Sense and Sensibility: Giving Notes in Chinese and English Literary Writings

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ABSTRACT
Notes are not secondary or supplementary. They provide text with sensible guidance, supported by serious scholarship. More importantly, they embrace controversial ideas and polemical attitudes. Such notes with both sense and sensibility facilitate the expression of personal ideas more efficiently than the text; they may even sustain the development of a literary work, a theoretical topic, or even a field of study by inheriting and provoking lively and consistent scholarly discussion. Such a practice, interestingly, has long appeared in both Chinese and English literary writings. By reviewing discussions about these paradoxical notes in both Chinese and English literary criticism and by examining the notes in The Waste Land and the Book of Poetry respectively, the article proposes that it is a shared practice in both English and Chinese writings to provide notes with both sense and sensibility, and such a practice not only has helped sustain lively and consistent studies of the two specific literary works in their respective writing traditions but also proves that notes, instead of being secondary and supplementary, reveal a new discourse that awaits in uncovering further profound findings.

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文章提出, 这种做法不仅有助于中文写作传统中的生动和一致的研究, 而且证明了注释不是次要和补充, 而是揭示了一种新的话语, 等待着进一步深刻的发挖掘。

1. Introduction

Though oftentimes unappealing to the casual reader, scholarly notes prove pervasive and necessary. Notes that signal conscientious scholarship have been recognized and defended by scholars. In their article, “The Footnote, in Theory,” Anne H. Stevens and Jay Williams investigate footnotes appended to essays found in the journal *Critical Inquiry* to discover and define the identity of theory as well as the journal itself. They observe that “today, footnotes in a scholarly essay are not uniformly marginal, minor, or digressive,” and they argue that “a fundamental function of the humanities footnote” is that “it allows us a means of evaluating the level of scholarship of an essay” (211). By comparing footnotes to “a humanist’s lab report” and their empirical data, they conclude that “in a general sense, footnotes are the mark of the author’s status as a professional” (211).

Apart from labeling serious and professional scholarship, footnotes also serve as spaces where writers can voice personal opinions. Footnotes, which supplant “critical responses and rejoinders” and attach “feelings of anger, disgust, and betrayal,” enable and facilitate dialogue between essays and authors – creating both passionate and polemical essays: the two most validated features of *Critical Inquiry* (210). The more polemical and passionate an essay, the more likely it will evoke and express strong thoughts and feelings, making footnotes indispensable and convenient to the sustainable vitality of theory studies (210).

Although footnotes can both be serious and sentimental, their seemingly paradoxical features coexist with and complement each other. Stevens and Williams, for example, justify the importance of such paradoxical footnotes by referring to them as a criterion by which to accept essays for *Critical Inquiry*.

This journal, in fact, argues that passion is not diminished when it is superscripted. It is a further mark of its complex nature that, although submissions have been rejected for not being passionate enough, and they have been rejected because of a lack of necessary citation and documentation, not one essay in our memories has ever been rejected because it did contain footnotes. (210)

In historical studies, footnotes that express both academic integrity and polemical subjectivity provide a guarantee for historians as professionals. In his book, *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Anthony Grafton suggests that footnotes not only prove but also persuade (22). “Persuade” can be interpreted in two ways. Stevens and Williams summarize that footnotes reveal historians’ erudition and efforts, essential to convincing the readers and indispensable to establishing “the authority of the author” and the “moral and intellectual stature” (211). Quoting Grafton, they assert it can no longer be accomplished only by how “inherent” the argument appears; footnotes with sources impartially demonstrate that “the author has sufficiently covered the field, that enough evidence has been marshalled, that the status of the evidence has been sufficiently questioned” (211).

Conversely, the word “persuade” indicates a sense of “partiality” conveyed through the footnotes in history studies. Persuasion is a deliberate gesture to achieve a predicted purpose through an intentional procession of information. Footnotes contain sources
which the authors carefully and consciously selected, depicting work as personal and individualistic. When Grafton explains how footnotes persuade readers, he refers to the inevitable subjectivity embedded in the footnotes:

In practice, moreover, every annotator rearranges materials to prove a point, interprets them in an individual way, and omits those that do not meet a necessarily personal standard of relevance. The very next person to pass through the same archival materials will probably line them up and sort them out quite differently. (56)

Although it is hard to wipe out the subjectivity from them, footnotes revealing personal feelings and individualistic preferences oftentimes may be regarded as unconvincing and inconsistent. Criticism targets them as idiosyncratic prejudices or biased interpretations to be justifiably ignored or minimized. In his essay “Marginalia,” Edgar Allen Poe suggests that “it may be as well to observe […] that just as the goodness of your true pun is in the direct ratio of its intolerability, so is nonsense the essential sense of the Marginal Note” (177).

Contrary to the strong dislike of the personal traces in the footnotes, some scholars advocate footnotes expressing strong feelings and opinions as worthy academic acts. Like Stevens and Williams, who appeal for passionate and polemical communication in footnotes in theory studies, Shari Benstock in her article “At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text” notices how a publication “becomes self-conscious, argumentative, defensive, even quarrelsome, or perhaps playful, ingenuous, or ironic” when its central argument is managed to be shifted via footnote (204). Benstock creatively turns to the footnotes in fictional texts and points out that instead of being a critical act, annotating in fictional texts is “a creative act” that highlights “the interplay between author and subject, text and reader” (204) and that enables authors to address “a larger, extratextual world in an effort to relate this text to other texts” and “to negotiate the middle ground between this author and other authors” (205).

Notes in ancient Chinese poems and literature are neither found at the bottom of pages nor separated from the text. As the text is typeset vertically in ancient Chinese literature, notes are given directly beneath the words or phrases to which they refer, resulting in interlineal notes and commentaries rather than footnotes. Distinguished by their relatively smaller fonts, these notes and commentaries commonly occupy most of the space on a given page, with only several words of the actual text scattered between them. Readers cannot overlook them as the notes and commentaries are so densely integrated within the proper text. The format of the interlinear notes in Chinese ancient literature can be clearly shown in the following picture, taken from a personal collection of the author Qian Jia Shi 《千家诗》(Selected Poems of Talented Poets from Tang and Song), edited by Liu Kezhuang (刘克庄) in the Song Dynasty with further annotations in smaller fonts surrounding the larger-font-printed and blackened texts of the poems.
The all-surrounding interlinear notes in ancient Chinese literary classics is reminiscent of the bulky footnotes in Franco Moretti’s “Conjectures on World Literature.” Moretti quoted secondary materials about national literature studies to support the general thesis point about world literature studies proposed in the text. They occupy most of the pages and include personally selected materials that should serve as persuasive proof of the argument. Notes in ancient Chinese literature prove highly similar. Apart from being bulky and all-surrounding, they simultaneously demonstrate sense and sensibility. “Note” in Chinese ancient literature is called zhushu in Chinese, which is comprised of two parts: 注(zhu), the notes that explain the meaning of the original texts and 疏(shu), the commentaries on the notes. The name itself indicates the paradoxical feature of the note. Notes in ancient Chinese literature are given by commentators rather than the writers. These notes sometimes faithfully explain the texts, whereas some record the commentators’ personal opinions or understandings. Some may deliberately present extra knowledge, which the commentator may believe helpful or relevant for a reader.

The validity of giving personal notes to ancient Chinese literary writings is supported by sinologists’ discussion about the function of poetry in Chinese ancient literature. C. H. Wang, for example, argues in his article “Ch’en Yin-k’o’s Approaches to Poetry:
A Historian’s Progress” that ancient Chinese poems are “used to suit the speaker’s intentions,” the “speaker” referring not to the original voice who creates or utters the poem but rather to the “historical personage” who recites the poem within a different historical context (Wang 4). “Making a discrete passage to obtain the meaning” and interpreting the poem according to the reader’s intentions, “even at the risk of twisting the poet’s clear, obvious intent” is justified and encouraged by documents and historical personage like Tso Chuan (《左传》) and Mencius (孟子), as quoted by Wang in the article (Wang 4). The ultimate purpose of the poems is “to prove, to verify, to confirm historical events,” and thus Chen Yinqe, or Ch’en Yin-k’o (陈寅恪), the protagonist of Wang’s article as a representative to approach the poems with a historical perspective (Wang 4). To approach the poem with a historical perspective, requires the attachment of long, explanatory and commenting notes to the original texts of the poems, enabling personal and recontextualizing comprehension of the poems. Interestingly, that is exactly what Wang does in the very article, with long footnotes on several pages providing examples and evidence with comments to the argument within the text, reminding us of Moretti’s aforementioned footnotes.
The effect of subjective notes in ancient Chinese literature should neither be minimized nor disregarded: unlike the repellent footnotes in western academia, critical notes attached to the ancient Chinese literary classic can be canonized and considered as authorized and reliable sources. Notes made by a certain commentator to an ancient literary classic would be compiled as an individual book with its own title. Different versions of notes attached to the same ancient classic or selected versions of notes to the set of ancient literary classics (e.g., Shi San Jing《十三经》The Thirteen Ancient Classics) not only consolidate the study of the literary classics to which they are attached, but also would be considered as a complete and inexhaustible system of knowledge and information that sustain and support an individual and specific field of study. Consider the ancient Chinese classic the Book of Poetry. Versions of notes exist from as early as the Han Dynasty (202–220 BC) to Qing Dynasty (AD 1636–1912) by different commentators: Maoshi Zhengyi《毛诗正义》(The Authoritative Annotations to Mao Heng’s notes to the Book of Poetry) annotated by Mao Heng early in West Han Dynasty, together with Zheng Xuan (郑玄) almost four hundred years later in East Han Dynasty, and three hundred years later, Kong Yingda (孔颖达) of the Tang Dynasty. Other versions include Shi Ji Zhuan《诗集传》(Collected Notes on the Book of Poetry) by Zhu Xi (朱熹) of the Song Dynasty and Maoshi Zuanjian Tongshi 《毛诗笺注通释》(Complete Explanations to Mao Heng’s Notes to the Book of Poetry) by Ma Ruichen (马瑞辰) of the Qing Dynasty. Compiled into independent and academic books, they serve as indispensable and prestigious references for studying the classic poetry book. Additionally, versions of notes, including the above, lay a foundation for the special field of “训诂学” (the study of annotating ancient texts).

Encompassing different personal preferences and ideological emphases, versions of notes surely compete. Through comparison, they also complement one another and enable a more thorough understanding of the text studied. Historically, notes in Chinese ancient literature have contextualized literature throughout different periods, reflecting different ideological emphases. The notes and commentaries surrounding a single text in ancient Chinese literature may not necessarily belong to the same authors. Rather, they can often span thousands of years – with notes made by previous generations either incomprehensible or inapplicable to a contemporary audience. Thus, different versions of commentaries emerge illustrating or revising the notes within the same literary work. Sometimes the scholarly notes on the original texts leave little room for change, whereas the commentaries on the notes provide secondary criticism, possibly filled with personal preferences and subjective opinions, influenced and determined by different ideologies. Conversely, the original notes made for the texts can be filled with specific ideological preferences which may sound absurd or outrageous to contemporary readers. Commentaries on those notes offer either introductions about historical contexts, illustrations about traditions and rituals, or further interpretations and explanations to justify and validate the notes given by previous generations. Some experts argue that a qualified commentator of Chinese ancient literature should be equipped with more than literary knowledge: they should possess fluency in history and metaphysics as well (Chen 10). Annotators use history and metaphysics to contextualize and thus justify the subjective and secondary comments to the primary texts. Chen mentions metaphysics, or Xuan,
specifically refers to Daoism and Buddhism, dealing with cosmic and supernatural power. Metaphysics, therefore, becomes the indispensable tool to validate notes appearing too superstitious and idiosyncratic – common in Chinese ancient literature. Interestingly, the Chinese character “玄” includes entries meaning “peculiar” or “mysterious” and additionally can mean “unreliable” in colloquial Chinese. However, Chen argues the scholarly discipline interpreting the baffling notes created in the distant past should be equally considered and emphasized by both literary annotators and college students, with the latter’s introduction to the classic pieces on metaphysics as the core of traditional Chinese culture (Chen Yongzheng 10).

With the help of history and metaphysics, annotators accommodate different ideologics within layers of notes and piece them together within the same literary classic, within the same pages. Unlike the shift of ideologies that are subject to the preference and demand of specific times or historical contexts, commentary notes are never to be regarded as forced propaganda or biased prejudice. Rather they are taken as constructive and convincing scholarship that facilitates readers to understand both ancient and obscure texts. Transcending time and space, they enable readers to witness the confrontation and communication of different thinking contextualized through diverse ideologics. The credibility of subjective, secondary criticism that constitutes the explanatory notes should never be questioned as being too personal, too deliberate, or too far-fetched.

Additionally, aesthetic values and personal taste are also important for a literary annotator of ancient Chinese literature. The difficulty in annotating Chinese ancient poetry, as Chen argues, lies in the requirement of both the “subjective” and the “objective”: the former encompassing the instinctive capability to appreciate and understand the poems with the latter encompassing the acquired knowledge and learning. In fact, both Chinese and English literary criticism have attracted lively and consistent discussions about the significance of “nature” and “nurture” in literary creation. In Chinese literary criticism, the question of “师心” shixin (to follow one’s mind) or “师古” shigu (to learn from tradition and predecessors) can find answers from as early as the pre-Qin era in the Book of Poetry which states that “The Ode is where the aim [zhi] goes” (诗言志 shi yan zhi) and “While in the heart [xin], it is the aim; manifested in words, it is an Ode” (Zoeren 95), to Yan Yu (ca. 1190–ca. 1240) who asserts that “judgment is the dominant factor in the study of poetry” and “The beginning must be correct, and your mind must be set on the highest goals” (Owen 394), and to Mo Yan 莫言 who suggests that “one writer influences another when they enjoy a profound spiritual kinship” while at the same time insists that “The process of creation is unique to every writer” (“Nobel Lecture”). In English literary criticism, we can trace the topic of “Tradition and Individual Talent” to critics before T. S. Eliot and after him, from Alexander Pope’s “Nature and Homer were the same” (Pope 26), to William Wordsworth’s “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth and Coleridge 8), and to Hemingway’s “…we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him” (“Banquet Speech”). Similarly, literary annotators, especially of ancient Chinese literature, who embrace notes that include secondary and personal criticism, need disciplined professional scholarship as well as “a poetic mind” to feel and appreciate (Chen Yongzheng 4). Chen Yinque, a modern Chinese literary critic who specializes in ancient Chinese literature studies, suggests that “the one who has deeper feelings, would produce more complete
interpretation as well” (Guo 1). The ability to feel and empathize, as Chen Yongzheng supposes, is more an instinct or gifted talent, when supplemented with the diligence of learning, which produces convincing notes. Accordingly, William Wordsworth asserts that a poet is “[a] man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility” (Wordsworth and Coleridge 13) and this sensibility differentiates poets from ordinary men. Such sensibility is certainly personal and subjective, but for both poets and annotators, it holds equal importance to conscious learning.

A mind of judgment and principle dedicated to serious and impartial scholarship is also required to annotate ancient Chinese literature. Guo Shaoyu (1893–1984), a modern Chinese scholar of ancient Chinese literature, indicates that annotators are just like historians who must simultaneously possess “talent,” “knowledge,” and most importantly “judgment” (Chen Yinquè 11). Judgment refers not only to the ability to examine and select from one’s extensive learning the proper perspectives, methods, or supporting materials for different kinds of texts to provide profound yet precise comments and interpretations, but also the alertness to distinguish serious scholarship for its own sake from the irresponsible research output subservient to deliberate the demands of a specific time or person. Other than judgment, “德,” or morality, is also considered the parallel of talent and knowledge as a prerequisite for a qualified annotator of Chinese ancient literature. “Morality” insists on retaining integrity to produce genuinely objective and unbiased notes, regardless of any personal preference or imposed ideology. Qian Zhongshu suggests that either the subjective opinions, the objective textual supporting materials, or the languages and expressions, all of which constitute serious research essays, must be evaluated in terms of their morality. Thus, they avoid immoral academic purposes such as concealing inadequate knowledge with vague and impractical ideas, pleading for doomed prejudiced viewpoints, or creating distortions to cater to the majority or to the dominant. Morality resonates with another critic of the Qing Dynasty, Ye Xie’s proposal of “胆” (courage), which is also paralleled by talent, judgment, and power when Ye Xie comments on what constitutes a good poet. Poets with courage, according to Ye Xie, would uphold and defend their ideas of truth and creativity, without yielding to what others say or any sacrificing for any rules or traditions (26). Similarly, annotators of ancient Chinese literature must possess the morality and courage to record their true beliefs, despite previous notes already occupying most of the page. Therefore the layers of notes in Chinese ancient literary texts compete and even revise one another with greatly varying interpretations resulting from the different contexts of the annotators. In theoretical essays of the English language, Anne. H. Stevens and Jay Williams encourage the polemical and passionate feelings and emotions detected in footnotes because they provoke strong thoughts and lively discussions that lead scholars to eventually achieving impartial and true answers. The notes of ancient Chinese literature reveal the subjective mind. Although inevitably constrained to historical or personal particularities, they rigidly adhere to creating a sensible and impartial scholarship, competing and communicating with one another, transcending time and space. They constitute a system of knowledge that transcends the paradigm of historical or personal specificity and become reliable references and trustworthy sources.

Interestingly, such interlineal notes filled with both genuine scholarship and personal traces, common and typical in ancient Chinese literature, are proposed to be adopted in the practice of translating Chinese ancient poetry into the English language – the literary
tradition which loathes footnotes, especially in non-academic writing. Lucas Klein in his article “Pseudo-Pseudotranslation: On the Potential for Annotation in Translating Li Shangyin” defends the significance and appeal of the footnotes by quoting Eric Hayot’s recent two works on academic writing:

“Why do all these people hate footnotes?”

“I have no idea. I like footnotes. I mean, seriously, what a great invention! Think of all the things they let you do. They’re like some amazing technology that radically changes the entire nature of the written page—not just the balance between argument and evidence, but the entire look and function of what a piece of paper can do.”

“So you’re saying the problem is that they’re a technology.” (“Academic Writing” 64)

“... understanding how those styles produce knowledge differently at least partly through patterns of citation and reference that will help you grasp the ways in which critics or schools put their preferred modes of intellection and analysis into play, or rather, the ways in which that putting into play—citation, reference, mention, the distinction drawn between primary and secondary—itself constitutes a mode of thought and analysis.” (“The Elements” 150)

Annotation in ancient Chinese literature is surely the type of technology Hayot describes. It provides more than sensible interpretation but also reflects a more appealing diverse personal design. Klein quotes Hayot to justify incorporating the format of interlineal notes in ancient Chinese literature into his English translation of Li Shangyin’s poem. Li Shangyin’s poems, as Klein points out, are famous for their sense of “disruption” and what Stephen Owen refers to as their purposeful “difficulty and impenetrable obscurity” (Klein 43). Accommodating annotations into English translations of Li’s poetry challenges by targeting the audiences’ negative feelings toward annotations enabling them to appreciate the work’s aesthetic value of disruption and alienation. Simultaneously, readers acquire the knowledge of how annotations were favored as an indispensable technology in ancient Chinese literature. Klein copies the format of the interlineal notes to visually and thus faithfully present this piece of ancient Chinese poetry to readers of the English language. He ingeniously incorporates the technique of peppering the explanatory annotations with personal design and subjective insights featured in ancient Chinese literature.

The screenshot of the specially translated poem in Lucas Klein’s article
Klein considers his design an experiment in translating ancient Chinese literature into the English language and this work appears among a series of articles titled “Experiments in Translating Chinese Ancient Poetry.”

In fact, the tradition and practice of attaching notes of both sense and sensibility are already well-established in both Chinese and English literary writings. The Book of Poetry and T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land provide examples from Chinese and English writings, both of which are significant literary works. The notes in both works are compared, not only to show that they each embrace serious scholarship and polemical opinions but also to adopt a cross-cultural perspective, indicating with specific textual evidence how the two languages and literature share the literary practice of paradoxical notes, regardless of the distance in time or space. Paragraph: use this for the first paragraph in a section, or to continue after an extract.

2. Notes in The Waste Land

T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land features extremely long and complicated notes that may attract even more attention and exploration than the poem itself. In the dense notes addressing different authors or texts, Eliot interplays between the text and himself as he becomes self-conscious, sentimental, and critical of his own writing in the notes, forcing the reader into a conscious communication with the text as they are consistently interrupted by the notes. Although The Waste Land is a poem that belongs to the creative writing genre, the attached notes function similarly to those in theoretical works discussed by Stevens and Williams and Benstock. In The Waste Land, freely yet properly referencing classic works not only shows Eliot’s undoubted erudition but also reveals his theoretical assertion that tradition should not be absent in writing poetry. They simultaneously comprise scholarly references and personal opinions. Notes in The Waste Land serve both as a serious and academic guarantee of the writer’s qualifications as a respected poet and as a mirror of the writer’s own theoretical preferences and creative designs.

The incoherency and inconsistency of T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land have become the most intriguing and most discussed features of the poem. Each of the five parts of the poem differs stylistically, unexpectedly constituting “a framework within which many complex themes and moods interact” (Gish 29). Apart from the complicated themes and moods illustrated in The Waste Land, the accompanying convoluted notes also contribute to the fragmented characteristic of the poem.

Allusions frequently appear in The Waste Land. Notes either clarify the works alluded to or explain how the allusions are formed. To grasp the full meaning of the poem, readers must constantly refer to the notes, which interrupts the reading process. As Gish suggests, notes have “the effect of directing the reader’s attention away from the immediate experience of the poem” (29). The content of the notes also detaches readers from the poem. Allusions to classic yet complicated works such as Dante’s Inferno, Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Augustine’s Confessions scatter in The Waste Land and references to them correspondingly appear in the poem’s notes. To most readers, these dense readings result in confusion and frustration. Readers cannot expect to fully comprehend these allusions with a mere glimpse at the notes. Rather, they must retreat from the discourse of the poem to ponder the notes’ allusions, disrupting the direct connection between the reader and the poem. A sense of time grows distorted. The Waste Land’s
notes alluding to classic works from previous periods blur a reader’s sense of time. The past shifts to the present while the present traces back to the past. This juxtaposition of different literary works and the subsequent literary blending of time contribute to the poem’s incoherence.

Why did Eliot create such a distinctively incoherent poem by appending complex and convoluted notes? When Eliot explains his reasons for appending the notes to his poem, he exclaims, “The notes to The Waste Land!” as if surprised at the unexpected attention that had been attracted by the notes (108). The original intention, as Eliot playfully indicates, was to expand the inconveniently brief poem to the standards of an independent book. Additionally, Eliot indicates that readers of that time would not buy editions excluding notes. Thus, his notes “can never be unstuck,” as doing so would affect the readership of the poem (108). Perhaps Eliot is commenting in jest because adding notes to a poem neither encourages publication nor promotion. The true purpose of The Waste Land’s notes, in fact, is to sensibly adapt academic tradition to new works of literature and perform a critical interpretive act on a poem itself.

Eliot’s insistence on quoting tradition and the classics in literary creation is widely acknowledged with his monumental works of criticism, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “What is a Classic?” Thus, readers expect the images and fragments pieced together in the highly allusive poem The Waste Land. As Eliot playfully states, the notes explicitly referencing those images and fragments shield the poem from any critics’ fierce accusations of plagiarism (108). Yet contrary to Eliot’s original expectations, the notes have been criticized as “the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship” (108). This seems an unreasonable censure considering Eliot’s preference for tradition, the classics, and serious scholarship. But if we examine the notes carefully, we can find some of the notes indeed appear sloppy and even defiant. The following three notes illustrate this:

Note to line 199: I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia. (72)

Note to line 221: This may not appear as exact as Sappho’s lines, but I have in mind the ‘long shore’ or ‘dory’ fisherman, who returns at nightfall. (73)

Notes for line 360: The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton’s): it was related to the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion. (74)

Unlike normal notes with specific and adequate information regarding references, Eliot fills these three notes with obscurity and uncertainty. He seems to deliberately emphasize his authorship rather than authority of the poem as the word “I” in the first note quoted above sounds subjective. Serious scholars and critics can deem “do not know” and “forget” as unacceptable for a poet of Eliot’s caliber. Furthermore, the apparent sloppiness of these aforementioned notes does not result from the indiscreet academic attitudes of the author but instead result from Eliot’s individualistic opinion about how to sensibly adapt tradition to the new. In his introduction to The Waste Land and Other Poems, Frank Kermode quotes lines from Eliot’s poem Little Gidding to illustrate how The Waste Land’s style “permitted a view of history as without perspective, and a mode of composition that did not forget the past but perceived its methods as effects of mere custom rather than law” (xxi). The quoted lines from the poem are as follows:
Last year's fruit is eaten,
And the fulfilled beast shall kick the empty pail.
For the last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice. (xxi)

To Eliot, adapting literary tradition is not rigid adherence to the original wording of the texts. Neither should these works be built upon to limit and impede the new. Tradition is not mandatory, but customary. It profoundly affects the new with traces of it embedded in the minds of the writers and readers of future generations. These traditions are easily remembered and readily quoted in new literary work. More importantly, they are adapted by and for “another voice.” Returning to the aforementioned examples, in the note to line 221, the “long shore” as well as the “dory” fisherman “who returns at nightfall” are both examples of imagery that Eliot borrows from Sappho’s poems. This clip of imagery, rather than the entire original sentence, suits Eliot’s novel poem. The elements selected from the ancient poems serve as fitting material for constructing an image of the homecoming of a sailor. References to classic works of literature are embedded naturally throughout Eliot’s poem. He relates to these classics naturally and creatively rather than consciously and rigidly quoting them verbatim. Eliot must have been well-versed with these classics for them to flow spontaneously as he wrote the poem. Whether he precisely presents the exact words of the original texts should not distract the reader from the work’s fluency and consistency.

The Waste Land includes more serious notes than presented in the previous examples. Informative, detailed, and accurate, they cite the names of the referenced literary works, their authors, and specific page numbers. Some notes even include quotations of original work and languages other than English, as observed in the notes to lines 60 and 63:

60. Cf. Baudelaire:
“Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant.”
63. Cf. Inferno, III. 55-57:
“si lunga tratta
di gente, ch’io non avrei mai creduto
che morte tanta n’avesse disfatta.” (71)

Although both serious and formal, most of these notes are quotations without further elaboration on either the original works or on their relevance to the poem. Readers may lack knowledge and assumed multilingual abilities. Unlike Eliot and the targeted critics of the notes, most readers would prove unable to recall or understand all the referenced works at a mere glimpse. Rather than communicating the meaning of the poem, these notes become an extra burden for the reader. Thus, these accurate and objective notes, lacking individualistic elements, seemingly aim to impress readers by the author’s erudition rather than to share knowledge with them. Hence, the style of these notes contributes to the “bogus scholarship” of the poem.

Furthermore, notes embedding subjectivity or even idiosyncrasies prove more valuable than intended, because they not only convey and implement Eliot’s theory on sensibly adapting the classic in literary creation but also perform and fulfill the criticism
and interpretation of the poem. They can present criticism to not only relevant and quoted classics but also to the poem itself. An example of this can be seen in the note to line 218:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a “character,” is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest . . . (72)

Thereafter, Eliot quotes a passage from Ovid’s Metamorphoses in the original Latin, which as Kermode summarizes in his explanatory notes, deals with “the sex change of Tiresias” (103). This note begins with Eliot’s own observations and comments on Tiresias, creating significance not only for the poem but also for readers and critics. The note not only provides reference information, as normal notes would do, but also illustrates why the “spectator” is invited and important. For readers and critics, this note provides an authorial perspective when interpreting the poem. Frank Kermode, for example, further affirms that “Tiresias is the point of view from which the exemplars of waste-land degeneracy are seen to meet” (103). Therefore, sharing such subjective and critical ideas in the notes not only enlightens the readers and facilitates their understanding of an allusion essential for the poem’s interpretation but also provides critics with firm evidence on which further analysis of the poem can be grounded.

The most vital facet about this note lies in its relevance neither to the poem nor to the readers or the critics, but instead to Eliot. Just as two perspectives (e.g., two sexes) are mixed within Tiresias, Eliot is mixed as the poem’s author and commentator, wandering between the text and the notes. To Eliot, Tiresias unites the poem and serves as the narrator as “what he sees” is “the substance of the poem” (73). In the notes, Eliot not only acts as the author to provide facts and reference information but also to present “what he sees” and “how he thinks” about the tradition as well as the poem. Notes enable Eliot to transfer between the author, displaying serious scholarship, and the commentator, casually sharing instructive thoughts embellished with idiosyncrasy.

3. Notes in the Book of Poetry

Notes in ancient Chinese literature have a very practical function, having facilitated people’s understanding of archaic poems over the years. They contain objective information and explanations based on textual and historical sources. Without notes such as these, ancient and obscure poems are destined to grow obsolete. For example, the Book of Poetry was compiled with poems that were created or performed by people living in China’s pre-Qin Dynasty era over two thousand years ago. The words, grammatical structures, and phonetics of China’s day-to-day language have undergone such constant and dramatic change that even in the Han Dynasty (the Chinese dynasty that directly followed the fall of the Qin Dynasty) these poems already sounded archaic. The meaning behind the poems were also consciously sacrificed for the sake of preserving the special rhythmic and formal limitations of poetry at the time (Xia 4). These changes could render the poems intelligible to later generations.
Consider the first poem in the Book of Poetry “Guan Ju” (关雎). The first four lines of the original poem in Chinese are followed by the English translations by Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲):

关雎
关关雎鸠，
在河之洲。
窈窕淑女，
君子好逑。
Cooing and Wooing
By riverside a pair,
Of turtle doves are cooing.
There is a maiden fair,
Whom a young man is wooing. (Xu 2)

The Chinese lines are among the most familiar lines of ancient Chinese literature to both adult readers and toddlers alike in China. The short lines rhyme in Chinese, which makes them easy to remember, thus becoming the “must-recite” for children when first studying ancient Chinese literature. The meaning of the lines, however, is not as literal or as easily understood as one may assume. The trick lies in the Chinese character guan (关). The meaning of the character guan in contemporary Mandarin Chinese is “to close” or “closed” and no longer applies to the poem, which describes love and wooing. Additionally, the repeated use of the character in the first line makes it more awkward to force a relevant contemporary meaning from the poem. To rigidly introduce the literal meaning of the character into the poem would result in bizarre interpretations. The dilemma can also be reflected by Xu’s translation, which eliminates the character guan (关) as well as the rhyming repetition of the character in the first line and replaces it with “wooing.”

The note attached to these specific lines, which was offered by Mao Heng (毛亨) in the Han Dynasty, helps solve the dilemma. As Mao explains in the note, “关关, 和声也” (guan guan are the harmonious sounds of birds) (22). Thus, the characters imitate the sound of turtle doves (or fish hawks as James Legge translates). In the poem, the characters “guan” (关) function as onomatopoeia rather than as verbs or adjectives, which are the functions they perform in contemporary Chinese.

The question of why a bird’s voice is quoted in a love poem arises. Notes in ancient Chinese literature contains not only objective information and facts to facilitate the understanding of the poems but also subjective interpretations that educate readers on the preferred and selected literary tradition, or on specific ideologies. The Book of Poetry, as the most classic piece coined before the Qin Dynasty, embodies archaic yet inherited literary traditions that are much too important to be neglected, and it incorporates ideological ideals as essential vehicles to educate the masses about political and civil morality. When someone describes the style of the poems in the Book of Poetry, the terms, Fu (赋), Bi (比), and Xing (兴), mean “direct depiction,” “similes,” and “allegories,” as proposed by Mao Heng in his preface to his commentaries about the Book of Poetry, which can never be ignored (Mao 11). These features, especially the latter two, can be fully reflected through the example of Guan Ju (关雎). The bird in the poem is there to allude to the maiden fair, or the bride of King Wen. Legge explains before his translation that this poem is “mainly allusive. Celebrating the virtue of King Wen, his quest for her, and his welcoming of her to his palace” (Legge 59).
The distinction between the ancient and contemporary meanings of the character guan (关) is so significant that common knowledge could never have deciphered the meaning of the ancient text. Without the note, the ideological allusion attached to the character creates difficulty understanding it in the context of the whole poem. The notes guarantee and extend the comprehensibility of the poems. They enable contemporary readers to comprehend the archaic texts as well as appreciate the literary masterpieces. Without notes, the poems, as Xia asserts, would simply appear as “一串串不可理解的上古文字” (a pile of ancient characters that are incomprehensible) (5).

Notes in the highly allegorical Book of Poetry prove essential to explaining the allegories, making the poems sensible and comprehensible. The problem lies with different ways of interpreting the allegories, especially with political inferences or preferences behind the notes. Notes not only communicate the meanings of the ancient allegories to readers of later times, but they also recreate and refine the meanings of them to better fit with the preferred social perspectives or different ideological strands that emerge in new eras. In these cases, notes become more subjective than sensible.

The note to another popular poem in the book, “Jian Jia” (兼葭) provides an example. The poem and its English translations are as follows:

蒹葭苍苍，
白露為霜。
所謂伊人，
在水一方。
Green, green the reed. Frost and dew gleam.
Where’s she I need? Beyond the stream.
Upstream I go. The way’s so long.
And downstream, lo! She’s there among. (Xu 133)
Reed and rush are dark and green;
As the hoar-frost the white dew is seen.
Him, the man I have in mind,
By the water I should find. (Legge 160)

The literal meaning of this little poem refers to courtship, and further elaboration would likely explore this topic. But when we refer to the accompanying notes, this simple poem turns out to be an allusion to an ideological or political issue. The crux of the poem lies in the rule of the people and of the state. See the line notes below:

毛以為，蒹葭之草蒼然雖盛，未堪家用，必待白露凝凍為霜，然後堅實中用，歲事得成，
以興秦國之民雖眾，而未順德教，必待周禮以教之，然後服從上命，國乃得興。今公未能
用周禮，其國未得興也。由未能用周禮，故未得人服也。所謂維是得人之道，乃遠在大水
一邊，大水喻禮樂，言得人之道乃在禮樂之一邊。既以大水喻禮樂，禮樂之傍有得人之道，
因從水內求之。若逆流酒而往從之，則道險阻且長遠，不可得至。言逆禮以治國，則無得
人道，終不可至。若順流逍遙而往從之，則宛然在於水之中央。言順禮治國，則得人之道，
自來迎己，正近在禮樂之內。然則非禮必不得人，得人必能固國，君何以不求用周禮乎！
(Mao 240)

Mao thinks that although the reed is exuberant, it cannot be used unless the dew on the reed becomes frost, which makes the reed solid. This is to allude to the fact that although the state of Qin had a large population, the emperor did not follow the moral of educating the people. The moral code that was inherited from Zhou Dynasty demanded the education of the people, so that they would follow the emperor and the state would be prosperous and strong. [...] Going upstream, one cannot reach a destination, as the journey would be far and
dangerous. This means that by infringing on morality, the emperor would distance himself from the right way, and his people would not obey. Going downstream, one would end up in the center of a river. This means that if the emperor rules the people according to a code of morals, he legitimizes his rule and the people will follow and obey him willingly.  

These notes transformed a folk poem that was sung and circulated by Chinese commoners into a serious allusion. The poem now raises issues on ideological perspectives and concerns of the paramount ruler of an empire during that time. In this way, notes not only expand a poem’s meaning but also contextualize it within its contemporary ideology. Learning from the failure of the Qin Dynasty, the emperors of the Han Dynasty adopted Confucianism to consolidate their legitimacy (Xia 65). Confucianism, similar to the morals of the Zhou Dynasty, emphasized class distinctions. Rigid adherence to the social class system was legitimized and advocated. In this way, the supremacy of the emperor was validated. The notes of the aforementioned poem frequently referring to morality reinforces this conclusion. Including these notes that associate the folk poem with such political ideals, not only catered to the ideological needs of the ruling class but also helped to broadcast these morals and their legitimacy among the people.

Similar to previously mentioned footnotes in theory studies, where polemical and passionate discussions can be witnessed, notes in ancient Chinese literature also embrace fierce and passionate exchanges of competing ideas, especially political. Notes in this sense function as secondary literary criticism trying to convince readers with chosen ideologies rather than to clarify information about the allegories. Notes to the same original texts in ancient Chinese literature could be offered by several commentators, as opposed to individual authors, and they may offer opposing opinions. Differing layers of interpretations and commentaries following the same lines of texts in ancient Chinese literature are common. These notes with intentional interpretations provoke controversy and criticism among each other, but they also play an indispensable role in preserving the archaic texts, helping them survive changing and sometimes challenging ideologies. They provide readers an objective perspective to witness the complete historical and scholarly development in interpreting the poems.

The quoted note to the poem “Jian Jia” (蒹葭) shows that political interpretation is common and typical to decode the allegorical poems in the Book of Poetry. In fact, the political propaganda for morals of the Zhou Dynasty is not the only proposed ideological perspective taken to interpret this poem. Apart from the Maoshi Zhengyi (毛诗正义) noted by Zheng Xuan (郑玄) (Han Dynasty) and Kong Yingda (孔颖达) (Tang Dynasty), from where the above note is quoted, other versions of notes to the Book of Poetry with different commentators include Qi Shi (齐诗) by Yuan Gu (辕固), Lu Shi (鲁诗) by Shen Gong (申公), and Han Shi (韩诗) by Han Ying (韩婴). Although all the commentators hailed from the Han Dynasty, their poetry noting perspectives diverged. Compared to Lu Shi, in which notes are more academic and concise, Qi Shi and Han Shi include miscellaneous theories to demonstrate their political preferences and purposes. Instead of adhering to the morals of the Zhou Dynasty, which is more relevant and accurate when considering the context when the poems were created and collected, notes to the allegorical poems in Qi Shi introduce a great deal of “谶讳迷信” (Xia 69; superstition and mystery) into the interpretation to “完全取得统治权力,迎合上意” (Xia 67; enhance and promote the bestowed and thus supreme power of the contemporary emperor). The reason behind these intentionally written notes lies in the political change and demand of the time. To consolidate their sovereignty, the Han Dynasty, after Emperor Wu of Han, established a system of thought grounded in the claim
that the emperor’s power was bestowed by the Mandate of Heaven. This system, with mysterious and sacred statements, fooled the people into believing that the imperial dynasty neither should nor could be overthrown. Studying literary classics such as the Book of Poetry enhanced the superstitious system. The Book of Poetry also contains many poems dealing with earthly issues such as love, nature, and labor. Rather than sacred prophecies of the divine, commoners sung the poems as folk songs. To bridge the gap between the book and the ideological perspectives of that time, Han Dynasty-era scholars created notes that excessively emphasized the “神学迷信” (Xia 68; divine and mysterious) aspects of the poems. Unfortunately, as Qi Shi together with Lu Shi and Han Shi have not been preserved throughout history, we cannot compare the different versions of notes to the poem “ Jian Jia” (兼葭). But through secondary comments on these different versions of notes about the Book of Poetry, we can denote how the style of notes differ from one another. In “Treaties on Literature” in the Book of Han (汉书 艺文志), Ban Gu (班固) comments:

漢興, 魯申公為《詩》訓故, 而齊韓固, 燕韓生皆為之傳, 或取《秋》, 采雜說, 咸非其本意, 興不得已, 魯最為近之。(Ban 1708)

After the Han Dynasty was established, Shen Gong from the State of Lu annotated it; Yuan Gu from State of Qi and Han Sheng from State of Yan both annotated it. Some take reference from Chun Qiu, and miscellaneous ideas, all are not the original meaning of the Book of Poetry. If one must quote the Book of Poetry, Lu Shi is the closest to the original meaning.2

Notes displaying over-interpretation and deliberate misunderstanding of the poems have provoked fierce reactions, with criticism and differing opinions voiced against them over time. Some scholars in the Han Dynasty argued that to insert notes emphasizing the mysterious aspects of the poems was to transgress the bounds of decency. The logic behind this criticism was that “子不语怪力乱神” (Confucius said that a decent man should not endlessly discuss unsolvable mysteries) (Xia 68). Conversely, scholars of China’s later eras have opposed political interference with literary notes. Some regard the poems as pieces of great literature and offer aesthetic evaluations in their notes instead; some choose to focus on the historical value of the poems and provide notes with contextual analyses of the poems (Xia 6).

Though notes sometimes produce imperfect meanings and provoke criticism and controversy, the study of the Book of Poetry has thrived resulting from the internal conflicts of these commentators. Like theoretical questions that grow more profound and interesting when opposing ideas collide and spark debate, the varied and competing notes bring new life and insight into the Book of Poetry. Studying its intricate notes is an established independent and specialized field of study. The study entails historically situating, specifically introducing, and critically comparing the different notes. Additionally, because of its notes’ extensive archive, the Book of Poetry has become an inexhaustible piece of classic literature drawing constant attention throughout the history of Chinese literary studies.

Providing notes with both sense and sensibility, as a shared practice in both English and Chinese writing, has sustained lively and consistent studies of the two specific literary works in their respective writing traditions. But such notes surely hold greater significance than for specific works or writing traditions. As Stevens and Williams asserted in their essay in 2006, these notes, continuously provoked by a scholar who “combines polemic with inquiry, passion with professionalism” and who represents and ensures “the future of reading” and “the future of theory,” would always be the mirror reflecting the emerging academic progress truly worthy
of consistent discussion and further exploration (Stevens and Williams 225). They do, in today’s new academic movements in literary studies, draw more attention and become the protagonist in research rather than the supplement as they have been long and commonly regarded. For example, in the field of world literature, which has become one of the most heatedly-discussed topics in literary studies today, bulky notes including both scholarly references and secondary criticism become the most important technique that enables Franco Moretti to implement the “distant-reading” in the very essay that advocates it. In China, a newly-published book focusing on James Legge’s notes to his translation of the poem “Guanju” attributes the smooth communication of this Chinese classic piece among the western audience to the notes which not only successfully combine faithful explanation and personal criticism but also ingeniously incorporate the Chinese annotating tradition with the western reading custom. These notes, as the author further suggests, become the model of efficient and impartial discourse desired in cross-cultural communication. Written with both sense and sensibility, the notes constitute more than just secondary and supplementary devices in literary writings; they reveal a new discourse that awaits the uncovering of further profound findings.

**Notes**

1. See Anne H. Stevens and Jay Williams. “The Footnote, in Theory.” *Critical Inquiry* 32.2 (2006).
2. This is a screenshot of the page. Characters in smaller font are notes given to the poem which is in larger font.
3. See Franco Moretti. “Conjectures on World Literature.” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68.
4. Translated by the author.
5. Translated by the author.
6. See Zhuyu Jiang. “Footnotes: Why and How They Become Essential to World Literature?” *Neohelicon* 42.2, (2015): 687–694.
7. See Meixin Hu, Xiru Jingzhuzhong de jingyi chonggou – liyage guanju zhushu huayu yanjiu 《西儒经注中的经义重构 – – 理雅各（关雎）注疏话语研究》 The Reconstruction of Meanings in Classics in Notes Given by Scholars from Europe and America – Discourse Analysis of James Legge’s Notes to his translation of “Guanju,”” (Hangzhou 杭州: Zhejiang Daxue chuban she浙江大學出版社 Zhejiang University Press, 2018).

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