

The “Flaw in the Word”: Reading *Shih-ching* with Aristotle, Xunzi and Mr. Lü.

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In “Dignified” (Yi 抑), the 256th poem of the *Shijing*, we find a turn of phrase that seems to be metaphorical. “The flaw in the white jade tablet / can still be polished / But the flaw in these words / cannot be worked upon 白圭之玷 / 尚可磨也 / 斯言之玷 / 不可為也.” From the point of view of comparative literature, these lines spur a number of questions. Can “the flaw in these words” really be called a metaphor, in the sense stipulated by Aristotle? How, and under which historical circumstances, did Aristotle define metaphora? And what has mainstream sinology have to say about such “Chinese metaphors”?

If, instead, we assume the perspective of the Chinese tradition itself, another set of questions emerge. How were these lines interpreted by the earliest Chinese commentators? If they did not develop a theory of the metaphor, then how did early Chinese thinkers theorize turns of speech such as “the flaw in these words”? Are the Western and Chinese traditions indeed separated by a “cosmological gulf,” as the great sinologist Frederick Mote claimed?

「斯言之玷」——

亞里士多德的 *metaphora*（比喻）可以解釋詩經嗎？

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詩經〈抑〉篇第五章曰：「白圭之玷，尚可磨也，斯言之玷，不可為也」。「斯言之玷」，要如何解釋？它是否是一個普通的 *metaphor*（比喻）而已？從比較文學的角度，可以提出對於這個說法的幾個問題。*Metaphor* 是從古希臘而來的一個概念，用它來解釋中國古老的詩歌是否可能？亞里士多德之 *metaphora* 的概念本來有什麼特別的意義？在什麼歷史情況下發展的？現代漢學家一般對 *metaphor* 的問題有什麼看法？

反之，如果我們從中國傳統詩學的觀點出發來分析這首詩，就要提出別的一些問題。戰國思想家和漢代經學家如何看待這種所謂的比喻？他們對它有什麼概念？中國傳統有無任何特點可以說明，為何一個與 *metaphora* 類似的概念沒有出現過的原因？