theories and methodologies

Thinking beyond Aristotle: The Turn to How in Comparative Rhetoric

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ANY MODEST ATTEMPT IN COMPARATIVE RHETORIC TO THINK BEYOND ARISTOTLE AND BEYOND A SINGLE CULTURE IS ENOUGH TO REVEAL DIversity in the use of language to converse, to instruct, and to persuade and in the concepts and theories developed to inform language practices. Since the publication, in 1971, of Robert Oliver's *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*, one of the early studies that recognized the need for and benefits of studying non-Euro-American rhetorics, comparative rhetoric has made significant advances as interest in moving beyond Euro-American-centrism in studies of rhetoric steadily grows. Comparative rhetoric, committed to different ways of knowing and speaking and to different forms of inquiry, investigates across time and space communicative practices that frequently originate in noncanonical contexts and are often marginalized, forgotten, or erased altogether. Acting in response to globalization, comparative rhetoric aims to transform dominant rhetorical traditions and paradigms. As an interdisciplinary enterprise, it intersects with cognate studies and theories to challenge the prevailing power imbalances and patterns of knowledge production.[1]

For the past couple of decades, rhetoric and composition scholars have contributed to a growing body of comparative work focusing on indigenous and other non-Euro-American rhetorical and composing traditions.[2] Parallel to this development is impressive work on classical, modern, and contemporary Chinese rhetoric and writing. Its outcomes have not only challenged Euro-American conceptions of Chinese rhetoric but also provided new methods of analysis for transforming traditional narratives of rhetoric in general and for depicting the diverse rhetorical experiences of Chinese people in particular.[3]

While much work has been done, much still remains. For example, what new methods of inquiry can we develop to study other rhetorics at a time when border crossings of all kinds are taking place on an unprecedented scale? What are the payoffs and pitfalls in pursuing comparative rhetorical studies here and now? More specifically, where do we look for rhetorical practices—in facts and internal evidence that

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are already colored, if not owned, by our own frame of reference or in experiences, places, and even lacunae that are necessarily in the process of becoming? What can we learn from the discursive fields that other cultures map out—symbolic spaces where related concepts and categories cluster and where different semantic alignments and subject positions take shape? And how can we open ourselves to how other traditions and cultures use and experience language and other symbolic means without romanticizing them beyond their own otherness and pitting them against Euro-American logic and intelligibility?

Reflecting on these questions, I start in this essay with one of Aristotle's criticisms at the outset of the *Rhetoric*. Lurking not far behind his criticism is the persistent search for an essential set of qualities or elements of the art of rhetoric. Then, calling on the rhetoric of the Dao to initiate a dialogue with Aristotle, I illustrate the turn to how in comparative rhetoric, highlighting the need to study both "facts of usage" (Schiappa 7) and what I call facts of nonusage—linguistic and other symbolic behaviors and experiences that have been disqualified, forgotten, or deemed something other than rhetoric. Thinking beyond Aristotle in this context may also call for thinking about and with Zhuangzi, the ancient Chinese philosopher and rhetorician, to whom I turn next. I use Zhuangzi's knowledge of fish's happiness to accentuate the interdependence between the known and the knower and between facts of usage and facts of nonusage. I close this essay by further reflecting on the complexities of meaning caught in power imbalances and in hierarchies of knowledge production and consumption and on the implications of these complexities for enacting the turn to how in comparative rhetoric.

In chapter 1 of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle criticizes earlier rhetoric-handbook writers for their lack of comprehensiveness. These writers concentrated on judicial situations to the neglect of the other aspects of rhetoric, including political oratory, and they said nothing about enthymeme, the "body" of persuasion. Most of their commentaries were, according to Aristotle, on what is "external to the subject," not on the substance of the cases in question. As Aristotle explains, "[V]erbal attack and pity and anger and such emotions of the soul do not relate to fact but are appeals to the juryman." And "it is wrong to wrap the jury by leading them into anger or envy or pity" (1354a).[4]

Behind Aristotle's criticism, however exaggerated or inconsistent, looms an emphasis on the need to define the proper and essential subject for the art of rhetoric and on the body of proof or *apodeixis* (rhetorical demonstration) as an indispensable constituent of that art. Fact and what is internal to rhetoric are key to Aristotle, and they subsequently became the holy grail of rhetoric in the Euro-American Tradition, one that has been challenged and complicated, for example, by recent feminist rhetorical studies and composition and literacy studies, as well as comparative rhetorical studies. Such an emphasis reveals a perpetual want to claim a proper set of concepts for rhetoric in spite of competing or overlapping meanings that have accumulated over years. This desire is in part fueled by the need to claim continuous intellectual progress and thus disciplinary autonomy and legitimacy. Of course, Aristotle is following the footsteps of his teacher Plato, many of whose early dialogues are organized around questions of "What is X?" In so doing, Aristotle seems intent on defining the essence of the art of rhetoric, on capturing what Edward Schiappa calls "facts of essence" (6).

According to Schiappa, inquiries into definitions typically seek two kinds of facts. Inquiries that take the form "What is X?" are asking what X really is rather than how X is used. Schiappa calls the definitional facts sought through this sort of question "facts of essence," or "real" definitions (6). On the other hand, inquiries that ask how X is used

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are interested in how individual speakers and writers use X in specific situations. Schiappa calls the definitional facts sought in this kind of inquiry "facts of usage" (7). For him the "natural attitude" toward definition, which he aims to denaturalize, elides the distinction between these two types of definitional facts. The more pragmatic approach treats facts of usage as "value (ought) propositions," distinct from "fact (is) propositions." It sees definitions as "rhetorically induced" and engages definitional disputes or ruptures by uncovering the persuasive processes that definitions inevitably involve and enact (9–10).

To genuinely embrace non-Euro-American rhetorical practices and their ways of knowing and speaking and to productively engage the cultural mappings that inform discursive fields, we must part ways with the perennial yet parochial longing for facts of essence. For comparative rhetoricians, the central question to ask then is not "What is rhetoric in/for these other cultures?" but "What does the other do in/with rhetoric, and how does the other do it?" In other words, as we continue to cross borders and to enrich our understanding of other communicative practices across language, culture, and time, we must stop searching for or claiming a proper or exclusive set of objects for the study of the other. Instead, we should promote thick description, dialogism, and consciousness of our own claims. Such an effort would lead us away from facts of essence and toward facts of usage.

The question "What is rhetoric?" gestures toward, if it does not predetermine, the definer's frame of reference as one organized around facts of essence and the existence of an objective reality free of social, cultural, and linguistic incongruities and definitional disputes or ruptures. The question betrays an ontology that privileges a transcendental agency responsible for the world's states of affairs. By contrast, asking "What does the other do in/with rhetoric, and how does the other do it?" moves us toward a commitment to facts of usage, to what I call an ecology of historicity, specificity, and incongruity.

The commitment to facts of usage is, first and foremost, a commitment to the centrality of the social, the cultural, and the linguistic to the making of rhetorical practices—hence historicity. Second, any meaningful engagement with facts of usage carries with it an imperative to address the processual occasions of their use, enabling a narrative that is contextualized in its time and place and marked with its own terms of engagement. Third, incongruities and even breakdowns may accrue as self and other, past and present, indigenous and exogenous, and local and global are brought together in today's global environment. Further, historicity, specificity, and incongruity entail one another, forming a system of interdependency and interplay, an ecology. For example, instances of incongruity will cumulatively yet necessarily impinge on the historicity and specificity of facts of usage, yielding possibilities for sponsoring new facts of usage and for complicating or even challenging the existing ones. Similarly, any critical attention to the historicity and specificity of facts of usage will contribute to a more informed understanding of the conditions that spawn instances of incongruity; such an understanding is a prerequisite for productive engagement with those conditions. In short, historicity, specificity, and incongruity are always becoming, "shifting and moving, grafted onto and connected with other events" and linked to "the in-between en/action of events and encounters" (Edbauer 10). Such a commitment may very well frustrate or flout the available (i.e., dominant) means and models of discourse and lead us to discovering and embracing new paradigms of knowing and speaking.

The rhetoric of the Dao has been attracting growing attention from rhetoric and composition scholars in the United States.[5] Daoism emerged as a challenge to Confucianism and Legalism, and Daoist sensibili-

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ties have permeated Chinese culture and its thought patterns (Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China* 228), even demonstrating unexpected affinities with postmodern views regarding, for example, language, truth, and rationality (Combs 3–4; Graham 227–29). How does one go about defining such a rhetoric when it is a couple of thousand years removed from us and when Dao that can be put into words is really not Dao (Ames and Hall, ch. 1)?

As we pivot toward facts of usage, we must move away from "What is the rhetoric of the Dao?" and toward "How does it guide human conduct?" We need to consider such questions as, How does the rhetoric of the Dao arise? What meanings does it convey? How does its discursive field get mapped out and become realized? And how does this rhetoric shape and inhabit the world? Further, any such effort must address the strategies that the rhetoric of the Dao provides through its own discursive field for translating the Dao into a guide for virtuous conduct and benevolent governance. For example, how does the rhetoric of the Dao help individuals negotiate the perpetual tension between cultivating the Dao's creative and processual dimension at the personal level and elevating one of many competing Daos to the status of the one and only Dao at the community, state, and cosmic levels? No less important, we must ask how we can represent the rhetoric of the Dao in ways that shine a light on the conditions of the present, such as the relation between the local and the global.

Questions like these evidently do not aim to catalog facts and principles of the Dao, nor do they attempt to uncover its underlying logic, or what Rey Chow calls "grids of intelligibility" (298). Instead, they intend to generate meaning and affordance *for* and *beyond* a dialectic between developing a local narrative (historicity) informed by the dynamics of Daos and the Dao and searching for that narrative's new and broader significance both in and outside its discursive milieu (specificity and incongruity). The process also involves looking for and advocating the rhetoric of the Dao where it has hitherto been ruled nonexistent (incongruity and historicity) while rejecting a concomitant temptation to anoint such rhetoric as unique, as incommensurable with all other rhetorics (specificity). These meanings and affordances are central, though not internal, to the rhetoric of the Dao, such that Dao that can be put into words without them is really not Dao.

Turning to the question "What does the other do in/with rhetoric, and how does the other do it?" also puts us in conversation with what Steven Mailloux calls "effects of texts." Mailloux defines texts as "objects of interpretive attention, whether speech, writing, nonlinguistic practices, or human artifacts of any kind." He promotes the study of "the political effectivity of trope, argument, and narrative in culture," which he defines as "cultural rhetoric" (*Disciplinary Identities* 40; also see Mailloux, "Places" 57). Mailloux's notion of effects of texts resembles Schiappa's facts of usage, highlighting not only the mutual entailment of culture and rhetoric but also the effectiveness or ineffectiveness, intended and unintended, of our discursive practices. It must be emphasized that effects of texts—the political dynamics of cultural conversations at specific historical moments and power-and-knowledge relations in the rhetorical rethinking of the human sciences (Mailloux, *Disciplinary Identities* 40)—are never fixed or stable, and they are always being realized. Therefore, they have to be repeatedly negotiated or calibrated as they are experienced and circulated. Similarly, the effects of the rhetoric of the Dao are never final either, because the many Daos at the personal and local levels are in perpetual tension with the one and only Dao at the communal and state levels.

More crucially, textual forms and effects that have been erased or elided have to be openly and systematically remembered, recovered, or restated. Just as the excess of

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meaning or of the signified over the signifier calls on us to both state what has been said and restate what has never been said (Foucault xvi), so texts' effects or their excesses (i.e., the concealed, the excluded, and the erased) require that we frequent places where rhetoric is unrecognized and is evidenced only by barely acknowledged traces and gaps. Our failure to do so may limit and even hamper our understanding of cultural conversations, power-and-knowledge relations, and whether beliefs and practices belonging to a tradition at a specific historical moment are importantly present or merely present.[6] Therefore, as we enact the turn to how in comparative rhetoric, we must address or restate instances of erasure or elision and resurrect knowledge that has been buried, disqualified, or ruled out of order. In a word, we must make every effort to study what I have called facts of nonusage. In representing the rhetoric of the Dao, we surely must attend to the one and only Dao of its time and to how it is deployed to bring about efficacious government and to lay an exclusive claim to authority, legitimacy, and even infallibility (facts of usage). At the same time, we must pay critical attention to many different Daos, examining, for example, why they have not made it to the big league and what standards or norms of operation have kept them from being selected, from becoming dominant (facts of nonusage).

Calling our attention to facts of nonusage this way also helps collapse the underlying binary that pits them against facts of usage and shuns them as undesirable or unacceptable. If both facts of nonusage and facts of usage are seen as resulting from and perpetuating the social, cultural, and linguistic norms, facts of nonusage should no longer be viewed as the antithesis or the mere shady side of facts of usage. Facts of nonusage in fact conceal or embody conditions that led to their own exile and to the sanctioning of facts of usage. Parasitic on each other, the two become the yin and yang of rhetorical reality.[7] Understanding their interdependence represents the first step toward contesting and transforming those conditions—historicity, specificity, and incongruity—that have formed and sustained the divide between facts of nonusage and facts of usage.

Thinking beyond Aristotle and beyond the persistence of, or insistence on, facts of essence may be enriched if we think about and with Zhuangzi (369–286 BCE), a Daoist philospher and rhetorician in ancient China, who was part of the emerging literati in one of the most tumultuous yet formative periods in Chinese history. Zhuangzi's work provides insights into a host of issues ranging from governing to language use to knowledge making to managing human relationships.[8] One passage is particularly relevant to the turn to how in comparative rhetoric and to facts of usage and nonusage:

> Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the dam of the Hao River when Zhuangzi said, "See how the minnows come out and dart around where they please! That's what fish really enjoy."
>
> Huizi said, "You're not a fish—how do you know what fish enjoy?"
>
> Zhuangzi said, "You're not I, so how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy?"
>
> Huizi said, "I am not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. On the other hand, you're certainly not a fish—so that still proves you don't know what fish enjoy!"
>
> Zhuangzi said, "Let's go back to your original question, please. You asked me *how* I know what fish enjoy—so you already knew I knew it when you asked the question. I know it by standing here beside the Hao.
>
> (Watson 188–89)

Zhuangzi may be trying to trick his interlocutor with wordplay, drawing on the ambiguity of a term in Huizi's question, 安知, which can mean both "how do you know . . ." and "from where do you know . . ." (Ames and Hall 109). But Zhuangzi is making another, more rhetorically significant point. By associating his

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knowledge of fish's happiness with his own spatial-temporal conditions—"standing here beside the Hao"—he is challenging the purported objectivity of facts and knowledge. His knowledge and thus representation of fish's happiness depend not on internal facts of essence but on the interdependence and potential tensions or incongruities between the fish and his experience of them there and then or between what we think we know about, and how we think we can speak for, fish's happiness (which can be read as the other's rhetoric) and what has to happen in order for us to begin to know about and speak for it. To state it another way, what is integral to the making and representation of knowledge is not searching for a finite set of facts of essence but discovering and articulating facts of usage and nonusage with an emphasis on their ecology of historicity, specificity, and incongruity.

Putting Zhuangzi in dialogue with Aristotle is not necessarily designed to map out differences and similarities between them. Rather, it is aimed to enact a form of what Haun Saussy calls "metadisciplinarity," which, while not guaranteeing uniqueness or coherence for the understanding of the other as well as the self, represents "the condition of openness to new objects and new forms of inquiry" (23). Cultiving a dialogue of this kind contributes to such an openness since it not only uncovers "new objects and new forms of inquiry" but also searches for all forms of excess meaning, unpacking how knowledge production and consumption become tethered to power asymmetry and historicities of meaning and how discursive practices are constituted spatially, materially, and invisibly. This methodological and ideological turn to facts of usage and nonusage means critically assessing and reassessing our received knowledge in general and not hesitating to ask for and value the yin of rhetoric (facts of nonusage) when only the yang (facts of usage) is available or permissible.[9] It also means learning how to step outside the Euro-American locus of logic and relations and to embrace histories of rhetorical practices that would be inaccessible or unrecognizable to us if we remained beholden to the "What is" question or to facts of essence. These histories, with their own internal complexity and external connections, shine a further light on the need to study other conditions of discursive and metadisciplinary possibility and other occasions of discursive production and consumption. The more we can identify ourselves with and speak for and about these histories and their ways of knowing and representing, the closer we will come to understanding and representing fish's happiness as well as Zhuangzi's reasoning about it.

Notes

1. I thank the participants in the Comparative Rhetoric Seminar at the 2013 Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute for their insights, which contributed to this understanding of comparative rhetoric.

2. E.g., Baca; Baca and Villanueva; Hatim; Kells, Balester, and Villanueva; Lipson and Binkley, *Ancient Non-Greek Rhetorics* and *Rhetoric*; Lloyd; Mao, *Reading*; Powell, "Down" and "Dreaming"; Romano; Stromberg; and Sun-Gi.

3. E.g., Combs; Garrett, "Classical Chinese Conceptions" and "Some Elementary Methodological Reflections"; Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China*, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, and "Studies"; Lyon, "Confucian Silence" and "Rhetorical Authority"; Mao, "Beyond Bias" and "Studying the Chinese Rhetorical Tradition"; Swearingen, "Plato" and "Tao Trek"; Wang, "Comparative Rhetoric" and "Engaging *Nuquanzhuyi*"; Wu, "Alternative Feminist Discourse" and "Paradigm"; and You.

4. Here Aristotle seems to reject emotions in favor of logical argument, a position, as has been pointed out, at variance with what follows in the rest of the *Rhetoric*, where emotion or pathos is considered part of rhetoric (Kennedy 9). And it is also possible that Aristotle exaggerates the limitations of earlier rhetorical treatises for his own polemical purposes and because of his own definitional biases.

5. Combs; Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China*; Lyon, "Rhetorical Authority"; Mao, "Writing the Other"; Swearingen, "Tao Trek."

6. According to David Hall and Roger Ames's "Principle of Mere Presence," the importance of a particular

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belief or set of ideologies in a culture depends not on its mere presence but on whether it is "importantly present—that is, present in such a way that it significantly qualifies, defines, or otherwise shapes the culture" (xv).

7. I pair facts of nonusage and facts of usage with yin and yang, major concepts in Daoism and in the history of Chinese science and philosophy, to foreground their interdependence and interpenetration. What is yin in one context can be yang in another, and neither can exist independent of the other. Analogously, what are facts of nonusage or merely present in the Euro-American Tradition could be facts of usage or importantly present in another tradition, and neither can exist independent of the other.

8. Not much is known about Zhuangzi ("Master Zhuang"), whose real name is said to be Zhuang Zhou. The writings attributed to him, which are contained in a collection called the *Zhuangzi*, may have been compiled by a group of individuals, including Zhuangzi and his followers, over many years.

9. The interdependence of facts of usage and facts of nonusage resonates with another story in the *Zhuangzi*, about the usefulness and uselessness of trees. Fruit trees and timber trees are "useful" but "their utility makes life miserable for them, and so they don't get to finish out the years Heaven gave them" because "they are torn apart and subjected to abuse." Their utility (to humans) thus is not useful to them. By contrast, "useless" trees (散木) grow to a ripe old age and avoid being cut down or "cut off in mid-journey." Their uselessness (to humans) is most worthy to them (Watson 63–65). Like the usefulness and uselessness of trees, facts of usage and nonusage are value propositions tied to a vantage point, and they are rhetorically motivated and materially determined.

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