

The Interpretative Source: A Tentative Definition of Allusion in Classical Chinese Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Allusion in classical Chinese poetry has a rather broad definition that has caused difficulties to the reader and led to misunderstanding on the part of exegetes—both inside as well as outside of China. This essay attempts to a more reasonable quantity. The essence of this new definition is that an allusion should have an interpretative source that coincides wholly with its textual source.

KEY WORDS

allusion

quasi-allusion

non-allusion

textual source

interpretative source

Introduction

Does allusion need a new definition? Especially does allusion in classical Chinese poetry need a definition? We may have a closer look at the definition of allusion in both Western and Chinese theories before giving an appropriate reply to these questions.

According to Earl Miner, allusion, in terms of its use in poetry, is a "tacit reference to another literary work, to another art, to history, to contemporary figures, or the like"(18). One may still ask, however, whether this definition involves metaphor or influence or intertextuality. Hence, I will attempt to offer a reply in the next section.

Now, in the case of the classical Chinese literature, allusion has a rather too simple definition given by Liu Xie (劉勰, 465?-532?): "to cite ancient practices to illustrate present-day ones"(614). And adopting allusion has been termed *yong-shi* (用事), "employing event."¹ This definition can be regarded as a quite broad one and it has been even more broadened by the conventional ways of traditional Chinese exegesis. A brief survey of the traditional Chinese exegesis which may need certain explanations.

According to *Hou Han Shu* (後漢書), the earliest form of commentary or exegesis in China was started by Bu Shang (卜商, 570-B.C.-?), a disciple of Confucius (551 B. C.-479 B. C.) (Fan 935). Later on, exegetes were disposed to use texts in the earlier classics to comment on the later ones. In fact, the mainstream of exegetes and expositors in successive generations would, when commenting on certain classics, put the etymological sources—usually a passage from an earlier classic—below the term they worked on as a commentary without further elucidation. In many cases, this kind of commentary can be considered more of a pedantic display than a commentary to facilitate understanding. Although no longer popular, this method has lingered to the present day and can be found in Western, Japanese, as well as Chinese scholars' writings on classical Chinese literature.²

Since the above-mentioned commentary had been regarded as a sort

of allusion, there seems to be the need to re-define allusion in classical Chinese poetry thus to narrow down the huge amount of allusion to a more reasonable quantity.

Finally, one word about why I especially choose allusion in classical Chinese poetry as the object of redefinition. It is because James J. Y. Liu posits: "A great deal of Chinese poetry is allusive; it is therefore necessary to pay attention to the use of allusions as a poetic device" (131). Consequently, an allusion may be more easily detected or felt in poetry as a jarring note which I will develop in the following pages.

1

In Western theories, allusion is a notion with a rich connotation that has been revised following the lapse of time.³ Its time-wrought definitions have sort of sfumato and can be confused with metaphor, influence, and intertextuality. It is necessary, therefore, to draw certain demarcations between these concepts.

In the first place, according to Aristotle, "metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species" or vice versa, "or from one species to another or else by analogy" (81). In consequence, we may regard allusion as a subclass of metaphor since it employs factual or conceptual details or quotations which bear a certain analogy to what is intentionally left unmentioned.

To me the difference is that a metaphor often stresses the novelty of an expression whereas an allusion is always a second-hand reference. For instance, when Homer chants "Phoibos Apollo walked with storm in his heart from Olympos' Crest" (13), he might be the first one who likened storm to anger. Now, if anyone after Homer again used this in similar terms, this individual could be reckoned as adopting an allusion since he or she was citing or imitating something that had already come into existence. A metaphor is brilliant with virgin splendor whereas an allusion is to add luster to an ancient ware by re-using it for new contents.

According to Edwin Stein, the fundamental difference between allusion and influence is that the operation of allusion is often "more limited in scope than influence study" (2) What I deem as more important is that there should be dyads of transmission of influence: the self-conscious and the un-self-conscious. Now allusion is always a self-conscious since it is a deliberate attempt to borrow expressions which have been considered more effective than the borrower's own words. We may conclude that allusion

can be included under the category of influence; however, allusion presents itself as something with peculiarities that distinguished it from other issues of influence.

Intertextuality is a term much younger than metaphor and influence although we can find its distant sources in the arguments of Stephane Mallarmé and Jacques Lacan.⁴ It was coined by Julia Kristéva in *Le mot, le dialogue, et le roman* in 1966:

... le mot(le texte) est un croisement de mots (de textes) ou on lit au moins un autre mot (texte). . . A la place de la notion d'intersubjectivités'installe celle d'*intertextualité* [sic.], et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme *double*. (145-6)

A similar idea of the decomposition of the text is expressed in another passage: "Dans l'espace d'un texte plusieurs énoncés, pris à d'autres textes, se croisent et se neutralisent" (113). Thus, allusion can be considered as an event within Julia Kristéva's concept of intertextuality which includes, in fact, the connections among all the constituents of language but allusion has its own peculiarities which can hardly be investigated in the light of such an all-embracing concept as intertextuality in Kristeva's sense.

To sum up, allusion can be compatible with categories like metaphor, influence, and intertextuality, but its own characteristics that should be investigated beyond the limited compatibility.

It may be suggested, from the preceding section, that allusion stands for a concept that has a narrower sense than do metaphor, influence, and intertextuality. However, as I have already stated, allusion in classical Chinese poetry has been regarded as a quite broad concept and a broad concept may have derivatives and specious offshoots. To me there is, therefore, the need to narrow allusion to a number smaller than is conventionally accepted to be the case. How can we distinguish, then, allusion from quasi-allusion—its derivative—and specious allusion—its misleading offshoot? By "specious allusion" I mean terms and/or expressions that have been regarded as, but should not be deemed as, allusion according to my categorization.

To begin with, a common feature of all three concepts is that they must have a source, and, clearly, a former text must serve as the source.

Then, the source of allusion can be classed under two different types. One is the textual source of the allusion, by which I mean the original text.

The other is the interpretative source that works as the key to allusion, without which the allusion cannot be fully understood. For instance, in the distich in "Listening to the *zheng*⁵" (聽箏) by Li Duan (李端) (fl. 766-79)

Wishing to invite young Zhou's back-glance,
She often misplays the strings.

欲得周郎顧

時時誤拂絃 (*Quan Tang Shi*, Vol. 9, 3280)

The term "young Zhou's back glance" in line three and "misplay the strings" in line four involve an allusion. Zhou refers to Zhou Yu (周瑜, 175-210), a famous general of Wu state in the Three Kingdom period (220-265) who died prematurely at the age of thirty-six. The *San guo zhi* (三國志) has the following passage about his musical proficiency:

[Zhou] Yu was an adept in music when he was young. Even after three rounds of wine, he could still discern the misplaying of instruments and he would always glance back [at the player] whenever he detected the misplaying. Therefore people made this ballad: "Young Zhou will glance back whenever the tune is misplayed." (Chen 1219)

The reader will probably not comprehend the meaning of the allusion in the above poem without knowing its source. What I want to emphasize here is that this source is both textual and interpretative. The fact is that we may regard this source as two sources that overlap each other perfectly and thus become identical. What should be stressed is that this is the predominant characteristic of allusion that demarcates allusion from quasi-allusion and specious allusion.

Whereas a quasi-allusion also has one textual and one interpretative source, both are imperfect in the sense that they do not convey to the reader the necessary information that can enable a full understanding of the reference since the allusion has acquired, through long years of use, a new definition that has deviated significantly from the original meaning. For instance, in the couplet in "A Poem Composed While Drunken For Zhang Xu the Ninth" (醉後贈張九旭) by Gao Shi (高適, 700-765):

Old with gray hair, having leisure,

Right now blue clouds appear.

白髮老閑事

青雲在目前 (*Quan Tang Shi*, Vol. 6, 2225)

The “blue clouds” is a quasi-allusion whose source is in the *Shi ji* (史記):

Xu Jia (須賈) asked [to Fan Ju (范雎), touching his forehead to the ground in deep respect: “I did not imagine that Your Honor could raise yourself above the blue clouds.”

(Sima, “Fan Ju and Cai Ze,” Vol. 1, 273)

in which “blue clouds” is used to exaggerate the weight of Fan’s position, but became thereafter the synonym of rapid advancement in one’s career, as it is used in Gao Shi’s lines. Accordingly, we may say that neither the textual nor the interpretative source suffices to illuminate the definition of a quasi-allusion. Practically, a quasi-allusion stands for a commonplace concept that is known to every well-educated reader. Hence, although quasi-allusion is similar to allusion in the sense that both have an interpretative source in previous classics, there is no point in tracing quasi-allusion to its source. Moreover, to track to the interpretative source of quasi-allusion would, in certain cases, increase the difficulty of understanding the line or poem appropriately.

In the case of specious allusion, it shows, when the reader peeps into it deeply enough, that a later text might be remotely connected with a previous one. This former text, if considered as the source of the later one, does not illuminate the later text which is self-evident without the need of illumination from its source. Thus, we may trace the later text to its source that is purely textual or etymological but by no means interpretative. It is, therefore, inappropriate to regard the later text as an allusion or quasi-allusion although it may have a certain relationship with a prior text.

The following example may help illustrate specious allusion. In “A Poem Composed to Give to Zhang Xuzhou Ji” (贈張徐州稷) by Fan Yun (范雲, 450-503):

All the retainers have pearls and hawksbills [as decorations],

Their fur-coats are light, their horses are fat.

賓從皆珠玕

裘馬悉輕肥 (*Wen Xuan*, Vol. 2, 372)

almost every term in the two lines has, according to Li Shan (李善, 630?-689), the T'ang commentator, a source: "retainers" comes from "Wu Du Fu" (吳都賦) (*Wen Xuan*, Vol. 1, 88) by Zuo Si (左思, 250?-305?); "pearls and hawksbills" from *Shi Ji* by Sima Qian (司馬遷, 145? Or 135?-?) ("Biography of Chun Shen Jun" 271); and the second line borrowed from *Analects*⁶. We shall not view all these terms as allusions since they are self-evident and do not need their sources to throw upon them a more elucidating light. In addition, these sources cannot make an exposition any clearer than that which these terms offer themselves. Hence, the sources are merely textual and not interpretative.

Again, in the opening lines of "Roaming in A Fairyland" (遊仙) by Cao Zhi (植, 192-232):

Human life cannot enjoy a hundred years, Every year there is less enjoyment. (*Cao zi-jian Shi Zhu* 79)

人生不滿百
歲歲少歡娛

The commentator Huang Jie notes that the first line is based on a line in the "Nineteen Ancient Poems": Living life cannot enjoy a hundred years. (*Cao zi-jian Shi Zhu* 79)

To sum up, we can use the following figures based on the textual and interpretative sources to distinguish allusion, quasi-allusion, and non-allusion from each other.

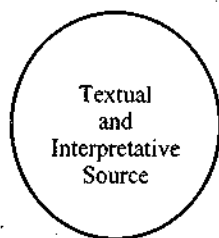


Fig. 1

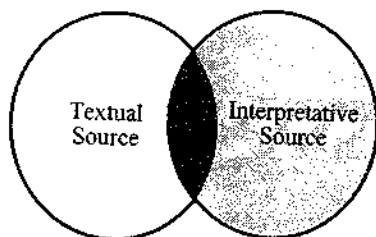


Fig. 2

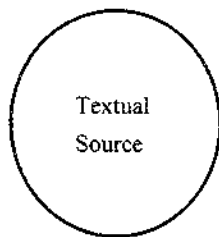


Fig. 3

Figure 1 is allusion, and the interpretative source coincides wholly with the textual source. Figure 2 indicates the relationship between the sources and quasi-allusion. The darker shadowed section is the part of the sources that has turned out to be the basis for the transferred meaning, and the lighter shadowed section is the quasi-allusion that has become the synonym for another concept. Figure 3 shows the specious allusion which has merely the textual source.

3

The textual/interpretative source is crucial to allusion since allusion affords a discernible clue for the existence of this textual / interpretative source, which also serves as a key to the connotation of allusion.⁷ For one thing, allusion is usually an unassimilated existence in a line or a poem: it serves as a lodestone to arrest the reader's attention by its marked unsociableness with—or, shall we say, aloofness from—other terms in the line or the poem. By “unsociableness” or “aloofness” I mean that it makes the reader realize that this term cannot be interpreted at its surface meaning while other terms can and the line or the poem cannot be completely or satisfyingly elucidated before the essence of this terms is appropriately understood. Consider the following poem:

Emotions on Happenstance Chen Zi-ang (661-702)

North wind blows against the sea trees,

Bleak fall comes to the frontier.

Who is there at the watchtower,

So sad in the moonlit building?

He says: 'I am from You and Yan,

I traveled far and wide as an adult.

With a red ball I killed an official,

With a white sword I avenged a personal insult.

To evade the enemy I came to the seaside,

And became a soldier at the borderland.

Three thousand *li*⁸ separates me from my hometown,

And the Liao River is long, so long.

I hate the alien aggressors,

And feel ashamed of the Han country.

Alas, I have fought seventy battles,

Still I don't have a degree of dignity!

(*Quan Tang Shi*, vol. 3, 894)

感遇 陳子昂

北風吹海樹
 蕭條邊已秋
 亭上誰家子
 哀哀明月樓
 自言幽燕客
 結髮事遠遊
 赤丸殺公吏
 白刃報私仇
 避仇至海上
 被役此邊州
 故鄉三千里
 遼水復悠悠
 每恨胡兵入
 常為漢國羞
 何知七十戰
 白首未封侯

Obviously, in the above poem, the only term that is elusive and thus does not coordinate harmoniously with the other ones is “red ball” in line seven. A ball cannot be used to kill a person, and why especially a red ball? The allusion thus presents itself with its aloofness, which requires one to seek out a source that is at once textual and interpretative.

According to *Qian Han Shu* (前漢書), young delinquents in Chang’an (長安)—the capital in Tang Dynasty (618-907)—often committed assassinations to show their bravery. They would mix red, black, and white balls together in a bag, and each of those participants would take one ball at random. The one who got the red ball would assassinate an officer, one who got the black ball would assassinate an official, and the person who got the white ball would take care of the funeral for the assassin(s) who got killed in the murderous act.⁹

In the above example we can see the way allusion works: its unasimulated existence strongly implies—by its jarring note—some information from its textual and interpretative source that has to be acquired before one can understand the line or the poem.

There is also the case in which allusion is not as spectacular as the one in the above poem. While it attracts the reader’s attention, it has a more commonplace appearance. For example, in the lines from “Emotions

While Offering Sacrifice to Confucius When Passing Zou, Shandong Province" (經鄒魯祭孔子而歎之) by Li Long-ji (李隆基, 685-762)

Now you are enjoying sacrifice between two columns,
It should be the scene you saw in your dream. (*Quan Tang Shi*,
Vol. 1, 30)

今看兩楹奠
當與夢時同

The term "enjoying sacrifice between two columns" seems quite unremarkable. It may, however, pique the reader's curiosity: why should sacrifice be offered between two columns? why not between four or more or not between columns at all? According to *Li Ji* (禮記) waking up from a dream in which he was sitting between two columns and enjoying offerings, Confucius told his disciples: "I think I am going to die" (1283) This indicates that, however stock an allusion may be, it is, by and large, telling enough to make the reader realize that something must be implied there. We can see that allusion is always suggestive of some information beyond its surface meaning and consequently points to its textual/interpretative source.

It is important to note that both the textual source and the interpretative source will play a decisive role in distinguishing allusion from quasi-allusion and specious allusion. They are the same in the case of allusion, but not in the case of quasi-allusion or specious allusion. I will explain, in the following sections, how they work in the other two cases.

4

Quasi-allusion can have various forms. In the first place, it may be an apparently stock term. For instance, in the lines from "Passing An Old Friend's Farm" (過故人莊) by Men Hao-ran (孟浩然, 689-740):

In the room facing the ground and garden, We talk about mulberry and hemp over wine. (*Quan Tang Shi*, Vol. 5, 1651)

開軒面場圃
把酒話桑麻

"mulberry and hemp" is a quasi-allusion. This term was first used in *Guan Zi* (管子): "The way to secure constant supply is to cultivate mulberry and

hemp and breed the six domestic animals" (Vol. 3. 1). Since then "mulberry and hemp" has become the synonym for agriculture as both were important crops in ancient times: the leaves of the former were used to feed silkworms and the latter was used to weave coarse cloth. It is thus unnecessary to regard it as an allusion since it is known to every educated reader.

Again a quasi-allusion can be a special name as Chang'an in the following lines from "A Poem Composed For Left Assistant Shen Who Is to Follow Counselor Wang to Shanxi, Wang Goes There as a Head Censor" (送沈左司從汪參政分省陝西，汪由御史中丞出) by Gao Qi (高啟, 1136-74):

I know you will look back on the westward journey, Because
Chang'an is now east of the Yangtze River. (Gao 514)
知汝西行定回首
而今定江左是長安

It was the name of a city—Xian (西安) today—that had been the capital of China for about fourteen hundred years over twelve dynasties up to the downfall of Tang Dynasty. It became, therefore, the synonym of the imperial capital after Tang¹⁰ and it is used in this sense in the above poem since Gao Qi was a poet in the early Ming Dynasty (1369-1644) that had Nanjing (南京) for its capital until 1421. It will not make sense if the reader interprets it as the actual Chang'an since this city was in Shanxi Province where the Head Censor Wang and his assistant Shen were going. In the above poem, Chang'an means, of course, Nanjing, the capital of the Ming Dynasty and the place that the Head Censor Wang would, as the poet Gao Qi anticipated, look backward to on his westward journey. In addition, all the information—historical, geographical, and so forth—that comes from the interpretative sources of this term does not help the reader understand its meaning in this poem. The term is used because it has become a synonym for the concept of capital which is merely partly related to the information that the sources can offer. Once the change from a special term to a synonym for a rather ordinary concept is accomplished, the information and sources of this special term can be ignored, as is the case with "mulberry and hemp." In the above poem, it is clear that it will only cause unnecessary confusion to the reader if he attempts to refer to the historical and geographical details about Chang'an.

To avoid misunderstanding that proper nouns must always be consid-

ered quasi-allusions, I will give an example when a proper noun could be an allusion. For instance, in the following lines from "Passing Da-yu Ridge" (度大庾嶺) by Song Zhi-wen (宋之問, 656?-712)

As long as I can go back home,
I will never dare to resent Chang-sha.

(*Quan Tang Shi*, Vol. 2, 641)

但令歸有日

不敢恨長沙

Changsha is a place name exactly as Chang'an, but it is an allusion here. It involves Jia Yi (賈誼, 200 B.C.-168 B. C.), a scholar who was in the favor of the Emperor Wen Di (文帝, reign 179-160 B. C.), but was slandered by his colleagues and was demoted to the position of Tutor of the Prince of Changsha. Feeling depressed at the demotion and uncomfortable at the humid weather in Changsha, Jia Yi composed a rhapsody, while crossing the nearby Xiang River (湘水), to lament the misfortune of Qu Yuan (屈原, 340?-278?), whom he revered as a predecessor.¹¹ This term "Changsha" is therefore an allusion in the sense that its meaning cannot be apprehended without knowing the anecdote of Jia Yi.

We have compared quasi-allusion with allusion. Now, to make the concept of quasi-allusion more conspicuous, we may examine the similarity and dissimilarity between quasi-allusion and metaphor. For one thing, quasi-allusion shares certain features with metaphor: both replace one concept with another. Nevertheless, quasi-allusion is different from metaphor. According to Northrop Frye:

A typical metaphor takes the form of the statement "A" is "B," examples being found in Jacob's prophecy of the twelve tribes of Israel in Genesis 49: "Joseph is a fruitful bough," "Issachar is a strong ass," "Naphtali is a hind let loose."

It is obvious that both allusion and quasi-allusion are never that straightforward. Allusion involves, as mentioned in the introduction, facts, events, concepts, or stories, and is therefore more like an implied narrative. Quasi-allusion is at once, on the contrary, more devious in its formation and less complicated in its definition. It is more devious since it usually begets a new meaning and leaves its original source behind as a shadow, but, once

the transferred meaning is acquired, it can be easily understood without the necessity of tracing back to its source.

Hence, we can also argue that the interpretative source of quasi-allusion does not necessarily coincide with its textual/etymological one. Quasi-allusion sometimes summarizes the meaning of its sources to become a synonym for one ordinary concept, like Chang'an for capital, and thus reduces its textual source to a worn skeleton. Again, for quasi-allusion that has acquired a transferred meaning, the interpretative source is merely partially important or not important at all in certain cases. This should be regarded as a special characteristic of quasi-allusion.

5

To dispel possible misunderstandings of the term "specious allusion," I will emphasize again, with reference to my argument about the sources, that by "specious allusion" I mean terms or expressions—in certain cases with an appearance which may be similar to allusion—that have been considered as allusion but without the interpretative source.

My definition is different from that of James R. Hightower's "non-allusion"—a term close to my "specious allusion"—"The resemblance is fortuitous, and misleading if pressed," (Hightower 109) in the sense that a non-allusion is not—in most cases—similar to an allusion, hence there is no need to be pressed. Furthermore, non-allusion can be, by and large, understood *liberatim*, therefore no need to trace it back to its source either. Moreover, there will be no illumination regarding its definition since it does not have an interpretative source. It has merely a textual source which serves as a historical nostalgic root for the exegetes. I will indicate in the following passages that more than one variety in Hightower's spectrum could be considered as specious allusion in the light of my argument about textual and interpretative sources.

In the introduction, I stressed the antiquarian passion for origin which became a tradition with Chinese exegetes who frequently tracked the characters that they annotated to their earliest source. This method may create some paradoxical difficulty since the quoted textual passage supposed to help understand the commentated term comes, as a rule, from an earlier text, and may be thus more difficult to interpret than the commentated term itself. Again, the method may bring for the a second result that involves specious allusion directly. A number of commentators in every generation are inclined to extend their antiquarian hobby beyond allusion to quasi-

allusion and specious allusion. This is likely to cause misunderstanding on the part of the reader who is led to think that those terms have a textual source as their commentary might be allusion as well.

I now take up certain points made by James R. Hightower as an instance. There are "Seven Varieties"—or "seven types" as he calls them in the later passages of his essay—in his spectrum. The fourth of the seven types involves the case in which "The line makes perfect sense. The allusion, when identified, adds overtones that reinforce the literal meaning." (110) He gives a "clear-cut" instance of this type as he argues that behind the following lines

If we do not enjoy ourselves today,
 How do we know there will be another year?
 今我不為樂
 知有來歲不

is the *Classic of Songs* couplet from "Xi Shuai" (蟋蟀), "The Cricket:"

If we do not enjoy ourselves today,
 The days and months will pass us by. (*Classic of Poetry* 361)
 今我不樂
 日月其餘

and T'ao's use of this former text was no doubt deliberate since "Both poems are about autumn and both urge enjoying present pleasure," and

The total effect of referring T'ao's line to its source is to lend the weight of classical authority to a proposition which otherwise might be taken as a frivolous piece of Six Dynasties hedonism. (Hightower 109)

Now the problem is whether we need to refer to the source of the first two lines to understand them better. It is clear that, first, Tao (T'ao)'s lines could merely be regarded as an instance of *yong ju* (用句), *yong yu* (用語), or *yong shi* (用詩)—using a predecessor's lines, terms, or poems—but not *yong shi*—using facts, legends, concepts, or anecdotes—which I consider to be allusion in the strict sense in classical Chinese literary criticism. Second, the terms in these two lines are similar to each other and there is no implication in either of them. We may agree with Hightower's position

that the source of Tao's lines lends "weight of classical authority to a proposition which otherwise might be taken as a frivolous piece of Six Dynasties hedonism," but we may also argue that this can be said of every case in which the latecomer's text is under the influence of a predecessor's. I will argue, therefore, that this may not be a good excuse to include in the concept of allusion the above latecomer's lines which seem to me a specious allusion.¹²

In fine, while it may be true that tracing back to the source might lend authority to Tao's lines, it should also be noted that this source-hunting could elicit the accusation that Tao's line is merely an imitation--if not plagiarism--of a line composed by an earlier poet. Tao merely added to the source line one character which is not consequential enough to make his own line radically different from the source line. Besides, this source is nothing but a textual one, unlike the sources--both the textual and the interpretative--of allusion which will help the reader interpret the meaning better. Contrary to Hightower's opinion, I will aver that to tract Tao's line to its source might well tarnish Tao's fame as a poet since, for whatever reasons, his lines are similar to those of a predecessor to an unjustifiable extent. To sum up, with specious allusion, it is often pointless to indicate its source which is, by and large, a textual/etymological one. As is shown above, it may be worthwhile in certain cases to let the source lend prestige to the specious allusion, but there might be certain side-effect as well. It would be difficult to determine which holds the dominant position: the positive effect or the dubious side-effect.

Hightower's Fourth and Fifth Varieties of allusion "shade into one another, and there is a large area where the division is subjective and to a certain extent arbitrary." (125) But the Fourth refers to a source which, "when identified, adds overtones that reinforce the literal meaning" (110) whereas the Fifth seems more effective in the poet than in the reader:

An expression or phrase in the line also occurs in a text undoubtedly familiar to the poet, but it makes no contribution to the reader's appreciation of the line, and it is impossible to say whether the poet's adaptation of it was conscious or not. (110)

Later he puts this in another way:

In both [the Fourth and the Fifth] cases a line of a poem makes

sense without the allusion. What a reader must decide is, did the poet write his line expecting him to recognize his source? And does this identification of his source add anything to the reading of his line? (125)

Then, he gives an example. First, he quotes Tao Qian's lines in "At General Wnag's Party for Departing Guests"

The autumn days grow sharp and chill
 And all the plants are dry and sere.
 秋日淒且厲
 百卉俱已腓

Here, according to him, "a *Shih Ching* couplet has been pressed into use which says the same thing in identical words (Tao has tucked in an extra word in each line to make it scan)." (127) To establish a close comparison, I translated the original in *Classic of Poetry (Shih Ching)* here, and my rendering adopts most of the words that Hightower used in his translation of Tao Qian's lines:

The autumn days grow so sharp
 And all plants dry and sere. (*Classic of Poetry* 462)
 秋日淒淒
 百卉具腓

One trivial point is that, if you follow a different version of *Shiling*, (Mao 460) Tao Qian tucked in two words—in fact, tucking in one and replacing another—in the first line. Hightower comments on the source and denies that Tao Qian's lines are plagiarism since Tao Qian "must have expected his readers to know the source." But even though the readers recognized it, "they could not make use of any part of their knowledge in interpreting T'ao's poem." That is because the source poem is "a complaint about ill-treatment." (Hightower 127)

Perspicuously, Hightower has realized the possibility of misunderstanding in tracing Tao's lines to their source. It is thus pointless to undertake this sort of source-hunting since the source is completely uninterpretable and will probably produce, on the contrary, a sort of misunderstanding by entrapping the reader in a maze of intertextuality. Again, what is more

important is that, according to classical Chinese literary criticism, Tao's lines are purely using a predecessor's lines and not using events or anecdotes. This case should not, therefore, be considered as an example of allusion. In addition, whatever the reason for which Tao Qian used a predecessor's lines, hunting down the source does not add to the reader's appreciation of the poem or of Tao Qian as a poet.

One point in Hightower's definition of a Sixth Type of allusion interests me particularly, since it involves my concept of quasi-allusion. According to Hightower, a word may be "used in a sense familiar from a classical text," but "it makes no difference whether you (or the poet) learned the meaning of the word from a dictionary or from its source." (110) To illustrate, he quotes a couplet from the first poem of "In the Fifth Month of the Year 400, Held Up at Kueilin" (庚子歲五月中從都還阻風於桂林):

My first joy will be to wait on my parents
 My nest pleasure to see my brothers.
 一欣侍溫情
 再喜見友于

Hightower remarks that "The word *yu* 'friends with' means 'brothers' only by virtue of its occurrence in *Shih Ching*, 'You are filial and friends with your brothers.'" (129) Recall that my notion of quasi-allusion is a term or expression with a source that is at the same time textual and interpretative but has later become, owing to its frequent use in classical Chinese poetry and/or essays, an expression for a certain common-place concept that is merely partly related to its interpretative essence. Moreover, this transferred meaning is, by and large, known to every educated reader of poetry. Thus, although quasi-allusion is similar to allusion in the sense that both have an interpretative source in prior classics, there is no point in tracking quasi-allusion to its source. Besides, to track the interpretative source of quasi-allusion would, in certain cases, simply compound the difficulty of understanding the poem appropriately.

Accordingly, I will argue that, in the above instance given by Hightower, *you yu* (*yu*) should be deemed a quasi-allusion. In the first place, this term comes from the line "being filial and friendly to brothers" (惟孝·友于兄弟) in *Classic of History (Shu Ching)* (Shang 236), and these two characters *you yu* literally mean "friendly to," and therefore are not a term that should be considered as a noun. Then, Shi Bi (史壁, fl. 147-80), a min-

ister in the imperial court, used *you yu* as an obscure expression to mean brothers in his written statement to the emperor Huan Di (桓帝, r. 147-67) against the evil imperial brothers: "Your majesty is very *friendly to*, and does not have the heart to suppress them" (Fan 987). Since then, this term has become the synonym for brother(s).

In Tao Qian's lines quoted by Hightower the characters *you yu* also mean "brothers." It is then reasonably clear that the current meaning of the term *you yu* has drifted away from its origin and merely partly refers to the interpretative source. It may also be assumed that Hightower realizes this since he posits that there could be the meaning from the dictionary—which I deem as the current meaning—and the meaning from its source. For instance, the dictionary *Hanyu Da Cidian* (漢語大辭典) gives, under the entry *you yu* its textual and interpretative source and then remarks that it has been taken as first, "the brotherly love," and second, "brother(s) in transferred meaning" (853). It is important to note that in the case of a quasi-allusion, the meaning of a word from a dictionary could be different from its meaning in the source as is shown above, and not as Hightower notes: "It makes no difference whether you(or the poet) learned the meaning of the word from a dictionary or from the source" (110).

Finally, Hightower's seventh type is "the real non-allusion," and it is included in the spectrum of allusion because "it does look like an allusion, and it will be cited by a commentator as though he thought it was one" (130). He offers the lines from Tao Qian's fourth poem of the "Untitled Poems"

With loosened belt relax in joy,
Get up late and go early to sleep
緩帶盡歡娛
起晚眠常早

and quotes Ting Fu-pao's(1873-1952) argument that this couplet is from the first of Nineteen Old Poems:

You left and every day go farther from me,
My garment's belt grows every day more slack.
相去日已遠
衣帶日已緩

then, he continues to say that Ting did not take this quotation as an allusion but probably "he remembered another line with the words *huan* and *tai* [*dai*] in it, in addition to the more relevant Ts'ao Chih's [Cao Zhi] couplet":

In their happiness they drink more than three cups
And loosening their belts empty the dishes of dainties. (130)

樂飲過三爵
緩帶傾庶羞

And he concludes that this parallel does not constitute real allusion either, but belongs to his Fifth Type, where the identity is probably accidental but in any case was not intended to be noticed by the reader" (130).

Obviously, Hightower wants to say that both the source in the Nineteen Old Poems and Cao Zhi's couplet are specious allusion, or not real allusion in his own words. In my opinion, they are actually the ordinary textual/etymological sources, and they are singled out by the exegetes under the spell of pedantic learned display. It is clear that the term *huan dai* in either the lines of Tao Qian or those of Cao Zhi should be taken at its surface meaning. Therefore it is not even a quasi-allusion which is always a synonym standing for some concept. It is specious allusion.

6

Similar source-hunting can be seen in Nieda Tadashi's *Hai Bungaku to Kan Bungaku*. If Hightower has included specious allusion in the spectrum of allusion, Nieda has obscured the distinction between influence and allusion. In the article "Buson's Haiku and Chinese Poetry and Essays," Nieda enumerates six sorts of influence of Chinese poetry and essays on the haiku poetry of Yosa Buson (與謝蕪村, 1716-84) (140-50). We need not dwell upon all of these except to note that first, of the six sorts of influences, the fifth is "Adopting ancient events and saying" (149) which, both in view of its literal meaning and the examples that Nieda offers to clarify it, may point to allusion. Secondly, Nieda stresses *tenkyo* (典據) (150), a Japanese term which could mean either source or foundation related, to a certain extent, to allusion.¹³ Just as Hightower offers a spectrum of allusions, although blended with specious ones, Nieda presents to the reader a wide variety of influence merged with allusion. While allusion can be considered a type of influence, there still should be a clear-cut demarcation

between the concept of influence and that of allusion in light of broad or narrow connotation, and the conscious or unconscious repercussion.

Notably, Nieda also adheres to the ancient Chinese commentary tradition of tracking a term, an expression, a line or lines to its ostensible source, though remote to such an extent that it could be viewed as irrelevant in certain cases. This is why there is no radical difference between his concept of influence and that of allusion. I will quote two of his examples to illustrate my argument. First, Nieda gives the following two haiku by Yosa Buson:

Oriole's warbling,
The distant sun also
Has set.
鶯の聲遠き日も暮にけり
The oriole,
Distant all day long,
Man in the field.
鶯に終日遠し畑の人

and remarks that these two haiku could be tracked back to two lines in "Learning in Guangzhou That Censors Cui and Ma Were Promoted to Ministers" (在廣州聞崔馬二御史並登相台) by Su Wei-dao (蘇味道, 648-705):

When egrets flying together,
The moving orioles can be heard afar. (*Quan Tang Shi* 754)
振鶯纒飛日
遷鶯遠聽聞

Then he comments on the two lines

"Moving orioles" means congratulations on Cui and Ma's promotion to ministers.¹⁴ I think Buson employed this term out of context and took it at its surface meaning. (Nieda 155)

We may ask whether it makes sense to trace a term back to a rather far-fetched source—moving orioles—that can hardly throw any light on what we may hesitantly call its derivative and actually may cause misunderstanding in the reader. We may also ask whether it is worth the trouble,

either for primitivist etymological hobby or for erudite display, to trail to a second-hand source since “moving orioles” first appeared in *Classic of Poetry* and not in Su Wei-dao’s poem. Finally, we may wonder why this source is still mentioned although it is admitted that “Buson employed this term out of context.” In my opinion, suppose the predecessor’s term has a transferred meaning and the latecomer employed it out of context and “took it at its surface meaning,” there is merely the relationship of intertextuality *per se* between the two, and there is no need for a source-hunt.

In the second instance the latecomer term may seem even more removed from its source. Nieda gives Buson’s haiku

A young monk,
Taking a nap,
One spring evening.
肘白き僧のかり寝や宵の春

and posits that it was remolded after the following two lines in “A Casual Doze” (偶眠) by Bai Ju-yi (白居易, 772-846):

Leaving the goblet on the desk,
Resting head on the arm before the stove.¹⁵ (159)
放杯書案上
枕臂火爐前

Nieda does not put forth the reason for which he holds that Buson’s haiku grew out of Bai Ju-yi’s lines. Again, there is no easily recognizable relationship between the two. The only association may be that between “taking a nap” and “resting head on the arm.” The Japanese term for taking a nap is *kari’ne* (假寝) that has its etymological root in the Chinese term *jia-mei* (假寐) the source of which is in the line “Taking a nap and heaving a long sigh” (假寐永歎), in *Xiao Pan*, (小弁), *Classic of Poetry* (Shi 462). It is difficult to understand why Nieda does not advance the pursuit of *kari’ne* to *Xiao Pan* but instead to Bai Ju-yi’s lines in which “resting head on the arm” is expressed in another two characters: *zhen bi*.

One may argue that both above examples suggested by Nieda could be regarded as those of influence and not of allusion. My reply is that first of all, I want to indicate how the traditional Chinese commentary method is still being observed by non-Chinese scholars in their writings on Chinese

literature—especially the classic—today. Second, both Hightower and Nieda do not draw a marked distinction between either allusion and specious allusion or allusion and influence. We should clarify these points further.

I hope I have not given the impression that this traditional Chinese commentary method has been given up by Chinese scholars today. In fact, it is still favored by certain scholars. A striking example is Huang Jie who employed this method in his commentaries on ancient Chinese poets' works. For one example, take his annotation of Cao Zhi's line "Cold breeze blows me" (涼風飄我身): "The Mao text of the *Poetry* says: 'The northerly wind is cold' (北風其涼) (*Classic of Poetry*, 310), also says: 'Wind blows you' (風其飄女)"¹⁶ (Cao 2). Obviously, the line "Cold breeze blows me" can be taken at its surface meaning and does not need a commentary; also, Huang Jie's commentary does not bring forward any implication that Cao Zhi's line may carry, but in fact it does not. This commentary can only be considered as a specious allusion since it shows merely a textual source which is not an interpretative one at the same time.

I want to stress that specious allusion can be, by and large, taken at its surface meaning, while allusion—however recondite or simple—is always an unbalanced force in the poetry by virtue of its inability to be assimilated with other words or expression. Hence it is always necessary for the reader to trace allusion to its textual/interpretative source while there is no pressing need for him or her to do so in the case of a specious allusion.

In "Allusion and Periphrasis as Modes of Poetry in Tu Fu's 'Eight Laments'" Shan Chou stresses that allusion is "a special case of periphrasis, one in which a knowledge of the original situation is required in order to understand the lines in which it occurs" (Chou 83) We can say that this involves what I define as the interpretative source of allusion. Also she analyzes allusion into vehicle and tenor which "are not balanced forces in whose interplay lies the poetic truth" (92).

To me both the vehicle and the tenor constitute an entity of components or the two components in an entity. What is striking is that allusion—however recondite or simple—is always an unbalanced force in the poetry by virtue of its inability to be assimilated with other words or expressions. Allusion is different from metaphor in this respect. Metaphor will generally add to the appeal to the reader's mind, but not necessarily to the intangibility of poetry. For example, in the following passage:

Ah, Hektor,
 this harshness is no more than just. Remember, though your
 spirit's like an ax-edge whetted sharp that goes thought timber,
 when a good shipwright hews out a beam: the tool triples his
 power. (Homer 69)

The metaphor likening Hektor's spirit to an ax-edge whetted sharp not only augments the attraction of language but also helps the reader understand better what the poet wants to tell, i.e., that Hektor has an indomitable spirit. On the contrary, allusion would generally cause difficulty on the part of the reader unless it is fully interpreted as is shown in the following instance:

Here, O ye hallow'd Nine! for in your train
 I follow, here the deaden'd strain revive;
 Nor let Calliope refuse to sound
 A somewhat higher song, of that loud tone
 Which when the wretched birds of chattering note
 Had heard, they of forgiveness lost all hope. (Dante 149)

The above passage and those that will follow may not convey much to the reader if he or she does not know that Calliope is the foremost of the Muses and the patron of epic poetry. Allusion is, therefore, an unassimilated entity in a line or lines, and the lines and poem could not be fully elucidated without referring to the allusion's textual/interpretative source.

Conclusion

The traditional Chinese commentary method is actually a sort of circumlocution¹⁷ since it usually adopts the earliest textual source to shed light on the meaning of a certain term or expression without giving, in a number of cases, a direct and plain explanation. Owing to this source-hunting, allusion defined simply as "employing events" is difficult, on certain occasions, to differentiate from using a predecessor's lines, terms, or poems. This, together with the practice of taking allusion for granted, has resulted in allusion in classical Chinese poetry being frequently mixed up with similar concepts like specious allusion, influence, borrowing from a created work without crediting the source,¹⁸ and so forth. As a result, it leads to the almost inevitable aftermath that there has been, *in esse*, a huge

host of cases called allusion, many of which should be, on every account, rejected. This would excuse the reader—and the annotator, to a certain extent—from the arduous labor involving reading unnecessary and inefficient commentaries and tracing characters, terms, and expressions to their textual/etymological source. This essay has attempted to limit allusion to the textual/interpretative source.

Circumlocution is a detour and allusion is a sort of circumlocution. We can not change allusion's nature or source, but we may make its outline more visible and detectable among the umbrageous bush of quasi-allusion, specious allusion, influence, intertextuality, and so forth. I sincerely hope that there will be more discussion on the definition of allusion in classical Chinese, a topic recently revived especially among Western scholars dedicated to the study of classical Chinese literature.¹⁹

Notes

¹ This term was first coined in "While composing articles, Marquis Shen employs event which is difficult to discern." See Yan 754.

² See *Xie Kang-le Shi Zhu* (謝康樂詩注), *Cao Zi-jian Shi Zhu* (曹子建詩注), Nieda, Hightower, and so forth. I will into details in the following sections.

³ See Wheeler 3 .

⁴ See Mallarme 357 and Lacan, *Ecrits* 1 152.

⁵ An ancient Chinese musical instrument, a *zheng* had either thirteen, sixteen, or twenty-five strings in different historical periods.

⁶ See *Analects*, "Yong Ye" (雍也), vol. 1, 2478.

⁷ Goren Hermeren argues that the relationship between an allusion and its source in fine art can be in the following different ways:

(a) the artist who created *X* (in this case, the Studio) intended to make beholders think of *Y* (in this case, *Las Meninas*); (b) as a matter of fact, beholders contemplating *X* make associations with *Y*; and (c) the beholders recognize that this was when the artist wanted them to do. (77)

To me the sole difference between allusion in art and allusion in poetry is that the former might, as a whole, associate with some previous work as in the relationship between *The Studio* and *Las Meninas*, whereas the latter can never make a poem which includes it wholly related to a certain ancient source. A poem could have allusions in every line, but every allusion

is, all the same, precisely a partial reminder of something that has been said before. To put it briefly, allusion in poetry can only barely convey to the reader a sense of integral association with its entire source; allusion in art can usually do this completely.

⁸ A unit of length, the ancient standard of which varies, more or less, from the present on which rules that one *li* is equal to 0.5 kilometer.

⁹ See Ban Gu, Vol. 1, 705.

¹⁰ As late as in 1920s, certain intellectuals who cherished, after the Revolution in 1911, a lingering feeling towards the overthrown Qing Dynasty still used "Chang' an" to mean the capital in their poetry. For instance, in *To Jie-qing* (寄階青) by Jin Zhao-fan (金兆蕃) (1867-1951): "We are old, yet the worldly way remains rugged, I dream the old Ching'an at night (世路未平吾輩老·深宵魂夢舊長安). See *An-le-xiang Ren Shi Xu* (安樂鄉人詩續) 87 (Taipei: Wen Hai, 1964).

¹¹ See Sima, "Qu Yuan and Scholar Jia," 281.

¹² Also, it involves the question of what kind of an attitude the reader should adopt towards hedonism. It will be assumed that hedonistic poetry has its own aesthetic points. What is said of erotic poetry may also be true of hedonistic poetry: it is

made to sub-serve an aesthetic effect, to submit to the artistic stylization of experience in the poem. However, although the imposition of stylistic and imaginative unity upon subject matter in poetry is analogous to moral integrity and self-control in practical matters, to demand control in poetry is not to require the poet to adhere to our own particular moral standards.

(*Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 250-1)

In view of this and the fact that many hedonistic poems—*Meghaduta* by Kalidasa, the odes of Sappho, certain poems by Cao Zhi (曹植), Lu Ji (陸機), Jiang Yan (江淹), etc., to mention a few of these poets of the Six Dynasties—hedonistic poetry *per se* may not give much cause for either affirmative or negative criticism.

¹³ According to *Ko Ji En* (廣辭苑), ed. Shinmura Izuru (新村出) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977) 1543, *tenkyo* means "source, basis, foundation of either speech or essays." Again under the entry *tenko* (典故)—meaning allusion—it says: "Ancient happenstance that can serve as *tenkyo*" (1544). Obviously, *tenkyo* can also mean allusion, though not to a considerable extent.

¹⁴ "Moving Orioles" is, actually, a quasi-allusion. Its source is in

"Woodcutting" (伐木), *Classic of Poetry*: "[The oriole] comes out of a deep valley, / And moves to a tall tree" (出自幽谷, 遷於喬木), in *Shi-san-jing Zhu Shu*, vol. 1, p.410. It has become a synonym for promotion or moving and thus deviates from whatever meaning its textual and interpretative sources can offer.

¹⁵ In addition, Bai Ju-yi's lines can be found in *Quan Tang Shi*, vol. 13, p. 5042.

¹⁶ See *Cao 2*. For the second line quoted in the annotation, see *Classic of Poetry*, "Fallen Leaves, Alas!" (攬兮), in *Shi-san-jing Zhu-shu*, vol. 1, p. 342.

¹⁷ San Chou stresses that allusion is "a special case of periphrasis, one in which a knowledge of the original situation is required in order to understand the line in which it occurs." See "Allusion and Periphrasis as Modes of Poetry in Tu Fu's 'Eight Laments,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 45, 1 (1985): 83. We may say that allusion is a sort of periphrasis derived from the traditional Chinese commentary method which is, *per se*, a kind of periphrasis that covers a much wider range. Moreover, San Chou's argument that "a knowledge of the original situation is required" involves what I define as the interpretative source of situation.

¹⁸ I hesitate to use the term "plagiarism" here since ancient and pre-modern Chinese critics have radically different opinions on this topic. Probably influenced by the antiquarian exegesis, there seems to be, according to my notes, more critics who approve this kind of borrowing without mentioning the source. I will leave the details for another essay.

¹⁹ Ziva Ben Porat emphasizes the importance of theoretical research on the definition of "literary allusion":

If "literary allusion" had been theoretically defined rather than understood intuitively much of the confusion would have been cleared away. However, the paucity of theoretical discussions of literary allusion stands in strikingly inverse proportion to the abundance of both actual allusion in literary works and the focus on particular allusions in many critical writings.

See Ports, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal For Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1 (1976): 105-6. The above argument can be regarded as a general phenomenon which exists in the case of classical Chinese poetry and essays.

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