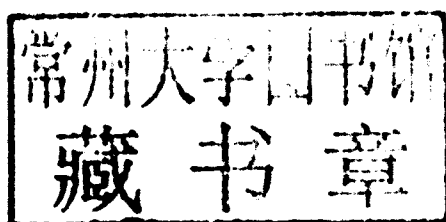


Authorship and Cultural Identity
in Early Greece and China

Patterns of Literary Circulation

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Introduction

The topic and the thesis of this book are each fairly simply stated: This book examines the development of the concept of authorship in early Greece and China, specifically with reference to Homer and Archaic lyric on the Greek side and to the *Canon of Songs*, or *Shi Jing* 詩經,¹ on the Chinese side. The thesis, put at its baldest, is that the concept of authorship in both cultures serves as a substitute for the sort of contextual information once provided in performance through such elements as music and dance, and through the ability of the audience to connect the performance they are witnessing to the community in which they live. The figure of the author, then, as represented in the *scenes of authorship*² that tend to form the core of our knowledge about these twin processes of creation, is used in the ancient world as a means of discussing in concrete form problems about the production, distribution, and value of literature. In particular, these scenes of authorship provide the basis on which ancient texts remained vital as they moved into new environments, not only through passage from performance to textuality, but also through the evolving and complex

¹ I introduce this, and other Chinese texts, to the non-Sinological reader in the final section of this Introduction.

² I discuss this term below; for the moment I offer the following definition: A scene of authorship is a narrative episode (or surviving fragment thereof) that purports to recount the composition or performance of a work of verbal art in such a way as to ground the interpretation and function of that work.

relationships between cultural and political boundaries that characterized both Greece and China.

Put another way, biographical anecdotes offer what I call *implied poetics*, a term that I define to include theories of literature not delivered as coherent manifestoes but rather revealed piecemeal and indirectly as they are enacted in the real or imagined lives of poets.³ My claim is that intentionality is not necessary for a poetics to be discernible; unspoken assumptions about the production, circulation, and value of literature permeate biographical anecdotes, and much of my task in this book is to attempt to uncover those unspoken assumptions. I explore this theme elsewhere, where I show, for example, that debates about whether or not Homer was blind reflect implicit or explicit assumptions about the use of writing in the composition of Homeric epic.⁴ These implied poetics, moreover, reveal (within and beyond individual anecdotes) a diversity of thinking on the problems they address, a diversity largely veiled if we concentrate our attention on more formal and foundational theoretical statements, such as Aristotle's *Poetics* and the Mao preface to the *Canon of Songs*, two texts that I examine in Chapter 1. I argue further that it is more fruitful to read these scenes of authorship as evidence of poetic ideology (explicit or implicit) than to read them merely as generated by the *biographical fallacy*—the tendency to construct lives of poets to match details of their poetry.⁵ Certainly, there are many anecdotes about poets and poetry in both Greece and China that can and should be read as constructed with the biographical fallacy; but to read all scenes of authorship in this way (usually, as it happens, dismissively) is less productive than to read at least some of them for the implicit evidence they may provide on the poetics of their time. I identify as the *reverse biographical fallacy* the modern tendency to read all ancient biographical anecdotes as if they had been constructed according to the biographical fallacy, and hope with this book to offer an antidote, or at least an alternative reading strategy, that can recover greater value from these episodes.

³ I borrow the term from Earl Miner, who uses “implicit poetics” to refer to programs of poetics inferable in cultures that did not, however, develop explicit poetic treatises (Miner (1990) 249n).

⁴ See Beecroft (2010).

⁵ The term “biographical fallacy” is of course a subset of Wimsatt’s “intentional fallacy;” see Wimsatt (1954) 21. See Lefkowitz (1981) for biographical accounts of Greek poets as products of the biographical fallacy.

Although in both Greece and China the scenes of authorship that I discuss tend most often to focus around authorship in performance and *as* performance, there is a subtle but important difference in emphasis. In the earlier stages of thinking and writing about authorship in China, where the use of the *Songs* as a medium of interstate communication results in their repeated deployment in politically charged circumstances, the claim is that it is performance rather than composition that reveals the essential meaning of a poem, whereas in Greece, where the political role of poetry focuses more on *intrastate* affairs, composition assumes a greater role. As the *Songs* and the other classics become fixed, textualized, and reified in the Han dynasty and beyond, authorship-as-composition begins to play a bigger role, in a development I examine in more detail in the relevant chapters.

There is much in this summary that demands further explanation, and such explanation will be forthcoming, both later in this Introduction and throughout the book as a whole. More urgent still might be an examination of the question of why this book should exist at all. I see this question as breaking down into two subsidiary questions: why write (or read) a book about Greece and China? and why focus such a book on authorship? The answer to the former question, I will argue, shapes the answer to the latter in important ways. What follows is an attempt to answer each of these questions in sequence. A book comparing early Greece and China has the opportunity, I believe, to enrich current debates about world literature by challenging some of the assumptions and bases of current theories. In particular, I find that this comparison helpful in developing a theory of cross-cultural poetics (specifically the extent to which Greek poetics is mimetic, and Chinese poetics “affective–expressive”). Further, the Greek–Chinese comparison is a good place to reflect on the mapping of cultural power onto political power, and on centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in cosmopolitan literary languages.⁶

⁶ On the forces I am characterizing as “centripetal” and “centrifugal,” see below. “Cosmopolitanism” is of course a concept coming under increasing academic scrutiny, both as a model for contemporary political and economic relations and as an idea demanding a thoughtful critique. Basic bibliography here would be Cheah and Robbins, eds. (1998), Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha, and Chakrabarty, eds. (2000), Brock and Brighouse, eds. (2005) and Appiah (2006). My own use of the word relies rather more on the work of Sheldon Pollock (see e.g. Pollock (1998) in Cheah and Robbins), although I believe the discussion of cosmopolitanism in the premodern world might contribute usefully to more contemporary discussions.

The figure of the author was a crucial site for the discussion of these issues. Poets' lives, and the implied poetics found therein, make visible a wider range of opinions concerning the value and function of literature in their respective cultures, changing the terms of discussion in the realm of comparative poetics. Archaic Greece and Early China were both regions in which cultural unity overlay a politically fragmented and disordered world; biographical accounts and anecdotes about authors provided a site in which these tensions could be negotiated, freeing literature in both cultures from its origins in specific if poorly known political contexts and facilitating its greater circulation, both within the linguistic community and, ultimately, beyond it.

Scenes of authorship are also important sources for attitudes on the production, circulation, and appreciation of literature. They provide insights into ancient debates on the roles of writing and of performance in the composition of poetry and on the relative value of each. They articulate relationships among works and among genres, often using genealogical connections to make abstract relationships concrete, and to make implicit claims about the nature of the interpretative community within which a poem was understood. In other words, the implied poetics we can recover from these scenes of authorship illuminate many of the debates that currently preoccupy scholarship on both ancient Greece and early China. If these texts do not resolve our own scholarly questions, they do certainly alter the terms of debate, demonstrating a wider range of possible opinions among the ancients themselves.

Why Greece and China?⁷

It might be reasonable to complain that I discuss *only* Greece and China, and not also the Ancient Near East, Japan, and the Sanskrit world, in order fully to address the questions about literary circulation raised earlier. My first reason for focusing on Greece and China is a

⁷ In investigating these two ancient cultures in conjunction I am, of course, enormously indebted to predecessor works in this vein, especially Zhang (1992), Saussy (1993), Zhang (1999), Shankman and Durrant 2000, Saussy (2001), Lloyd and Sivin (2002), and Zhang (2005). Their influence inevitably far exceeds what is suggested in the footnotes, as does the influence of Michael Puett and David Schaberg, two scholars of Early China whose work is inherently comparativist in inspiration.

purely pragmatic one, which is that these are two languages and civilizations I happen to know something about. To some extent, then, this is a book whose topic is chosen by the limitations of its author. If there is more to the choice than that, the answer might lie in the particular appropriateness of these two literatures to revealing the shifting of relationships between literatures and their political/social environments over the *longue durée*. I believe, as I have argued elsewhere, that recent debates about “world literature”⁸ have oversimplified the nature of these relationships because of a focus on the present and on literatures circulating in or through the Euro-American world. Literatures, I argued there, are always in interaction with their environments, but the nature of those interactions varies. In a general sort of way, the trend over time has of course been for literatures to have ever wider arenas of circulation open to them, but shifting political configurations and the relationships individual languages have borne to political circumstances make for a complex range of patterns. I suggest a series of six phases through which the circulation of literary texts and prestige operate, linking each to a relationship between political and cultural power. These six phases I label the epichoric, the panchoric, the cosmopolitan, the vernacular, the national, and the global. The last two of these (in which, respectively, literary cultures map (or are represented as mapping) onto national borders, and in which literary cultures claim audiences around the world through the venue of global capitalism), are products of the modern world and need not concern us here. In what follows, I retrace briefly what I mean by the first four phases.

My model derives much of its primary inspiration from the work of the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock. Pollock has written compellingly about the pervasiveness of inscriptional poetry in Sanskrit, from modern Pakistan to Java, in the years 300–1300 AD.⁹ In the regions Pollock discusses, Sanskrit inscriptions exist alongside inscriptions in vernacular languages – Prakrits, Kannada, Tamil, Khmer, Old Javanese – throughout much of this period, but with the important distinction

⁸ Beecroft (2008b). There, drawing on Wallerstein’s account of world-systems theory, I distinguish between a world-literature, which would be a global literary system (which might or might not account for all the literatures of the world), and a world literature, which is the sum total of the world’s literary production.

⁹ Pollock (1996).

that the vernacular languages are used, as Pollock puts it, to “document” the world, whereas Sanskrit is used to “interpret” the world.¹⁰ Practical matters such as the title to lands or the granting of privileges are in the vernacular; the idealized and aestheticized self-representation of the ruling classes is in Sanskrit. Strikingly, the spread of Sanskrit across South and Southeast Asia takes place without military conquest or large-scale colonization; it seems to be a free and voluntary act on the part of dozens of regimes across the region.¹¹ Not only does Pollock provide one of the most compelling examples of an incongruity between cultural and political power in the premodern world, but even more importantly he explicitly identifies this incongruity as one worth studying – a concern that should, I argue, be reflected more broadly in premodern studies. I derive my use of the term *cosmopolitan* from Pollock, although I define the term to include situations in which a literary culture circulates either through an empire that claims universal rule (like the Han Empire in China, or, to some extent, the Roman Empire), or in which at least *ideas* about rulership are held to be universal (as Pollock suggests to be the case for the Sanskrit cosmopolis). In the context of Greek culture, I find incipient tendencies toward this sort of cosmopolitan thinking even in Herodotus, and especially in Plato’s bid to frame questions of justice and good government in a universal, rather than particularist way; the circulation of Greek literature in the Hellenistic and Imperial eras is an outstanding paradigm of a cosmopolitan literary system. In the Chinese world, I find incipient tendencies toward cosmopolitan thinking in the philosophical world of the fourth century, and thus in certain layers of the *Zuozhuan*; the major focus of cosmopolitan thinking lies, however, in orthodox scholarship on the classics emerging in the Han as both an ideology of imperial rule and a standard of elite education.

In a later article Pollock develops an argument about the nearly simultaneous development of *vernacular* languages (that is, of local literary languages existing in conjunction with a preexisting cosmopolitan literature) in South India and in Western Europe, beginning with

¹⁰ Pollock (1996) 219.

¹¹ Interestingly, Pollock also points out (p. 232) that the creation of his “Sanskrit cosmopolis” had little to do with homogeneity of script, because Sanskrit itself could be and was written in a variety of regional scripts.

Old English and Kannada in the eighth century AD, and spreading across the Latin and Sanskrit ecumenes in the following seven or eight centuries.¹² As with the article discussed earlier, Pollock's goal again is not to offer an all-encompassing theoretical account of the two phenomena, but to suggest that both phenomena, and vernacularization in particular, have histories that remain to be written. Something important, in other words, can be said about Latin and Sanskrit, or about Old English and Old Kannada, as typological pairs, without worrying about whether there is the least cultural contact between the two. Such a project is hardly new; indeed, Milman Parry's use on South Slavic oral poetry as a paradigm for Homeric epic anticipates this sort of work in some ways by seven decades. I believe, however, that the field of world literature has much to gain through an emphasis on such methodologies. This project is in part an attempt to answer Pollock's question of how cosmopolitan languages and literatures emerge. To do so, I push the questions Pollock is asking back another millennium, to the period in which certain languages – including Greek, Chinese, Persian, Latin, and Sanskrit – are beginning to emerge as incipient cosmopolitan languages.¹³

Clearly, these contexts call for something other than the colonial/postcolonial model of political and cultural hegemony familiar from our times. Even the terms “cosmopolitan” and “vernacular” will need

¹² Pollock (2000). As Pollock himself points out (Pollock (1998) 52), Tamil occupies a somewhat problematic position within this schema; if the (disputed) traditional dating of early Sangam literature to the first few centuries AD is accepted, then Tamil becomes a somewhat disruptive vernacular intrusion on the cosmopolitan millennium. The point need not be to embrace Pollock's model dogmatically; the value in this exercise lies in recognizing that something typologically similar is going on in different environments, and that an investigation across cultures will generate valuable new insights into each.

¹³ Zhang Longxi (2006) develops the concept of the “reference culture” for cultures that serve as classical models for other cultures. The notion has an analogue in political anthropology in the concept of “primary state formation,” which is believed to have taken place in (at most) six locations: southern Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, northern China, Mesoamerica, and the Andes. State formation elsewhere is conventionally understood as secondary, depending by analogy on the primary formations. See Smith (2003) 82 for a critique of the idealization of the “pristine” isolation of these primary state-formations. Certainly, in the cultural sphere we must be equally careful to avoid assuming that reference cultures exist in isolation. Nonetheless, certain languages and cultures do certainly circulate more widely than others in the premodern world, and the reasons this is so seem worthy of study.

rethinking in the context of the first millennium BC. As used by Pollock and others, “vernacular” implies both a use in written verbal art and a deliberate reaction against an already established cosmopolitan language; Old English and Old Kannada develop as vernaculars in conscious opposition to Latin and to Sanskrit. What, then, do we call local languages, highly developed for the purposes of verbal art, but seemingly operating in a vacuum, without an emulative relationship with a better established and universalizing literary tradition?¹⁴

I suggest the term *epichoric* for such situations, drawing on the work of Gregory Nagy on archaic Greek lyric.¹⁵ Nagy introduces the term *epichoric*, in opposition to the *Panhellenic*, for myth and ritual produced in a local context and whose meaning depends on that local context, cultural material that, whether for reasons of dialect or content, or merely through lack of circulation, does not travel well. The *epichoric* is thus the zero-grade of literary circulation: a production of verbal art for a local community, and for that community alone. There is a natural tendency to associate the *epichoric* with the oral and with performance, though we should take care not to make this elision with too much ease. The *epichoric* may also have a political dimension, in reaction to a broader cultural and political sphere.¹⁶ In this book, I will use the term *epichoric* with reference to both Greek and Chinese traditions, in the sense I have outlined earlier, and I will suggest its potential applicability to other contexts.

The tension for what I am calling *epichoric* literatures is clearly not at first with a cosmopolitan idiom as such; rather, the tension can be located within languages themselves, between, say, the *epichoric* tendencies of archaic Greek lyric and the more generalized language and thematics of Homeric epic, or the *epichoric* claims of the poetry of the *Airs of the States* section of the *Canon of Songs* and the more universal claims (within a cultural world) of the *Court Songs* and *Hymns*. In this cultural phase, political units remain small and localized, but there

¹⁴ This is not to say that early Greek and Chinese literatures *did* in fact evolve in vacuums; see, for example, M. L. West (1997) on cultural relations between Greece and the Ancient Near East. See also Mallory and Mair (2000) and Mair (ed.) (2006) on connections between early China and the Indo-European world.

¹⁵ Nagy (1990b) 66–7.

¹⁶ Nagy (1990b) 67. Nagy points out that lyric, as we know it, tends to merge *epichoric* and *Panhellenic* tendencies, a strategy that, in part, enhances local prestige.

is an emergent awareness of a shared culture among a community of such political units, a culture that defines itself partly in literary terms, and that is able to rule some states in, and others out. Nagy's term "Panhellenic" is useful here, and I will generalize it as well. In the Chinese context I will use the term "Panhuaxia"¹⁷ to refer to the dimension of early Chinese literature that aims at speaking to the entire Chinese political and cultural world of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras (roughly, the eighth through the third centuries BC, the era of the slow decline into irrelevance of the Zhou dynasty) and, moreover, will designate the generalized version of this phenomenon as *panchoric*.

I characterize the relation between the epichoric and the panchoric as a synchronic and dynamic tension, rather than in terms of a diachronic shift. Indeed, one of my reasons for using these terms is to change the organizing metaphor from the temporal to the geographic, precisely to downplay the notion of an evolutionary change from one mode to another and to see the two modes as complementary. It is quite clear from both the Chinese and the Greek cases that both modes can exist simultaneously and that in fact both may be mutually constitutive. Given the nature of our evidence, we cannot and do not possess much that would qualify as unmediatedly epichoric literature.

¹⁷ I use this term, by analogy with Panhellenic, to refer to an increased sense of cultural self-awareness, with the term Huaxia 华夏 as an emergent autonym, beginning in the eighth and seventh centuries (Chang (2007) 39). Lineage-based ancestor cults give way to the worship of Heaven and of geographic features (Lewis (2006) 147). A common body of poetry begins to circulate, much of which will later enter our *Canon of Songs*, which may have contributed to a *lingua franca* amongst the different dialects of the time (Nylan (2001) 84). Ritual and music likewise become generalized. Li Feng takes the *Hua* in Huaxia to refer to Mount Hua, roughly equidistant between modern Xi'an and Luoyang (the two "capital regions" of the Zhou), whereas *xia* refers to the Xia dynasty (Li (2006) 87). The term thus incorporates a claim to a specific history and a shared geography, fixing the culture in space and time. Simultaneously the history of the Western Zhou is rewritten to downplay the role of the Rongdi "barbarians," to develop mythological figures such as the Yellow Emperor as common ancestors for all the Huaxia lineages, and retrospectively to represent the Western Zhou as a unitary state (Wang (1999) 244–6). In other words, it seems to have been during this period that the master narrative of Chinese history was first written. The term "Chinese," which Western languages take from the name of the Qin dynasty of the third century BC, is anachronistic in pre-Qin China, although in the interests of simplicity I frequently use the terms "Greek" and "Chinese" alike to refer to the cultures conventionally known by those names, even when those labels are anachronistic.

Although I have represented the panchoric and the epichoric earlier as different systems of literary circulation, we are mostly not able to observe epichoric circulation directly. Rather, the panchoric and the epichoric manifest themselves to us most clearly as alternative modes of reading the same texts. They coexist for long periods of time (certainly, in Greece, as long as pride in the *polis* lasts), and, so long as they both last, are available as modes of interpretation for most texts. Certainly Homeric epic and the *Canon of Songs* both contain within themselves the seeds of both sorts of reading.

In both Greek and Chinese it is especially in the practices of reading embodied by scenes of authorship that we see the tensions between the panchoric and the epichoric, and thus between different modes of mapping the circulation of literature onto the circulation of political power, at work. This mapping can be understood in terms of *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces, with panchoric readings exerting a centripetal desire to assimilate diverse traditions to a homogenous literary practice, and epichoric readings facilitating the centrifugal desire of individual regions to use their verbal art to assert distinct (cultural or political) identities. Panchoric readings assume a degree of cultural unity across the linguistic reach of their texts, and tend to represent literature as a commodity circulating outward from a center, whereas epichoric readings emphasize the knowledge of local circumstances in decoding their texts, and imply something more like a barter-economy of literature, in which the movement of a work of verbal art from one place to another is understood in terms of a personal exchange. Contemporary ideas about the circulation of literature, such as those described by Moretti and Casanova,¹⁸ are the remote descendents of panchoric models, but in the period I am discussing our mappings and models will need to be more complex and diverse.

The Greek and Chinese contexts are intriguing both for their similarities and for their differences. Both Greek and Chinese, from the earliest stages of literary production known to us, simultaneously *are* polycentric literary cultures and *represent themselves* as such. Homer and the archaic lyric poets are all understood as having origins in distinct local (if sometimes unlocalizable) regions of the Greek world, and the

¹⁸ See, for example, Casanova (1999) and Moretti (2000).