

by Hengchun, but others too, to avert these terrible events; still less do we feel the full effect of the tragedy that results when a distant emperor is misled by incompetent, fearful and prejudiced officials. But how are we to get closer to the question of how attitudes towards the Hui were shaped prior to the events of the mid-century? As Atwill's study so clearly underlines, to suggest that the Hui were viewed just like any other non-Han group, is clearly not the case. Indeed, I am still troubled by the unsubstantiated, yet oft cited suggestion made, I believe, originally by Owen Lattimore, that when the Zuo Zongtang advanced into Xinjiang, his troops dealt with the Hui much more severely than the Turkic Muslims, because they were regarded as Chinese who should have known better. Could there be any truth in this statement? Did not many Han Chinese believe that the Hui, so almost-perfectly "civilized" were, in fact, Han Chinese who had perversely adopted an alien religion? But here I am at risk of re-awakening old and unfashionable arguments.

In conclusion, then, *The Chinese Sultanate* is an excellent book which will hopefully serve as a launching pad from which Yunnan will be integrated more thoroughly into the debates on identity and ethnicity in late imperial China, as well as that on imperial frontiers in general. It is a book that should be read.

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*Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West.* By Zhang Longxi. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. x + 256. \$39.95/£22.95.

Is Comparative Literature a dead discipline? Gayatri C. Spivak has recently raised such a question, to follow on many other scholars and critics, who continue to make available the requiems for comparative poetics or the reports of its failing health: that sales of classical literature in translation have shrivelled, interests in languages other than English and Chinese or Spanish have drastically declined, and practitioners of comparative literature are graying, no longer able to attract students at the internet age of media and cultural studies.

Apparently, Longxi Zhang thinks differently. His new book, entitled *Allegoresis*, offers most erudite and nuanced, not to mention comprehensive, accounts of reading canonical as well as contemporary literature—East and West, ranging from the *Iliad* and *Book of Poetry* to *Richard II* and *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. The book is a welcome addition to the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of interpretation and translation studies. It offers fresh methodologies and insights on allegorical theories of reading. It will certainly win notice, as it complements Angus Fletcher's seminal *Allegory* (1964), Annabel Patterson's *Censorship and Interpretation* (1984), Zhongshu Qian's *Guan zhui bian* (1986), among a handful of classical treatises on the very subject. Not only does Zhang consider literary examples from Greco-Hebraic tradition, examining the cultural politics of interpretation as exercised by the Jewish and Christian missionaries in relation to Chinese classics, but he also reinterprets a great number of foundational traditional Chinese commentaries while engaging a rich diversity of critics such as Aristotle, St. Augustine,

Boyarin, Bruns, Confucius, Derrida, Eco, Gadamer, Owen, Ricoeur, Rushdie, and Zhu Xi, to name but a few. *Allegoresis* thus takes us steps farther than Zhang's previous work in Chinese-Western literary hermeneutics and comparative culture, *The Tao and the Logos*, for instance.

The book opens with the famous debate between two ancient Chinese philosophers, Zhuangzi and Huizi, on the validity of knowledge and the possibility of understanding "what constitutes a fish's happiness." Elaborating on the controversial anecdote, Zhang suggests that we may well consider Zhuangzi's claim that one does not have to be a fish to know about fish as a radical move for opening up new connectivities to cross-cultural understanding. Zhang asks: "Can we speak of Zhuangzi and Aristotle in the same context? Is Zhuangzi advocating knowledge as a kind of *phronesis*? Can such terms and concepts be translated at all?" (p. 4) These questions lurk in the background as we read further into the book, often fascinated by illuminating moments of trans-cultural dialogues across the gaps of languages and space-times, though occasionally intrigued by some of the resonances and even resemblances that Zhang manages to find in texts that appear, at first glance, to be incommensurate.

From the perspective informed by Zhuangzi's insights, Zhang argues that the belief in the "possibility of common knowledge and cross-cultural understanding, in the availability of conceptual tools for the interpretation of human behavior across the boundaries of language, geography, culture, and time, can indeed come from a genuine appreciation of the *equal capabilities* of different individuals, peoples, and nations" (p. 11, italics in the original). Among such conceptual tools, Zhang singles out allegorical reading theory to bridge the great East/West divide, to take up the question of moral responsibility and socio-political allegiance as implicated in various texts. He finds dominant views of Chinese poetry as advocated by Stephen Owen and Pauline Yu to be overemphasizing the principle of impersonality and literalness, to be "predicated on a simplistic notion of Platonic dualism of true and concrete reality, or transcendence and immanence," and hence failing to take into consideration such rhetorical features as "metaphor, fictionality, and above all allegory" that are also to be found in Chinese literature (p. 23). Zhang sets out to prove that allegorical features are not the monopoly of Western literature. He debunks the conceptions of cultural relativism and of the fundamental incommensurability of Chinese and Western literatures and cultures that have cast long shadows over sinology. To him, Liu Xie already indicated in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon* that poetry is not to be understood as literally true and that it "expresses the truth of human emotions and the human condition in a manner different from factual accounts" (p. 42). In other words, historical imagination and allegorical interpretation are vital as well as integral to the philological hermeneutic project of comprehending both Chinese and Western literary traditions.

Zhang makes his points by teasing out the double structuring forces embedded in canonical texts that seem to have become something other than what they literally say, by constantly displacing their literal senses with spiritual meanings. Readers of *The Song of Songs* or any single text from Jewish Midrash to Christian allegorization to modern utopian literature have no difficulty pinpointing a "strong" interpretation that often ignores, distorts, or even does violence to the letter of the texts "in order to make it fit within the framework of a religious, moral, political, or philosophical system" (p. 86). To illustrate why and how

allegoresis is so dynamic in the composition and interpretation of a literary text, Zhang examines Quintilian in relation to Confucius, Boyarin, Curtius, Stern, Philo, Origen, and others, with intertextual references to a most impressive, if not a bit formidable, corpus of literary and philosophical texts drawn from Greek, Jewish, European, and above all Chinese revenues. Zhang tends to build his arguments on the basis of brainstorming, cataloguing, and cross-referencing, almost to the extent of indulgent pedantry. On the interrelationship between history and narrative fiction, for example, he provides a comprehensive checklist from Aristotle to Hayden White to Wang Chong to Su Shi and what not. The evidence is so exhaustive and forceful that one finds it hard not to be convinced. However, it is in the process of commenting on the ancient debates that Zhang reveals his insights concerning contemporary literary theory and political readings of literature past and present.

On the ethico-political dimensions of classical Chinese literature such as *The Book of Poetry*, Zhang suggests that “[M]ost Western Sinologists recognize the long tradition of moralistic exegesis as ‘allegorical’ and feel quite uncomfortable with it” (p. 96). As a result, modern Sinologists become more sensitive to aesthetic values or literal meanings while rejecting the moralistic rationalization in traditional commentaries. Zhang cautions us against such literal readings; instead, he proposes that in reading love poems the reader’s horizon of expectations is to be radically redefined. As the speaker in a love poem is identified with a historical figure and related to a historical situation, such semiotic structure of identification helps create a political or religious context within which the text can be read in a certain direction, “in conformity with a certain ideological premise as the forestructure of understanding” (p. 109). However, such identification is also “displacement, the essential interpretive strategy of allegoresis, because by identifying the speaker in a love poem with some hagiological or historical figure, the voice and tone of the poem are displaced and the meaning of the entire poem completely changed” (ibid.). Zhang dwells on the problematic of interpretation and ideology, highlighting the modern sceptical tendency to question any doctrinal authority and to render allegory as a rhetorical device suspect. “The ascendance of a literal reading of Scripture is also closely related to the increasing secularization of the modern world and the appreciation of aesthetic values of the biblical text,” he advocates (p. 129). Zhu Xi would be a true representative of such literal and sensible reading in this regard, and Zhang goes on to say that with Zhu’s legacy of revisionist reading theory firmly established it is no wonder that twentieth-century scholars try to dismantle “farfetched interpretations” of classical literature and to reject in their iconoclastic rethinking of the entire heritage of traditional culture the moral and political allegoresis in the Han commentary (p. 143). May Fourth, New Culture Movement, and later on Cultural Revolution are but further developments of such a trend. Zhang points out the ideological structure and politics of interpretation underneath the sort of “modern” reading, drawing on St. Augustine’s comment on the hermeneutic principle and the rule of faith. He ponders over the danger and rewards of modern reading theory which tend to equate the text with authorial intent, confusing a poem with lived experience, in contrast to traditional moral and political reading that treats poems as allegories that “present one thing in words but another in meaning” (p. 159). The last incidences Zhang sites toward the end of the book are about the Queen’s reaction to *Richard III* and Chairman Mao’s comments on Wu Han’s seemingly innocuous play in relation to Hai Rui’s dismissal from office. “Subversiveness allegedly

detected in literary works often has consequences that are far more serious and dangerous than anything one can find in the new historicist reading of Renaissance literature, the equating of ‘political’ with ‘beautiful’ or ‘valuable’” (p. 238), Zhang concludes. In final analysis, “the politicization of interpretation and the celebration of subversive force in literature become possible only when literature and literary scholarship are effectively insulated from the power of the state and can discourse on the subversive from a safe distance. That insulation, let us bear in mind, is also an important aspect of the politics of interpretation” (ibid.).

Against the grain of rejecting allegorical reading, Zhang urges us to rethink a subgenre that has a natural affinity with allegory—utopia. Seemingly a “political fantasy,” utopia “is inherently allegorical as its story of a socially organized way of life is always meant to expound a political idea, the ideal and principles of a good society” (p. 165). Chapter 4 of *Allegoresis* is devoted to utopia, and it touches upon a rich variety of utopian visions in their Chinese and Western expressions, including dystopian or anti-utopian themes. Textual examples in this chapter clarify many points Zhang has tried to make and that in more succinct terms.

However, Zhang tends to conduct dialogues with a few highly selected authors and critics, to the exclusion of current scholarships which may have direct bearings on the subject. Some of the scholars are certainly representative, but most of them dated, if not from antiquity. One begins to wonder if Ernst Bloch, Louis Marin, Karl Mannheim, Tom Moylan, and even Slavoj Žižek, among many others, can also shed light on utopia as an allegory of social and political ideas (or ideals). Zhang is absolutely erudite and persuasive when he engages classical rhetoricians or ancient scholars; his textual exegesis is brilliant and often well-supported by evidence. In fact, even on the subject of allegory, readers have to look for textual examples Zhang examines to get a grip of what it means. He quotes Fletcher as saying “Allegories are the natural mirrors of ideology” and even admits that Fletcher’s work is a “thorough study of allegory as a mode of symbolic representation” (pp. 149–50). But Zhang leaves Fletcher there hanging and quickly moves on the Homeric epics, the Song of Songs, and Umberto Eco (one among the most favoured contemporary critics), to make his points that allegorical interpretation is called upon to attribute meaning or function to a canonized text. Even there, one is troubled by quoting Eco to relate him to what “had also happened in Chinese culture with the interpretation of the *Book of Poetry*” without contextualizing his remarks on the process of suspicious reading. Another somewhat puzzling parallel case study concerns the political interpretation of Shakespeare’s and of Wu Han’s plays. Of course, reading for political subversiveness is a common practice throughout different times, and under the Bush administration this sort of censorship and surveillance actually aggravate. With meticulous detail regarding the specific historical and political milieu of Elizabethan England and of Mao’s China, Zhang ventures to suggest that the two worlds so much apart in material conditions and history effects can be brought together to mutually illuminate each other. In this way, Zhang compels us to recognize, as David Stern aptly puts in the blurb, the “profound commonalities and difficult differences between Western and Chinese literary culture.”

Overall, the book presents a most convincing case for an allegorical reading, calling attention to the tension between texts and interpreted meanings, not only dating back to

classical Chinese and early Christian eras, but still informing contemporary theory and politics. It is a most wide-ranging discussion of allegorical readings and a ground-breaking work that contributes substantially to our understanding of literary texts East/West.

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