Yangtze river as all initial xing, medial xing, and final xing in “Han Guang” 漢廣 in “Zhou Nan” 周南 (#9).

³³ In addition to the one pinpointed here in terms of Su Che, another realist approach to xing connects or even equalizes the notion of xiang 象 in *The Classic of Changes* to xing. See Chen Kui 40; Wen Yiduo 118. Qian Zhongshu criticizes the equalization by pointing out that, in *The Classic of Changes*, xiang can be forgotten when we get the meaning (yi 意), but, in poetry, xiang (imagery, symbol, metaphor, xing and so on) is part of the text so that it cannot be forgotten or isolated as something beyond the text (I: 12).

³⁴ See Tse-tung Chow, Gu wuyi; Lin; Chen, “The Shih-ching.” Luo Zhenyu and Xiang Chengzao have a debate about the xing character in shell and bone inscriptions. See also Yang Shuda.

³⁵ See also Zhu Dongrun; Zhou Zhenfu 319.

³⁶ See Hu Shi, “Tantan shijing” 談談詩經, in *Hu Shi xueshu wenji*, I: 446–55. See also his *Baihua wenxue shi* 白話文學史 when he comments on Bai Juyi.

³⁷ Hu Nianyi (“Guanyu”) and Lin Yelian doubt whether most of *The Odes* in the “Airs of the States” of *The Odes* are really folksongs collected from

ordinary people. Zhu Dongrun also draws on T. F. Anderson's *Ballad in Literature* to argue that only a certain sophisticated class of people could possess the "breeding" that makes the creation of sophisticated poetry possible (46).

³⁸ Siu-kit Wong outlines the direction and substance of the exegeses scholars compiled for the classics, with reference to *The Odes*: "The first was to establish the best possible text and the hope was to come as closely as possible to what had originally been said or written. The second was encyclopedic. The end was to describe and explain physical objects referred to in the ceremony, observations of heaven and earth in astronomy and geography, and so on. The third and fourth aims were concerned with two different areas of language: etymology and grammar. Etymology, which was sometimes inseparable from phonology, dealt with the meaning and derivation of individual words while grammar dealt with syntax, the relations of words to one another in sentences" (128). Although the above outline may not be able to cover all the possibilities, it summarizes the four basic aims shared by scholars from the shadowy Mao Gong 毛公 to such Qing scholars as Chen Huan 陳奂.

³⁹ Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 thinks that it should be 倍舊章矣, not 信舊章矣. See Liu Xie. Owen's bilingual edition of this passage in *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* also uses 倍 instead of 信.

⁴⁰ Owen remarks: "It is a measure of the strangeness and the problems of 'The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry' by Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837–908) that if the title 'Shi pin' 詩品 did not contain the word 'poetry,' there would be no way even to guess what these elusive verses referred" (Readings 299). Here are some of the examples: "implication beyond flavor" 味外之旨 (356); "If there is some resemblance of shape, the grasping hand has already missed it" 脫有形似，握手已遠 (306).

⁴¹ Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) articulates Zeno's (ca. 490-ca. 430 B.C.) argument: "...the slowest runner will never be caught by the fastest runner, because the one behind has first to reach the point from which the one in front started, and so the slower one is bound always to be in front" (Waterfield 76).

⁴² Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 369-ca.286 BC) notes that there is such an argument by the Sophists while debating with Hui Shi 惠施: "A stick one foot long, if you take away a half every day, will not be exhausted for a myriad ages" 一尺之捶，日取其半，萬世不竭 (Chuang-tzu 284).

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未知的詩學：中國文學傳統中關於「興」的爭論

摘 要

長久以來，「興」都是個廣受爭論的議題。論者時常把它與《詩經》雙題並論，聯繫到《詩經》這部被認為是中國文學傳統中最早的詩歌選集內，有關指涉、詮釋和意涵的問題。本文討論「興」作為一概念、文類、文學技巧或是文學思維模式，如何被吸收於中國文化傳統之中，卻又不斷顛覆著傳統中關於指涉、詮釋和意涵的概念。能否釐清「興」的定義並非重點。正正是關於「興」的種種爭論，才顯現出它如何在中國文學與文化史中，挑起各種關於指涉、詮釋和意涵的反思。在某些詩句中，「興」確實是些需要被解讀的符碼，但它也是不同時代的人們一些重塑解碼過程的嘗試一些只能用 X 去代表的不確定性和可能性。這也正正是本文認為「興」的意義所在。

關鍵字：興、《詩經》、指涉、比喻、轉義、文類、符號、中國詩學、中國文學史

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur as Early American Natural History Writer

Li-ru Lu

ABSTRACT

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) is an eighteenth—century American writer who is famous for his *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More Letters from an American Farmer*. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, most critics regard Crèvecoeur as a patriotic and national writer because his writings frequently celebrate American freedom and prosperity and vehemently portray America as the true Paradise and the American as a veritable Adam.

Completely different from the readings of most critics, this essay will focus its emphasis on Crèvecoeur's effectiveness as a natural history writer. The aim of this paper is to establish Crèvecoeur as a natural history writer and to point out that through his natural historical discourse, Crèvecoeur celebrates his kinship with nonhuman nature and advocates environmental concern, thereby introducing a pattern of ecological thinking and proto-ecological sensibility in American culture. In this way, this essay hopes to refer the readers interested in an alternative view to the writings of Crèvecoeur.

KEY WORDS

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, natural history writing, ecological thinking, environmental concern, early American natural history writer



I

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) is an eighteenth-century American writer. In 1782, Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* was published and received enthusiastically in Britain, France and America (Skipp 12); it was an immediate success (Baym 657). In addition to *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur also composed another literary text — *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More Letters from an American Farmer*.¹ Crèvecoeur’s works, as most twentieth-century and twenty-first-century critics frequently suggest, project an appealing image of America as an unspoiled agrarian landscape where class distinctions are insignificant and individual effort is richly rewarded. Through his works, Crèvecoeur constructs an archetypal image of the strong, self-reliant, and self-sufficient American farmer; such an image still resonates in popular conceptions of the American Dream.

In the twentieth-century literary history of America, Crèvecoeur is generally regarded as a patriotic writer because his works vehemently celebrate American prosperity, shape an ideal image for America, and glorify the notion of the American Adam. In *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), D. H. Lawrence asserts that Crèvecoeur is “the emotional” “prototype of the American” (29), considering that for most Europeans Crèvecoeur’s works establish a distinctive image for America. In an essay entitled “Michel-Guillaume St. Jean De Crèvecoeur: *Letters from an American Farmer*” (1970), Nye contends that Crèvecoeur’s works mainly explore “the differences between American and European society” and help to create “the

original, self-sufficient, independent Yankee as an American character” (39 and 47). In *A Handbook of American Literature* (1975), Day — another critic — maintains that Crèvecoeur’s works first give “explicit form to the idealistic American image in American literature” (37). In *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988), Crèvecoeur’s works are discussed by Elliott in a chapter entitled “Toward a National Literature” (187); in this way, Crèvecoeur is considered a national and patriotic writer in early America.

American literary history of the twenty-first century, most critics still consider that Crèvecoeur’s texts mainly intend to create national consciousness, national image, and national character for America. In *The Literatures of Colonial America: An Anthology* (2001), Castillo contends that Crèvecoeur’s works chiefly intend to articulate “the concept of America” and create national consciousness for America (497). In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2003), Baym states that Crèvecoeur’s works “followed close enough on the American Revolution to satisfy an almost insatiable demand for things American and conformed,” for most readers, “a vision of a new land, rich and promising, where industry prevailed over class” and fashion (657). In *A History of American Literature* (2004), Gray argues that the general thrust of Crèvecoeur’s books is toward “celebration of both the promise and the perfection of America” (74).

On the whole, considering that American literature as the voice of American national consciousness began in 1782 with the publication of Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*, most of the above-mentioned critics regard Crèvecoeur as a patriotic and national writer because his works primarily intend to answer a crucial question — “What is an American, this new man?” (Crèvecoeur 63). True, Crèvecoeur’s writings frequently portray America as the true Paradise and the American as a veritable Adam. Such an emphasis is understandable, indeed nearly inevitable. Nevertheless, to think of Crèvecoeur as a nineteenth-century patriotic writer who primarily cares about celebrating the freedom, prosperity of America and about defining American character is to miss the crucial aspects of environmental concern and ecological consciousness in his writings.

In effect, Crèvecoeur is not merely a patriotic writer; he is also a natural history writer. Although Crèvecoeur's writings are best known for examining the question of American national identity in such an essay as "What Is an American?" (Letter III), his works are also a detailed study and an exploration of the American natural environment that frequently invokes natural history (Branch, *Reading the Roots* 166). On the whole, Crèvecoeur's works are a comprehensive look at America, constructed around a natural historical core that takes the characteristic forms of the manners-and-customs account and the natural history essay on a single kind of flora and fauna.² Natural history, in other words, is the primary intellectual orientation of *Letters from an American Farmers* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*. However, the formal and intellectual debt to natural history in Crèvecoeur's writings is rarely acknowledged and analyzed.

Completely different from the readings of most critics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this essay will focus its emphasis on Crèvecoeur's effectiveness as a natural history writer. The aim of this paper is to establish Crèvecoeur as a natural history writer and to point out that through his natural historical discourse, Crèvecoeur celebrates his kinship with nonhuman nature and advocates environmental concern, thereby introducing a pattern of ecological thinking and proto-ecological sensibility in American culture. In this way, this essay hopes to refer the readers interested in an alternative view to the writings of Crèvecoeur.

II

In this section, before establishing Crèvecoeur as a natural history writer and before exploring how Crèvecoeur's representations of the relationship between human and nonhuman nature contribute to the ecological awareness in early America,³ I would like to briefly discuss the context and a definition of natural history. In the mid- and late-eighteenth-century Europe, natural history became a flourishing discipline (Johnson and Patterson 3), and it became a thriving discipline in America around the turn of the nineteenth century (Branch,

“Early Romantic” 1059). At that time, natural history as a term was generally used to refer to all descriptive aspects of the study of nature. Natural historians took for their subject matter all of what they called the Creation. Any object within the natural world — such as rocks, mountains, plants, animals, and so on — was a proper subject of natural historical inquiry; only man-made objects lay outside its scope.

Generally speaking, natural history, in the eyes of most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans and Americans, was a broad area of scientific and cultural inquiry circumscribing the present-day disciplines of meteorology, geology, archeology, ethnology, zoology, and botany; it encompassed “the aggregate of facts relating to the natural objects, etc. of a place, or the characteristics of a class of persons or things” (Regis 5). In their activities to explore the world of nature, natural historians (or naturalists or natural history writers) primarily employed two basic procedures: observing and describing. Through these two procedures, natural historians provided people with a way of looking at the natural environment, with a way of describing what they saw, and with an overarching scheme in which to fit what they had seen. Natural history, in short, provided people with method, rhetoric, and context in their detailed study — including observations, perceptions, and descriptions — of the natural world.

Emphasizing objective observations and detailed descriptions of nature, natural history owed much to science, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was regarded as scientific demystification of the natural world (Lyon 20), yet natural history was also viewed as belles lettres, for it offered people with methods and rhetoric in their descriptions and representations of the nonhuman beings in nature and it also presented an individual’s perception of the natural environment. In other words, natural history deliberately brought together science and literature (Johnson and Patterson 3);⁴ it was viewed as both science and belles lettres (Branch, “Early Romantic” 1059).

In this paper, I would like to read Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* based on the tenets of natural history. In the following section, I shall examine how Crèvecoeur, as a farmer and explorer of North America, applies

the natural historical method to observe and record basic information about the natural productions in the territory he lives: the weather, the climate, the rivers, soils, plants, animals, insects, and so forth.

III

Although Crèvecoeur's importance as a patriotic author has been widely acknowledged, his talent and significance as a natural history writer has been overlooked. In effect, many of Crèvecoeur's important achievements were in the field of natural history: he promoted Franco-American seed exchange and was responsible for introducing several new plants to the republic (Regis 110–11); he helped found botanical gardens in Connecticut and New Jersey; his invaluable contributions on American natural history informed the French *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772) article on the United States; and, in recognition of his contributions to natural science, he was made a member of the French Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society (Branch, "Early Romantic" 1065). What is more, Crèvecoeur was also honored by election to the Royal Agricultural Society and the Society of Agriculture, Sciences, and Arts at Meaux (Regis 112).

As an ardent natural historian, Crèvecoeur was in contact with the natural history circles in both France and America. After the publication of *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782, Crèvecoeur returned to France, and his friends took him to meet Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788),⁵ whose works he had widely read and highly admired (Regis 112). In America, Crèvecoeur also made contact with the members of the natural history circle, such as Thomas Jefferson.⁶ In 1785, Crèvecoeur wrote a letter to Jefferson, his one-time neighbor in New York, thanking Jefferson for giving him helpful advice about plants (Regis 112). In addition, Crèvecoeur knew the Bartrams — both John Bartram (1699–1777) and William Bartram (1739–1823) — as well (Regis 112). To express his great admiration for John Bartram, father of William Bartram and one of America's earliest and most accomplished nature historians, Crèvecoeur spent the

length of a whole chapter in *Letters from an American Farmer* — Letter XI — to discuss John Bartram and describe a visit to John and William Bartram’s botanical garden outside Philadelphia.⁷

In effect, within the textual world of *Letters from an American Farmer*, the privileging of natural history is most important in Crèvecoeur’s adulation of John Bartram — the widely recognized colonial botanist and natural historian — in Letter XI. Letter XI is devoted completely to the visit of the chapter’s narrator to John Bartram’s famous botanical garden outside Philadelphia. In this letter (Letter XI in *Letters from an American Farmer*), Crèvecoeur shapes Bartram into a successful American natural historian and suggests that Bartram’s secret to success is inscribed over the door of a greenhouse in his botanical garden:

Slave to no sect, who takes no private road,
But looks through nature, up to nature’s God! (185)

Believing that men should “look through nature,” Bartram, suggests Crèvecoeur in Letter XI, is enthusiastic about making a record of the “curious plants and trees” in the world of nature (188), devotes his time, energy, and life to the scientific investigation of botany in his own botanical garden, and consequently becomes a “celebrated Pennsylvanian botanist” and a distinguished natural historian in colonial America (181).

In addition to Letter XI, the second letter of *Letters from an American Farmer*, “On the Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures of an American Farmer,” is one typical example of Crèvecoeur’s natural history essay as well. In this letter, the narrator’s (James’s) curiosity and powers of observation lead to questions about the formation of frost, the social intelligence of honeybees, the mating rituals and migration patterns of birds, the life cycles of trees, the nests of insects, and the nests of wasps. In the following paragraph (selected from Letter II in *Letters from an American Farmer*), Crèvecoeur presents his narrator’s careful observation of the nests of wasps:

. . . most of them [wasps] build their nests in mud, which they fix against the shingles of our roofs as nigh the pitch as they can. These aggregates represent nothing, at first view, but coarse and irregular lumps; but if you break them, you will observe that the inside of them contains a great number of oblong cells, in which they deposit their eggs and in which they bury themselves in the fall of the year. Thus immured, they securely pass through the severity of that season, and on the return of the sun, are enabled to perforate their cells and to open themselves a passage from these recesses into the sunshine. (58)

In these lines, Crèvecoeur offers readers the objective facts relating to the nests of wasps “in mud” (58), and presents his narrator’s close observation and detailed description of the wasps’ cells, thereby establishing himself as an early natural history writer in America.

In *Letters from an American Farmer*, Letter IV — “Description of the Island of Nantucket, with the Manners, Customs, Policy, and Trade of the Inhabitants” — is also another typical example of Crèvecoeur’s natural history writing. In this letter, before giving manners-and-customs account of the people of Nantucket, Crèvecoeur’s narrator offers a detailed description of the Island’s location to readers:

The Island of Nantucket lies in . . . 60 miles N. E. from Cape Cod; 27 N. from Hyannis, or Barnstable, a town on the most contiguous part of the great peninsula; 21 miles W. by N. from Cape Poge, on the vineyard; 50 W. by N. from Woods Hole, on Elizabeth Island; 80 miles N. from Boston; 120 from Rhode Island; 800 S. from Bermuda. (104)

The incorrectness of this description notwithstanding, the method here is natural historical. In these lines, Crèvecoeur’s narrator employs the method of natural history to carefully, objectively, and detailedly represent the location of the Island of Nantucket.

In Letter IV, Crèvecoeur’s narrator employs a series of natural

historical descriptions to represent the plant productions on the Island of Nantucket as well. The narrator objectively describes the island's plant productions:

It appears to be the uneven summit of a sandy submarine mountain, covered here and there with sorrel, grass, a few cedar bushes, and scrubby oaks; their swamps are much more valuable for the peat they contain than for the trifling pasture of their surface; those declining grounds which lead to the sea-shores abound with beach grass, a light fodder when cut and cured, but very good when fed green. (108)

With all the zeal — and the objectivity — of a natural historian, Crèvecoeur's narrator describes the plant productions of the Island of Nantucket (such as "sorrel, grass," "cedar bushes," "scrubby oaks"), the docks, the gardens, the community ropewalk, and the common meadow (Crèvecoeur 108). All of this description is couched in the impersonal historical present dictated by the rhetoric of natural history.

What is more, Crèvecoeur's natural historical descriptions and subjects occupy Letter X, "On Snakes: and on the Humming-Bird,"⁸ in *Letters from an American Farmer*, too. In Letter X, Crèvecoeur's description of the hummingbird includes details that are rendered with objective, orderly observation:

From this simple grove I have amused myself a hundred times in observing the great number of humming-birds with which our country abounds: the wild blossoms everywhere attract the attention of these birds, which like bees subsist by suction. From this retreat I distinctly watch them in all their various attitudes, but their flight is so rapid that you cannot distinguish the motion of their wings. On this little bird Nature has profusely lavished her most splendid colours; the most perfect azure, the most beautiful gold, the most dazzling red, are forever in contrast and help to embellish the plumes of his majestic head. (178)

The mode of presentation here is natural historical and the rhetoric

recognizably objective. In these lines, the careful description of humming-birds' "splendid colours" is couched in the detailed, descriptive prose of natural historical discipline (Crèvecoeur 178).

In addition to *Letters from an American Farmer*, *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More Letters from an American Farmer* is Crèvecoeur's natural historical writing as well. In this book, the very first paragraph of Chapter One — "A Snow Storm as It Affects the American Farmer" — evinces a command of natural historical subjects and descriptions:

No man of the least degree of sensibility can journey through any number of years in whatever climate without often being compelled to make useful observations on the different phenomena of Nature which surround him and without involuntarily being struck either with awe or admiration in beholding some of the elementary conflicts in the midst of which he lives. A great thunder-storm; an extensive flood, a desolating hurricane, a sudden and intense frost, an overwhelming snow-storm, a sultry day — each of these different scenes exhibits singular beauties even in spite of the damage they cause. (231)

In this passage, there exists some emotional presence; however, the predominant mode of presentation here is natural historical. Presenting his close and "useful observations on the different phenomena of Nature" in these lines, Crèvecoeur describes various climates of the land he lives in, records the "singular beauties" of these diverse climates, and in this way writes natural history for late-eighteenth-century America (Crèvecoeur 231).

IV

In his natural historical writings — *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur frequently celebrates his kinship with nonhuman nature and advocates environmental concern,

thereby introducing a pattern of environmental awareness and proto-ecological thinking for late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century America. In *Letters from an American Farmer*, for instance, Crèvecoeur's narrator pays close attention to the squirrels, birds, wasps, bees, gnats, and many other tiny inhabitants of his farm; however, he does more than pay attention — he delights in them and views them as co-inhabitants. In a chapter entitled “On Snakes; And on the Humming Bird” (Letter X in *Letters from an American Farmer*), Crèvecoeur's narrator praises the ruby-throated hummingbird:

The richest palette of the most luxuriant painter, could never invent anything to be compared to the variegated tints, with which this insect bird is arrayed. . . . When fatigued, it has often perched within a few feet of me, and on such favorable opportunities I have surveyed it with the most minute attention. Its little eyes appear like diamonds, reflecting light on every side: most elegantly finished in all parts, it is a miniature work of our Great Parent, who seems to have formed it the smallest, and at the same time the most beautiful of the winged species. (178)

In these lines, the natural historical description of the hummingbird includes details that do not merely suggest the narrator's sense of kinship and membership in the natural community, but also are rendered with admiration, approval, and a feeling of great liking for the species in nonhuman nature.

When considering Crèvecoeur's approach to natural history, we should notice that his narrator's proximity to nature and sense of membership in the natural community demonstrate a kind of genuine environmental concern. In the second letter of *Letters from an American Farmer* (“On the Situation, Feeling, and Pleasures of an American Farmer”), the narrator's respect for nature manifests itself primarily in his love for animals, both domestic and wild. He shares his food with quail during freezing weather, and he congratulates the compassionate farmer who saves the entire quail species by giving

sanctuary to the remnants of the population during an unusually hard winter. He builds shelters for songbirds and honeybees, and he celebrates animal “intelligence” at every turn:

The whole economy of what we proudly call the brute creation, is admirable in every circumstance; and vain man, though adorned with the additional gift of reason, might learn from the perfection of instinct, how to regulate the follies, and how to temper the errors which the second gift often makes him commit. (56)

In the above-quoted passage, Crèvecoeur suggests two “ecological principles.” Firstly, though man is “adorned with the additional gift of reason” (Crèvecoeur 56), he ought to accept himself as a modest and humble member of nature’s community. In other words, man should cease to believe that he is the center of creation. Second, man should learn to admire and respect “the brute creation” and all non-human members in the natural world (Crèvecoeur 56). In effect, throughout *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, the narrator’s concern for nature manifests itself primarily in his love and respect for animals and insects, such as blackbirds, squirrels, turtles, wasps, and bees. In the second letter of *Letters from an American Farmer*, for another instance, Crèvecoeur’s narrator celebrates “the sagacity” of animals: “the sagacity of those animals which have long been the tenants of my farm astonish me; some of them seem to surpass even men in memory and sagacity” (49). In this letter, Crèvecoeur’s narrator even claims that the bees in his farm attract his “attention and respect” (49). Simply stated, Crèvecoeur’s narrator approaches the natural world with an attitude of respect and reverence;⁹ this sense of reverence demonstrates an incipient environmental concern — a concern that is essential to the work of most later nature writers.

In addition to celebrating men’s sense of membership and sense of reverence toward nonhuman nature, Crèvecoeur’s literary brand of natural history often displays an incipient ecological sensibility, especially in its emphasis upon the idea of oneness and

interconnectedness. In a chapter entitled "Thoughts of an American Farmer on Various Rural Subjects" in *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, Crèvecoeur displays his environmental awareness and proto-ecological sensitivity:

When the floods rise on our low grounds, the mice quit their burrows and come to our stacks of grain . . . There, secured from danger, they find a habitation replenished with all they want. I must not, however, be murmuring and ungrateful. If Nature has formed mice, she has created also the fox and the owl. They both prey on these. Were it not for their kind assistance, [the mice] would drive us out of our farms.

Thus one species of evil is balanced by another; thus the fury of one element is repressed by the power of the other. In the midst of this great, this astonishing equipoise, Man struggles and lives. (297)

What these lines reveal is the totality of creation existed in undisturbed harmony. Claiming that "Man struggles and lives" at the end of this quoted passage (297), Crèvecoeur suggests that humankind is only one among many natural kinds existing within an interrelated and interconnected community of life on earth; in this way, Crèvecoeur presents his sensitivity to environmental processes and ecological interrelationships

What is more, Crèvecoeur in his natural history writings often laments men's ruthless destruction of animals (such as blackbirds, squirrels, beavers, and so forth) and strongly denounces the brutality of man — the "huge monster" in the world of nature (Crèvecoeur 294). In a chapter entitled "Thoughts of an American Farmer on Various Rural Subjects" in *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, Crèvecoeur poignantly portrays men's relentless destruction of the beavers in America:

The beavers are the philosophers of the animals; the gentlest, the most humble, the most harmless. Yet brutal Man kills them. I was once a witness to the destruction of one of their associated

confederacies. I saw many of them shed tears, and I wept also; nor am I ashamed to confess it. (301)

On the one hand, these lines displays Crèvecoeur's poignant environmental awareness that through natural history writing, he is documenting aspects of the wild animals before their inexorable loss; on the other hand, these lines also fully reveal Crèvecoeur's sympathetic attitude toward non-human nature, especially the beavers — "the philosophers of the animals" (Crèvecoeur 301). In addition, what these lines portray is the brutality, egotism, and arrogance of men. Repudiating men's arrogance, Crèvecoeur finds humans' brutal treatment of beavers loathsome and abhorrent.

To repudiate the brutality and arrogance of men, Crèvecoeur's natural historical discourse proposes the prophetic and revolutionary idea that non-human nature has the right to exist. In the fourth chapter of *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, stating that in order to prevent the blackbirds from eating men's grains and crops, American farmers sometimes poison corn to kill the blackbirds; Crèvecoeur criticizes the cruelty, arrogance, and selfishness of men and asserts that blackbirds have the right "to live" (293):

But after all the efforts of our selfishness, are they [blackbirds] not the children of the great Creator as well as we? They are entitled to live and to get their food wherever they can get it. We can better afford to lose a little corn than any other grain because it yields above seventy for one. But Man is a huge monster who devours everything and will suffer nothing to live in peace in his neighborhood. (293–94)

Claiming that blackbirds "are entitled to live and to get their food wherever they can get it" in this passage (293–94), Crèvecoeur completely rejects the arrogant view of his utilitarian contemporaries who saw non-human nature only as natural resources for men's use. Also, the first sentence of this passage — "are they [blackbirds] not the children of the great Creator as well as we?" (Crèvecoeur 293) — is a

rhetorical question; it suggests the equal worth of all creatures and it emphasizes that man should accept himself as an equal and humble member of Nature's community, thereby introducing into American letters the notion of bio-centric equality.

In his natural history writings, Crèvecoeur describes land abuse and criticizes the deforestation that accompanies the establishment of an agrarian society, too. In "Thoughts of an American Farmer on Various Rural Subjects" (Chapter IV in *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*), Crèvecoeur poignantly describes watershed abuse:

I could show you in this country the ruins of eleven grist-mills, which twenty years ago had plenty of water but now stand on the dry ground with no other marks of running water about them than the ancient bed of the creek, on the shores of which they had been erected. This effect does not surprise me. Our ancient woods kept the earth moist and damp, and the sun could evaporate none of the waters contained within their shades. Who knows how far these effects may extend? (285)

Obviously, Crèvecoeur sees the necessity of "ancient woods" and primitive forests (285); these lines reveal Crèvecoeur's keen attention to the issues of environmental sustainability. Asserting that "Our ancient woods kept the earth moist and damp, and the sun could evaporate none of the waters contained within their shades," Crèvecoeur presciently and prophetically suggests the significance of forest protection (Crèvecoeur 285). This proposal for forest protection in Crèvecoeur's natural historical discourse would eventually be realized by Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946) -- "the father of American Forestry and the Forest Service" (LaLonde 162),¹⁰ but not until one hundred years later, with the establishment of the US Forest Service in 1905.

What is more, the last sentence of the above-quoted passage — "Who knows how far these effects may extend" (Crèvecoeur 285) — is a rhetorical question;¹¹ it shows that Crèvecoeur's narrator is well

aware of the changes abroad in the land. While most critics and readers know that Crèvecoeur frequently celebrates the prosperity and inexhaustibility of the American land, few critics know that Crèvecoeur is also a natural history writer who objectively portrays that American environment and mourns its destruction. The last sentence of the quoted paragraph is a dark-side echo to Crèvecoeur's upbeat and best-known rhetorical question, "Who can tell how far it [North America] extends?" in the much-anthologized essay, "What Is an American?" (88). Speaking for the need of protecting "the ancient woods" in America (Crèvecoeur 285), Crèvecoeur's natural historical discourse documents the American natural environment and expresses concern regarding its critical endangerment by human development.

V

Today, Crèvecoeur is frequently remembered as a patriotic writer and he continues to be remembered only as the author of such essay as "What Is an American?" Defining Crèvecoeur as a national and patriotic writer who primarily cares about celebrating the freedom, prosperity of America and about defining American character, literary history ignores the fact that Crèvecoeur is also a natural history writer who observes and describes American geography, climates, plants, animals, and insects in loving detail and who espouses an attitude of environmental concern and ecological awareness.

Crèvecoeur's natural historical discourse — his close observation, detailed study and careful description of nature — in *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More Letters from an American Farmer* helps initiate a tradition of environmental concern into American intellectual history. Through celebrating men's sense of membership and sense of reverence toward nonhuman nature, lamenting men's ruthless destruction of animals and denouncing the brutality of man, proposing the prophetic idea that non-human nature has the right to exist, and suggesting the significance of forest protection, Crèvecoeur's natural history writings do not merely lead toward an ecological understanding of the world of nature,

but also cultivate a new ethical sensitivity to nonhuman nature. In this way, Crèvecoeur introduces a pattern of proto-environmental ethics and ecological thinking for late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century American culture. Crèvecoeur is unquestionably an early American natural history writer.

NOTES

¹ Though the essays in *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America, More Letters from an American Farmer* were published together in the twentieth century, these essays were all written between 1770 and 1778 (Lyon 33).

² In *Letters from an American Farmer*, Letters IV through IX, for instance, are manners-and-customs accounts that describe the inhabitants of Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, and Charles Town. Letter X, a natural history essay, describes New World snakes and hummingbirds. In the third section of this paper, I shall discuss some passages in Letter IV and Letter X.

³ In the next section (the third section) of this essay, I shall establish Crèvecoeur as a natural history writer; in the fourth section, I will explore how Crèvecoeur's representations of the relationship between human and nonhuman nature in his natural history writings contribute to the ecological awareness in early America.

⁴ In an essay entitled "Writing about Nature in Early America: From Discovery to 1850," Johnson and Patterson define nature history writings as "texts in which authors, in representing the natural world in language, deliberately bring together science and literature, and description and meditation, in order to effect some artful end" (3).

⁵ As court naturalist to Louis XV, Comte de Buffon was the premier natural historian of the eighteenth century (Branch, "Early Romantic" 1066). The forty-four volumes of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* (1787–1804) gave him nearly unassailable authority in the field of natural history.

⁶ Published two years after his friend Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) was a significant contribution to American natural history writing in the Revolutionary period. *Notes on the State of Virginia* distinguished Jefferson as

a man well versed not merely in architecture, law, political philosophy, and statesmanship but also in the field of natural history.

⁷ In Letter XI of *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur calls John Bartram “the first botanist” in America (181). In this paper, the following paragraph of this section will briefly discuss Letter XI.

⁸ In *Letters from an American Farmer*, Letter X, “On Snakes: and on the Humming-Bird,” is two natural history essays, one on hummingbirds imbedded within an essay on snakes.

⁹ In *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur approaches the natural world with reverence and respect, as a living testament of the Creator; indeed, the American farmer avers this natural divinity with the acknowledgement that “I know no other landlord than the lord of all land, to whom I owe the most sincere gratitude” (46).

¹⁰ Gifford Pinchot was the first American to choose forestry as a career (Nash 73). Also, he was “the first chief of the USDA Forest Service and an architect of the early conservation movement” (Miller and Sample xi).

¹¹ Today, conservation biologists have set themselves the task of answering this rhetorical question -- “Who knows how far these effects may extend?” (Crèvecoeur 285). One effect of cutting the last of the nation’s ancient woods and forests, these conservation biologists allege in trepidation, is to effect global warming and to hasten extinction rates.

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克瑞弗克爾：一位早期的美國自然史作家

摘要

在美國十八世紀末與十九世紀初這個世紀交替的時空下，克瑞弗克爾廣被認為是最負盛名的作家之一，他的代表作《來自一位美國農夫的書信》在十九世紀末問世後深受歡迎。在二十世紀以降的美國文學選集中，大多數的批評家選擇收錄《來自一位美國農夫的書信》裡的第三封信——〈何謂美國人〉，藉由此信將克瑞弗克爾定位為一個歌頌美國繁榮前景、探討美國性、以及定義美國民族性格的愛國作家。

本文完全不同上述解讀。此文試圖指出，克瑞弗克爾不只是一位定義美國人這個「新人類」的愛國作家，他其實更是一位自然史作家，而他的作品乃是典型的自然史文本。透過其自然史書寫，克瑞弗克爾不但為美國的大地風貌及物種做了詳實的觀察與紀錄，同時亦呈現了他對自然萬物的肯定與關切態度，進而為美國引進一套早期的生態思維與環境關懷意識。

關鍵字：克瑞弗克爾、自然史書寫、生態思維、環境關懷、美國早期自然史作家