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Comparative Literature and the Ideology of Metaphor, East and West

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Abstract: In his article, "Comparative Literature and the Ideology of Metaphor, East and West," Karl S.Y. Kao offers a comparative reading of the ideological function of metaphor within Eastern and Western thinking. Nietzsche is recognized as the earliest serious challenger to the concepts of meaning and truth within the West, whilst Derrida and de Man are discussed with respect to their conception that figurality is inherent within -- and integral to -- Western philosophical and literary discourse. Parallel to this conception of conceptuality is the Eastern view of language and literature. Kao notes that the Western opposition between logic and rhetoric is not inherent within -- or integral to -- Eastern thought. He examines various rhetorical figures within Eastern philosophy and literature and a contrasting between affective (expressive; East) and mimetic (representational; West) is urged and interrogated. Eastern thought may be distinguished by an awareness of the problematical status of the conceptuality of thought. Despite this awareness, parallel problems threaten to emerge -- whilst the West has tried to inaugurate a distinction between metaphor and concept, the East has tended to subsume them. On the one hand, we encounter a problematical distinction between meaning and truth; on the other hand, we encounter a problematic equivocation.

Karl S.Y. KAO

Comparative Literature and the Ideology of Metaphor, East and West

Traditional confidence in the ability of conceptual thinking to control the working of rhetorical figures started to receive serious challenges in the nineteenth century. Nietzsche pointed out that thinking is always and inseparably tied to the rhetorical devices that are part and parcel of language itself. Not only does the philosophical discourse lack epistemological superiority over other kinds of discourse, it is self-deluding for us to think that any kind of discourse could be exempted from rhetorical penetration and contamination. Set forth mainly in the well-known essay that describes "truth" as a used-up, worn-out metaphor, Nietzsche's criticism of the truth-claim of philosophical discourse as illusory has to do with his mistrust of metaphysics. Reality and truth are not accessible without mediation, while interpretations and "anthropomorphisms" have their roots not in some transcendental source but the drive to appropriate and conquer, the "will to power" (42-47).

Deconstructive criticism follows up on this by inquiring into the problematics of rhetoric and figural discourse, making inquiries in this respect a fundamental aspect of its project. Both Derrida and de Man have examined the question in detail and exposed how thinking is bound to rhetorical devices, how figures are connected with metaphysics and ideology. To recapitulate briefly, in Derrida's view, the Western tradition since the time of Plato has been confused by the thinking that there are fixed truths and non-linguistic facts "out there," that through the tools of reason, argumentation, and evidence, philosophy and science could capture or uncover these truths. This thinking follows from a belief in the "metaphysics of presence" which, however, could never be reached or realized through language. All fiscourses, philosophical or scientific, are in reality but varieties of "writing," systems of signs, which are characterized by *différance* and the free play of signs. The logocentric purpose, the pursuit of "transcendental signified," arrests this play by suppressing the difference in the sign and freezing the differing process. This is also the moment when, in Derrida's words within *Of Grammatology* (1976), "a metaphoric mediation has insinuated itself into the relationship [between the signifier and the signified] and has simulated immediacy" (15). What is called "literal truth" is but a willful interruption of the free play of language and the restriction of the sense of the sign as determinate. As David Novitz puts it in his 1985 article "Metaphor, Derrida, and Davidson," "When once we freeze this play, when once we speak determinately, we are ... speaking metaphorically" (105). In a logocentric system, where language is used in a "determinate" way, speaking will appear to have definite meanings.

Philosophers have dreamt for language to be purified of its contamination by figures and rectified of the aberration, but it is only through a "double effacement" of the metaphor that this illusion is sustained. Exploring the question of "metaphor in the text of philosophy," Derrida shows in "White Mythology" that philosophy is a "process of metaphorization which gets carried away in and of itself" (211); it is not so much that metaphor is in the text of philosophy but theses texts are in metaphor. In reading a text, says Derrida in *Of Grammatology* that "it is not ... a matter of inverting the literal meaning and the figurative meaning but of determining the `literal' meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself" (15). The choice of a metaphor inevitably entails the positing of a perspective or frame, a positioning of the discourse in its "will to power." In this view, dominant values and ideologies of a given time are supported by the ruling metaphors, as Foucault's conception of discursive formation would also argue. Philosophy, then, is a kind of writing that cannot help being contaminated by metaphoricity; concepts only become such by a process of metaphorization of language. But this process is often hidden from epistemological scrutiny, as metaphoricity has also often been rendered transparent and invisible. Deconstructive reading of philosophical texts exposes how privileged terms in Western culture, in their striving for a metaphysics of presence, are held in place by the force of dominant metaphors rather than undisputable logic. Exposure of the hidden metaphor and the metaphoricity of the text in general also disrupts the logic of rational argument, resulting in the instability and undecidability of the meaning of a text. As Derrida urges in *Dissemination*, "Metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic" (149). Richard Rorty remarks, in his "Philosophy as a Kind of

Writing," that the function of "that there is an alternative to the metaphysics of presence and the logocentrism which it encourages" (98).

De Man sees rhetoricity and its subversive force as the most tenacious and inescapable characteristics of Western literary and philosophical discourses (this is the case also with Derrida). To him figurality is ingrained in the act of cognition itself; no conceptualization and abstract thinking can escape it. In the words of his "The Epistemology of Metaphor," as "soon as one is willing to be made aware of their epistemological implications, concepts are tropes and tropes concepts" (21). Rhetoricity therefore is tied to the questions of knowledge and representation. At another level, de Man deals with the issue of specific tropes and their literary functioning, relating them ultimately to the question of the ideology of aesthetic (see Norris 1988). In the Western tradition, rhetoric from the very beginning has been opposed to logic as an alternative faculty. The addition of grammar to the classical opposition between logic and rhetoric to form the trivium of an integral liberal arts education in Medieval times could be seen as a measure introduced to diffuse the tension between oratory and scientific discourse. Grammar is expected to work together with logic to ensure the accuracy of language's mediation of conceptual reasoning so that language may better represent the phenomenal reality, and through this representation we may gain better control of the world. At the same time, the devious operation of rhetoric "making the worse appear as the better cause" may be contained by its "grammatization," subjugated by the rules to serve the enhancement of the expressive power of language. De Man questions such an assumption of collaborative functions. Rhetoricity is not something added to the rules of language, but something inherent in it. Contrary to serving language's purpose of conveying or accurately describing reality, rhetoric cannot but disrupt this function. As de Man sees it in *Allegories of Reading*, "Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration" (10). Since concepts are metaphors and language itself is structured by conflicting systems of signification, under rigorous reading the text will deconstruct itself. Hence de Man's dictum: "The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction" (205).

De Man also examines and reads specific figures and their cultural and ideological valorizations. Traditionally, metaphor is considered as the foremost trope, more powerful or fundamental than metonymy, or for that matter, any other tropes and figures. This privileging of metaphor over metonymy has much to do with the fact that the former, through its ability to induce the perception of sameness in difference, is thought to have the power of capturing the essence of things, even providing a hope to reach the metaphysical; whereas, metonymy, based on association by contiguity, establishes relations that are accidental, non-essential. With Aristotle, artists themselves also believe in the power of metaphor. In Proust's texts, besides being a trope of necessity as opposed to that of arbitrariness, metaphor is considered superior to other figures also because it has a "totalizing" ability it is superior even to reality which can be experienced only in fragments. For example, reading a passage from *Du Coté de chez Swann*, where the young Marcel defends his preference of reading indoors to playing outside, de Man notices that through the use of metaphors, "Marcel's imagination finds access to 'the total spectacle of summer,' including the attractions of direct physical action, and that he possesses it much more effectively than if he had been actually present in an outside world that he then could only have known by bits and pieces" (60). But in a close analysis, the impression of such a total experience turns out to be created by the use of metonymy, rather than metaphor as such, and the latter's alleged ability to capture essences relies in fact on the accidental contiguity effects of the former. There is an inversion of our normal valorization of these two tropes in de Man's reading of Proust.

De Man's deconstructive reading of metaphor corroborates his revaluation of symbol and allegory carried out in relation to a study of Romantic poets. Again, questioning the traditional view held since the late eighteenth century which assumes the superiority of symbol over allegory as a poetic mode or device, he contests, in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," the notion that symbol could effect the reconciliation of man and nature. The promotion of symbol at the expense of allegory may be related to an aesthetics that attempts to bridge the gap between experience and the representation of that experience. De Man describes this aesthetics by paraphrasing Gadamer

in his "The Rhetoric of Temporality" thus: "The subjectivity of experience is preserved when it is translated into language; the world is then no longer seen as a configuration of entities that designates a plurality of distinct and isolate meanings, but as a configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a total, single, and universal meaning" (188). For de Man, this is a delusion. Symbol allures by its promise of organic unity and oneness with the transcendental, which is but a mystification. On the other hand, allegory and irony, with their operations based on the explicit discrepancy between signifier and signified, are considered a more authentic understanding of language, just as temporality would serve as a better model for the relation between figuration and interpretation. His "allegorical reading," with an "ironization," exposes the discontinuity and non-identity in symbolism "organic world" poetics which has implications for political totalitarianism has prevented us from seeing. Thus, Derrida and de Man both see figurality as inherent in philosophical and literary discourses: its motivation and function is to arrest the free play of signification by imposing a "centric" perspective for the reading of the "proper" meaning. Derrida sees this "logocentric" impulse come from the drive for "the transcendental signified," the supposed originary point of meanings. His reading exposes the figural source of the value hierarchy and points to the instability of the text under close scrutiny. De Man further looks to the referential implications of figures and their disruption of the signification process. In *Resistance to Theory* (1986) de Man sees ideology as "the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" (11), his reading thereby uncovers the ideological aberrations caused by figural interference.

Deconstruction is a project designed for the critique of Western metaphysics; it aims to debunk the belief that some truths external to language exist "out there." The basic assumption about language here is its truth-claim. Parallel to this, the referential aberration exposed by the deconstructive reading of the literary and philosophical texts is based on a mimetic-representational theory of language. Early Chinese theories of language, however, do not seem to share such an orientation or assumption. Chad Hansen argues, for instance, in the 1985 article "Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy, and Truth" that early Chinese theory of language has had a pragmatic orientation (also see Hansen's 1983 book *Language and Logic in Ancient China*). And neither the tension sustained opposition between logic and rhetoric, nor anything like the trivium of the Medieval curriculum, has been established to exert an influence in the formation of discursive systems in this tradition. As a consequence, a different rhetoric and rhetoricity in Chinese. This will become clear from the theories that underlie the use of metaphors or metaphor-like figures to be discussed below. But first it might be pointed out that not all languages have the same figures and that the same, or equivalent, figures may not operate in exactly the same way in different languages. Figures are language-specific. There is a figure (trope) frequently used in early Chinese poetry that shows operations similar to metaphor. But closely associated with it in the same context is another figure that has been interpreted to operate like a metaphor, and yet at the same time functions quite differently. An examination of these tropes in the settings of their usages, and the controversies surrounding particularly the latter in its readings, could throw light on the specific ideological questions of Chinese metaphor.

Of the three basic "modes of composition" recognized in the *Shijing* (*Book of Songs*) exegeses, *bi* and *xing* have been considered to operate like metaphors. *Bi*, meaning basically "comparison (by contiguity)," is in fact generally taken to be an equivalent of metaphor (including simile), while *xing* "evocation, stirring" often invites a metaphoric reading of the image involved. A most important and fundamental device in early Chinese poetry, *xing* continued, in a transformed guise, to dominate the theory of poetic composition and reading for much of the imperial period after the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE), when the interpretation of *Shijing* began to be codified. *Xing*'s literary operations, however, are ambiguous. They have "stirred" up much controversy in the Chinese exegetic tradition and different attempts have been made trying to explain how xing works or simply define what it is is it a mode, a generic style, a kind of imagery, a rhetorical device, or a trope? In *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese* (1987), Pauline Yu translates *xing* as "stimulus" and spends ten dense pages of her book on the imagery in the Chinese tradition to explain its history and the various theories about it (57-67; for other essential studies of the

question of *xing*, see also Chou 1980; Cai 1986; Saussy 1993; for a succinct summary of different interpretations of this term throughout Chinese history, see the entry "fu, bi, xing" in Yue 153-56). Stephen Owen in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (1992) renders the term as "affective image" and cuts the Gordian knot of its interpretive history with a concise explanation of the concept: "*Hsing* [*xing*] is an image whose primary function is not signification but, rather, the stirring of a particular affection or mood: hsing does not "refer to" that mood; it generates it. Hsing is therefore not a rhetorical figure in the proper sense of the term. Furthermore, the privilege of hsing over *fu* and *pi* [*bi*] in part explains why traditional China did not develop a complex classification system of rhetorical figures, such as we find in the West. Instead there develop classifications of moods, with categories of scene and circumstance appropriate to each. This vocabulary of moods follows from the conception of language as the manifestation of some integral state of mind, just as the Western rhetoric of schemes and tropes follows from a conception of language as sign and referent" (46).

One of the most illuminating statements ever made about the nature of Chinese poetry, this passage accords well with the affective-expressive orientation of Chinese literature (as opposed to the mimetic-representational one of the West). For all its perceptiveness and explanatory efficacy, the passage's definition of *xing* as "an image" however is most baffling. The term *xing* is usually taken to designate not an object or entity but an activity: an "evocation," "rousing," or "stirring" and "generation," just as *fu* is "exposition" and *bi* "comparison." I would like to add that Yu's translation of the term as "stimulus" is ambiguous if not misleading as well. But from her discussion, it is clear that the term refers not so much to the object that stimulates as to the activity or process of stimulation (57) and Yu's translation of the term as "stimulus" may be motivated by the topic of her book as about the "reading of imagery" in the Chinese tradition (this is true of Owen too). However, *xing* is known for its ambiguity and this unusual translation should evoke no surprise. Like *fu* and *bi*, *xing* may be used also to refer to a mode of composition that implies a particular kind of relationship between the image and the mood or meaning of the poem (the thematic reading of xing imagery is not uncommon; see below). It involves the question of how the image is to be understood in relation to the rest of the poem and in what way the reader may be affected in his/her reading. The main controversy of xing is not over its designation of a process of stimulation or "stirring" (that leads to the generation of a mood and the affecting of the reader by the poem). It is concerned with two other issues: 1) Exactly how the image that serves as the stimulus is related to the event of the poem and its mood is it like a bi comparison? is the relationship "allegorical"? or something else? and 2) What is the provenance of the stimulating, affecting image is it something external that the poet becomes aware of on the spot, or something arising internally in his/her mind at the moment of composition? or is it a stock image used in typically associated with some set theme or mood the poem wants to present or evoke? Only the first question (the relationship between the image and the rest of the poem) is of immediate interest to us here.

An image posed (or read) in the xing mode stirs up feelings or generates a mood. But as the interpretive history from Zheng Xuan (127-200) to Zhu Xi (1130-1200) has testified, there has always been an urge to assign a thematic or cognitive meaning to the image in the context of the poem as a whole by an allegorical reading. The different conceptions of the image as mood-generating and as thematic seem to suggest that a xing image operates in several ways, and we need to see in it a more complex structure than has been recognized. In his analysis of metaphor "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," Paul Ricoeur sees three kinds of activities as intrinsic to an interactive metaphorical process. With an intentionality of their own, feelings are "integrated thoughts" that "abolish the distance between knower and the known without cancelling the cognitive structure of thought and the intentional which it implies" (154). Ricoeur alludes to Aristotle's analysis of catharsis as well as Northrop Frye's definition of "mood" as "the way in which a poem affects us as an icon" and as something that gives unity to a poem (155; for an analysis of *xing* imagery in terms of Ricoeur's concept of "predicative assimilation," see Wei-qun Dai's 1991 "Xing Again: A Formal Re-investigation"). There is a structural analogy between the cognitive, the imaginative, and the emotional components of the complete

metaphorical act, and that "the metaphorical process draws its concreteness and its completeness from this structural analogy and this complementary functioning" (157). A *xing* image may be seen to have an interactive structure like a metaphor, with three similar components or dimensions relating to three respective processes. The semantic dimension provides the ground on which the cognitive operation is based; it requires a thematic reading of the image. The emotional dimension evokes feelings and leads to the development of the poetics of moods in Chinese tradition. With a proper metaphor, the cognitive (semantic) dimension of the image will be dominant, while in the case of a xing image, it is its emotional (affective) dimension that is preeminent. Such a theory would more easily account for the various kinds of readings in the history of Shijing interpretations.

Ricoeur is vague in his analysis of the imaginative dimension, but this component may be compared to another way of traditional reading of the xing imagery. A *xing* image is sometimes thought to function in such a way that it connects the events of the poem to a larger, "cosmic" order. It can do this because the image is said to belong to or to be correlative of a "category" with a cosmic significance. Unlike the bi comparison which derives its meaning from some recognizable common semantic grounds between the two things juxtaposed, the relationship here is based on a "categorical correspondence" predicated on an organic view of the universe. This relationship between a particular object and the "category" (or class: *lei*) it belongs to is described as "organic," as that between genus and species, but from a linguistic point of view the "semantic features" presumably shared by the two entities are only assumed, not identified. Ultimately the "category" itself is a metaphor; it can only be conceived and represented metaphorically in terms, for instance, of yin and yang which "literally" mean the sunny and shady side (respectively) or those of the Five Elements defined as the correlatives of the Five Directions, the Five Internal Organs, etc. This reading may be understood as a kind of schematization that transcends both the dimensions of senses and feelings.

Initially, a free sign that evokes a certain mood or poetic ambience, a xing image theoretically need not incur the problem of "referential aberration" nor succumb to the seduction and mystification of the metaphysics of presence. However, as in the Western discourse, the desire for a determinate reading stops the free play of meanings and the indefinite affective associations. Ricoeur's analysis of the cognitive component of metaphor identifies, in place of Derridian différance and apporia, a split between "the literal incongruence and metaphorical congruence" at the semantic level, and analogically there is at once "a suspension and commitment" at the other levels as well. In the Chinese context, this split, or tension, is put in terms of "ambiguity" or "obscurity" of signification. In *Wenxin diaolong* (*The Literary Mind Carves Dragons*), Liu Xie (465-520) sees the commentaries given by the interpretive authorities as a shedding of light on the originally dim configuration of meanings, a revealing of the "correct" relationships and their significance: "It is getting brighter but not yet full sunlight: Thus they can be visible only after commentary has been given" (Owen 258). Since the significance of the image exists, presumably, a priori the authoritative interpreter's job is point out this significance, can be no split of reference, only "potent" meaning awaiting discovery and revelation. In a thematic reading, the cognitive dimension of a xing image is often given political or didactical interpretations. Thus "the song of ospreys" (birds that "makes a distinctions between the sexes") is said to suggest "the virtue of the Queen Consort"). The emotive content, on the other hand, seems more likely to escape the ideological co-option. This aspect of the image has in fact led to the later mainstream theory that sees poetry as a combination of jing and qing, or a fusion of verbalized external "scenes/situations" with that of subjective "feelings/affections." Such a content is more or less purely aesthetical, but it is not entirely immune to contamination. By Ricoeur's analysis, feeling involves an internalization of the world as well as assimilation by it. "To feel, in the emotional sense of the word, is to make ours what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase" (154). From an opposite perspective, this assimilation in relation to what we "feel" is also a self-assimilation vis a vis the world, just as we are "made similar" in relation to what we "see." The poetic mood of the "happy air of a good era," or the "licentious song of a degenerate time," can be understood then as an ideological assimilation of the feeling: it is an "interpellation" in the

emotional sense. As for the dimension of the image's "categorical correspondence," it also yields easily to the co-option by the state or its contending powers. Poetic images believed to be correlative of the "alternation of Cosmic Phases" had been enlisted, for instance, to legitimize the overthrow of a dynasty, for the change-over in power was said to correspond to a due course of the "natural" process that was already reflected in the poem and that no one should try to reverse.

As the account above indicates, the *xing* imagery contains in it various dimensions that make it more complex in structure than *bi*. *Bi* does not occupy a predominant position in Chinese poetry as metaphor does in Western discourse, although the pieces in *Chuci* (*Songs of the South*) (3rd century BCE to 2nd century CE) composed after the *Book of Songs* rely on a system of imagery that is heavily emblematic (see Yu 84-117). Liu Xie considers *xing* a "superior" operation to bi because the former is "covert" and the latter "overt" (Owen 256-58). This judgment is based on different political functions of these literary devices, on the suitability of their linguistic mechanism for social comment. The covert *xing* is more appropriate for the important task of making political and social comments which must be done through "indirection" or circumspection. On the other hand, the overt quality of *bi* makes it a more suitable tool for philosophical argument and explanation. In this respect, there is an inherent tendency in this trope that is ideological in nature. While theoretically *bi* could emphasize contrast, distance, and dissimilarity characteristic of Western metaphor, its metaphoric operation is based on comparison, rather than substitution. As Michelle Yeh observes in her 1997 article "Metaphor and Bi: Western and Chinese Poetics" uses of *bi* often stress similarity (237-54), unwittingly privileging unity over diversity and valuing continuity above break with tradition and the status quo.

Although not essential in poetry, the analogical mechanism of *bi* was employed frequently in early philosophical prose essays in the figural forms of *piyu* and *yuyan*. Functioning mainly as an explanatory device in the contexts of both the Confucian and Taoist discourses, *yuyan* refers to a parable-like story or anecdote which sometimes also looks like an allegory (*piyu* usually designates a short explanation by analogy). *Yuyan* serves best in a discourse where an abstract point is in need of concrete explanation. As such it is an important tool frequently employed by the pre-Qin writers in their philosophical debates and by persuaders in state policy deliberations (the retention of many of these yuyan in the condensed form of four-syllabic idioms in today's vocabulary also attests to their continuing currency and vitality).

The pervasive use of *yuyan* in place of a syllogistic logic for argumentation constitutes both the strength and weakness of the philosophical discourse in early China. Using analogy to illustrate a point, *yuyan* is a valid device of explanation, but generally speaking it lacks the force of logical inference. Such a metaphorical or analogical illustration does not constitute a premise for a valid deduction, even though occasionally an illustration may form the ground for a sound inference. Usually the analogues are not homologous. But the effectiveness and vividness of analogical *yuyan* give it the ability to insinuate homologicality between the two things compared. Like metaphor, *yuyan* is creative for its bringing together two disparate, incompatible things, and this creativeness may have enhanced the misconception of it as a figure of proof. The way *yuyan* develops in the Confucian and Taoist discourse shows a marked difference which seems to betray the divergent ideological appropriation clear that the use of yuyan had greatly diminished in frequency in Confucian texts, its place taken by a related figure called yongshi, i.e., historical allusion. A hallmark of the classical literary discourse after the Han, yongshi is ostensibly a figure also of comparison, but it has a modelling (framing) function as well. The speaker's own situation or the current affair is related to, compared with, the historical (or supposedly historical) situation alluded to. This general intertextual device of using the past as a frame of reference for the present is appropriated by Confucianism and made a primary device of the school to transmit, disseminate, and perpetuate its values. The subject or the personage alluded to often attains the quality of an archetypal symbol or cultural icon through frequent invocations. Like the appeal to authority as an argumentative device where the authorities are usually the "past sages," "ancient worthies," or Confucius himself historical allusions look to the past to define one's own situation, and thereby the present also carries on the traditional values. Yongshi allusions are similar to yuyan in that both provide a frame or standard for measuring the situation at hand, but yuyan is usually

constituted by fictitious stories whereas yongshi involves history, reflecting a pragmatic Confucian mentality that values wisdom derived from past experiences rather than pure inventiveness. This particular kind of metaphoric operation promotes to the full the tendency of bi to emphasize similarity in comparison, and in so doing it also makes itself lose much of metaphor's "world making" creative power.

In contrast to this development in Confucian discourse, the *yuyan* told in the Taoist texts tend to be, not only imaginary, but fantastic in nature Zhuangzi's *zhongyan* parables also feature "historical personages," but mostly only their names are historical not t e events associated with them. Zhuangzi's *yuyan* are made of imagery such as the transformation of the tiny kun-fish into a peng, a giant bird with wings spanning hundreds of miles, soaring like a whirlwind for a journey to the mythic "Southern Deep," and the picture of the Lord of the Yellow River travelling downstream with autumn floods in the survey of the vast expanses of the sea, there to carry on a lofty conversation with the Spirit of the Ocean, which in turn contains many fantastic yuyan anecdotes. But more importantly, most such Taoist yuyan have images that work like metonymy and synecdoche, rather than metaphor; there is often an ontological common ground between the illustration and the illustrated. For the explanation of the concept of *xuanjie*, "Freedom from the Bonds," we are given in the Zhuangzi the image of a wizened but wise old man whose left arm gets transformed into a rooster to keep morning watch, the right arm into a crossbow to shoot pellets, and so on. Or to illustrate the concept of wuhua, the "Transformation of Things," we have the intriguingly ambiguous concomitant possibilities of a Zhuangzi himself dreaming that he is a butterfly and/or a butterfly dreaming that it is Zhuangzi dreaming of itself dreaming of Zhuangzi. Besides the mise-en-abime quality of the imagery, the intended message of "transformation" is illustrated by a not entirely metaphorical change of a person into a different being or Burke's use of the term "consubstantial." The term is used here in a different, but related, sense).

Transformation or transmutability of things is in fact not merely a transferring of sense, as with a metaphor, but a central theme of Zhuangzi's philosophy. The Taoist imagination displays a belief in physical transformation, akin to the philosophy of tianren heyi ("Union between Man and Heaven") and the later metaphysics of "immanent transcendence" characteristic of Neo-Confucian thought based on the Doctrine of Mind. Seemingly harmless in the context of "spiritual cultivation," this belief in the transmutability of things and consubstantialism could have consequences similar to de Man's warning against the mystification of the aesthetics of ideology. Zhuangzi and Liezi use the image of the True Man (*zhenren*) or the Ultimate Man (*zhiren*), a being endowed with the supernatural qualities of cosmic power and impervious to fire and water, to describe the state of attainment to Tao and the spiritual later converts took literally such figurative descriptions, attempting to give a "proper" reading of the metaphoricity of thelanguage, the belief led not only to the phenomenon of the immortality cult in the tradition of internal alchemy. It also led to such disastrous histories as the Boxer Uprising, which took place, not during the Han or the Six Dynasties, but at a time not so remote from our own.

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