Contextualization and Generic Codes in the Allegorical Reading of *Tz'u* Poetry

Grace S. Fong

This study aims to analyze the semiotic strategies involved in the traditional Chinese allegorical reading of *tz'u* poetry developed in the eighteenth century. Due to recent studies which have problematized allegory and allegorical interpretation as valid critical terminology when applied to Chinese poetry, it is necessary to begin with an apologia and a (re)definition of the use of these terms in this paper.[1] It is true that if we follow the strict definition of allegory in the Western literary tradition as "a technique of fiction-writing" and "a structural element in narrative,"[2] and that allegorical interpretation must begin with this generic fact, then the term cannot be applied to non-narrative poetry, least of all to lyric poetry. However, until we can come up with a more appropriate term, we may have to allow for the descriptive and functional definition of allegory as a literary structure (going beyond the restrictive requirement of narrative) with "a double meaning: a primary or surface meaning, and a secondary or under-the-surface meaning"[3] as applicable in the discussion of certain structures in Chinese poetry; and allegorical interpretation as the critics' attempts to elucidate what they see as the underlying meaning. In this expedient definition, the scope of allegory is limited to that of topical and political allegory generally found in Chinese poetry. I believe the terms thus defined, admittedly in a loose and simplistic fashion, can be useful in this study; they have been useful in discussions of a persistent reading practice in the Chinese hermeneutic tradition.[4]

The roots of this enduring method of reading lie in the Han period exegeses of the Confucian canonical text *Shih Ching* (*The Books of Odes*) and the quasi-canonical text *Ch'u tz'u* (*Songs of Ch'u*). It is not the place here to repeat the many details of painstaking explications and critical judgments of the interpretive commentaries on these two texts, that on the *Shih Ching* in particular.[5] The purpose here is rather to extrapolate the principles of contextualization and generic codification underpinning the allegorical reading of these two ancient texts; in semiotic terms, to identify the signifying processes and interpretive operations which allow for the construction of this mode of reading by the interpreting public, leaving aside the evaluation of the meaning arrived at in the interpretations. As Jonathan Culler writes, "[i]t is crucial to insist that a semiotics of reading leaves entirely open the question of how much readers agree or disagree in their interpretations of literature. It attempts to account for facts about interpretation.... It is interested in the range of readings for a given work...."[6] Once we have identified the principles operative in the "canonical" reading modes, we can then demonstrate how these principles are applied as interpretive strategies to the reading of *tz'u* texts by later critics.

It is common knowledge that the classic Mao Commentary to the *Shih Ching* exercises allegorical exegesis on the poems of the collection. Allegorical exegesis is especially performed in the case of the simple folk poems (numbering 160) in the section "Airs of the States" 國風, by which usually historical, social, and political contexts containing a moral message are supplied for the simple poems. By so doing, the surface meanings of many love songs, which are fundamentally lyrical in nature, are read as refering to another more profound, or serious, level of meaning. Thus the poems are interpreted to realize the diadactic purpose that the poems were already presumed to possess. The allegorization of the *Shih Ching* renders the songs, particularly those on love and courtship, exemplary of moral instruction as befits the function of poetry conceived in ancient times and therefore commensurate with the *Shih Ching's* canonical status in the Confucian tradition. The improbable readings for many of the poems which the Mao commentary proffers are discredited by modern readers. However, neither the motivation behind nor the critical status of Mao's allegorical readings is the real concern of this study, whose aim is to delineate the reading strategy underlying the Mao commentary, which had a strong influence on the development of traditional Chinese hermeneutics.

The primary allegorizing techniques of the Mao commentary are contextualization and also the valorization of imagery. Since the Airs are for the most part constituted of imagistic lyricism and are context-free in themselves, by framing the songs with a set of external referents – be it situation or purpose behind the composition, they are given an added level of meaning which is not inherent in the original text. The reading becomes an act of interpretation, creating a meta-text of a moral and didactic nature. By the same token, by attaching meanings to images (particularly those termed *hsing* "indirect metaphors"[7] which occur at the beginning of poems and stanzas) whose direct relation to the lyrical import is unclear, unknown, or open-ended (at least at the time prior to the contextualizing commentary), the simple free-floating images are harnessed and brought to bear upon the interpretation.

The allegorical readings of the Mao commentary are in the form of short prefaces (小序) provided for the poems and were transmitted as an intergral part of the poems well into the Sung period (960-1279). The implications of the Mao meta-text on the reading tradition is enormous, when we realize that any educated Chinese reading the *Shih Ching* read it with the contextualizations and glosses of the authoritative commentary. It wasn't until the Neo-Confucian scholar Chu Hsi (d. 1200), who reinterpreted some of the poems according to the surface meaning of the text, that the traditional contextualizations were seriously challenged.[8] Any number of poems from the Airs can serve to illustrate the classical interpretative process. Poem #26 "Cypress Boat," has a Mao interpretation and a Chu Hsi reinterpretation, and shows the latter's relationship to the former (in Arthur Waley's translation):

Tossed is that cypress boat,
Wave-tossed it floats.
My heart is in turmoil, I cannot sleep.
But secret is my grief.
Wine I have, all things needful
For play, for sport.

My heart is not a mirror,
To reflect what others will.
Brothers too I have;
I cannot be snatched away.
But lo, when I told them of my plight
I found that they were angry with me.

My heart is not a stone;
It cannot be rolled.

My heart is not a mat;
It cannot be folded away.
I have borne myself correctly
In rites more than can be numbered.

My sad heart is consumed, I am harassed
By a host of small men.
I have borne vexations very many,
Received insults not few.
In the still of night I brood upon it;
In the waking hours I rend my breast.

On sun, ah, moon,
Why are you changed and dim?
Sorrow clings to me
Like an unwashed dress.
In the still of night I brood upon it,
Long to take wing and fly away.[9]

A naive reader (innocent of contextual trappings) would probably read this poem simply as the expression of someone in a very agitated and unhappy state of mind caused by unwanted circumstances. There is a great deal of indeterminacy in the text: concerning the gender of the speaker, his or her social position, the precise nature of the difficulties s/he is experiencing, the identity of the "small men," etc. In short, a context which will clarify the content of the poem and give a more or less coherent interpretation is lacking. What the Mao commentary does precisely is to contextualize the lyrical expression: "The 'Cypress Boat' is about the good official not gaining the confidence of the ruler. During the rule of Duke Ch'ing of Wei (8 c. B.C.), wise officials were not able to gain recognition from him because of the presence of petty man."[10] Thus the poem is read as the complaint of a wrongly treated official. Chu Hsi offers a different reading for this poem, though in this case he also relies partially on contextualization for his reinterpretation, on contextualization provided for the next poem by the Mao commentary to boot. To him the poem expresses the complaint of a woman who is not in the good grace of her husband and, "since it resembles the next poem, couldn't it also be by Chuang Chiang?"[11] The childless wife of Duke Chuang of Wei, Chuang Chiang lost her husband's favor when one of his concubines gave birth to a son. Poems #27-30 are all contextualized as Chuang Chiang's complaints in the Mao commentary.

If contextualization was essential to the reading of the anonymous poems of the *Shih Ching* in most of pre-modern exegesis, it is no less true for the reading of the *Ch'u tz'u*. The collection as it has been handed down again comes from the commentarial hands of a Han exegete, Wang Yi (2 c. A.D.), who claims that he based his compilation on an earlier collection of the *Ch'u tz'u* by Liu Hsiang (77-6 B.C.).[12] The authorship of Ch'ü Yüan for a good part of the collection was never questioned traditionally. As such, contextualization operates somewhat differently from that found in the *Shih Ching*, in which the vast majority of poems are by anonymous authors. The life (or legend) of Ch'ü Yüan provides the basic referential frame for allegorical reading. As the archetypal loyal official who fell from favor with his ruler, his poems were seen as expressions of his frustrated desire to serve and as records of the circumstances that brought about his alienation. The general context is already known and it remains for the commentary to draw out the specific correspondences between elements in the poems and events and persons in Ch'ü Yüan's political life. Awkward and arbitrary as this equative practice may seem, it is precisely the practice of allegorical reading assumed by later critics.

By far the most apposite piece for allegorical reading is the first and most famous selection in the anthology, the long autobiographical poem "Li sao" (Encountering Sorrow). The consistent and abundant use of floral and plant imagery as metaphors for the poet's virtues and high-mindedness transformed the most significant into emblematic signs in later poetry. These signs, subsumed under the general term "fragrant plants," 香草 became potential codes for allegorical elements.[13] Similarly, the use of a female persona as a figure for the poet-official and the lack of appreciation and neglect she suffers from her lord as a figuration of the poet-official's plight in not obtaining his ruler's trust and recognition became a topos, the stock theme of the beautiful woman in neglect 美人. In time, contextualization based on historical and biographical evidence, the formation of imagery into generic codes, and topoi derived from the two canonical collections often overdetermine allegorical reading in later poetry.

With the above outline of the basic process of allegorical reading filiated with the *Shih Ching* and *Ch'u tz'u*, we can turn to an examination of its application in *tz'u* poetry. *Tz'u* poetry originated during the T'ang as a form of popular songs written in colloquial diction and sung to preset melodies.[14] When the literati adopted it as an alternate verse form beginning in the mid and later T'ang period, the *tz'u* slowly evolved into a high literary genre. By virtue of the class of people who wrote *tz'u*, it gradually also came under the scrutiny of the Confucian moral and didactic view of literature. Pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic verse, whether in regulated style or the freer old style, generically known as *shih* poetry, had come to be the orthodox poetic medium for self-expression, allegorical or otherwise. In the orthodox view, the *shih* genre exemplifies the ancient dictum of *shih yen chih* 詩言志 "Poetry expresses intent" quoted in the Great Preface of the *Shih Ching*. Poetry, *shih*, has a purpose that is both serious and venerated (except, it was thought, in the hands of "decadents," such as the Palace Style poets of the Southern Dynasties who were criticized for having abused the form for frivolity). With the *shih* as the core of orthodoxy in poetic discourse, the *tz'u*, a late comer with questionable origins, was regarded as a supplementary genre with marginal status.

During the Sung, however, the writing of *tz'u* was avidly pursued by many literati. Through their creative engagement many innovative developments in structure, style, theme and diction were realized, raising the *tz'u* from merely banquet and entertainment songs and light verse to a potentially serious medium of poetic expression. Yet negative views and slighting attitudes toward *tz'u* were not uncommon. When the great statesman Wang An-shih (1021-1086) came across some *tz'u* written by the prominent prime minister Yen Shu (991-1055), he wondered if it was indeed proper for a prime minister to write little songs;[15] the famous *shih* poet Lu Yu (1125-1210) regretted his youthful indulgence in writing *tz'u*, a genre which was to him the absolute last form of change in decline from the *Shih ching.*[16] Accordint to the Southern Sung scholar-official and poet Liu K'o-chuang (1187-1269), the Neo-Confucianists especially held the genre in contempt.[17] It was quite likely in reaction to this atmosphere of criticism and in justifying the legitimacy of *tz'u* in face of its popularity among the elite that divergent opinions regarding the genre arose in the Southern Sung. Wang Cho (?- after 1149) in discussing the origins of *tz'u* begins from the *Shih ching*, and Chang Yen (1248-c. 1320) opts the ancient formula for the definition of poetry for *tz'u*, saying that "*tz'u* poetry must be elegant and correct, because it is where the intent expresses itself."[18]

Most discussions of *tz'u* in the Sung period were remarks made on the technical and stylistic aspects of *tz'u*, rarely going beyond a sort of fragmentary impressionistic practical criticism. The appearance of statements concerning the larger perspective of origins and orthodoxy, aligning the *tz'u* in the tradition of the *Shih ching* and *yüeh-fu*[19] 樂府 and filiating it with the orthodox conception of poetry, signals implicitly the possibility for allegory and allegorical reading in the genre. This implicit assumption was made explicit by Liu K'o-chuang, who makes direct reference to the allegorical function of *tz'u* poetry. In the colophon to a sequence of eight *tz'u* poems (unfortunately no longer extant) by Liu Chen (*chin-shih* 1202), he wrote that Liu "borrowed [the images of] flowers and plants to express the strong emotions of the Man of Sao (Ch'ü Yüan the frustrated official) and of the scholars, and lodged the feelings of the banished official in the complaints of the boudoir;"[20] he also compared his contemporary Huang Hsiao-mai's *tz'u* to the best poems in the Airs of the States.[21] The somewhat isolated statements bearing on the deeper significance of *tz'u* indicate the existence of a different attitude on the part of some literati towards the nature and function of *tz'u*: though elegant party songs remain a staple, it was felt that the genre also has the same potential as *shih* poetry for serious expression.

Tz'u poets and critics during the Sung rarely exercised allegorical interpretation on specific *tz'u* poems. Generally speaking, some distance, whether temporal or historical, is necessary for the appearance of hermeneutics, which is an attempt to interpret the meanings of works which are no longer self-evident. During the *tz'u's* long eclipse in the Yüan and Ming dynasties not much *tz'u* or *tz'u* criticism was written. However, the Ch'ing dynasty saw a true renaissance of the genre, albeit without the music. Much of the same ambivalence arising from moral concerns towards the *tz'u* remained, sometimes creating a kind of schizophrenic attitude among some practioners – "addiction" on the one hand and abhorrence on the other – which some resolved by giving up their indulgence in writing in the genre. At the same time, dedicated writers of *tz'u*, such as the well-known scholar-poets Chu I-tsun (1629-1709) and Ch'en Wei-sung (1625-1682) continued the effort to defend and elevate the genre in prefatory remarks to *tz'u* collections, much in the same vein as in the Sung.

With the advent of the Ch'ang-chou School of *tz'u* critics in the mid Ch'ing period, the approach to *tz'u* writing and interpretation took on the appearance of a concerted program.[22] Significantly, Chang Hui-yen (1761-1802), the founder of the school, was a classical scholar. Rather than simply reiterating the respectable content and purpose of *tz'u* poetry, which he does, Chang compiled the *Tz'u hsüan* (Anthology of Tz'u Poetry), comprising 116 *tz'u* from the late T'ang, Five Dynasties, and the Song periods, in which he offered brief comments on 39 of the selections, and for 35 of these he carried out terse allegorical interpretations modelled on the commentaries of the *Shih ching* and *Ch'u tz'u.*[23] Regardless of later criticism of his rigid method and forced interpretations, Chang Hui-yen and his more sophisticated follower Chou Chi (1781-1839) set a general and lasting trend in the reading of *tz'u* poetry. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on Chang's interpretations in his anthology.

In Chang Hui-yen's preface to the *Tz'u hsüan*, he defined *tz'u* poetry as internal ideas that are formalized in subtle words. He relates its contents to the frustrations and laments of superior and sagely men which are allegorized and disguised in the joys and sorrows of ordinary men and women, in the manner of the "Airs of the States" and the "Li sao" (that is, in the way these poems have been interpreted). However, he also states that this is only the case in the best *tz'u*, whose need for interpretation he will provide, whereas in the hands of dissolute writers, the genre becomes indecorous and extravagant in language and content.[24] His stringent moral discrimination in part explains the exiguous size of his selection. One would have thought that he would have excluded all "dissolute" poets from his anthology. Chang did make culprits of Liu Yung (987-1055) and Huang T'ing-chien (1045-1105); both were condemned in the preface for their erotic and colloquial *tz'u*; though the former was in fact known as having been a profligate, the latter was a well-known scholar-official and the founder of the Chiang-hsi School of *shih* poetry. Chang did make allowances in including *tz'u* by poets whose reputation were in some way tarnished, and he ventured to say that even those poets whose characters were generally thought to be correct occasionally slipped into impropriety in their *tz'u*. The implication that there is no hard and fast correlation between character and poetry in fact allows the critic to put emphasis on the poem more than the poet as the source for allegory.

From these statements in the preface we can reconstruct the paradigm Chang Hui-yen set up in compiling his anthology and for his commentary on the poems. According to this preliminary contextualization in the preface, there would be two general categories of poets based on biographical knowledge and the kind of *tz'u* they wrote: those who are morally upright and those morally questionable. I have mentioned above that he includes works by the latter category. Moreover, for his interpretations of the poems he does not appear to be hindered by character typology. Instead, for the *tz'u* he deems allegorical, I see two other orders at work: those that are contextually determined from known historical and biographical background, and those that are determined from generic codes. And in most instances, these two orders are mixed.

To elucidate the paradigmatic variations in Chang Hui-yen's strategy of interpretation, I will examine his comments on the most important selection in the anthology, the famous series of fifteen *tz'u* written to the tune pattern *P'u-sa man* by the late T'ang poet Wen T'ing-yün. Already in the preface Chang had singled out Wen T'ing-yün's *tz'u* for praise, saying that they are "of the highest order," and that "his words are profound and beautiful, of great scope and also economy."[25] Now Wen T'ing-yün is far from a paragon of virtue; it is well known from his biographies in the two *T'ang Histories* and other sources that he led a disaffected life, frequenting the pleasure quarters where most of his *tz'u* were probably composed. Chang must have known the unsavory facts concerning Wen's life, but he also must have seen elements in the poems – generic codes – which made him override and suppress the use of contextualization in his reading. The most telling sign of censorship is the deletion of the last poem in the series from the anthology. This poem has a much too direct tone and language in the second stanza for Chang's serious purposes:

> Where the slender jade fingers strum, pearls drop,
> Too many tears secretly wash thin the powdered flower.
> Spring dewdrops moisten the morning blossom,
> Autumn waves reflect the sunset clouds.
>
> Romance is a thing of the heart,
> And for romance I have offered myself.
> Look at the heartless fellow,
> His silk robe does not have these stains.[26]

The first stanza is characteristic of Wen T'ing-yün's style in its imagistic density. Even though all the images are cliché substitutions for feminine attributes: her fingers ("jade slenderness" in the original), tears, tear-stained face, and eyes which sparkle presumably from having cried from morning to night, it is the frank and shallow emotionalism of the second stanza that undoes the poem for any elevated reading. Compare this to the first poem in the series:

> Small hills on double-folded screens, gold flecks flicker,

> Clouds of hair seem about to pass over the snow of her cheeks,
> Langorously she rises, paints her moth-eyebrows.
> Slow with her dressing, she combs her hair and washes.
>
> To see the flowers, mirrors in front and back,
> The flowers and her face reflect each other.
> On her emroidered silk jacket newly ironed,
> Pair upon pair of golden partridges.[27]

Chia-ying Yeh Chao has remarked on the impersonal quality of the imagery and objective presentation in Wen T'ing-yün's *tz'u*, which allow readers to make free associations.[28] Indeed, this poem reads like a cinematic view of a woman who slowly wakes up and performs her toilet, with the poet's camera-eye sometimes focusing on some resplendent details. Chang Hui-yen's comments after this poem reads: "This [series] feels for the scholar who does not meet with recognition. The method somewhat resembles the 'Ch'ang-men fu,' but it narrates in reverse in sections. This piece begins with waking after the dream. It leads with the two words 'langorously rising' to imply the events and emotions in the later pieces. The last four lines have the meaning of [the line 'And so, retired, I would again fashion my] former raiment' in the 'Li sao.' "[29] These laconic comments, typical in style of Chang Hui-yen's interpretations and of traditional Chinese criticism, take for granted the familiarity with a continuous cultural and literary tradition. Chang rallies support for his opening claim by making references to the "Ch'ang-men fu" and the "Li sao." The rhyme-prose "Ch'ang-men fu" was attributed to the Han poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ru for Empress Ch'en expressing her lament after losing Emperor Wu's (r. 14-87 B.C.) favor; the preface states that he wrote it to try to bring about a change of heart in the emperor.[30] And Ch'ü Yüan, out of favor with his prince, at one point in the "Li sao" retired to "fashion his former raiment" out of floral and plant material. Wang I's commentary on the "Li sao" interprets "former" as meaning "originally pure."[31] Self-adornment as an allegorical figure for self-cultivation is a generic code that developed out of the *Ch'u tz'u* and Chang Hui-yen reads this code into Wen T'ing-yün's *tz'u*.

What is perhaps most interesting about Chang Hui-yen's interpretation is his sequential reading of the *P'u-sa man* series (minus the last poem of course) and of the five *tz'u* to the same tune pattern by Wei Chuang (836-910). It is modelled after a practice found in the *Shih ching* commentary.

For the rest of the series, Chang focuses on the dream motif as a kind of intermittent narrative thread linking the female persona through the states of dreaming and waking, and demonstrates what he had refered to in the opening comments as "narration in reverse order." For instance, Chang reads the second poem, with the line "Warm fragrance stirs up dreams under mandarin-duck quilts of brocade," as the beginning of dreaming and elaboration of the realm in the dream; the next three poems as elaborating on the events and emotions in the dream; Poem #8 as expressing the feelings of a faded dream; Poem #13 as direct description of the dreamscape; and finally, Poem #14 as waking up from the dream.[32] However, although Chang's laconic statements on the dream motif point to intertextual references between the poems, they do not give any evidence that he links it to his allegorical reading of the series, unless, of course, there is some hidden sub-text in his commentary still waiting to be deciphered. His concluding comment to the series reads like a feeble attempt to return to the allegorical significance stated at the beginning: " 'Green gate' (i.e. palace gate; in Poem #4), 'golden hall' (this can also be palace architecture; in Poem #13), 'former country' and 'Wu Palace' (in Poem #14) slightly reveal the allegorical meaning."[33] Although he is taking these images as codes which point to associations with the ruler, his arcane commentary fails to draw out and develop the allegorical significance which he attributes to the series.

It is neither within the scope of this paper to unravel any potential sub-texts underlying Chang's comments nor is it my intention to evaluate the soundness of his hermeneutic enterprise. In my interpreting his interpreting Wen T'ang-yün's *P'u-sa man* series, I merely wish to point out what causes Chang to read the series the way he does. It is not simply free association; there is no gratuitousness in his being "reminded of Ch'ü Yüan's floral garb" by the first poem. His strategy is very much shaped by a deep-rooted hermeneutic tradition. (It is arguable whether there is not an unwarranted degree of gratuitousness in the tradition itself.) Operating within a convention of signification in which there is generic codification, Chang reads certain images and structures in Wen Ting-yun's *P'u-sa man* series as signifiers whose signifieds he takes to be the meanings of the generic codes, thus rupturing the complacent surfaces of these poems.

In the *Tz'u hsüan*, only Wen T'ing-yün's *tz'u* are read as embodying allegorical meaning solely on the basis of signifiers within the poem – imagery, topos, the implicit sentiment, etc. – which are interpreted by

Chang Hui-yen as generic codes; no reference to external circumstances are pointed out. Chang's usual practice, however, assumes some historical circumstance, political climate, or biographical detail as contexts to support his allegorical reading or as the allegorical referent of the poem. In other words, contextualization seldom serves as the sole determinant of the presence of allegory without the prop of generic codes. The *tz'u* of Wei Chuang, Feng Yen-ssu, Su Shih, and Hsin Ch'i-chi are all interpreted in this interactive fashion. These men, many of them eminent statesmen, were all concerned about and involved in the politics of their times. Chang's commentary on Hsin Ch'i-chi's *P'u-sa man*, given as a verbatim quote from the *Ho-lin yü-lu* by the Southern Sung writer Lo Ta-ching, gives a specific historical incident as the allegorical reference in this poem.[34] This interpretation, made prominent by Chang, has elicited much debate and speculation among critics.[35] Indeed, his own interpretations of the allegorical referents of specific images and the particular historical or political context which the poems are supposed to allegorize are often called into question. For example, on another *tz'u* by Hsin Ch'i-chi to the tune *Chu Ying-t'ai chin*, he writes, " 'All the flying red petals' express his grief at the superior gentleman being abandoned; 'the flitting orioles' express his distaste at the petty men getting their way. In the phrase 'Spring brings sorrow' could he be criticizing Chao [Ting] and Chang [Chun] (two contemporary officials)?" A reader will be hard put to see these meanings in the poem itself; the subtitle "Late spring" is not included in Chang's anthology:

> The jewelled hairclasp broken into halves.
> At Peach Leaf Crossing
> Misty willows darken South Bay.
> I fear climbing the storied tower,
> For in ten days nine are of wind and rain.
> Heart grieved at all the flying red petals
> That no one cares for.
> And who would persuade the flitting orioles to hold their noise?
>
> Stealing a glance at my hair
> I try to divine the time of return with the flowers,
> Those I just pinned on I now count again.
> By the gauze canopy the lamp dims,
> Words in the dream are choked with sobs.
> It is the spring that brings sorrow.

Where has the spring gone?
It does not even think to take the sorrow away.[36]

The theme of lament at the passage of spring is often a lament at the stormier side of politics in traditional Chinese poetry. Perhaps the flowers so brutally violated by the storm can suggest the suffering of good men at bad times; but how this poem criticizes two specific men is not evident without a great deal more circumstantial documentation. As an exegete, Chang Hui-yen is too much of a classicist to bother to justify or clarify his interpretations.

His claims for allegory fares considerably better in the case of the late Southern Sung poet Wang I-sun, though not in the specific meanings he attributes to the poems. Wang lived through the complete demise of the Sung into the Yuan dynasty under the Mongols. As a *tz'u* poet he is particularly known for the large number of allegorical "poems on objects" 詠物詞 he wrote which embody the suppressed grief of a Sung loyalist under alien rule. Chang Hui-yen says of these "poems on objects" by Wang that "they contain the anxiety and concern for his [former] ruler and country."[37] One of the three "poems on objects" by Wang that Chang selects for his anthology is on the pomegranate flower:

The song of Yü-chü has faded,
The lines written in Chin-ling cut short,
Year after year it has turned its back on the warm wind from
the south.
The secluded neighbor to the west
Alone pities the red petals flying in through the door.
Before, we used to carry wine under its green shade,
The color on the tips of the branches same as the dancing skirt.
What need was there to imitate
Waxy pearls for flower stems,
And yellow silk to be clusters?

No one is in the former palace halls,
Since T'ai-chen left as an immortal maiden,
Spring's grounds are swept empty.
With the vermilion banner protecting
Now they should mislead the caretaker of flowers.
Scattered in confusion red blossoms cover the path,
I imagine there are no carriages going into the mountain.

After the west wind,
A few dabs still remain,
Surpassing their springtime lushness.[38]

This poem on the pomegranate flower is as complex and allusive as the usual poems on objects from the late Southern Sung. A subgenre that began as a descriptive form of verse popular at social functions and literary gatherings gradually developed into an indirect and opaque mode of expression. At that point the poem no longer aims at a coherent mimetic representation of the object, though the object is refered to through relevant allusions and imagery throughout the poem. In an allegorical poem on an object, another level of meaning is expressed through the allusive texture. This poem contains a host of allusions to people, poems and other texts related to the pomegranate flower: the poems on this flower by Su Shih and Wang An-shih (1. 1-2), lines of a *shih* poem by Wen T'ing-yün (1. 9-10), a legend about the pomegranates planted by the imperial consort Yang of the T'ang (1. 11-13), legend about a vermilion banner which protected the flowers from the destructive forces of the wind (1. 14-15), and a *shih* poem on the pomegranate by the T'ang poet Han Yü (1. 16-17).[39] Through this poetic mosaic emerges a temporal strucutre – the bipolar opposition of present and past. The present, made up of a sense of loss (1. 1-5), emptiness (1. 11-13) and ruin (1. 16-17) is contrasted to the prime and glory in the past, all figured in the pomegranate flowers' cycle of growth and decay. The tension arising from this bleak contrast is resolved in the final lines in which the persona manages to hold onto some hope and meaning – that there is something left to be appreciated – in the aftermath of an autumn storm. I think it is not difficult to draw inferences to the alienation and despair the poet experienced in a time of national disaster from this poem, especially in light of the general tenor of Wang's corpus. But one would be hard put to pin down any specific incident the poem is allegorizing.[40] Even Chang Hui-yen desists from supplying historical names and events: "This poem says that even in a disordered world there are still talented people around and it is a pity that the world does not employ them. I don't know what he is refering to specifically."[41] Whether or not one agrees with Chang's reading of this poem, one can at least see some logic in the way he interpreted the general tenor of the poem. Also, when Chang admits to his inability to locate the allegorical referent in this case, one suspects that his other readings are not so absolutely arbitrary within his scheme as they appear to be, that he may have some evidence satisfying his own logic in committing some baffling intentional fallacies in other poems.

Chang Hui-yen's privileging of generic codes in his allegorical interpretation became the general direction and in the end the most tenable approach in the allegorical reading of *tz'u*. The signifiers are interpreted against a common stock of allegorical themes – the gentleman out of favor in government, lament for the times, remembrance of a fallen dynasty. Thus, *tz'u* by any poet, regardless of biographical context, can be read allegorically by the critic's interpretation of the generic codes against some common theme. Almost every major *tz'u* poet from Ch'in Kuan and Chou Pang-yen to Chiang K'uei and Wu Wen-ying have yielded some fertile pieces to one critic or another. Such a reading is offered for Shih Ta-tsu's famous poem on spring snow, written to the tune *Ch'i lo hsiang,*[42] in which the description of the rain is seen as the description of the ways of petty men, when the record of Shih Ta-tsu's character is far from illustrious.[43] Reception of such readings and readings of topical allegory based on contextualization is another area for investigation, for it continues to form a forum of lively debate centuries after Chang Hui-yen's pioneering attempt.

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Notes

1. The critic of the indiscriminate use of the term in writings on Chinese poetry is Pauline Yu. She strongly questions the appropriateness of applying certain Western critical terminology in writing about Chinese poetry when the theoretical assumptions underlying the two traditions are so fundamentally different. See her article "Alegory, Allegoresis, and the *Classica of Poetry*," *HJAS* 43.2 (1983): 377-412; and more recently *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). While I agree with the basic premise of her argument, I see a justification for borrowing the term allegory in reference to a similar though not identical tradition of reading in Chinese poetry.
2. *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 12.
3. J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Penguin Books, 1979), p. 24.
4. Works on Chinese poetry that have used the term fruitfully in elucidating this reading process are many, see for example, Chia-ying Yeh-Chao, "The Ch'ang-chou

School of *Tz'u* Criticism," in *Chinese Approaches to Literature*, ed. Adele Rickett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 151-88; and Kang-i Sun Chang, "Symbolic and Allegorical Meanings in the *Yueh-fu pu-t'i* Poem Series," *HJAS* 46.2 (December 1986): 353-86. Recently, Charles Hartman's paper, "Reviling Peach Blossoms: Two Quatrains of Li Yu-hsi," presented at the East Coast Chinese Poetry Discussion Group Meeting held at Yale University on April 5, 1987, elicited a great deal of discussion on allegory and allegoresis centering around the two poems. As Stephen Owen's "Comments" point out, Hartman's study "follows in the tradition of the class of Chinese interpretation from which it draws" (p. 1). The tenacity of the traditional method reveals itself in its modern application by a Western sinologist.

5. See Pauline Yu's erudite discussions in *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, chapters 1 and 2.
6. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 50.
7. Tr. by Wang Ching-hsien, "The Nature of Narrative in T'ang Poetry," in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 217.
8. Professor Stephen Owen pointed out in a personal communication that, while traditional educated Chinese readers of the *Shih Ching* could interpret the poems according to the Mao commentary, this did not mean that they did not read and think of the poems in their more literal sense.
9. Waley, *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press), p. 71.
10. *Mao shi*, 2: 1a (SPTK).
11. Chu Hsi, *Shih chi chuan*, 2: 1b-2a (SPTK).
12. For a complete translation with a detailed introduction, see David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and other Poets* (Penguin Classics: 1985).
13. For possible influence from the *Shih ching* on the allegorical use of imagery in the Ch'u songs, see David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Penguin Books, 1985), p. 26.
14. For more details on the origins and development of *tz'u*, see Glen Baxter, "Metrical Origins of the *Tz'u*," *Studies in Chinese Literature*, ed. John L. Bishop (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u Poetry from Late T'ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton University Press, 1980); and Marsha Wagner, *The Lotus Boat: the Origins of Chinese Tz'u Poetry in T'ang Popular Culture* (Columbia University Press, 1984).
15. Wei T'ai, *Tung-hsüan pi lu, Chuan* 5, cited by Chiang Chün-hsun, *Tz'u-hsueh p'ing-lun shih kao* (Hong Kong: Lung-men shu-tien, 1966), p. 17.
16. In preface to his own *tz'u* collection, cited by Chiang Chün-hsun, *Tz'u-hsueh p'ing-lun*, p. 40.
17. See his remarks in the colophon his wrote for Wang Hsiao-mai's collection of *tz'u*, in *Hou-ts'un hsien-sheng ta ch'üan-chi*, 106: 10b (SPTK).
18. Wang Cho, *Pi-chi man-chi*, 1: la-b (*Tz'u-hua ts'ung-pien* ed.); Chang Yen, *Tz'u Yuan*, 2: 9b (*Tz'u-hua ts'ung-pien* ed.).
19. The *yueh-fu* lineage proffered in prefaces to *tz'u* collections as a "key element in the interpretion of *tz'u* as a serious form" is also called to my attention by Professor Owen.

20. *Hou-ts'un hsien-sheng*, 99: 17a.
21. *Hou-ts'un hsien-sheng*, 106: 10b-11a. There are less than five *tz'u* extant by Huang, see T'ang Kuei-chang, ed., *Ch'uan Sung tz'u*, 5 vols. (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1977), vol. 4, p. 2773.
22. For a detailed examination of the background and theories of the Ch'ang-chou School, see Wu Hung-i, *Ch'ang-chou p'ai tz'u-hsüeh yen-chiu* (Taipei: Chia-hsin shui-ni kung-ssu wen-hua chi-chin hui, 1970), and Chia-ying Yeh Chao, "The Ch'ang-chou School of *Tz'u* Criticism," in *Chinese Approaches to Literature*, ed. Adele Richett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 151-88.
23. Chang Hui-yen, *Tz'u hsüan* (1797; Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chu, 1970).
24. Chang Hui-yen, Preface, 3b-4a. This preface has been partially translated in Chia-ying Yeh Chao, "The Ch'ang-chou School," pp. 154-55.
25. Chang Hui-yen, Preface, 3b.
26. Lin Ta-ch'un, compiler, *T'ang Wu-tai tz'u* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1963), p. 60. Wen T'ing-yun's *tz'u* are preserved in the *Hua-chien chi*, the first anthology of *tz'u* compiled by Ou-yang Ch'iung, with a preface dated 940 A.D. For a complete translation of the *Hua-chien chi*, see Lois Fusek, *Among the Fowers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
27. Lin Ta-ch'un, *T'ang Wu-tai tz'u*, p. 56; Chang Hui-yen, 1: la.
28. Chia-ying Yeh Chao, "The Chang-chou School," p. 169-70.
29. Chang Hui-yen, 1: la. The translation of the line from the "Li sao" is by David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, p. 71.
30. Hsiao T'ung, *Wen hsüan, chüan* 16 (rpt. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 327-330.
31. Hung Hsing-tsu, *Ch'u tz'u pu-chu*, 1: 13b (rpt. Peking: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1957).
32. Chang Hui-yen, 1: 1b-2b.
33. Chang Hui-yen, 1: 2b.
34. Chang Hui-yen, 1: 4b.
35. Among modern critics, see for example, Cheng Ch'ien, *Tz'u hsuan* (Taipei: Hua-kang ch'u-pan she, 1952), pp. 107-108; Yu P'ing-po, *T'ang Sung tz'u hsuan-shih* (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsueh ch'u-pan she, 1979), pp. 188-89; and Chia-ying Yeh-chao, "The Ch'ang-chou School," pp. 171-75.
36. *Ch'üan Sung tz'u*, 3: 1882.
37. Chang Hui-yen, 1: 7a.
38. Chang Hui-yen, 1: 7b-8a.
39. I follow Cheng Ch'ien's annotations, p. 143.
40. For a discussion of allegorical elements in Wang I-sun and other Sung loyalists' poems on objects, see Chia-ying Yeh Chao, "On Wang I-sun and his *Yung-wu Tz'u*," *HJAS* 40: 1 (June 1980), pp. 55-92; and Kang-i Sun Chang, "Symbolic and Allegorical Meanings," pp. 353-85.
41. Chang Hui-yen, 1: 8a.
42. *Ch'üan Sung tz'u*, 4: 2325-6.
43. Huang Liao-yuan *Liao-yuan tz'u-hsuan*, cited in a lecture by Chia-ying Chao-yeh.