

Introduction

The Shepherd Dreams—The Great Man Divines

In early China, was poetic language conceived of as a continuation of nature, a metonymy of the extralinguistic world? Was *shi* 詩 (“poetry”) thereby a symmetric opposite of what allegedly characterizes the poetic tradition in the West: re-presentation, abstraction, and figurality? Or should one perhaps suspect that this way of equating “China” with the “anti-West”—a cultural, philosophical, and literary antipode promising a *lux ex oriente* for the reader weary of a Western mimesis thrice removed from reality—is rather a cunning trick from a branch of comparative literature seeking to justify its own discipline?

The object under scrutiny is the *xing* 興, an intricate little concept that first surfaced in the Han dynasty *Mao Commentary* on the *Book of Odes*, acknowledging the existence of what very provisionally may be called “indirect language,” and marking the start of a systematic rhetorical analysis in China. As food for thought for the journey on which we are about to embark, consider the fourth stanza of the 190th ode, “No Sheep” (“Wu yang” 無羊).¹ The “imagery” under consideration is not labeled *xing* by Mao Heng, the eponymous author of the *Commentary*; indeed, it is prevented from being a *xing* by not appearing in the *xing*’s privileged position, the first two lines of a given poem.² Nonetheless, the stanza may serve as an introduction both to the ancient *Odes* and to Mao school exegesis, in that it thematizes cosmology, the Confucian distinction between Superior Man (*junzi* 君子) and commoner, and, not least important, the devious ways of language and the constant need for interpretation.

The shepherd then dreams:
many are the fish

there are tortoise-and-snake banners and falcon banners
The great man divines it:
“Many are the fish”
the harvest will indeed be great
“There are tortoise-and-snake banners and falcon banners”
the house and clan will be multitudinous³

牧人乃夢
眾維魚矣
旄維旗矣
大人占之
眾維魚矣
實維豐年
旄維旗矣
室家溱溱

The previous stanza speaks of “your shepherd,” indicating that the dream is not interpreted for the simple herdsman himself but for a man of high status and power.⁴ It is not a coincidence that the preceding ode, “Si Gan” 斯干, describes a similar scenario, in which a lordling (*junzi*) has dreams of bears and serpents that are divined by a “great man.” Nor is it by chance that the figure of the “great man” appears several times also in the divinatory, and possibly contemporary, *Book of Changes*.

Dreams appear spontaneously, and outside the control of the person in which they occur. Here, the uncanny independence and serendipity of dreams are underscored by the fact that they occur not in the person they concern but in a simple commoner. The shepherd’s unconscious is thus conceived of as a writing pad on whose surface the signs of the cosmological forces are inscribed, not unlike the sky with its constellations, cyclic occurrences, and extraordinary phenomena.

Mao Heng—here the interpreter of an interpreter—comments that “When yin and yang are in harmony, fish are multitudinous. *Zhenzhen* means ‘multitudinous’” 陰陽和則魚眾多矣。溱溱，眾也。⁵ The oneiric fish are thus signs that point both backward and forward. On the one hand, they are a symptom (and thereby the final link in a causal chain) of the harmonious state of the cosmological yin and yang forces. On the other hand, as mantic signs they refer to the plentiful harvest that the future will bring. Mao’s comment thus points to a chain of interrelated phenomena; when “harmonious,” the yin and yang forces generate a multitude (*zhong*

眾) of fish that, in its turn and according to the laws of the language of dreams, indicates a plentiful harvest in the future.

Several important observations may be made at this point. First, while “fish” is a symptomatic sign of the harmonious balance of yin and yang, this order of causality is broken in the following stage of semiosis, as the multitude of fish is a sign, but obviously not the cause, of a plentiful harvest.⁶ The shepherd’s dream, and whatever causes it, must make a detour around the message it wants to convey, and instead of dreaming of a great harvest the shepherd therefore dreams of fish. The second stage—“fish” signifying “harvest”—thus escapes cosmological causality and enters into the order and logic of rhetoric, in that it takes one sign (fish) to stand for another (harvest). Why substitute harvest for fish? Mao Heng implies that the transference from fish to harvest is metonymic, and banks on their shared origin, namely the harmony of yin and yang. Fish and harvest, therefore, exist at the same level in the cause-effect hierarchy that underlies this example of oneiric semiosis, and are interchangeable because of their proximity.

If “fish” and “harvest” can be exchanged metonymically on account of their common origin, how about the appearance of banners in the shepherd’s dream? The poem itself says that the “great man” interprets the banners as an omen of a clan rich in offspring, and Mao explains the logic of that interpretation: “Tortoise-and-snake banners and falcon banners are what is used to gather a crowd” 旃旗所以聚眾也.⁷ We note in passing that Mao uses the character *zhong* 眾 (which translates as “many,” “crowd,” “plenitude,” or “multitude”) three times in his comment on this stanza. This is a subtle trick often employed by the *Commentary* to create a sense of continuity. By using the character *zhong* so abundantly, Mao—almost on a subliminal level—makes the idea of plenitude the hermeneutic center of the poem. Mao’s ideological exegesis strives, among other things, for textual coherence, and *zhong* is the word that unites “banner,” “fish,” and “clan” and makes the text consistent. More importantly, the cosmological forces of yin and yang are irrelevant to the generation of meaning here. Yin and yang, and their interaction, are not the origin of those banners, at least not in the same direct way that they are the cause of the many fish and the plentiful harvest, and can therefore not explain why the two phenomena are linked.

Metonymy is nonetheless what allows “banner” to stand for “multitude.” Banners, Mao explains, are instruments used to gather people in groups. In the subconscious of the shepherd, instrument or cause (banner) is therefore mistaken for product or effect (the crowd thus gathered). Yet this instrument-for-product metonymy does not derive from the mundane

knowledge of what banners are used for. Realizing the detour in the shepherd's dream language, the dream-diviner interprets the (imaginary) crowd gathered together under the (imaginary) banners as referring to the many people of the aristocrat's "house and clan." Compared to the fish-harvest metonymy, the transfer from "banner" to "clan" is more abstract and relies on a common denominator ("multitude") that can only be deduced by the hermeneut who knows the devious ways of the language of dreams—and that "banners" refers to the aristocrat's clan.

In both cases, one image or motif appears as the substitute of another, based on a perceived proximity. I later discuss the theory that early Chinese poetics describes poetic language as straightforward, hypermimetic, even antirhetorical, and that what may seem like tropes (say, metonymies or metaphors) are in fact literal representations of cosmological correspondences in the text-external world. That idea will be put to the test over the next three hundred or so pages.

What the fourth stanza of "Wu yang" demonstrates beyond doubt is the need for and the task of a hermeneut or, at this particular historical stage, a diviner. This is how the shepherd's dream was experienced and processed: an ordinary "reader" of the language of dreams senses that the oneiric imagery of "fish" or "banners" might have another meaning (or, lapsing into semiotic terminology, other *signata*) than its conventional one. A "great man" familiar with the devious ways of language is called upon to supply extratextual information, and "fish" is thereby interpreted as "plentiful harvest," "banner" as "crowd," and, thence, as "many offspring." The diviner, the divinatory hermeneut, is called for because language is not transparent. There is no simple, immediate correspondence between oneiric, linguistic, or pictorial representation and its supposed meaning—or, in more technical terms, between *signans* and *signatum*. We observe lastly that the interpretation banks on, or introduces, a distinction between primary (or "literal" or "original") and secondary meaning; that is, between the shepherd's dreams and the secondary meanings that the "great man" is able to extract therefrom.⁸

In his *Commentary*, Mao Heng is effectively assuming the position, function, and indeed the techniques of a textual diviner. There is thus a direct historical connection between the "great man" described in ode 190 and the early Han dynasty exegete whose commentary we shall read in some detail. In the middle of speaking, dreaming, and writing, there was—even to the Chinese of ancient times—a crisis of the sign and a demand for interpretation and reinterpretation.

Methodology and Scope

In this study of the *Book of Odes* (詩經 *Shijing*), the *Mao Commentary* and the exegetical tradition from which the 305 odes became inseparable in the early Han Dynasty (the second century BCE), I read the *Commentary* in isolation, despite its often terse and ambiguous wording. In spite of the references to the Western tradition of hermeneutics sprinkled here and there, it has been my ambition to allow the early Chinese texts to inform us of how the *Odes* were produced and read without forcing them to speak the language of Western literary theory. This study is therefore one that aspires to be text-centered in the most concrete sense of the term. Although this mode of operation necessarily leaves some of Mao's comments unexplained, it would be futile and plainly illogical to consult later commentators whenever Mao is unclear. Even Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (d. 200 CE)—often held to be Mao's most faithful follower—deviates considerably from his predecessor.⁹ In short, I try to use internal evidence only.

Naturally, those comments of Mao Heng's that are clear pose no problem. Other comments can be explained through a close comparison with the poems they annotate. Here, Mao's paraphrases or puns ("subliminal," as I sometimes call them) reveal how he understood the text in question. A third category of comments can be made clear by way of intertextual comparisons, that is, by comparing Mao's interpretation of one poem with that of another. In the instances when Mao is too obscure to allow any of these options, I have acknowledged my defeat by placing those comments in "Appendix B" below.

The dating and origins of the 305 odes are highly uncertain. From the extensive historical chronicle *Master Zuo's Commentary* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), it may be surmised that the compilation was still not completed in 621 BCE, whereas striking similarities between certain odes and certain passages in the *Zhouyi* 周易 and certain Zhou Dynasty bronze inscriptions, respectively, point to a *terminus post quem* somewhere in the ninth century BCE.¹⁰

I underscore the great difficulty we have in ascertaining, for instance, if the word written approximately 詩 in early manuscripts and pronounced *shi* in modern Mandarin referred to a collection of poetry, or to "poetry" or "songs" in general. Indeed, it is also uncertain to what degree the body of odes mentioned in the *Zuozhuan*, and in other pre-Han texts and manuscripts, is identical to the received *Shijing*. On the one hand, the presentation or recitation (*fu* 賦) of "Ye you si jun" 野有死麕 ("The Wilderness Holds a

Dead Doe”) described in the *Zuozhuan* narration of the First year of Duke Zhao (541 BCE) suggests that the poem known to the reciter—a certain Zipi 子皮 who died in 529 BCE—corresponded to the three stanzas of the received version.¹¹ On the other hand, the 285th ode in the Mao recension, “Wu” 武, is markedly different from the poem of that title quoted in *Master Zuo’s Commentary*, and there attributed to King Wu of Zhou.¹²

Similarly, “Qi ye” 耆夜, a recently discovered manuscript dated to circa 300 BCE, contains a description of King Wu’s brother, the much lauded Duke of Zhou, quoting, composing or extemporizing (*zuo* 作) a song (*ge* 歌) called “Xishuai” 蟋蟀 (“The Cricket”), which is only partially similar to the poem of that name in the received *Shijing*.¹³ These two examples seem to suggest that an ode did not necessarily have set lyrics or a fixed number of stanzas but that both content and form could be adapted to fit the particular situation in which the ode was quoted, performed or improvised. Differently put, a certain title (such as “The Cricket”) may have been loosely associated with a limited number of motifs and themes, which could have been combined extemporaneously into a poem at ritual gatherings such as that described in “Qi ye”; perhaps this kind of modular, improvised composing of poetry resembled what C. H. Wang describes in *The Bell and the Drum*, as discussed below.

Yet this hypothesis is contradicted by a passage in the *Zuozhuan* in which Zichan 子產, a dignitary from the state of Zheng 鄭, quotes (*fu*) the ode “Gao xiu” 羔裘 (“The Lambskin Furcoat”).¹⁴ It is specified that the ode Zichan quotes is “‘The Lambskin Furcoat’ from Zheng” (*Zheng zhi ‘Gaoxiu’* 鄭之羔裘), probably to distinguish that poem from two other poems bearing the same title in the received *Book of Odes*.¹⁵ The hypothesis is also contradicted by the passage in which the ruler of Qi tries to “make the Grand Master [of music] sing the last stanza of ‘Artful Words’” (ode 198 in the Mao version) 使大師歌巧言之卒章.¹⁶ When the Grand Master declines to do so, one of his colleagues named Cao instead performs the task, knowing full well that the message imparted by the poem’s last stanza is likely to make the two visitors present at the court of Qi attack the ruler, against whom Master Cao bears a grudge. The same version of the “last stanza of ‘Artful Words’” must therefore have been known by the two Music Masters and the ruler, and probably also by the two visitors to the Qi court.

These examples, again, would suggest that the *Odes* as a corpus of poems was fairly stable at the time of the *Zuozhuan*, and that a particular title (such as “The Wilderness Holds a Dead Doe,” “The Lambskin Furcoat,” “Artful Words,” or “The Cricket”) did refer to a specific poem and was not

merely a tag for a poem containing a particular set of motifs and themes.¹⁷ The two are of course not mutually exclusive; the practice of quoting (*fu*) from a corpus of poems already in existence may well have existed alongside the practice of “making” or “extemporizing” (*zuo*) poems from a set of traditional themes and motifs also derived from that corpus. Although my main objective is to explain the logic of Mao Heng’s Han dynasty *Commentary*, I make a brief return to the questions of authorship, authorial intent, and the “integrity” of the *Odes* in chapter 12 below.

During the Spring and Autumn (770–476 BCE) and the Warring States (476–221 BCE) periods, the *Odes* were pivotal for the champions of traditional learning and ritualism called—somewhat frivolously and anachronistically—*Ru* 儒, “Classicists” or “Confucians.”¹⁸ Confucius, as quoted in the *Lunyu* 論語, considers the *Odes* an absolute necessity for the person who wishes to learn not merely how to “speak” or “converse” (*yan* 言) but also how the world functions in general. He says that through the *Odes* one learns the “names of birds, beasts, plants and trees” 鳥獸草木之名 and, conversely, that not knowing the “Zhou Nan” and “Shao Nan” sections of the *Odes* is like “standing facing a wall” 牆面而立.¹⁹ Thinkers as different as Mozi 墨子, Mencius 孟子, and Xunzi 荀子 all use quotations from the *Odes* to amplify and exemplify their arguments, and many manuscripts excavated during the past decades also display this characteristic.²⁰ *Master Zuo’s Commentary*, as described above, records multiple instances of high dignitaries reciting or quoting (*fu*) from the *Odes* as a roundabout and courteous way of communication (which, perhaps, is what Confucius’s remark about the *Odes* as a “means to discourse” 以言 refers to).²¹

Let us linger a moment at this particular form of quotation because it may very well shine a light on the question of the *xing*, the exegetical tool at the center of this study. The “Qiu ren” 求人 chapter of *Master Lü’s Chronicle* (*Lüshi chunqiu*) 呂氏春秋 describes how “Qian shang” 褰裳 (ode 87) was recited at a diplomatic meeting between representatives from the states of Jin 晉 and Zheng 鄭, one of whom was the above-mentioned Zichan:

“The men of Jin wanted to attack Zheng and so sent the envoy Shu-xiang 叔向 to make an official visit and inspect their capacity. [The Zheng minister] Zichan made a recitation of an ode for him:

If you love and desire me
I shall hitch up my underskirt and wade the Wei river
If you do not desire me
how could there not be other gentlemen?

Shuxiang returned home and reported: ‘There are [able] men in Zheng, Zichan is among them. Zheng cannot be attacked. [The states of] Qin and Chu are nearby. His poem had another meaning [or: “his poem had a rebellious intent”]. Zheng cannot be attacked.’ The people of Jin thereupon discontinued their attack on Zheng.” 晉人欲攻鄭，令叔嚮聘焉，視其有人與無人。子產為之詩曰子惠思我，褰裳涉洧。子不我思，豈無他士。叔嚮歸曰鄭有人，子產在焉。不可攻也。秦、荆近。其詩有異心。不可攻也。晉人乃輟攻鄭。²²

The situation in which the poem is quoted may appear slightly comical but is in fact coolly hostile. That Zichan assumes the persona of a young woman who promises to lift her skirt and wade the river clearly suggests that if Jin will not offer its protection Zheng will find other and more caring allies, as indeed becomes obvious to Shuxiang when the poem is decoded and properly reinterpreted, hence his report that “Zheng cannot be attacked for Qin and Chu are nearby.” The female role, furthermore, indicates that Zheng is not itself strong but derives strength from the alliances that it may form with other states.

For my present purposes I draw two conclusions. Zichan’s quotation of this ode depends on an analogy, and hence a perceived similarity, between the states of Jin and Zheng on the one hand, and the poem’s narratrix and her prospective beau on the other. Zichan’s act of quoting thus depends on, and produces, a tension between what provisionally may be called a primary and a secondary meaning. This, in turn, introduces a need for hermeneutics, understood as an act of interpretation and contextualization. In this regard, Shuxiang appears as a direct precursor of Mao Heng, and a successor of the “great man” who divined the shepherd’s dream in ode 190. If Shuxiang had not contextualized ode 87 but regarded Zichan simply as a lover of erotic poetry, or his quotation a way of showing off his command of the *Odes*, Zichan’s message (as distinguished from the poem’s primary meaning) would not have been communicated. The potential for language, and the *Odes* in particular, to become decontextualized and invested with secondary meaning was thus not only realized in the Warring States tradition of poetry quotation; it is also what caused Mao Heng to coin the concept of *xing*.

In the early Han dynasty there were already several recensions, or manuscript traditions, of the *Odes* that incorporated commentaries explaining both the general meaning of the poems and their often arcane language, among which the so-called Lu 魯, Qi 齊 and Han 韓 schools seem to have been the most long-lived and famous.²³ Then, probably in the first half of the second century BCE, Mao Heng 毛亨 composed a systematic annotation on the *Odes* commonly known as the *Maozhuan* 毛傳, the *Mao Tradition*,

or (as in the following) the *Mao Commentary*.²⁴ The *Commentary* consists partly of linguistic glosses explaining the obscure vocabulary of the ancient *Odes*, and in this respect probably represents an endeavor to recapture a Zhou dynasty tradition to a large extent arcane in early Han times. The Mao recension gained in influence and the *Commentary* was subsequently recognized as the canonical and authoritative exegetical companion to the *Shijing*, whereas the other three schools fell into oblivion.²⁵

Apart from the *Odes* and the *Commentary*, the *Mao Recension of the Odes* consists of two texts. The first of these is the *Great Preface*, a short but not unambiguous exposition on the origins, nature, and function of *shi* 詩 (of which “poetry” is an approximation).²⁶ The other is the so-called *Minor Preface* (or *Prefaces*), which consists of brief comments on each individual *Shijing* poem. In contrast to Mao’s *Commentary*, they do not analyze the poetic and stylistic traits of the *Odes* but inscribe them in a historic and dogmatic context.²⁷ The *Commentary* is thus not as blatantly ideological as the *Minor Prefaces*; yet it is clear from his comments on poems such as “Guanju” (ode 1), “Er zi cheng zhou” 二子乘舟 (ode 44) and “Xiao pan” (*sic*) 小弁 (ode 197) that Mao partook in the allegorizing tradition, at least to some extent. Moreover, the brevity of Mao’s comments, and his casual references to two predecessors called Meng Zhongzi 孟仲子 and Master Zhongliang 仲梁子, lead one to speculate that they were written as detailed annotations to a more general commentarial tradition that contextualized the poems.²⁸ Perhaps this hypothetical earlier commentary was the so-called *Older Prefaces*, or the “upper” part of the *Minor Prefaces*; perhaps it was the “Commentary” or “Tradition” (*chuan* 傳) cited in the “Da lue” 大略 chapter of the *Xunzi* (“Regarding the sensuous lust expressed in the ‘Guofeng’ section a commentary says ‘it is desire filled to the brim but it stops at the right point’” 國風之好色也，傳曰盈其欲而不愆其止); perhaps it was the exegetical tradition found in the excavated manuscript called *Kongzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (Confucian discourses on the *Odes*), according to which the first ode “‘Guanju’ [analogically] explains ritual principles by [describing] sensuous desire” 關雎以色喻於禮.²⁹

Why did the *Mao Commentary* survive and the Three Schools decline? I suggest that by introducing the concept called *xing*, which marks the start of a formal rhetorical analysis in the Chinese exegetical tradition, Mao had an advantage over his predecessors and colleagues in the project of transforming the *Odes* into Confucian dogma.³⁰ What, then, is Mao’s “*xing*”? The term is complex, and has been defined, redefined, and distorted so many times over the centuries that an answer can only be tentative at this stage: Mao’s *xing* is a marker of nonliteral, figurative meaning; or—much bolder—a way

of describing one entity in terms of another; or (from another perspective) a semantic expansion of a given word according to principles that we can provisionally call metaphorical.³¹ For example, when the first poem speaks of *jujiu* birds (“ospreys”), Mao calls that statement a *xing* because it refers to the young couple later described in the text, and it does so by way of an analogy: the young couple is “virtuous” and the osprey a “virtuous” bird. The method of the *xing*, it seems, is to describe human traits or action in terms of natural objects or events, such as animals, plants, and climatic phenomena.

Reader’s Guide

While also serving, indirectly, as an introduction to some of the key themes of the *Shijing* and to Mao Heng’s *Commentary*, the book’s first part revolves around one question: How have the *Odes* and early Confucian exegesis been described in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Western and Chinese scholars have been surprisingly unanimous in their efforts to present Chinese poetry and hermeneutics as radically different from the literary tradition of the West. According to the Sinological consensus, early Chinese poetics described *shi* 詩 (“poetry, song, ode”) as unpremeditated and nonmetaphorical. Permutations of this idea are omnipresent in the modern works on ancient China treated here, and their goal, one sometimes suspects, is to make the early Chinese literary tradition the absolute opposite of its Occidental counterpart.

This tendency is perhaps most explicit in the works—doubtless insightful but also intriguingly problematic—of Pauline Yu, François Jullien, and more recently Cecile Chu-chin Sun. The typical Western reader, Yu claims, is on the lookout for a “deeper” or “secondary” meaning of a text, whereas the reader in the Chinese tradition tends to take the text at face value and as the product of a particular context; he or she expects no extended or allegorical meaning transcending the given personal, historical context, or, indeed, the “‘literal meaning’ of the songs.”³² The Western literary tradition can thus be described as abstract, metaphorical, and metaphysical in contrast to its Chinese counterpart, which is concrete, literal, and cosmological.

This is also how the concept of *xing* is typically contextualized. The first part of the book thus begins with a lengthy discussion about C. H. Wang’s reconstruction of *Shijing* poetics and then demonstrates how Wang’s project developed out of the theories of his mentor, the great Sinologist and

comparatist Chen Shih-hsiang 陳世驥 (1912–1971). For both scholars, the *xing* is a marker of nonmetaphoricity, literalism and rootedness in a particular historical context. Chen holds that *xing* was originally a “heave-ho” exclaimed by the people of yore united in work—a claim repeated almost verbatim in 2011 by Cecile Sun.³³ Wang, banking on the works on oral poetry by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, understands the *xing* as a way of composing songs by putting together ready-made phrases. I suggest that what these theories describe were never *xing* in early China and has little to do with the concept coined or advanced by Mao Heng. I then attempt to demonstrate how variants of these notions of literalism and nonmetaphoricity appear in most important modern works on the *Odes*.

The essay that constitutes the first part thus takes as its prime object the tendency among modern scholars to denounce the traditional allegorizing readings of the *Odes*. One has attempted to reach beyond Confucian allegoresis in order to find the “authentic” and “original” meaning of these poems. This tendency occurs with some variation, depending on the interpretational preferences of the respective scholar. One common denominator, however, is a strong suspicion of figurative language. Allegorical and metaphorical literary language, it seems, did not exist until the revolutionizing advent of Confucian exegesis, when Mao Heng et al. introduced the analytical instrument known as “*xing*” to usurp the literal truth expressed by the *Odes* and distort it into figurative, fictitious language characterized by abstraction.

Toward the end of the essay there occurs a slight change in subject. Whereas the first five studies (chapters 2 to 6) deal with different aspects of the *xing*, the following four (respectively devoted to the works of Marcel Granet, Pauline Yu, François Jullien, and Cecile Chu-Chin Sun) consider the “reading of imagery in the Chinese poetic tradition” from a comparative perspective. We see the formation of a dichotomy of China and the West, based on what the Sinologist Frederick Mote once called the “cosmological gulf” between the two traditions.³⁴ Indeed, Chinese literature, philosophy, and hermeneutics are described in terms of literalism, concretion, and correlative cosmology, as opposed to their Occidental counterparts, which allegedly are characterized by metaphoricity, abstraction, and metaphysics.

By way of conclusion, I consider the notion of Confucian exegesis as a “performative” mode of reading that “works upon” and refines the textual raw material, in keeping with the Xunzian theory of the lauded Confucian Rituals as a *wei* 偽—which relevantly translates both as “falsification” and “refinement” or “working over”—of primitive human instincts. Ultimately, however, my analysis of the Mao *Commentary* also gainsays the description

of Mao's hermeneutics as purely performative since it is obvious that Mao's "xingish" readings, at their best, succeed in explaining the mechanisms of poetic language in the *Odes*. In chapter 12, which the book's first part closes with, I briefly develop the comments made above on the authorship, authorial intent, and integrity of the *Odes* in an attempt to show how these three concepts relate to each other and to the notions of orality and an early Chinese "performance culture."

The theory of metaphor outlined in chapter 13 is sketchy and *ad hoc* rather than systematic. It is offered here as a heuristic device to explain the heterogeneity of Mao Heng's xing, as explained momentarily. In chapters 14 and 16, I briefly explore the relationship between the *Minor Prefaces* and the *Mao Commentary*, and how the *Prefaces* describe the origins, function, and formal characteristics of *shi* ("poetry"). Chapter 15—in effect a bridge between the first and the second part—is probably the most contentious portion of the book: a short, exploratory essay on the *Great Preface*. "[According to the *Great Preface*] poetic expression is involuntary," claims one modern-day exegete.³⁵ The famous opening lines of the *Preface* undoubtedly speak of a spontaneous, unbridled expression of emotions in speech, sighing, song and dance; yet that statement is contradicted, or at least modified, by the latter part of the text. My reading of the *Preface* through Xunzi and the *Minor Prefaces* rather proposes that poetry is *made* by the superior man in order to convey a carefully deliberated message by means of allegory and metaphoricality. The "commoner," on the other hand, cannot help being moved by the external world. He sings and hollers, wields his arms and stomps his feet, and produces mere "sound" since he is incapable of deliberation. Poetry, to the author of the *Preface*, is the product of intent, whereas "sound" is the outcome of the common man's spontaneous feelings. The notion of spontaneity, moreover, feeds directly into the lore of the literalness of the Chinese poetic tradition. Because if poetry is wholly unmeditated—so the tacit argument goes—it cannot be metaphorical since the metaphor is a trope and so presupposes deliberation.

If I were to make a programmatic statement it is this: any hypostatization or reification of xing must be rejected. Instead of assuming that "the xing" is actually and essentially a part of the *Odes*, and that an all-embracing definition thereof may be found if only the scholar tries hard enough, I suggest that the xing is a tool for literary analysis used by many classical authors, among whom Mao Heng was the first. Therefore, a diachronic study of the different versions that have appeared through the ages in order to find the "true" xing would be futile. One ought instead to study the

internal organization of the *Mao Commentary* to expose its rules and contradictions. In 116 (or roughly 38 percent) of the 305 *Odes* Mao identify a xing element.³⁶ I categorize them according to the kind of relationship Mao establishes between the natural descriptions and the descriptions of human activity in the poem under analysis. In other words, the project aims at establishing a typology of early Han dynasty literary semiotics.

The remainder of the second part is thus divided into seven chapters. The first (18–20) focus on the formal aspect of the xing, in the hope of discerning the rules that govern Mao's use of it. I conclude that most xings are based on a perceived similarity between natural phenomena and human action but on an increasingly complex scale, going from what I call simple metaphor (as in the first ode) to analogy and irony. Chapters 21 and 22, on the other hand, argue that the xing is predominantly “pragmatic,” and that Mao uses it as a tool to transform the *Odes* into idealized representations of Confucian ritual behavior. This claim is sustained in two ways, first by a short discussion about Confucian (or, more exactly, Xunzian) dogma as it appeared in the second century BCE, and by showing how Mao, by way of the allegory and metaphoricity invested in the xing, can find or insert Confucian topics in the *Odes*. Conversely, I explain how a number of *Shijing*-motifs are metaphorized and allegorized into Confucian dogma. I argue that Mao's xing is pragmatic—rather than law-bound and systematic—by discussing several poems where a certain natural description, whose meaning has already been established by Mao, is repeated in a similar context but with a different interpretation.

Chapter 23 aspires to be pivotal in the scholarship devoted to the xing. If in the preceding chapters I defined Mao's xing as the habit of interpreting natural imagery as metaphorical statements about human situations, then by juxtaposing this alleged norm to deviating instances one must rather conclude that the xing, in its earliest incarnation, obviously lacks the coherence that later scholars have presupposed in their attempts to find an all-comprising definition. While a perceived similarity between nature and the human realm certainly is the most common trait of the xing, there is a subgroup of poems labeled xing where the xing trope is based on a causal link between the descriptions of natural phenomena and man. Perhaps this causal xing, as opposed to the “normal” and normative metaphorical xing, was a residue from the divinatory hermeneutics of the *Zhouyi*; perhaps Mao, living in an age where Confucian “rationality” and textuality were slowly replacing “superstition” and divination, took up the fallen mantle of the oracular interpreters and became a textual diviner—a hermeneut of the literary text.