Words Well Put

Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition

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Introduction

October 19, 2000. I was walking to my office at the University of Toronto on a cloudy morning. I had just turned the corner from London Street onto Bathurst Street, and there, across from the subway station, was a red mailbox that I had passed a thousand times before. The side of it was encrusted with advertisements, posters, stickers, graffiti—but one message, carefully printed in black ink on a white nametag (the kind that says, "Hello, my name is . . ."), caught my eye. It read:

You were what you said; you are what is in your head.

It struck me as significant, as somehow true. I filed it away in my memory with the thought that I might use it as the epigraph for a book someday.

I

Before I can even begin to discuss the notion of poetic competence in the Chinese tradition, I must consider the status of the surviving premodern texts that contain descriptions of poems being composed, performed, and received. When faced with thousands upon thousands of books resting silently upon shelves, it is often easy to forget that every text in those books comes from the hand of a human being. And a good number of premodern Chinese texts were transmitted with the mouth before they were set down by hand. It is not always possible to identify a point of origin for a text—a particular act of production (oral or written) by a particular person at a particular time. Many texts seem to have emerged over time, among

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groups of people, large and small. Some texts may have had an initial point of production, but have mutated through centuries of reproduction. They come down to us by way of breath, bone, bronze, stone, bamboo, silk, and paper, jumping from one medium to another, evolving in their journey, spawning variants, interpolations, excisions, and paraphrases. However these texts may have ended up between the covers of books, they are certainly marked by their journey outside those covers. They are all traces of a larger realm that may be called discourse, which I define as the entire range of verbal practices through which human beings articulate themselves to others in specific contexts. A particular instance of discourse may be called an utterance. Thus a text is the trace of an oral or written utterance that endures beyond its original context, a context that, once past, can only ever be postulated rather than known. Discourse is experienced in the context of the moment; once the moment has passed, only its traces remain.

Discourse, as the etymology of the word suggests, is a "running away" (*discurrere*) from the human subject. Each utterance—whether it be made in speech or writing—moves beyond the control of the person who produced it once it is received by others. It was never completely under the control of the producing subject in the first place, for he or she is always-already conditioned to produce certain types of discourse in certain situations—conditioned by the social position he or she occupies, conditioned by the web of past texts and current discourse that already defines that position. One can understand each surviving text as the trace of a speaking subject's attempt to negotiate his or her position in relation to others, and in relation to the entire complex of discourse that defines those positions. Every text is the trace of a performance, an act of a discoursed subject discoursing.

Once a text is understood as the trace of a performance, it becomes imperative to establish the context of that performance. Any given context is actually made up of a nested series of osmotic contexts. The immediate context of an utterance includes the circumstances of its production and reception: who was present, where the parties were located, when the utterance was made, when it was received, what events recently occurred, and what possible out-

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comes hang in the balance. The significance of these variables is conditioned by the social context of the utterance, which defines the positions occupied by the producer and receiver and the milieu in which they move. The social context is in turn temporally shaped by a historical context; thus, positions must be understood diachronically in their development as well as synchronically in their relationships. These contexts simultaneously give rise to and are encompassed by a cultural context that determines what can and cannot be said in a given realm of discourse, depending on received ideas of what is appropriate to various positions in society.

Any attempt to delineate the immediate, social, historical, and cultural contexts of an utterance is really an attempt to arrest an instance of discourse, to keep it from "running away" long enough that it may be fully appreciated. Such an arrest is made in name only, however, because of the simple fact that every past context is itself accessible only through texts. Our understanding of premodern China is no exception—only through an understanding derived from texts do any surviving extratextual material artifacts or locations gain their significance. Objects cannot speak fully by themselves in a culture so persistently and pervasively defined by texts as China's. Witness the Chinese obsession with inscribing material objects—bones, shells, stelae, cauldrons, bells, mirrors, fans, lutes, paintings, walls, bodies, cliffs, textiles—there is scarcely a type of object that has not been inscribed, woven, carved, branded, or otherwise marked by signs. The entire realm of discourse that was premodern China—every instance of discourse that left its trace as a text, every context that now persists as a trace of discourse—appears to us as would the jewel net of Indra, with each text reflecting and being reflected by every other text. The task of the critic—one task at least—is to attempt to uncover the speaking subject implied in a given text. A careful assessment of the multivalent contexts of an utterance implied in a text—the persistent trace of a discursive performance—can reveal the desires and anxieties of the speaking/writing subject who made the utterance. But what is the status of the subject thus revealed?

In the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, "Discourse on Considering All Things as Equal" 齊物論, it is written:

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The one who dreams of drinking wine may cry and weep when morning comes; the one who dreams of crying and weeping may set out on a hunt when morning comes. When they were dreaming, they did not know that they were dreaming. In the midst of a dream, one may even interpret a dream within the dream and only realize that it was all a dream upon waking. And so only after a Great Awakening will we know that this too is all a Great Dream. It is a fool who claims that he is already awake and is self-assured in this knowledge. He fancies himself a lord or just a shepherd? Such pigheadedness! Confucius himself is and you too are both dreaming. And when I tell you that you are dreaming—that too is a dream.

夢飲酒者◦旦而哭泣◦夢哭泣者◦旦而田獵◦方其夢也◦不知其夢也◦夢之中又占其夢焉◦覺而後知其夢也◦且有大覺而後知此其大夢也◦而愚者自以爲覺◦竊竊然知之◦君乎◦牧乎◦固哉◦丘也與女◦皆夢也◦予謂女夢◦亦夢也◦[1]

The speaking subject in this passage admits that his discourse, his "telling you," is just as unsubstantiated as his claim that our entire reality is unsubstantiated. His admission is a deft rhetorical move that serves to strengthen his argument by acting as its own case in point. There can be no Great Awakening for the critical project. It will always be interpreting a dream within a dream. The speaking subject of an utterance and the critic's attempt to discover that subject may be nothing more than the convergence of a mass of texts, but this should not mitigate the value of the discovery. For how people construct and portray themselves as speaking subjects—how they dream—is worth knowing.

II

Texts in the Chinese tradition are rarely lonely. On their journey to the reading present, they often pick up fellow travelers in the form of prefaces, colophons, commentaries, annotations, anecdotes, companion pieces, and a host of other texts that are in a *transtextual* relationship with the core text.[2] The poem (*shi* 詩) seems to be more

1. Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解, pp. 24–25. Translations from Chinese are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. Gérard Genette defines *transtextuality* as "everything which puts the text in explicit or implicit relationship with other texts" (*Palimpsestes*, 7). He has identified

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gregarious than most texts in this respect. It usually travels with a title, at the very least, and often picks up a preface and a commentary somewhere along the way. It tends to travel in packs, grouped together with other poems of the same provenance, theme, form, or some other characteristic held in common. Occasionally, a poem or a portion of a poem will hitch a ride inside another text—a speech, essay, or narrative of some kind. It is this last mode of travel—a poem being borne by a narrative—that is the subject of this book.

The act of narrating (*narration*) produces a narrative text (*récit*) that tells a story (*histoire*).[3] Thus a narrative is the textual trace of a particular act of uttering a narrative. The story told by that narrative might recount characters uttering their own utterances, including poems. The poem-bearing narrative (especially a narrative in the classical language of histories, biographies, and anecdotal collections) subordinates the poem to the narrative, relegating the production (or reproduction through citation) of the poem to the status of an event in the story.[4] In other words, the narrative is told by the voice of a narrator, who relates a story in which characters appear and in turn speak in their own voices through discourse, poetic and otherwise. Such a narrative holds out the hope of recovering, to some degree, the multivalent contexts of a poetic utterance.

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five such relationships: (1) *intertextuality*—the presence of one text within another (citation, allusion); (2) *paratextuality*—auxiliary texts that frame a main text (*peritexts*, such as the title, preface, or footnotes, appear in the same volume, and *epitexts*, such as conversations or correspondence, appear outside the main text); (3) *metatextuality*—commentary on a text, such as literary criticism; (4) *hypertextuality*—transformation of a *hypotext* into a new form (translation, parody, versification, etc.); and (5) *architextuality*—the power of genre to determine and classify the nature of texts. A useful summary of this taxonomy is Barbara Havercroft's article in Makaryk, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 335.

3. Genette develops the full ramifications of this tripartite relationship throughout *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*.

4. The alternative to this subordinate relationship is a coordinate one: the use of poetic discourse by the narrator rather than by characters in the story depicted by the narrative. This appears most frequently in vernacular stories and novels because of their tendency to mimic the form of oral storytelling performance, in which spoken narrative and chanted or sung poetry (often with musical accompaniment) are alternately used to relate a story to the audience.

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"Poetic competence" is the term I use to designate the ability of a person to deploy poetic discourse as a means of affecting the attitude and behavior of another person in order to achieve a desired end. Such competence can only be immediately apprehended in the context of a narrative, where the conditions of a poem's production and the effects of its reception can be ascertained. The motivation for producing poem-bearing narratives, however, was to provide ideal examples of the operation of poetry, not faithful records of it. They cannot be used as a reliable basis for reconstructing how poetry *really* was performed and received in ancient China; the only historical fact that we can be sure of is that these narratives were written down at some point. The stories they narrate are surely a mixture of what happened, what might have happened, and what should have happened. The goal in this book is not to systematically establish the social conditions of poetic production and reception, but to delineate the evolving concept of what a poem is and the changing idea of what one might *plausibly* achieve through poetic performance. Such stories fulfill and deny wishes for poetry and the self—it is these wishes that merit our careful attention.

The housing of a poetic utterance within a narrative produces a nested relationship with a poem at its center, which is diagrammed in Figure 1 in the Appendix. At this point, I will beg the reader's patience while I lay down some of the theoretical groundwork needed to build a rigorous analysis of the complex relationship that arises between a poem and the narrative that houses it. The terminology and concepts I discuss explicitly in the following paragraphs inform the analysis of poetic competence in the rest of the book, where I have tried to keep them implicit as much as possible.

The text of a poem in a narrative is the enduring trace of a particular spoken or written utterance, which bears the traces of the circumstances of its being uttered.[5] The act of uttering a poem,

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5. The distinction between the act of uttering (*énonciation*), the utterance (*énoncé*), and the traces of the former found in the latter is developed by Emile Benveniste in both volumes of his *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Benveniste characterizes the *énoncé* as the oral utterance or written text produced by each act of *énonciation*. I prefer to reserve the term "text" to indicate the fixed pattern of words that persists in the memory or on the page after a particular act of uttering.

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which may be called a performance, is in turn represented by the text of a narrative. The performance of a poem is a moment of practicing discourse—it is experienced over a brief span of time and can never be fully recuperated. The contours of a performance are implied by the utterance it produces (preserved as the poetic text) and described by the utterance that houses it (preserved as the narrative text). Clear understanding of the poetic text and its implied performance can only be derived from knowledge of the position occupied by the speaking subject and the immediate context of the performance, the kind of knowledge conveyed by the narrative text. In short, the poetic text opens up questions (who? where? when? why? how? what?); the narrative text attempts to resolve those questions with answers.

The narrative text is itself the trace of an act of uttering by a narrator, who, as a speaking subject, is the construction of an author or authors who utter the narrator into existence. Access to the circumstances of production of the narrative text—the narrating—is gained through explicit intrusion of the narratorial voice into the narrative, which frequently occurs at the point of closure in Chinese narratives. Access to the author's construction of the narrator is gained through *paratexts*, such as prefaces, colophons (peritexts), and external texts that mention the narrative text in question (epitexts). The number of paratexts that may associate themselves with a given text is open-ended, as is indicated in figure 1 by the broken line that forms the outermost boundary.

The story that is told by the narrative describes the contours of the poetic utterance depicted as an event within the story. From the story, one can gain a sense of the poetic utterance as (1) a *locutionary* act, the fashioning of an utterance to articulate something to someone; (2) an *illocutionary* act, the attempt to achieve something through an utterance; and (3) a *perlocutionary* act, which comprises the results of the utterance when it is received, which results may or

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Such a text can then be uttered again to form a new utterance, which may or may not persist in itself as a text. There are really two types of "trace": (1) the trace that is the persistent text of a particular utterance made at a particular moment, and (2) the traces of the circumstances of the act of uttering that are found in an utterance.

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may not coincide with what was intended in the illocutionary act.[6] Poetic competence can be succinctly defined as the ability to utter a poem as a locutionary act with enough illocutionary force to bring about the desired perlocutionary effects. The "acts" and the "effects" need not be tangible; they might be as ineffectual in concrete terms as venting one's frustrations to generate sympathy in a listener.

Finally, three transcontextual forces shoot through the whole complex of nested contexts that appears in figure 1. The first is *intertextuality*, which acknowledges that the boundaries between contexts are permeable, that a poetic text may call forth a certain narrative text to satisfy its urgent questions (or that a narrative may tell a story that reaches a point of such emotional intensity that a poetic utterance is inevitable), that an utterance at one level can effect the uttering at another, and that utterances can migrate and commingle. No single level of utterance is completely definitive and no single level of uttering is completely determinative. There is always another context for every context; even if one proceeds directly to the center of the diagram, to the poetic utterance itself, it too may be construed as a context—the surrounding words—of the speaking subject, which can only be known through the shape of the words that emanate from it.

The second transcontextual force is *discourse*, which simply acknowledges that all of the acts of uttering, the utterances made, and the texts produced exist in time. Any two-dimensional diagram of a practice that takes place over time immediately falls prey to the synoptic illusion that results when practices such as discourse are treated as though they can be frozen and analyzed in a state of suspended animation.[7] When dealing with a collection of narrative texts, one is dealing with the textual traces of a set of practices that are irrevocably past. The texts themselves may be static, but a con-

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6. These three terms were developed by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, which took up the work of John R. Searle and galvanized the entire branch of critical theory known as speech act theory. The model of speech act theory is too limited in itself—particularly in its analysis of power—to comprise all of the facets of poetic competence that will emerge in this book, but it does provide a useful point of departure.

7. See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 10–11.

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sideration of time and of space—of interval (*jian* 間)—must be reinserted into an analysis of the practices implied by texts.

The third transcontextual force is *power*, which acknowledges that all stories are told by people who wield varying amounts of social power. It is obvious that a narrative is merely a representation of reality, but it should also be kept in mind that it is a biased representation fashioned to serve the needs and desires of the person or people who generated and transmitted the narrative.

Why is this theoretical framework necessary in order to better understand poetry? To enjoy a poem in a pristine textual state, stripped of its paratexts and narrative context, is to resurrect but a small portion of the person who uttered it—at a particular place and time, to a particular audience, under a particular set of circumstances.[8] While the poem itself may yet shine brightly in our minds, the rest of these particulars persist as a faint corona of implications to be cross-checked, verified, surmised through other sources, or simply filled in with equal parts intuition and imagination. The poem-bearing narrative provides a way to reinsert a poem into its living context, or, more accurately, into a representation of its living context. In the simulacrum of reality forged by such narratives, an ancient poem may be revivified as a vital mode of discourse with affective and suasive power, as a means of exchanging thoughts and feelings between people in the *same* place and time. The people, the world they inhabited—these are lost to us forever. But the fully rounded articulation of one person's interior to another—this can live again through the power of a narrative, through its ability to represent a world, its people, and their words.

Such a narrative carries within it the representation of the immediate context of a poetic utterance: the circumstances of its production and reception. It gives an indication of its social context: the relative status of the parties involved and the nature of the arena

8. There is poetry, especially poetry explicitly marked as non-occasional, that is uttered for a more general or diffuse audience, but this rules out neither a specific audience for the uttering of such a poem, nor the ability of a poet to have both a specific and general audience in mind simultaneously. There is also poetry that explicitly denies concern for an audience (certain poems by Tao Qian, Li Bai, Bai Juyi, and others), but such a denial only has force when made to an audience.

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in which they discourse. When the narrative is part of a larger collection of narratives that spans decades or centuries, the historical context for the poetic utterance begins to emerge, and one can begin to ascertain the changes that take place in attitudes toward poetic practice over time. When that collection holds a preeminent place in the textual legacy of a group of people, it expresses and gives shape to the cultural context of the utterances represented within it. Such a collection plays a role in determining what is sayable, who may say it, and how it is said. Such culturally influential collections are the source of the poem-bearing narratives that are the quarry of this book.

III

This book takes four compilations of narrative texts as its case studies in poetic competence: the *Zuo Tradition* 左傳, the *Han History* 漢書, *Topical Tales: A New Edition* 世說新語, and *Storied Poems* 本事詩. Each compilation was fashioned for very different reasons, but they all include narratives that depict poetic performance and reception. They also share a similar composition in that each was compiled from other sources spanning centuries, rather than being written from beginning to end by a single author during his own lifetime. This makes them useful cross-sections (albeit highly mediated ones) of entire eras: the Eastern Zhou (770–256 B.C.E), Western Han (206 B.C.E.–23 C.E.), Six Dynasties (265–589), and Tang (618–906), respectively. Each of these collections was highly influential and, in providing exemplars of poetic competence, surely shaped how subsequent poetic practice was performed and depicted. The first three books have been well studied for centuries, and I do not presume to offer any new information on their composition; my goal is to provide a new view of their contents pertaining to poetic performance. The last book, *Storied Poems*, is less well known, and in addition to my analysis of its entries from the point of view of poetic competence, I do provide an extended discussion of the history and composition of the text, as well as copious translations (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

Chapter 1, "Performing the Tradition," addresses the narratives of the *Zuo Tradition*, which cover the period 722–468 B.C.E. and

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were compiled by court historians from a larger body of lore (oral and written) about the conduct and speech of the different states of the Eastern Zhou era. These narratives depict the Traditionalist 儒家 advisors at the courts of these various states as refining a set of practices through which they demonstrate their mastery of the emerging canon of *Poems* 詩 as source material for performance through intoning or singing ("offering a poem" 賦詩) and quotation in speechmaking ("citing a poem" 引詩). The poetic competence they develop is part of a wider cultural competence deployed to ensure their place as advisors in the political hierarchy of the early Chinese courts. These narratives repeatedly show that a judicious use of poetic discourse can help one influence the thinking and behavior of a superior, and that the reputation of oneself and one's kingdom can be enhanced or diminished by how well one reproduces and receives the *Poems*. The primacy of the *Zuo Tradition* in China's narrative tradition establishes an enduring object lesson about poetry: words from the past, well put in the present, constitute a stake in the future.

Chapter 2, "Baring the Soul," deals with the biographical narratives found in the *Han History* compiled by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 C.E.), many of which were derived from the *Historical Records* 史記 compiled by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–85 B.C.E.). In narrating the history of the Former Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–23 C.E.), these narratives include songs that were putatively improvised by members of the Han royal house under circumstances of distress. The narratives conform to a model of literary production that Sima Qian calls "venting frustration" 發憤, in which people who are powerless to carry out their ambitions turn to literary expression as a means of compensating for their impotence. This marks a shift from the pre-Qin model found in the *Zuo Tradition* of citing the inherited words of the *Poems* in a premeditated fashion, to the production of original poetry as a result of spontaneous outbursts in song form. With this shift from the use of inherited words to the production of new words comes an attendant loss in suasive power. None of the poetic utterances in the *Han History* seems to accomplish anything of immediate value for the people who perform them. In the hands of the historians who fashioned these narratives, however, the

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poetic outburst becomes an effective way to capture the interior qualities of men and women who have been defeated but deserve a last word. Under this model, poetic competence shifts from adept use of old words to the heartfelt expression of new words and their subsequent insertion into biographical narratives, where they will exert an enduring power in shaping posterity.

Chapter 3, "Playing the Game," takes up the anecdotal narratives found in *Topical Tales: A New Edition*, which were compiled under the auspices of Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444), a prince of the Liu Song dynasty (420–479)—one of the Six Dynasties that followed one another during the extended time of disunion that followed the collapse of the Han dynasty. These narratives, spanning the two centuries from the fall of the Han to the time of Liu Yiqing, demonstrate a subtle combination of the two models of poetic competence outlined above. The characters depicted within are equally adept at quoting old poetry, quoting contemporary poetry, and improvising new poetry. This more sophisticated notion of poetic competence plays itself out on a much smaller stage. The conflicts between individuals depicted in *Topical Tales* concern stakes of far less moment than entire states or imperial rule, as is the case in the *Zuo Tradition* and the *Han History*. The goal of the participants in the cultural milieu depicted in *Topical Tales* is to build and maintain one's reputation for being a cultured man (or woman, or even child). The physical violence inherent in the struggle for kingdom or empire recedes into the background of these narratives (with occasional eruptions) and is replaced by a contest of wits, a significant part of which is a facility in quoting and composing poetry in an impromptu manner. Poetic competence is portrayed as a polite art, the goal of which is often nothing more than to decisively demonstrate one's competence.

Chapter 4, "Gleaning the Heart," departs in approach from the previous three chapters by examining the preface to a Tang dynasty compilation of anecdotes about poetry, known as *Storied Poems* (literally "poems based in events" 本事詩) by Meng Qi 孟棨 (fl. 841–886). The preface is dated 886, placing the compilation near the end of the Tang era, but it includes anecdotes that not only stretch back across the entire history of the dynasty but in some cases even

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predate it. As a paratext for the entire work, the preface explicitly discusses Meng Qi's motivations and methodology for compiling a collection of anecdotes exclusively about poetic production and reception, the first such collection of its kind. In his brief essay, Meng Qi constructs a model of poetic production and reception heavily indebted to the theory of passionate outburst and response outlined in the "Great Preface" 大序 to the *Poetry Classic* 詩經, a model demonstrated in the biographical narratives of the *Han History*. Meng Qi states that texts depicting poetic expression abound, "but instances in them of being moved to intone a poem by encountering events are what really cause one's emotions to well up. If these instances are not manifested, then who will comprehend their significance?" Meng Qi claims to be gleaning those very examples of poetic expression that show poetry in its purest form.

The preface as a genre lends itself to certain rhetorical gestures establishing a legitimate position for its accompanying text in the web of discourse that it engages. The contents of Meng Qi's collection often deviate in fascinating ways from the position of legitimacy he stakes out in his preface. A close reading of the preface teases out the influences on Meng Qi's constructed ideal of poetry and sets the stage for the more complex picture of poetic competence that emerges from the poetic practices depicted in the stories themselves.

Chapter 5, "Placing the Poem," addresses the more than 40 brief anecdotes of *Storied Poems*, which run from the fall of the Chen dynasty in the late sixth century to the late ninth century (near the end of the Tang dynasty). The collection provides an invaluable cross-section of poetic practice as it is portrayed by and among educated, literate people of the Tang—men and women, famous and obscure, in the capital and in the regions, under conditions both mundane and supernatural. The chapter comprises a translation of the bulk of this short work, with an ongoing commentary on the multivalent concept of poetic competence that emerges from its individual entries. The analysis divides the entries among three broad overlapping fields: politics, literature, and love. What results is a nuanced model of poetic competence that shows the protagonists of these narratives taking into account such variables as place,

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time, audience, and mode of performance in order to maximize the effect of oral and written poetic utterances. These stories indicate an explicit awareness of the affective power of heartfelt poetry as outlined in Meng Qi's preface to the collection, but they also evince an implicit awareness that the power of a poem to effect change in the world is contingent upon its deployment as a *socially engaged* form of discourse. Poetic competence means not merely that one's words be well put in a text, but that one must also put one's words well into the world of discourse that subsumes them. One must master both the utterance and the uttering to lend a poem power.

IV

What emerges in the following pages is a larger story of the development of the concept of poetic competence. It is not possible to draw a straight line of development from one source to the next. It is better to think of them as stops along the way. Poetic competence starts out as calculated performance of inherited words in the Eastern Zhou, shifts to sincere passionate outburst in the Han, then, during the Southern Dynasties, takes on the more complex form of playful facility in verbal wit, combining calculation with the *appearance* of spontaneity. All of these streams—calculation, passion, wit—converge in the Tang to produce a multivalent concept of poetic competence that designates the skill of an individual to pitch his or her poetic utterances at the right time, in the right place, and to the right person to achieve a desired outcome. By the Tang, there is no single notion of competence, but a repertoire of competencies upon which to draw as the occasion demands. The goal of this book is not to provide a stable definition of poetic competence for the entire history of pre-Tang and Tang literature, but to tell the story of the concept's evolution, to uncover its complexity, and to identify the sources and exemplars of that complexity.

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ONE

Performing the Tradition

I

The royal courts of Eastern Zhou (770–256 B.C.E.) China—as with all sites of human interaction—emerged out of and were shaped by the daily practice of individuals, each with an awareness of his or her own position derived from membership in a certain group. This awareness of position led to a sense of the appropriate means of expression at a given time before a given person. Such things as "awareness" and "sense" are not easily committed to writing, however, and what we are left with in texts such as the *Zuo Tradition* 左傳 are traces of how a particular group, in this case, that which we may call the Traditionalists 儒家, represented its practices to its own members and to the members of other groups.[1] The Traditionalists,

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1. The label "Traditionalists" emerged during the period of time covered by the *Zuo Tradition* (722–468 B.C.E.) and gained a distinctly pejorative connotation of being excessively "bookish" and out of touch with pragmatic concerns. But the role filled by the Traditionalists—advisors at court who drew on their knowledge of the Tradition to guide their rulers and debate with one another—long preceded the label. The emergence of the explicit label seems to coincide with the increasing systematization and transcription of the orally transmitted bodies of knowledge and lore that constituted the cultural capital of the Traditionalists. Confucius 孔子 (ca. 551–479 B.C.E.) is the best known of these Traditionalists. Most of the advisors

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as the self-designated custodians of the Western Zhou (1066–771 B.C.E.) cultural legacy, were particularly well positioned to fashion a representative account of their practices and to introduce that account into the orthodox canon of Tradition. Such an account—partial, biased, full of significant silences—can never be taken for the whole truth, even though it seeks to represent itself as such. The truth of practice can only be experienced; it cannot be represented. However, a textual account may attempt to describe, as the *Zuo Tradition* does, the various situations in which certain types of practice were carried out. This is the value of the *Zuo Tradition* in establishing the nature of poetic competence in the Chinese tradition. In it is inscribed its compilers' desire that properly deployed poetic utterances would provoke certain affects in those who heard them, with concomitant effects on their behavior. Whether these utterances really had such efficacy in any given case is beside the point. From its lofty vantage point in the canon, the *Zuo Tradition* wielded a powerful and enduring influence on later poetic practice and its representation in writing.

The power of the *Zuo Tradition* as a representative text was not originally or solely derived from its position among a growing corpus of orthodox Traditionalist texts. It was entrenched in the canon only after it was broken up and appended as a commentary to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋 traditionally attributed to Confucius. In its earliest forms, the *Zuo Tradition* seems to have emerged from a large body of orally circulated lore about the Springs and Autumns period, lore which consisted mainly of reports of speeches and rituals performed at the royal courts of various states. As such, it is in a direct line of descent from the earliest forms of historiography, such as the *Documents*, bronze inscriptions, and even oracle bone writings, which take the recording of speech in a ritual context as their main purpose.[2] The difference between the *Zuo Tradition* and these earlier texts, however, resides in its exten-

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mentioned in the *Zuo Tradition* long preceded Confucius, and statements attributed to him would, of course, be unknown to them. However, his respect for traditional knowledge certainly reflects a wider attitude among the Traditionalists that was centuries in the making.

2. For a detailed and cogently argued discussion of recorded speech in a ritual context, see Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, pp. 21–30.

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sive use of narrative to provide a framework for its represented speech. It is narrative that makes the *Zuo Tradition* a powerful text, for only narrative—as a representation of events occurring over time, emplotted with a beginning, middle, and end—can create the illusion that it carries the whole world (and its meaning) within its purview. A narrative frame for a particular instance of speech can outline the events leading up to the utterance (allowing its illocutionary motivations to be inferred), describe the variables of person, time, and place surrounding the utterance (allowing its locutionary competence to be judged), and communicate the eventual outcome of the utterance (allowing its perlocutionary effectiveness to be ascertained). And if the voice of the narrator is completely self-effacing—as is the case with the *Zuo Tradition*, which explicitly demarcates any interpretations and judgments it makes—then a narrative can create the powerful illusion that it is simply communicating the world as it is without any mediation.[3] It shows us the world as it is or was, rather than telling us how it should be, thus closing off any opportunity for rebuttal. Facts, unlike opinions and principles, are not open to disputation.

The final influential characteristic of the *Zuo Tradition* is its tendency to repeat a certain type of narrative, in two variations: salutary and minatory. In the first variation, an official in an advisory or diplomatic capacity makes an argument to a superior figure, often a ruler, who is convinced by the argument and acts or refrains from acting in such a way as to procure a positive outcome. The outcome may be immediate or delayed. In the second variation, which makes up the bulk of narratives in the *Zuo Tradition*, the superior figure does not heed the argument and meets a bad end. It is not hard to see that this type of narrative casts a favorable light on the Traditionalists, who were carving out a niche for themselves as indispensable advisors to figures of authority.

Repetition in narrative has two effects: it naturalizes the elements that are repeated, making them seem to follow the natural order of

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3. A narrative's ability to convincingly depict an alternative version of the world can constitute an ontological challenge to versions of reality conveyed by orthodox narratives. This is a potential source of danger and explains why the Chinese tradition vigorously marginalized certain types of narrative even as it preserved them.

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things (in this case indicating that superiors will inevitably stray from the proper path of morality, and that they thus require wise counsel); at the same time, it draws attention to the elements in the framework that do vary (in this case the utterances made by officials to correct deficiencies in their superiors). The point at which the official must step forward to perform continually presents itself as a moment charged with the possibility of success or failure—not only for his particular utterance but perhaps for an entire state. Again and again, the *Zuo Tradition* shows us that the man who is competent in his knowledge and deployment of Tradition will rise to the occasion and either save his superiors from misfortune or, if they prove too obtuse to heed his counsel, at least win the right to say, "I told you so." Thus the *Zuo Tradition* gradually inculcates in its readers a sense of the proper operation of hierarchy at court, namely that it behooves superiors to heed wise counsel. The narrative never has to resort to explicit descriptions of the hierarchy (other texts in the canon, such as the *Zhou Rituals*, take on this task); it wields the more subtle and thus more effective power of representing the very *process*—the specific set of practices—that constitutes and maintains the hierarchy.

The constant site for the performance and inculcation of hierarchy is, of course, the court. The ruler, whether he be called king 王 or duke 公, is the source of power and the focal point of all speech and ritual acts at court. Thus, the currency of power at court is the ability to win the ruler's attention and approval. The ruler demands a certain attitude of deference in demeanor and a certain type of language in speech if he is to let others impose themselves on his time and space (a pattern replicated in all superior-inferior interactions). It is no coincidence that the *Zuo Tradition* repeatedly portrays those officials with competence in Traditional knowledge as the ones most successful in winning the ear of the ruler, who will usually repay their efforts with an expression of appreciation such as "Excellent!" 善 and, in the best of circumstances, an attendant change in behavior that preserves or enhances the status of the state.

The encounter between official and ruler may be the major axis on which the court hierarchy is organized, but the narratives of the

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Zuo Tradition make it clear that other groups are present. The business of court is transacted before an immediate audience consisting of other members of the nobility, ministers, officials, guests, musicians, and servants, as well as an extended audience including the people of the state, other courts in other states, and, ultimately, the vast readership of the narratives contained in the *Zuo Tradition*. The cultural competence of the Traditionalist is demonstrated before and judged by more than a single ruler, who may not always be up to the task of appreciating it. This is why a *Zuo Tradition* narrative will rarely close with a speech without giving at least some indication of whether the principles or predictions stated in that speech were appreciated by an extended audience and vindicated by the events of history, the ultimate impartial judge.

When an official at court succeeds in winning and maintaining power through a competent performance of Tradition before the king, his resulting position of power inside the court is reflected outside the court in his role as a delegate representing the king's interests through speech (diplomatic missions) and violence (warfare). The categories of *oratores* ("cultural" 文 scholars) and *bellatores* ("martial" 武 warriors) were not distributed evenly between two different groups of people in the Eastern Zhou. Rather, members of the elite ruling class were expected to be well versed in both disciplines. Tradition certainly encompassed both spheres. In the long view, however, the scholarly frame of mind always prevails for the simple reason that speech subsumes violence into its symbolic code: actions can only be recorded, recalled, and represented through words. Actions may speak louder than words, but words speak longer. The Traditionalist thus seeks to define and justify his position through the custodianship of words. Indeed, once his position as a repository for relevant learning is established, he can maintain his position at court (and its accompanying wealth) simply by being what he is, thereby escaping the stigma of pursuing profit directly. The *Zuo Tradition* was an important text for the Traditionalists because it demonstrated their efficacy even before they were institutionalized as a civil bureaucracy. It stakes out a place in history for the Traditionalists because its narratives constitute the very mode of

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legitimate history. Ultimately, the Traditionalists succeeded in transmitting a social order in which they occupy the position of transmitters of the social order.

If a custodian of words is to maintain respect and power, his charge cannot be just any group of words. Those who would seek to sway their superiors through words must carefully choose both the particular words *and* their mode of delivery. In a society such as ancient China's, whose fundamental rituals are based on continuity with and worship of human and divine ancestors, the surest way of stamping one's words with authority is to derive them from a Golden Age of antiquity. For the Traditionalists of the Eastern Zhou, the Western Zhou—as the formative stage of their own dynasty—was such a Golden Age, a source of exemplary behavior and words against which all later ages could be measured. Of course, any golden age is a retrospective construct created by cultural agents seeking a means to interpret, judge, and exercise some measure of control over events in the present. The universal impulse to compare a deficient present to a better past is rooted in anxieties over mortality coupled with the cognitive disposition of human beings to seek out a semblance of order in the chaos of daily existence. Once a segment of society has formed a fundamental set of values, the past can be construed to support those values, which are themselves shaped by the past. For the ruling class of the Eastern Zhou, the Western Zhou was golden because it was an age in which the elite knew how to be the dominant class and the people knew how to be dominated (and the members of the dominant class knew how to reproduce this scheme on a smaller scale, each person making obeisance to his superior, right up to the Zhou king). The mark of decline in this Golden Age appears when people lose their sense of the "natural" relationship between inferior and superior and must begin talking about it explicitly. Concern over the minutiae of sumptuary codes, promulgation of laws in written form, debates over proper forms of ritual and terminology: these are indications that people have forgotten how to act properly and must be compelled to do so through external strictures rather than their own sense of what is right. This is the perfect environment for the rise of the Traditionalists, who take it upon themselves to remind anyone who will listen what "right"

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is, based on bodies of ancient knowledge over which they claim mastery.

The irony inherent in the approach of the Traditionalists is that the very practices in which they engage to restore the values of a Golden Age are a symptom of the state of decline in their own age. If the culture of the Western Zhou can be viewed as a continuous fabric of beautiful patterning (*wen* 文), encompassing right music, poetry, ritual, and speech, then the Traditionalists of the Eastern Zhou rend that fabric and attempt to sew its luminous threads into the dull cloth of the present. This only serves to heighten the contrast between the fragments of a perfect past and a degraded present that can never be fully rectified. Mencius 孟子 (379–289 B.C.E.), who lived at the very close of the Eastern Zhou, is cited in *Mencius* as saying, "With the demise of the wooden clappers of the former Kings, the *Poems* came to an end. Only after the *Poems* had come to an end were the *Spring and Autumn Annals* composed" 王者之跡熄而詩亡。詩亡然後春秋作 (4B.21).[4] In this statement, Mencius refers to a golden age in which dedicated officials circulated among the people sounding wooden clappers to solicit and collect their songs, forming a continually changing corpus of poems with which the Kings could gauge the minds and hearts of their people and thus the quality of their rule.[5] When this practice ceased and the corpus of poems reached a stable form, it signaled a transition from an age of song to an age of history, from an age of unalloyed utterance to one in which a representation of what people said and did was purposefully fashioned. The only way to revivify proper values in this context is to internalize them and to act them out—talking about values at length, as the Traditionalists were wont to do, will not

4. My translation of 跡 (*ji*, "trace") as "wooden clappers" is based on a widely accepted variant reading cited by D.C. Lau in his translation of *Mencius* (p. 131) of radical 162 辶 plus 丌, meaning "wooden-tongued clappers."

5. On this matter, the *Zuo Tradition* (Xiang 14) cites a passage from the "Documents of Xia" 夏書 in the *Documents* 書. The passage is found in the section entitled "The Punitive Expedition of Yin" 胤征 and reads: "The runners circulated throughout the roadways with their wooden clappers" 遒人以木鐸徇於路. Music Master Kuang makes the citation in a speech to the Marquis of Jin, in which he describes how the ancient kings relied upon discourse flowing to them from all levels of society to maintain the quality of their rule.

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bring them back and runs the risk of boring one's audience.[6] This is why competence was such an important issue for the Traditionalists: they needed to employ their words in such a way that their audience would not only pay attention, but also *act* on them.

II

It is an age of decline that engenders a need for competence. To employ the term "competence" at all is to acknowledge that there are those who are not competent, and thus to acknowledge that a Golden Age of harmony in thought and action has passed. This lesson is taught in the *Zuo Tradition* when the Duke of Song, the fiefdom of the descendants of the defeated Shang dynasty that preceded the Zhou, refuses to attack enemy forces until they have had a chance to draw up their battle lines. As a result of the duke's gallant gesture, his army is routed, his personal guards are slain, and he is wounded. The duke defends his decision by saying:

> A true gentleman does not wound those who are already wounded, nor does he capture those with graying hair. When the ancients employed their armies, they did not do so by trapping the enemy in a narrow spot. Although I may be all that is left of a ruined dynasty, I refuse to strike an army in disarray. (Xi 22.8)
>
> 君子不重傷。不禽二毛。古之爲軍也。不以阻隘也。寡人雖亡國之餘。不鼓不成列。

The duke's War Chief makes the following rebuttal, which contrasts starkly with his master's nostalgia for a golden age of gentlemanly conduct in warfare:

> Your lordship has never understood warfare. Should a more powerful enemy find itself in a narrow spot in a state of disarray, this is Heaven coming to our aid. Why should we not trap them there and strike them? Even in such a situation we should still be wary of them! In this battle, all the strength was with our enemies. We should have captured and taken

6. Confucius, after a lifetime of talking about values, seems to have reached this conclusion in his famous statement that only at the age of seventy was his mind sufficiently conditioned that he could give it free rein without fear of moral transgressions (*Analects* 2.4). Of course, few rulers in the Eastern Zhou had the will to pursue a lifetime of self-edification, and thus they tolerated the Traditionalists as a quick means to essential knowledge.

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them all, right up to the elderly. Why make an exception for those with graying hair? Understanding the shame [of a potential defeat] in teaching military tactics is simply a matter of seeking to kill the enemy. If you do not inflict a mortal wound the first time, why would you not wound again? If you feel compunction over wounding again, it is as not wounding in the first place. If you feel compunction over those with graying hair, then it is as surrendering to them. Our three divisions should take every advantage. With the sounds of drums and gongs stirring our courage, we should take the advantage of trapping them in a narrow spot. With the surging sounds magnifying our resolve, we should strike them in their confusion. (Xi 22.8)[7]

君未知戰◦勍敵之人◦隘而不列◦天贊我也◦阻而鼓之◦不亦可乎◦猶有懼焉◦且今之勍者◦皆吾敵也◦雖及胡耇◦獲則取之◦何有於二毛◦明恥教戰◦求殺敵也◦傷未及死◦如何勿重◦若愛重傷◦則如勿傷◦愛其二毛◦則如服焉◦三軍以利用也◦金鼓以聲氣也◦利而用之◦阻隘可也◦聲盛致志◦鼓儳可也◦

The rules of the game have changed. In Golden Age warfare there were commonly accepted ground rules that resulted in consensus amidst conflict. In an age of decline, however, adherence to a common culture is not guaranteed, and one cannot simply ape ancient models of behavior and hope for the best. The goal now is to kill the enemy by "taking every advantage" 利而用之. The defeated duke lacks a *practical* sense of when it is appropriate to deploy his knowledge of the past. He is not competent in handling his cultural legacy. This is precisely the breach into which the Traditionalists thrust themselves: they claim competence in handling the Tradition (one might call this "cultural competence"). They are not passive receptacles of bodies of learning, mere human relays communicating words from the past. They are expert in *applying* knowledge of the past to present circumstances in order to produce a successful outcome. In deploying their knowledge, they must select appropriate citations and then clearly illustrate the relevance of those citations to the matter at hand.[8] The Traditionalists must reconcile

7. I have based my translations from the *Zuo Tradition* on the annotations of Yang Bojun (*Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu*) and Kamata Tadashi (*Shunju Sashi den*). For this particular passage, I also consulted Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, p. 2.

8. Once the Traditionalist canon was reified into written textual form, these two practices—selection and application—would give way to editing and annota-

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ideals from the past with the less than ideal conditions of the present; their constant search for a path to a better future routes them through the muck and mire of an age of decline. This is not a grand project, for it is carried out only through the quotidian reiteration of a set of practices. The Traditionalist must engage in his practice at the appropriate moment *while* he has the attention of the appropriate person. These considerations of time and audience (which can only be conveyed in narrative form) make the Traditionalist a sort of performer, who must improvise his inherited repertoire of lines to fashion a performance powerful enough to sway his audience. The role of the Traditionalist is in a sense an implicit admission of discontinuity and loss, as he is required to be a vessel for a world that can no longer assert itself. His cultural competence is measured by how well he can reanimate that world through performing its vestiges.

A particularly important cultural vestige for the Traditionalists of the Eastern Zhou courts was the corpus of three hundred poems in tetrasyllabic meter known simply as the *Poems* 詩, which are cited in the *Zuo Tradition* far more frequently than any other text. Poetic competence—a facility for performing or quoting the right poetic lines at the right place and time—is portrayed as the primary skill in demonstrating that one has a broader sense of cultural competence. The *Poems* are treated as "deeds of words, as linguistic acts, whose significance was intimately related to the particular situation in which they were uttered."[9]

There are places in the Traditionalist canonical texts where one can find explicit discussions of cultural competence, particularly concerning the use of the *Poems*. The *Analects* 論語 is a rich source for such discussions, even though it took shape long after many of the events described in the *Zuo Tradition*. Though one must exercise caution in reading the attitudes expressed in the *Analects* back into previous centuries, the text certainly retains its relevance as the end

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tion. This point is made by Van Zoeren in *Poetry and Personality*: "Confronted with [fixed texts] the necessary process of accommodating doctrine to new concerns and questions must be displaced from expansion and reformulation to interpretation" (p. 23).

9. Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, p. 51.

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result of a long period of evolution stretching back into those centuries. In the *Analects*, Confucius is reported to have admonished his son to study the *Poems* more carefully, for "without studying the *Poems* one lacks the means to speak" 不學詩無以言 (16.13). Elsewhere, he states that the *Poems* are useless to a man who "is unable to respond independently when sent on missions abroad" 使於四方不能專對 (13.5). And he claims that to have not studied the *Poems* is akin to "standing face-to-face with a wall" 正牆面而立 (17.10). Exhorting his disciples to study the *Poems*, he lists all the benefits such cultural competence encompasses:

The Master said, "Little ones, why do you not study the *Poems*? Through the *Poems*, one may incite, one may observe, one may keep company, one may express resentment. Near at hand, one may serve one's father. At a farther remove, one may serve one's lord. And there is much to be known in them about the names of birds, beasts, plants, and trees." (17.9)

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

But simple knowledge of the *Poems* is not enough; one must know how to apply them properly. Confucius appraises this skill in the following passage from the *Analects*:

Zigong said, "To be without obsequiousness though poor and without haughtiness though rich. What do you think of that?" The Master replied, "That is fine, but it would be better to be joyful though poor and to love propriety though rich." Zigong said, "The *Poems* say,

> As if cut, as if filed,
> as if chiseled, as if polished.[10]

Does this refer to what you are saying?" The Master replied, "Zigong, now I can finally speak of the *Poems* with you. After I told you something, you knew what it implied." (1.15)

子貢曰。貧而無諂。富而無驕。何如。子曰。可也。未若貧而樂。富而好禮者也。子貢曰。詩云。如切如磋。如琢如磨。其斯之謂與。子曰。賜也。始可與言詩已矣。告諸往而知來者。

Zigong deserves praise not for memorizing the *Poems* (acquisition of such knowledge is a bare minimum for cultural competence), but

10. Mao #55. After Karlgren, *Book of Odes*, p. 37.

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for being able to use poetic citation to give figural expression to the crux of the matter under discussion: namely, that properly internalized moral precepts shape the person like a stone that is chiseled and polished. Confucius's statement that "I can finally speak of the *Poems* with you" implies that simply having the knowledge is not enough; one must know how to use it. In fact, speaking of the *Poems* outside their application is pointless. When Confucius tells Zigong, "After I told you something, you knew what it implied," he is praising Zigong's performance, his ability to bring his knowledge to bear on the matter at hand in a timely and appropriate fashion. He has demonstrated cultural competence. That these passages in the *Analects* are able to address matters of cultural competence explicitly is an indication that such practices were in place long before its compilation. The figure of Confucius is portrayed in the *Analects* in two roles: as an exemplar of cultural competence, who is able to handle bodies of received knowledge judiciously in his own debates; and as a teacher of cultural competence, who enjoins his disciples to do the hard work necessary to achieve fluency in certain bodies of knowledge and in a certain set of practices.[11] He is not preaching a new doctrine so much as codifying a set of existing practices that might help one to achieve distinction within the community and to succeed in the service of one's lord.

It is one thing to demonstrate cultural competence before your teacher, where praise and censure are at stake, but it is another thing in front of a ruler at court, where one's livelihood (if not life) may very well hang in the balance. The cultural competence of the ancient Chinese courtier comprises two skills similarly much prized by the Renaissance courtier in Europe: *sprezzatura*, the appearance that one is speaking off the top of one's head with wit and timing, and *mediocrità*, a solid grounding in knowledge. In fashioning a style of speech that at once appears improvised and well supported by knowledge of the past, the Traditionalists were endeavoring,

11. Note that Confucius never attempts to explicitly teach his disciples how to frame a good argument, or how to use a poem well; he simply does it himself or tells them what they need to achieve, tests them, and gives his evaluation of their efforts. He realizes that cultural competence is something that can only be gained by each person through practice. (See *Analects* 1.1 and 7.8.)

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through daily repetition of the practice, to establish their mode of discourse as the only one acceptable at court.[12] The narratives of the *Zuo Tradition* are simply a powerful and enduring extension of that desire. The Traditionalist, through repeated citations from orthodox knowledge and insistence on proper protocol in performance of ritual, attempts to control how *and* what the world means. He does this by constantly making reference to the golden standards of the past, thus giving structure and meaning to chaotic events of the present. He either praises events and behavior for being in accord with received models, or shows exactly in what respect and by what degree they fall short, shoring up a teetering society with threads of "patterned culture" (*wen* 文). In the Traditionalist view, cultural competence becomes a matter of survival for the entire state.[13]

Cultural competence is not a set of skills that can be explicitly taught by a teacher to a student; it is inculcated in a particular environment. Much like Wheelwright Bian in the Daoist parable found in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (chap. 13), who maintains that his skill in fashioning wheels is an innate sense derived from experience that cannot be transmitted in words, the Traditionalist develops a sense of fashioning utterances through experience. But where is a young, aspiring Traditionalist to look for guidance? In the first instance, he turns to his senior cohort, of whom Confucius eventually became the ultimate representative. But there is another place: the guidelines for competent deployment of the Tradition are already encoded within the Tradition itself. Certainly, if a Tradition is to perpetuate

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12. The question of improvisation is vexed here. Officials often knew beforehand what sort of advice they might give or what behavior of the ruler they were attempting to rectify; so they would have had ample time to prepare their speeches. It was also in the interest of those repeating (and eventually transcribing) the narratives found in the *Zuo Tradition* to make their confreres seem as competent as possible; embellishment, polishing, and even fabrication certainly occurred after the fact. Nevertheless, the speeches were always meant to *appear* as improvised utterances, however that appearance might be achieved.

13. Haun Saussy, in *The Problem of the Chinese Aesthetic*, identifies this impulse to view the Tradition as a restorative force in the Mao prefaces to the *Poems* (or *Odes*): "the tradition reads the *Odes* as the description of a possible ethical world. It reads them in the performative mode, as narrating, in the form of history, the model actions that its own reading must second in order to make them actual" (p. 105).

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itself, especially in the absence of a widespread form of durable transcription, it requires a group of people who will memorize it and utter it repeatedly. This is not enough, however—in order to justify its continuing preservation and transmission, a Tradition must be made relevant to an ever-shifting present moment at the locus of political power, the only place with the means to support a class of people with enough leisure time to study and practice traditional bodies of knowledge. In short, the Tradition needs the Traditionalist to justify its continuing existence just as much as he needs it to do the same. Knowledge and person are bound in an inextricable symbiotic relationship.[14]

It should come as no surprise, then, that the bodies of knowledge inherited from the Western Zhou were not transparent to their recipients in the Eastern Zhou and subsequent eras. They exhibit the very lacunae, inconsistencies, and ambivalences needed to provide space for a class of people to interpret them and to allow those people the latitude to apply them to a wide variety of circumstances. In addition to providing this space, they bear encoded guidelines for their use. For example, the *Changes* is a divination manual for interpreting the operations of the cosmos that takes the form of a series of interpretations nested one within the other; the *Documents* is largely a collection of important speeches that is used as a rhetorical resource in speeches; the *Poems* contain a variety of encoded guidelines, including how to deduce an interior state of mind from ambiguous external evidence (Mao #65, 76), how to fashion a song of praise for your superior (Mao #235, 240, 260), how to use metaphorical language to veil satirical intent (Mao #113, 155), how words may be used to enact and preserve ritual (Mao #245, 272, 282, 283), and a host of other skills necessary for a Traditionalist to demon-

14. This symbiosis is akin to the one between human beings and genes. Do our genes encode the pattern of life necessary to perpetuate our existence, or are we simply the means by which genes perpetuate their own existence, as Dawkins argues in *The Selfish Gene*? The answer, of course, is "both." Remove one element and the other perishes; attempts at separating them only lead to paradox. Certainly, the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty 秦始皇帝 realized the nature of this relationship when, in 213 B.C.E., he ordered both books *and* scholars to be destroyed during the "Burning of the Books and Burying of the Traditionalists" 焚書坑儒.

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strate his cultural competence.[15] The Chinese Tradition is perpetuated through the very sorts of practices (namely, interpretation and application) for which it stands as a model. Even this overarching principle is encoded within it. One of the *Poems* tells us: "Hew an axe-handle, hew an axe-handle, / The model is not far off" 伐柯伐柯/其則不遠.[16] This recursive quality means that the Tradition constantly expands to include all later acts of interpretation and application, even as it preserves a kernel of originary knowledge at its core.

The Eastern Zhou, as it is depicted in the *Zuo Tradition*, is an era of transition from a time in which the core bodies of knowledge in the Tradition were accessed through ritual reenactment to a time in which they were treated as a rhetorical resource for speechmaking. In either case, Traditional knowledge in the Eastern Zhou is still something to be *performed* with a measure of cultural competence.[17] The two modes of performance—reenactment and speechmaking—are clearly manifested in two types of practice common at court: "offering poems" 賦詩 and "citing poems" 引詩.[18] Both practices embody what might be called poetic competence, a specific and essential component of cultural competence in general.

The difference between offering a poem as a form of ritual reenactment and citing a poem in a speech is a difference in the mode

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15. Arthur Waley in *The Book of Songs* organizes his translation of the *Poems* along such lines.

16. Mao #158. After Karlgren, *Book of Odes*, p. 103.

17. With the imperially sanctioned transcription of the Traditionalist canon in the Han dynasty, the stage was set for cultural competence to move into the arena of written composition. Advancements in writing technologies, territorial expansion of the empire, and the increasing complexity of its bureaucracy (and eventually the advent of the imperial examinations) placed a premium on interpreting and applying Traditional knowledge as writing *in* writing.

18. Both Yang Xiangshi (*Zuo zhuan fushi yinshi kao*) and Zeng Qinliang (*Zuo zhuan yinshi fushi zhi shijiao yanjiu*) collect and annotate all instances of offering and citing found in the *Zuo Tradition*. Schaberg (*Patterned Past*, pp. 72–80, 234–43) discusses both practices, while Tam's dissertation ("Use of Poetry in *Tso Chuan*") is on offering, which he terms "chanting." Lewis (*Writing and Authority*, pp. 155–63) also briefly addresses the practice. In what follows, I will discuss only a few salient examples of each practice as they relate to the notion of poetic competence.

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of discourse during performance. Each mode has its appropriate context and demands a certain type of response from its audience.

To cite a poem—as is suggested by the Chinese character *yin* 引 "to draw a bowstring"—means to "draw in" or to "intromit" the marked language of the *Poems* into one's own discourse, usually a formal speech made before a peer or a superior at court. The *Poems* are but one rhetorical resource to be exploited during the performance of a speech; other bodies of Traditional knowledge, such as the *Documents* and *Changes*, are also cited, though not with the same frequency as the *Poems*. It is the performance of the speech as a whole that commands the attention of its audience, and, if properly deployed, wins the heart and mind of the listener.[19] The citation of poetry is just one rhetorical practice that goes into fashioning a successful speech, but it has a profound influence on the evolving concept of poetic competence, for it is through such practice that the *Poems* are continuously applied and interpreted in an explicit fashion.

To offer a poem—as suggested by the Chinese character *fu* 賦 ("to remit, to give over"), cognate with *fu* 敷 ("to spread")—means to "display" a selection from the *Poems* through performance, usually as part of ritual protocol at a banquet. As a form of reenactment, it revivifies the poem in its primordial role as a form of marked discourse (that is, singing, chanting, or intoning) distinct from every-

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19. The *Zuo Tradition* tells of a Zheng official, named Zichan, who protests against the cramped conditions in the lodgings that the state of Jin provides for visiting dignitaries. He makes a finely crafted speech that shames Jin into correcting the problem. In appraising this speech, a Jin minister, Yangshe Shuxiang, says, "The impossibility of doing away with words (*ci* 辭) is surely exemplified here. Because Zichan had a capacity for words, the feudal lords benefited by him. So how could we ever dispense with words? The *Poems* say:

> The harmony of the words
> is the concord of the people;
> the kindness of the words
> is the tranquility of the people. (Mao #254.
> After Karlgren, *Book of Odes*, p. 214)

Zichan surely knew this." (Xiang 31.6) 辭之不可以已也如是夫。子產有辭。諸侯賴之。若之何其釋辭也。詩曰。辭之輯矣。民之協矣。辭之繹矣。民之莫矣。其知之矣。

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