# The Homeric Epics and the Chinese *Book of Songs*:

## *Foundational Texts Compared*

Edited by

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# THE FORMATION OF THE *CLASSIC OF POETRY*

*Martin KERN*

## 1. The Formation of the Early Anthology

The *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*) is the fountainhead of the Chinese poetic tradition. The individual parts of the book likely date from different times over the eight-hundred-year span of the Western Zhou (ca. 1046-771 BCE), Springs and Autumns (770-453 BCE), and Warring States (453-221 BCE) periods. According to Sima Qian's (ca. 145-ca. 85 BCE) *Records of the Archivist* (*Shiji*), the *Poetry* was compiled by Kongzi ("Master Kong," i.e., Confucius; 551-479 BCE) in the early fifth century BCE. The authors of the poems themselves are not known. Since antiquity also called *The Three Hundred Poems*, the text has been transmitted in the form of the *Mao Poetry* (*Maoshi*), one of the four Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) exegetical traditions of the anthology that were canonized and taught at the Han imperial academy. The *Mao Poetry* is divided into four sections, comprising 160 "Airs of the States" (*Guofeng*), 74 "Minor Court Hymns" (*Xiaoya*), 31 "Major Court Hymns" (*Daya*), and 40 "Eulogies" (*Song*). Recently excavated manuscripts suggest that this division existed already by the fourth century BCE. The *Records of the Archivist* includes the following passage in its Kongzi biography:

> In antiquity, there were more than three thousand poems. When it came to Kongzi, he removed their duplicates and chose [only] what could be matched to the principles of ritual. Above [in time] he selected [poetry from the founding ancestors of the Shang and Zhou dynasties] Xie and Lord Millet, and in the middle he transmitted [poetry from] the flourishing [time of the] Yin and Zhou. Coming to the shortcomings of [the Zhou] Kings You and Li, those had begun with [the affairs of] the sleeping mat … Kongzi put all the three hundred and five poems to the [zither] strings and singing, seeking to harmonize the tunes of [the an-

> cient dances] "Shao" and "Wu," and the "Court Hymns" and "Sacrificial Eulogies." From here on, ritual and music were obtained and could be transmitted in order to accomplish the Royal Way and to complete the Six Arts.[1]

The *Records* speaks of the *Poetry* as a unified and universally shared text organized by Kongzi; it does not yet speak of that text's subsequent lineages of transmission or interpretation. The "Monograph on Arts and Writings" in Ban Gu's (32-92) late first-century CE *History of the Han* (*Hanshu*) takes the history of the *Poetry* into the early empire:

> The *Classic of Documents* states: "Poetry expresses intent, song makes words last long." Thus, when the heart-mind is stirred by grief or joy, the melodies of singing and chanting issue forth. To recite words is called poetry, to chant melodies is called song. Thus, in antiquity there were officials to collect poetry, allowing the ruler to comprehend local customs, understand [his own] accomplishments and failures, and examine and rectify himself. When Kongzi committed himself to gather the poetry of the Zhou [dynasty], upwards [in time] he selected from Yin [i.e., the Shang dynasty], downwards he collected from [his home state of] Lu, [assembling] altogether three hundred and five pieces. The reason why [the anthology remained] complete after meeting with [the disaster of the] Qin [bibliocaust] was that it had been recited [from memory] and had not merely been [written] on bamboo and silk. When the Han [dynasty] arose, Lord Shen of Lu made individual character glosses on the poems, and Yuangu of Qi and Mr. Hán of Yan both made commentaries. Some [others] drew on the *Springs and Autumns Annals* and collected miscellaneous explanations but entirely missed the basic principles [of the poems]. Compared to these failures, the Lu [commentarial tradition] comes closest. The three [Han dynasty] intellectual lineages [of *Poetry* exegesis, i.e., Lu, Qi, and Hán] were all arrayed [for study] in the imperial academy. In addition there was the learning of Lord Mao who claimed for himself the commentarial tradition of [Kongzi's disciple] Zixia. Prince Xian of Hejian was fond of [the Mao commentary], but it did not become established [at the Han imperial academy].[2]

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[1] *Shiji* 47: 1934.

[2] *Hanshu* 30: 1708. While the Lu, Qi, and Hán versions of the *Poetry* had been taught at the imperial academy since the second century BCE, the *Mao Poetry* was accorded such status only under the nominal reign of the infant Emperor Ping (r. 1 BCE-6 CE). By the end of the second century CE, the *Mao*

The two passages translated here are the earliest systematic accounts of the *Poetry*. Both date from the early empire, that is, centuries after Kongzi's lifetime (and following the Qin imperial unification of 221 BCE). Both are centered on the role of Kongzi not as the author but as the compiler of the anthology; and neither account indicates how the poems had come into being in the first place, or who had authored any of them.

This picture is consistent with how the *Poetry* is mentioned or quoted across pre-imperial and early imperial sources, including a range of recently unearthed manuscripts on bamboo and silk dating from ca. 300 through 165 BCE.[3] In both the manuscripts and the transmitted literature of early China, no text from antiquity is more frequently invoked than the *Poetry*, and no text is more intimately related to Kongzi (whose mention, in turn, far outnumbers that of any other philosopher in early Chinese texts). The *Poetry* stands at the core of the early Chinese textual tradition and cultural imagination. As the Master pronounces in the *Analects* (*Lunyu*), the three hundred poems can be "covered in one phrase: no wayward thoughts!" (*Analects* 2.2); with them, "one can inspire, observe, unite, and express resentment" as well as learn "in great numbers the names of fish, birds, beasts, plants, and trees" (17.9), while those who fail to study them "have nothing to express themselves with" (16.13) and are like a man who "stands with his face straight to the wall" (17.10). Moreover, if one can recite the three hundred poems but is unable to apply them to the practice of governing or to diplomatic speech when abroad, "what use is there for them?" (13.5). In two bamboo manuscripts from Guodian, the *Poetry*

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*Poetry* was rapidly rising to dominance while the "three lineages" (Lu, Qi, Hán) began to fade away from the canon of classical learning, even though some of their readings remained relevant, visible in quotations and allusions, in the later literary tradition; see Wang Zuomin 2005; Tanaka 2003; Kern 2007.

[3] Primarily the "Five Modes of Conduct" ("Wu xing") and "Black Robes" ("Zi yi") bamboo texts from Guodian tomb No. 1 (Jingmen, Hubei province; ca. 300 BCE), the "Five Modes of Conduct" silk manuscript from Mawangdui tomb No. 3 (Changsha, Hunan; before 168 BCE), the fragmentary *Poetry* anthology on bamboo from Shuanggudui tomb No. 1 (Fuyang, Anhui; before 165 BCE), and the "Black Robes" and "Kongzi's Discussion of the *Poetry*" ("Kongzi shilun") bamboo manuscripts purchased by the Shanghai Museum on the Hong Kong antiquities market. See Kern 2005.

is listed as part of the classical curriculum of the "Six Arts" (*liu yi*)—also mentioned by Sima Qian—and hence grouped together with the *Documents* (*Shu*), the *Rituals* (*Li*), the *Music* (*Yue*), the *Changes* (*Yi*), and the *Springs and Autumns Annals* (*Chunqiu*).[4] In the *Mozi* (*Master Mo*), we even have an early (fourth century BCE?) voice ridiculing the classicist followers of Kongzi for being consumed with singing, dancing, and putting to music the three hundred songs.[5]

By the late fourth century BCE, and possibly for quite some time before that, the *Poetry* was not an isolated body of literature but part of the larger set of moral, pedagogical, ritual, and socio-political precepts and practices of the "Six Arts" that had gained currency across the Chinese cultural realm. While the *Poetry* is associated with the Zhou heartland in the north, with the "Airs of the States" attributed to fifteen states or regions stretching in an East-West corridor along the Yellow River from modern Shandong to Shaanxi, the ancient manuscripts that quote them all come from southern central China. The quotation patterns in these manuscripts reveal that while the writing of the poems was not yet standardized even by the mid-second century BCE, the anthology had been largely stable in its content and possibly even wording by around 300 BCE.[6] Despite what must have been considerable differences in dialect across the vast early Chinese *oikouménē*, the manuscript quotations from the *Poetry* are phonologically (if not, indeed, phonetically) consistent with their counterparts in the received anthology, suggesting a spoken élite koiné in which the poems were preserved and which, in turn, was embodied and perpetuated in canonical verse. The existence of this idiom is attested in *Analects* 7.18 where Kongzi is said to have used "elegant standard speech" (*yayan*) for the *Poetry*, the *Documents*, and matters of ritual.

To Han thinkers, writing from the perspective of the unified empire, the ultimate audience of the *Poetry* had been the Zhou king himself: as poetry was believed to emerge as a quasi-cosmological event, naturally and inevitably expressing the speaker's emotional response to personal experience, it was taken to reflect the moral and political order of its time. Furthermore, it represented the voice of the common people—an unmanipulated voice of truth that, collected by court officials, rose

[4] Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998, 179 ("Xing zi ming chu"), 188 ("Liu de"); further 194-5 ("Yucong").

[5] *Mozi xiangu* 2001, 48.456.

[6] Kern 2003, 33-7; and Kern 2005.

upward to the ruler to remind him of his duties and failures. With the Qin-Han empire, the notion of poetry as socio-political symptom and omen generated an exegetical tradition that turned decidedly historical, satisfying the need for a moral and political teleology that gave order and explanation to a chaotic past and, ultimately, to the rise of the empire itself. Grasping the meaning of a poem would yield an understanding of specific historical events, turning poetry into "history told in verse."[7]

Yet, on the other hand, it was also acknowledged that poetry did not speak in any direct, literal way and hence was not to be taken at its surface meaning. It was so wide open to mutually exclusive interpretations that it caused rivaling exegetical lineages to emerge. In the early empire, these traditions of teaching and interpreting the *Poetry* often advanced fundamental differences in understanding an individual poem. Nevertheless, they all agreed on the principal function of poetry as a source of historical knowledge and moral edification; and they further concurred in their general disinterest in individual authorship, poetic beauty, linguistic differences, and the possible circulation of poetry beyond the realms of the political élite.

The nature of the *Poetry* as a diverse anthology of different kinds of poetry (likely dating from different times) suggests that it was a selection from a larger body of material—regardless of their actual or imagined number, or of the persona of their collector and compiler. The only figure who in Warring States and early imperial times is consistently associated with the *Poetry*, and who is granted unquestionable authority over the text, is indeed Kongzi. This association of the ideal text with the ideal sage elevated the *Poetry* to a book of wisdom that gave account of history as much as it did of the human condition, that spoke of the ambitions of kings, of the plight of farmers and soldiers, and of the anxieties of lovers; it was, to borrow Stephen Owen's characterization, "the classic of the human heart and the human mind"[8] and as such was attributed to the exemplary sage. To the early tradition, it was only in the mirror of Kongzi's unique perspicacity and unimpeachable moral perfection that the *Poetry* became fully visible. Moreover, it was only with its idealized compiler that the *Poetry* as a body of text came into being, not as his words or the words of his time, but

[7] Riegel 1997, 171.
[8] Owen 1996, xv.

as a repository of expressions inherited from the past. After Kongzi, and especially with the Han imperial scholars, it was an artifact of *the past remembered*—a canonical curriculum that enshrined all at once the poems, the course of history they marked and revealed, and their sagely compiler and transmitter.

Yet, the heavy burden placed on the cultural and historical meaning of the *Poetry* reveals an acute problem: while, in general, the *Poetry* is believed to contain earlier and later layers of text, with the earliest poems possibly dating from the eleventh and tenth centuries BCE, the textual record up to the Han anthology is extremely fragmentary. In the *Mao Poetry*, the longest poem, "The Closed Temple" (Mao 300 "Bi gong"), contains 492 characters, and several others are nearly as extensive. However, the longest quotation of any poem in any early text outside the anthology itself contains merely forty-eight characters: one of eight stanzas of "Great indeed!" (Mao 241 "Huang yi") as quoted in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan*), the grand pre-imperial work of historiography probably dating from the fourth century BCE.[9] The only quotation of an entire poem is of "Grand Heaven Had Its Accomplished Mandate" (Mao 271 "Haotian you cheng ming"), a text of merely 30 characters quoted in *The Conversations of the States* (*Guoyu*), another work of early historiography possibly contemporaneous with the *Zuo Tradition*.[10] Otherwise, the standard quotation pattern comprises a single line, a couplet, or a quatrain. While early quotations from the *Poetry* number in the hundreds, they do not let us reconstruct longer poems; often, they show a preference for particular phrases that are quoted repeatedly across various sources while other verses and entire stanzas are not quoted even once. Altogether, the presence of the individual poems in the overall textual record of early China is very uneven. This disquieting situation may explain to some extent the urgency felt by Han commentators to supply each piece in the *Poetry* with a historical context: not *extracted from* the poems—as claimed by way of the notion that "poetry expresses intent"—but rather *injected into* them.

We therefore do not know the original forms of the poems: did they have as many stanzas as we see in the Han anthology, or are the longest poems composite texts from various sources? Were they nearly as

[9] Yang Bojun 1992, 1495 (Zhao 28); Legge 1985, 727.
[10] *Guoyu* 3.4 ("Zhou yu, xia"); Xu Yuanhao 2002, 103.

regular in their formal features? Did some of the very short poems ever exist as individual texts before being anthologized as such? Was the internal order of stanzas and lines stable? Recognizing the numerous possibilities of retrospective editorial intervention—archaizing recomposition, formal standardization, creative compilation of disparate textual material, acts of textual combination, division, and selection—before the poems were finally arrested within the framework of their canonical anthology, it becomes exceedingly difficult to define which parts are "early" and which others "late." Any particular poem that might appear "early" may well be a much later artifact of commemoration and imagination. Considerable evidence suggests that some of the "early" poems are composite artifacts formed from different types and chronological strata of text.[11]

## 2. Sacrificial Eulogies

In general terms, Chinese poetry began to take shape in the early religious and political rituals of the Western Zhou (ca. 1046-771 BCE) royal court, including the ancestral sacrifice, banquets, and proclamations. The presumably earliest examples of poetry—especially the "Eulogies of Zhou" ("Zhou song")—are believed to come from the early decades of the Western Zhou dynasty.

The thirty-one anonymous "Eulogies of Zhou" differ from the "Major" and "Minor Court Hymns" in both their brevity and overall lack of the two principal features of formal regularity in early Chinese poetry: rhyme and meter. As such, they appear as particularly archaic forms of Zhou verse employed within sacrificial ceremonies to commemorate and feast the dynastic ancestors. While semanticizing and interpreting the sacrificial act through words of commemoration and religious expectation, poetry, always as song, was integrated into the performance of dance and music. Judging from its linguistic properties as well as from the available historical accounts, this poetry existed in the context

[11] For a decidedly more optimistic approach to the origins of Zhou poetry and music, based on considerable speculative risks I do not feel confident to take on myself, see Chen 2007. An admirably detailed study of the *Poetry* in pre-imperial times, albeit traditional in its thoroughly positivistic bent, is Ma Yinqin 2006. For one of many earlier interpretations of the origins of the *Poetry* as ritualistic, see Chen 1974.

of and for the purpose of synesthetic religious ceremonies.[12] Fundamentally non-lyrical, non-self-expressive, and non-authored, it embodies the political and religious community of the Zhou royal court, giving voice to the reciprocal relationship between the living king and the powerful spirits of his ancestors.

Not all "Eulogies of Zhou" have left traces in the early literary tradition,[13] but the poems associated with King Wu's conquest of the Shang dynasty are particularly visible. In a narrative dated to the year 595 BCE, the *Zuo Tradition* contains the following entry:

> When King Wu conquered Shang, he made a eulogy saying: "[He?] gathered and stored the shields and dagger-axes, gathered and encased the bows and arrows. We strive for admirable virtue, to be dispensed across this [land of] Xia. Truly the king will preserve it!" He further made "Martiality," the final stanza of which says: "[You?] made firm your merits!" Its third [stanza?] says: "[He?] spread out this abundance; we proceed and seek for this to be established." Its sixth [stanza?] says: "[He?] pacified the myriad states, made bounteous harvest-years come in succession." As for martial prowess, [it lies in the sequence of] oppressing violence, storing away weapons, protecting the great [mandate?], establishing merit, pacifying the people, harmonizing the masses, and [creating] bounteous riches. Therefore [King Wu] ensured that sons and grandsons will not forget these stanzas (or: this display of brilliance).[14]

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[12] Wang 1988, 1-51, offers a useful survey of modern scholarship. The Chinese ancestral sacrifice is well captured in Stanley J. Tambiah's definition of ritual: "Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are charaterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual action in its constitutive features is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of performative wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the third sense of indexical values—I derive this concept from Peirce—being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance." See Tambiah 1979, 119.

[13] See Ho and Chan 2004. For example, only 11 out of the 31 "Eulogies of Zhou" are quoted in the *Zuo Tradition*.

[14] Xuan 12; Yang Bojun 1992, 744-6; Legge 1985, 320.

While the text claims that King Wu "made" (*zuo*) a "eulogy" (*song*) apparently of several "stanzas" (*zhang*, also the word for "brilliant display"), the individual quotations of different "stanzas" come from four separate "Eulogies of Zhou" (*Mao* 273, 285, 295, 294), not from a single poem. Moreover, in the *Conversations of the States*,[15] the first and most extensive of these quotations is said to come from a "eulogy" by the Duke of Zhou (r. as regent 1042-1036 BCE). Thus, in our two earliest sources for this text, the poems are attributed to either King Wu representing his own accomplishments or to his younger brother, the Duke of Zhou, who commemorated King Wu. Most intriguing, however, is a passage in the Han dynasty compilation *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*) where Kongzi instructs an interlocutor that "music is the representation of accomplishments" and goes on to describe the six pantomimic dance movements of "Martiality" ("Wu") that represented King Wu's conquest of the Shang.[16]

At least in the cultural memory after 771 BCE, and possibly already in the religious and political rituals of the Western Zhou, entire collections of dances, music performances, and poetic texts were employed to communicate the accomplishments of the dynastic founders toward both the spiritual and the political realm. This archaic poetry originated with the ritual specialists of the Zhou royal court. Its preservation and transmission depended on the Zhou political and religious institutions where—according to our earliest sources—it was not merely archived but continuously performed; and while the perspective of the speaker is usually uncertain, the use of first- and second-person personal pronouns suggests dramatic, polyvocal enactments.

By the mid-first millennium BCE, after the Zhou's suzerain power had declined dramatically, its cultural heritage of ritual, music, poetry, and royal speeches was known to be preserved elsewhere: the small eastern state of Lu (in modern Shandong province), birthplace of Kongzi. If, initially, Western Zhou ritual had contained and perpetuated the poetic utterances of hymns and eulogies in the performances

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[15] *Guoyu* ("Zhou yu, shang") 1.1; Xu Yuanhao 2002, 2.

[16] In the chapter "Records of Music" ("Yueji"). *Liji jijie* 1989, 1023-4; Legge, 1967, 2: 122-3. Modern scholars have invested great efforts in reconstructing the original sequence of "Martiality" from different poems of the "Eulogies of Zhou"; see Wang Guowei 1975, 2.15b-17b; Sun Zuoyun 1966, 239-72; Wang 1988, 8-25; Shaughnessy 1997, 165-95; and, for an excellent recent study, Du Xiaoqin 2013, 1-28.

of the ancestral sacrifice and other court rituals, over time this relationship between text and ritual became reversed: by the time of Kongzi, when the old rituals had long faded, it was the archaic poetry that preserved the memory of ritual, as is amply expressed in *Poetry* invocations in the *Zuo Tradition*, the primary text to portray the *Poetry* as the core of Chinese cultural memory and coherence.[17]

Almost all "Eulogies of Zhou" are very short: of the thirty-one poems, eight have between 18 and 30 characters; nine between 31 and 40; four between 41 and 50; six between 51 and 60; and only the remaining four hymns have 62, 64, 92, and 124 characters. It is not certain that, originally, these poems existed as discrete, self-contained textual units: first, in the *Zuo Tradition* account quoted above, the eulogies related to King Wu's conquest form a single unit of several sections or stanzas (*zhang*) while in the *Mao Poetry*, they are divided into individual poems with separate titles.[18] Second, a hymn of just 18 words, accompanied by music and dance, was probably not considered (or performed as) a text of its own. Third, some "Eulogies of Zhou" are closely interrelated: they share entire lines or even couplets with one another but not with other poems, marking them as a single larger unit of text.[19] Thus, of the thirty components of characters of "Year of Abundance" (Mao 279 "Feng nian"), sixteen are verbatim identical to verses in "Clear Away the Grass" (Mao 290 "Zai shan"). At the same time, "Clear Away the Grass" also shares three more lines with "Good Ploughs" (Mao 291 "Liang si"), and additional individual lines with four other neighboring texts.[20] One may, thus, think of the texts of the "Eulogies of Zhou" not as individually authored texts but as variations of material taken from a shared poetic repertoire. This repertoire was largely confined to the "Eulogies" themselves (from which later court

[17] For the *Zuo Tradition*, see Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002; Li 2007. For a table and extensive discussion of poetry performances and possible instances of composition in the *Zuo Tradition*, see Zeng Qinliang 1993.

[18] Note that the *Zuo Tradition*, unlike in many other cases of quoting from the *Poetry*, does not mention any of these titles other than "Martiality" ("Wu").

[19] Thus, the brief hymns numbered 286, 287, 288, and 289 in the *Mao Poetry* share lines in several ways, and only with one another; in addition, they share a number of two-character formulas. See Dobson 1968, Appendix II, 247-9.

[20] Mao 277, 292, 293, 294.

hymns then borrowed the occasional line), operating within the formal and semantic constraints of ritual utterances. In the performance of the ancestral sacrifice, they represented configurations of what Jan Assmann calls "identity-securing knowledge" that is "usually performed in the form of a multi-media staging which embeds the linguistic text undetachably in voice, body, miming, gesture, dance, rhythm, and ritual act … By the regularity of their recurrence, feasts and rites grant the imparting and transmission of identity-securing knowledge and hence the reproduction of cultural identity."[21] Not surprisingly, the "Eulogies" are only one arena where this repertoire of memory of the Zhou foundational narrative becomes realized and staged in various textual forms; another place is the sequence of several "harangues" (*shi*) in the *Classic of Documents* where King Wu's conquest is recalled in various speeches attributed to him, with the king staged as speaker.[22]

The writing of the *Poetry* was not yet standardized even in Han times, and the different hermeneutic traditions had to make their own choices in constituting the written text by choosing particular characters over other (usually homophonous) ones—and even then, the archaic idiom left multiple possibilities of interpretation. While this situation leads to massive difficulties in the understanding of the hermeneutically open "Airs of the States" (see below), it is less severe in the case of the "Eulogies" and "Court Hymns", despite some uncertainty over certain individual words. Altogether, these ritual poems are semantically overdetermined in their intensity of repetitive, euphonic language, enacting and doubling linguistically the sacrificial rituals during which their performance took place.[23] Their overall lack of ambiguity is further reflected in how the "Eulogies" were used in post-Western Zhou recitation practice as reflected in the *Zuo Tradition*: unlike the "Airs of the States" and "Minor Court Hymns," which were routinely *recited* as coded communication in order to elicit a particular hermeneutic response from the addressee, the "Eulogies", in all cases but one,[24] are *quoted* as proof and explanation in support of an argu-

[21] Assmann 1992, 56-7 (my translation); now somewhat rephrased in Assmann 2011, 72.

[22] Nomura 1965; Kern 2017.

[23] On this, see Kern 2009, 164-82.

[24] The single exception is found in Zhao 16; Yang Bojun 1992; Legge 1985, 664.

ment.[25] They were considered self-evident, with neither space nor need for interpretation.

## 3. Dynastic Hymns

Like the "Eulogies of Zhou," the "Major" and "Minor Court Hymns" emerged from the rituals of the Zhou royal court. The "Major Court Hymns" tell the story of the Western Zhou—from its glorious founding in the eleventh to its lamentable decline in the eighth century. The "Hymns" were probably performed in mostly secular, political contexts, such as at court banquets and on diplomatic occasions.[26] If the "Eulogies of Zhou" are marked by brevity, lack of rhyme, and comparatively loose meter, the grand dynastic narratives, especially of the "Major Court Hymns", can be described as the exact opposite. Arranged in long, highly regular stanzaic structures,[27] they reflect a developed poetic diction that—if more or less original—cannot be dated before the ninth or eighth century BCE, at the earliest. It remains unknown, however, how much of the regularity in wording, rhyme, meter, stanzaic division, etc. is a feature of original composition as opposed to the work of later editors. To complicate things further, since at least the eighth century, highly archaizing gestures were employed in the royal and regional production of bronze vessels and bells,[28] and similar impulses may have governed the production of poetry, opening a range of possibilities for the original composition of the "Major Court Hymns." To locate these texts in the eleventh or tenth century, or instead in the eighth or seventh century, or even much later, implies different under-

[25] For the presentation of poetry in the *Zuo Tradition*, see Schaberg 1999; Schaberg 2001, 57-95; Zhou 2003; Lewis 1999, 155-76. For the reception of the *Poetry* in the Warring States period, including in the *Zuo Tradition*, see Goldin 2005, 19-35.

[26] The four "Eulogies of Lu" (Mao 297-300) and five "Eulogies of Shang" (Mao 301-305) are likewise banquet hymns, not sacrifical hymns, and believed to come from the Springs and Autumns period states of Lu and Song.

[27] The longest hymns, Mao 256 and 257, contain 450 and 469 characters, respectively. Most hymns contain between 100 and 300 characters.

[28] A poignant case is that of a set of eight inscribed large bells commissioned by Duke Wu of Qin (r. 697-678 BCE), which are best described as archaizing reconfigurations of Western Zhou models; see Kern 2000, 104-5.

standings of their nature and purpose. In the first case, they would be regarded as witnesses of their time and most valuable primary sources for the practice and ideology of Western Zhou ritual; in the second, they were monuments of commemoration and idealization, if not artifacts of invented traditions.

The "Major Court Hymns" display a particular focus on King Wen, with two hymns, "King Wen" (Mao 235 "Wen wang") and "King Wen Has Fame" (Mao 244 "Wen wang you sheng"), entirely devoted to his praise. In addition, another five hymns have been read as a set recalling the story of King Wen.[29] Here again, we may be witnessing less a set of discrete poems than a large repertoire of verse from which to recall the origin of the Zhou.

"King Wen," the first of the "Major Court Hymns," unfolds as follows, including shared lines with five other poems, among them "Clear Temple," the first of the "Eulogies of Zhou":

> King Wen is on high, / oh, shining in Heaven. / Though Zhou is an old state, / its mandate, it is new. / With Zhou, he was greatly illustrious, / God's mandate was greatly timely. / King Wen ascends and descends / to God's left side and right.
>
> Vigorous, vigorous was King Wen, / his good fame never ceases. / Arrayed are the bestowals on Zhou, / extending to King Wen's line of descendants. / King Wen's line of descendants / grows as root and branches for a hundred generations. / All the officers of Zhou / shall be greatly illustrious in each generation.
>
> Across generations greatly illustrious / reverently, reverently are they in their plans. / Admirable are the many officers, / they are born in this land of the king. / The king's land is able to give birth to them, / and they are the supporters of Zhou. / Dignified, dignified are the many officers, / King Wen, by them, is at ease.
>
> Solemn, solemn was King Wen, / continuously bright and reverent. / Great indeed is Heaven's mandate, / from Shang's line of descendants. / Shang's line of descendants / were in number a hundred thousand. / [But] God on high gave the mandate, / making them subjects of Zhou.
>
> They were made subjects of Zhou / [but] Heaven's mandate is not constant. / The officers of Yin are eagerly serving, / now conducting libations in the capital [of Zhou]. / When rising to conduct the libations, /

[29] Mao 245, 250, 237, 241, and 236, in this sequence; see Wang 1988, 73-114.

> they don the customary robes and axe-patterned caps. / Chosen subjects of the king, / never forget your ancestors!
>
> Never forget your ancestors, / display and cultivate their virtue! / Forever strive to conjoin with the mandate, / bringing manifold blessings upon yourself. / When Yin had not yet lost the multitudes, / they were able to conjoin with God on high. / Take [the fate of] Yin as your mirror, / the lofty appointment is not easy [to keep]!
>
> The mandate is not easy [to keep], / may it not cease with you! / Spread and make bright your good fame, / take your measure from and rely on Heaven! / [Yet] the doings of Heaven above / are without sound, without smell— / model yourself on King Wen, / and the myriad states will submit in trust.

According to the sequence of the poems in the *Mao Poetry* and the comments in their prefaces, the first eighteen hymns praise Kings Wen, Wu, and Cheng (r. 1042/35-1006 BCE); the next five reprehend King Li (r. 857/53-842/28 BCE); the next six praise King Xuan (r. 827/25-782 BCE); and the final two reprehend King You (r. 781-771 BCE). The hymns are thus believed to reflect significant moments in the development of the Western Zhou dynasty, beginning with an initial "golden age" and ending with the dynastic collapse under King You, the prototypical "bad last ruler" (and mirror image of the last ruler of Shang).

Traditionally, the hymns, mostly attributed to anonymous court officials, have been regarded as witnesses to, and compositions of, these inflection points; yet they may just as well be products of retrospective imagination. None of the more than ten thousand Western Zhou inscribed bronze vessels, bells, weapons, and other artifacts shares a single couplet with any of the hymns. In the *Zuo Tradition*, one line of four characters from "King Wen" is first quoted in an entry nominally dated to 706 BCE,[30] and another line from the same song appears in an entry dated to 688 BCE.[31] The next recitations of, or short quotations from, "Major Court Hymns" appear only from 655 BCE onward, and even then only very sparingly until about the mid-sixth century BCE, when they begin to occur in somewhat higher frequency.[32] Altogether,

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[30] Huan 6; Yang Bojun 1992, 113; Legge 1985, 46.

[31] Zhuang 6; Yang Bojun 1992, 169; Legge 1985, 79.

[32] See Zeng 1993. We must distinguish quotations and records of recitations within the *Zuo Tradition* narrative proper from the narrative comments

only twenty of these thirty-one poems are either mentioned by title or quoted. None is quoted in full, and the only quotation of a full stanza of forty-eight characters appears in the entry for the year 514 BCE.[33] Moreover, quotations or recitations mentioned under particular years in the *Zuo Tradition* did not necessarily take place during these times but may have been inserted when the text was compiled some time in the late fourth century BCE; the same may be true of the eleven "Major Court Hymns" quoted in the *Conversations of the States.*[34] Even if all these references were made on the historical occasions attributed to them, the traces of "Major Court Hymns" in texts from before or during Kongzi's lifetime would still be scant. Aside from a single stanza-length quotation, the textual record contains no more than a few dozen words, beginning in 706 BCE and, hence, post-dating the reigns of the early Zhou kings by more than three centuries.

Two "Major Court Hymns" conclude with four lines that are traditionally understood as self-referential statements on their authorship—that is, statements that would allow us to date the poems:

> Jifu made a recitation, / its lyrics are very grand. / Its air is exceptionally fine, / to be presented to the Lord of Shen.
> ("Grand and Lofty" [Mao 259 "Song gao"])

> Jifu made a recitation, / may it be gentle as the clear wind! / Zhong Shanfu bears enduring sorrows; / may it thus soothe his heart.
> ("The Multitudes" [Mao 260 "Zheng min"])

"Jifu" is traditionally identified with an official Yin Jifu ("Overseer Jifu") at the court of King Xuan (827-782 BCE). Not much is known about him, though he is celebrated as a military leader in the poem "The Sixth Month" (Mao 177 "Liu yue") as well as in the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian*), a pre-imperial text discovered in an ancient tomb in 281 CE. The reference to Jifu in Mao 259 and 260 seems to provide the poems with an author and historical anchor, dating the text

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attributed to "a noble man" (*junzi*) or Kongzi, which seem to be a much later textual layer. For the comments by the "noble man" and Kongzi, see Henry 1999; also Schaberg 2005.

33 From "Great indeed" (Mao 241), a poem of altogether 393 characters; in Zhao 28; Yang Bojun 1992, 1495; Legge 1985, 727. A second, shorter, stanza of a hymn is quoted in a Kongzi comment for the year 522 BCE.

34 Ho and Chan 2004.

into King Xuan's reign. Yet, in both hymns, no individual voice is discernable prior to the final quatrain, which, furthermore, is formally set apart by a new rhyme. And while the two poems are quoted 110 times in early texts,[35] the final quatrains are never invoked, nor does any other early text attribute either song (or any other text) to Jifu. Finally, "recitation" refers to performance rather than original composition.

In China, the notion of the poet as autonomous creator did not exist before the early empire in the second century BCE. With the possible exception of, at most, four poems—all of them "Airs of the States"[36]—the *Zuo Tradition* speaks only of performances of anonymous (if canonical) poetry, not of acts of poetic composition. Like virtually all pre-imperial texts that invoke lines from the *Poetry*, it is fundamentally unconcerned with a poem's moment of origin as opposed to its interpretability and applicability. The recently discovered bamboo manuscript "Kongzi's Discussion of the *Poetry*"[37] does not touch on authorship or origin but instead defines the poems in broad semantic terms, perhaps for instruction on their appropriate use.[38] In the received pre-imperial literature, only one passage in *Mencius* (*Mengzi*) 5A.4 claims that in order to understand a poem correctly, one must trace the "intent" (*zhi*) it represents, but even here, "intent" is not identified with the authorial mind. Such disinterest in individual authorship extends beyond poetry into the larger textual tradition; for example, none of the dozens of recently discovered literary or philosophical manuscripts contains an authorial attribution. It remains uncertain what "Jifu made a recitation" may have meant to a pre-imperial Chinese audience. Jifu the author may have been irrelevant; but Jifu the reciter excelled in his role as a high official, bringing lines from the *Poetry* to bear on matters significant to his lord.

In the *Zuo Tradition*, in place of scenes of poetic composition, we find scenes of poetic performance, usually with the purpose of admoni-

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35 Ibid.

36 These are poems 54, 57, 79, and 131, mentioned for the years 720 (Yin 3; Mao 57), 660 (Min 2; Mao 54, 79), and 621 (Wen 6; Mao 131) BCE. However, in each case the verb interpreted as "made" is *fu*, the standard term for "to present" (as song or recitation). Despite early commentarial claims, it is not certain that, in these four cases, it means "to make."

37 See Ma Chengyuan 2001, 13-41, 121-68.

38 See Kern 2015.

tion or diplomatic exchange; accordingly, the place of the named author is often taken by the named, sometimes even prominent, reciter.[39] Here, the reciter skillfully articulates a latent poetic meaning recognizable by the cultural and political élite across the Chinese realm. This meaning is not fixed or obvious but requires a perspicacious recipient to match the poem with the situation at hand; the *Zuo Tradition* contains several anecdotes where the addressee fails to grasp the import of a recitation. Such failure disgraces the person: having never learned the art of poetic application (*Analects* 13.5), he "stands with his face straight to the wall" (*Analects* 17.10), separated from the communal agreement regarding its potential "intent."

From this perspective, the two poems where "Jifu made a recitation" are inscribed with a fourfold representation: of the poems themselves, of their canonicity that made them fit for recitation, of the exemplary and prominent reciter, and of the perspicacious addressee, King Xuan. The concluding quatrains thus comment on the poems' early history of application and reception: while adapted to the poetic form, they stand outside of the poems themselves.

"The Jiang and Han" (Mao 262 "Jiang Han"), at 193 characters a "Major Court Hymn" of average length, reveals how this composite nature could cross over into other, non-poetic genres:

> The Jiang and the Han were surging, surging, / the warriors were streaming, streaming. / Not resting, not at leisure, / the Huai barbarians, these they assaulted. / Now they moved our chariots, / now they planted our banners. / Not resting, not at ease, / the Huai barbarians, these they harassed.
>
> The Jiang and the Han were swelling, swelling, / the warriors were rushing, rushing. / They ordered and organized the four quarters, / reported the accomplishment to the King. / The four quarters were now pacified, / the royal state, it was settled. / And thus, there was no strife, / the King's heart, it was at peace.

The first two stanzas offer a typical narrative, in this case, of how the Zhou vanquished the southern barbarians. The diction shifts fundamentally beginning in stanza three:

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[39] For a comparative study on authorship in the *Poetry* and in early Greece, different in emphasis from the present essay, see Beecroft 2010; also Beecroft 2014.

> On the banks of the Jiang and the Han, / the King commanded Hu of Shao: / "Ah! Open up the four quarters! / Clear our border lands! / Not causing anguish, not pressing, / let [the people] be drawn to the royal state. / Go to draw borders, go to draw divisions, / reach as far as the southern sea."
>
> The King commanded Hu of Shao: / "There you go around, / there you make announcements. / When Kings Wen and Wu received the mandate, / the Duke of Shao, he was their pillar. / Do not say: 'I am but the small child.' / The Duke of Shao, him you succeed. / You commenced and pursued great achievement, / for this, I bestow blessings on you."

The final two stanzas provide an account of the gifts the King gives to Hu of Shao, followed by Hu thanking the King:

> "I give you a jaden libation ladle, / one [bronze] vessel for flavored black-millet ale. / Announce this to your accomplished ancestors: / I bestow on you hills, land, and fields. / In Zhou you receive the command, / to continue the ancestral command of Shao." / Hu made obeisance with his head to the ground: / "To the Son of Heaven, a myriad years!"
>
> Hu made obeisance with his head to the ground: / "May I requite by extolling the royal blessings; / may I rise to my ancestral Duke of Shao! / To the Son of Heaven, a myriad years! / Bright, bright is the Son of Heaven, / his illustrious fame will not cease. / He spreads his civil virtue, / harmonizing this state throughout its four quarters!"

This poem, traditionally dated into the reign of King Xuan, is typical in its narrative voice devoid of any particular identity; even its two speaking voices show numerous parallels elsewhere. Eleven out of the sixteen lines of the first two stanzas are shared with ritual poems from the "Eulogies," "Major," and "Minor Court Hymns,"[40] revealing "The Jiang and the Han" as a modular text from the linguistic repertoire of court ritual. Of the related poems, none is identical to any other, but most are alike, together constituting a single totalizing narrative of Zhou, and circumscribed by a limited lexicon and tight formal structure: tetrasyllabic lines, extensive use of end-rhyme, frequent reduplicative binomes, and a small set of syntactic patterns. These features embody the ideology of Zhou ritual especially in its orientation toward

[40] Poems 164, 168, 177, 179, 183, 204 (two lines), 205, 208, 223, 227 (two lines), 234, 238, 241, 245, 263, 274, 299, 300, 302.

the ancestral past: the old is always the model of the new, and the new never fully its own but shared with other ritual expressions. In 809 BCE, the following text of 97 characters was cast into the inner walls of a bronze tripod:

> It was the 19th year, the fourth month, after the full moon, the day *xinmao*. The King was in the Zhao [Temple] of the Kang Palace. He arrived at the Grand Chamber and assumed his position. Assisted to his right by Intendant Xun, [I,] Feng, entered the gate. [I] assumed [my] position in the center of the court, facing north [toward the King]. Secretary Liu presented the King with the written command. The King called out to the Secretary of the Interior, [?], to announce the written bestowal to [me,] Feng: "[I bestow on you] a black jacket with embroidered hem, red kneepads, a scarlet demi-circlet, a chime pennant, and a bridle with bit and cheekpieces; use [these] to perform your service!" [I] made obeisance with my head to the ground. [May I] dare in response to extol the Son of Heaven's greatly illustrious and abundant blessings and on account of this make for my August Deceased Father, the Elder Zheng(?), and his wife Zheng [this] precious tripod! May [I enjoy] extended longevity for ten thousand years! May sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure [this tripod]![41]

The inscription documents a royal appointment together with the ceremony in which it was presented. It is largely identical with four other inscriptions, dating from 825 through 789 BCE, that record the appointment ceremonies of other appointees to different positions.[42] About one hundred such appointment inscriptions cast into bronze vessels from the ninth and eighth centuries have been excavated so far, showing a continuous ritual and administrative practice together with its institutional textual memory at court. About half a dozen of them record in detail the ceremony of appointment itself.

The parallels to "The Jiang and the Han" are obvious. The language of a bronze text, specific in its date and purpose but generic in its diction, was appropriated for a general celebratory hymn to extol and perpetuate the glory of the Zhou dynasty. The bronze text itself was based on a royal "command" first written on a bundle of bamboo slips. This command was recited at the appointment ceremony and then transformed twice. First, it was transformed into the contents of a

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41 Chen Hanping 1986, 17-20; Chen Peifen 1982, 26.

42 See Kern 2007a.

bronze inscription: for this purpose, the narrative of the ceremony was added to historicize the command proper, and a final prayer for blessings was added to adapt the overall account to a religious address to Hu's ancestors. Second, the bamboo text (or the bronze inscription) was also extended into a hymn. Here, the specific case of a ceremonial court appointment was integrated into the general narrative of the Zhou. While the inscription was largely interchangeable with other inscriptions of the "appointment" genre, the hymn was shaped by the poetic idiom of a court hymn.

Compared to the unified, coherent inscription, "The Jiang and the Han" falls into two distinctly different units: the first built entirely from language shared with other hymns, the second containing numerous parallels with two sets of texts: bronze inscriptions and the Zhou royal speeches preserved in the *Classic of Documents*. Expressions such as "the King commanded (a person)," the "bestowal" of insignia and gifts, "border lands," "I am but the small child," "one [bronze] vessel for flavored black-millet ale," "to announce toward," "to receive the mandate in Zhou," "to make obeisance with his head to the ground," "in response extol," and "royal blessings" are all phrases that—except for "I am but the small child" (in the "Eulogies" 286, 287, and 288)—appear nowhere else in the *Poetry* but repeatedly in royal speeches and bronze inscriptions. Moreover, lines such as "Do not say: 'I am but a small child'," "I bestow on you hills, land, and fields," and "may I rise to my ancestral Duke of Shao" are prose phrases that despite their tetrasyllabic form violate standard poetic rhythm. These observations match the poem's rhyme patterns: stanzas one and two are highly regularly rhymed, fully in accordance with other ritual hymns; in stanza three, the rhyming becomes loose, while in stanzas four and five, it unravels, rendering the poem unfit for vocal musical performance. In stanza six, for a final return to the idiom of Zhou hymnic praise, the text resumes a more regular pattern of rhymes.

As such, "The Jiang and the Han" is a composite text, compiled from various sources and linguistic registers rather than authored by a poet. In its present form, it probably never functioned as a performance text but, instead, as a bookish, commemorative record of the idealized rituals of Zhou, composed from the fragments of archaic verse and ceremony. Remarkably, the poem does not appear in any other pre-imperial text. Likewise, the extensive "Minor Court Hymn" "Thorny Caltrop" (Mao 209 "Chuci"), which integrates a polyvocal representa-

tion of the performance of an ancestral sacrifice within a narrative framework, has left barely a trace in the pre-imperial record.[43]

This greatly complicates the ways in which we imagine the origins of Chinese poetry, and of the *Poetry* anthology, even though some linguistic strata are demonstrably archaic. The anthology contains groups and sub-repertoires of texts that are not authored but compiled, that are composite and modular in structure, that are sometimes too short to stand on their own, and sometimes too long to be taken as unified poems, and that have the early reception and compilation history of the *Poetry* inscribed into them. The "Eulogies" and "Court Hymns" are layered, diachronic artifacts whose (re)composition extended across the first millennium BCE. Warring States and early imperial sources introduce most quotations from the *Poetry* with the words "a poem says," which also means "The *Poetry* says." Without references to authors or titles, these quotations invoke not individual texts but the poetic and ritual tradition as a whole. Even for the historically oriented "Eulogies" and "Hymns," we do not know to what extent their received form may have predated the compilation of the anthology, and when and where this compilation took place.[44]

## 4. "Airs of the States"

Many of the 160 "Airs of the States," arranged under the headings of fifteen North Chinese states and regions, express profound, archetypical human sentiments—the longing of the lover, the suffering of the soldier, the resentment of the overtaxed farmer—that can be experienced in any place and at any time. Five of the fifteen sections of the "Airs" are not represented at all in the *Zuo Tradition*. Altogether, only ten poems from the "Airs" are quoted there, each of them very briefly,

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[43] For an extensive study of this hymn, see Kern 2000a. While initially, I had taken the poem as a sacrificial performance text, I now see it as a composite artifact commemorating the rituals of old by drawing on their archaic language; see Kern 2009, 173-7.

[44] I refrain from discussing in detail the "Minor Court Hymns." While traditionally believed to postdate the "Major Court Hymns," no such conclusion holds. Many of the seventy-four "Minor Court Hymns" are layered and composite texts as well, and, furthermore, are organized in sub-repertoires.

[45] possibly four are said to have been composed on a particular occasion,[46] and another twenty-five titles are said to have been recited, often clustered in a single exchange of recitations.[47] While certain poems can be integrated into historical narratives of the *Zuo Tradition* or later sources, such a connection is usually neither unambiguous nor necessary. While the origins of the "Eulogies" and "Hymns" are identified in the ritual culture of the Zhou royal court, no such institutional background can be recognized for the "Airs." Aside from the attributions furnished in their individual *Mao Poetry* prefaces, few poems can be anchored historically, or provide internal evidence for their dating. Royal officials are said to have collected the "Airs" from among the common folk, set them to music, and presented them to the Zhou king for him to gauge the sentiments and well-being of the populace. This legend appears to have gained wider currency only in Han times, possibly as a reflection of the collection of regional music at the Han imperial court.[48]

The traditional view of the "Airs" maintains several notions: (a) the poems originated from specific geographic regions; (b) they were expressive of popular sentiment and hence revealed the socio-political and moral conditions of their times; and (c) because of their folk origin, they were endowed with fundamental truth claims. In China, the notion of the "Airs" as folk songs gained particular prominence since the early twentieth century, following the lead of European Romanticism, such as Herder's perception of popular song as the true and original voice of the nation. With the collapse of the Chinese empire and the rise of democratic and nationalistic ideas, the need for a Chinese literary history beyond the Confucian scholastic tradition was felt with particular urgency. In the wake of the May Fourth literary and political

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[45] Mao 7 (Cheng 7), 17 (Xiang 7), 18 (Xiang 7), 26 (Xiang 31), 33 (Xuan 2), 35 (Xi 33), 38 (Xiang 9), 58 (Cheng 8), 116 (Ding 10), 160 (Zhao 20).

[46] This remains uncertain; see note 38 above.

[47] In Wen 13 (614 BCE), poem 54; in Cheng 9 (582 BCE), poem 27; in Xiang 8 (565 BCE), poem 20; in Xiang 14 (559 BCE), poem 34; in Xiang 19 (554 BCE), poem 54; in Xiang 26 (547 BCE), poems 75 and 76; in Xiang 27 (546 BCE), poems 14, 49, 94, 114, and separately 52; in Xiang 29 (544 BCE), poem 36; in Zhao 1 (541 BCE), poems 12, 13, and 23; in Zhao 2 (540 BCE), poems 55 and 64, and separately 16; in Zhao 16 (526 BCE), poems 80, 83, 85, 87, 90, and 94; and in Ding 4 (506 BCE), poem 133.

[48] See Kern 2004, 33-40.

revolution of 1919, this history was found in the "discovery" of the novel, of drama, and of folk poetry—at exactly the same time when in the West, Milman Parry and Albert Lord developed their theory of oral-formulaic composition. Meanwhile, the French sociologist and sinologist Marcel Granet interpreted the "Airs" as expressions of ancient Chinese popular festivals and customs.[49] Diverse as they are, the ideas of Herder, Parry and Lord, and Granet proved immensely influential in modern scholarship.[50] The view of the "Airs" as the genuine, if artistically polished, expression of the common folk—in China all but orthodox—connects effortlessly with the Han legend of popular songs collected by court officials and early Chinese political philosophy in general.

The most famous example of a poem composed in response to the historical circumstances of its time is "Yellow Bird" (Mao 131 "Huang niao") in the "Airs of Qin":

> *Jiao-jiao* cry the yellow birds, / settling on the jujube tree. / Who followed Lord Mu? / Ziju Yanxi! / Truly, this Yanxi, / the finest of a hundred men! / He draws close to the pit, / trembling, trembling in terror. / Heaven, the azure one, / slays our good man! / If one could ransom him, ah— / a hundred men for his life!
>
> *Jiao-jiao* cry the yellow birds, / settling on the mulberry tree. / Who followed Lord Mu? / Ziju Zhonghang! / Truly, this Zhonghang, / a match for a hundred men! / He draws close to the pit, / trembling, trembling in terror. / Heaven, the azure one, / slays our good man! / If one could ransom him, ah— / a hundred men for his life!
>
> *Jiao-jiao* cry the yellow birds, / settling on the caltrop bush. / Who followed Lord Mu? / Ziju Qianhu! / Truly, this Qianhu, / a guard against a hundred men! / He draws close to the pit, / trembling, trembling in terror. / Heaven, the azure one, / slays our good man. / If one could ransom him, ah— / a hundred men for his life!

For the year 621 BCE, the *Zuo Tradition* narrates that at the burial of Lord Mu of Qin, Yanxi, Zhonghang, and Qianhu followed him into the grave as human sacrifices, whereupon "the men of the state mourned

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[49] Granet 1919.

[50] For an application of the Parry-Lord theory to the "Airs," see Wang 1974. For a recent comparative reading of the "Airs" as expressive of communal feasts as well as of gender relations in Chinese antiquity, see Zhou 2010.

them, and on their behalf recited 'Yellow Bird'."[51] Here we have the single most plausible case where *fu* ("to present," "to recite") should be taken as "to make,", which is, quite naturally, how the *Mao* preface interprets the situation. Note, however, that the "men of the state" (*guoren*) are not the common folk but members of the Qin court élite.

This rare example, where the *Zuo Tradition* relates not only a poem's historical context but also its act of composition, generates credibility for the general idea that early Chinese poetry could emerge in response to specific circumstances—even though no poem from the "Airs," unlike the "Major Court Hymns," contains a sustained historical narrative. The underlying dictum that "poetry expresses intent" makes poetry symptomatic and revealing, and endows it with an unquestionable truth claim. It also encourages the identification of authorial agency, even in semi-anonymous terms such as "the men of the state." Yet the poetics attributed to the "Airs" frame authorship not as autonomous or creative. A poem is not "made" by a controlling poet but arises from history, and its truth claim rests precisely in the absence of authorial control and artful manipulation. Thus, early Chinese aesthetic appreciation is primarily concerned with how a poem matches the world it depicts. As individual poems could, thus, be decoded—or constituted—as symptom and omen, so could the entire body of the *Poetry*. Consider the performance of dance, music, and song that the court of Lu gave to Prince Ji Zha of Wu, who, in 544 BCE, requested to be allowed to "observe the music of Zhou." The *Zuo Tradition* provides the following account of his judgment of the different "Airs":

> He asked to observe the music of Zhou. When the musicians were made to sing for him the "South of Zhou" and "South of Shao," he said, "How beautiful! They have begun to give it a foundation. It is not yet done, yet they are assiduous and uncomplaining."
> When they sang the "Bei," "Yong," and "Wei" for him, he said, "How beautiful! How profound! These are anxious but not hindered by difficulties. I have heard that the virtue of Kang Shu and Duke Wu of Wei was just so; these must be the airs of Wei!"
> When they sang the "Royal Domain" for him, he said, "How beautiful! They are thoughtful but unafraid; these would be from Zhou's move to the east."

[51] Wen 6; Yang Bojun 1992, 546-7; Legge 1985, 244.

> When they sang the "Zheng" for him, he said, "How beautiful! Already they are very trivial, and the people cannot bear it. Surely this will be the first to perish."
> When they sang the "Qi" for him, he said, "How beautiful! How expansive! They are indeed great airs. It is one who faced the eastern sea—this would be the Grand Duke. The state cannot yet be measured."
> When they sang the "Bin" for him, he said "How beautiful! How grandiose! They are joyous but not lascivious. These would be the Duke of Zhou's move to the east."
> When they sang the "Qin" for him, he said, "This is what is known as the grand sound. What is capable of being grand is great, and these are the perfection of greatness: these would be from Zhou's past."
> When they sang the "Wey" for him, he said, "How beautiful! How buoyant! They are great yet subtle, rugged yet easy to traverse. With virtue to support these things, there would be an enlightened ruler."
> When they sang the "Tang" for him, he said, "What profundity of thought! These would be the remaining scions of the Taotang line! Otherwise, how could their concern extend so far? If not the descendants of fine virtue, who would be capable of this?"
> When they sang the "Chen" for him, he said, "That state is without a master. How can it last long?"
> For "Kuai" and the others, he made no remark.[52]

While Ji Zha's comments on the "Court Hymns," "Eulogies," and dances all praise the glory of antiquity, his remarks on the "Airs" are more complex, including—with the "Airs of Zheng" and the "Airs of Chen"—predictions of future demise. Altogether, they take poetry as symptomatic of socio-political realities, as is stated in the (Han dynasty?) "Great Preface" to the *Poetry*:

> The tones of a well-governed era are at ease and lead to joy; its rulership is harmonious. The tones of an era in turmoil are bitter and lead to anger; its rulership is perverse. The tones of a perishing state are lamenting and lead to longing; its people are in difficulty.

The performance for Ji Zha comprises the entirety of the *Poetry*; the only section not mentioned in the passage above is the "Airs of Cao" (presumably contained among "the others" on which Ji Zha made

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[52] Translation taken from Schaberg 2001, 87-8; for an excellent discussion of the event, see ibid., 86-95.

no remark). In terms of their sequence, the first eight sections of "Airs" for Ji Zha—from the two "South" regions through the "Airs of Qi"—match the arrangement in the *Mao Poetry*, whereas the performance of the remaining sections from "Bin" to "Kuai" are in a wildly different order. It may not be accidental that of the altogether forty-three instances of "Airs" mentioned or recited in the *Zuo Tradition*,[53] thirty-seven are from the first seven sections in the *Mao Poetry*. We do not know which individual poems were performed for Ji Zha, but does their representation in the *Zuo Tradition* reflect the historical development of the *Poetry* as a canonical collection? Whatever the case, the concert, or rather its description in the *Zuo Tradition*, treats the *Poetry*, or "poetry," as a unified and circumscribed discourse. While the textual integrity and identity of individual poems remains elusive prior to their *Mao Poetry* arrangement, the integrity and unity of the overall discourse was established no later than by the fourth century BCE.

The above observations regarding the composite, modular, and sometimes diachronic nature of the "Court Hymns" and "Eulogies," and their possible early existence less in discrete poems than in repertoires of poetic material, can be extended to the "Airs of the States" as well. While no received pre-imperial text contains an entire poem from the "Airs," the newly discovered manuscript "Qi ye" from ca. 300 BCE furnishes just such a case with the poem "Cricket" (Mao 114 "Xi shuai") from the "Airs of Tang."[54] The received text has twenty-four tetrasyllabic lines in three stanzas; the manuscript version appears to have thirty (some lines are broken off on the bamboo slips), three of which contain not four but six characters. Of the twenty-three complete lines in the manuscript, just three match the wording of the received version; otherwise, we find numerous lexical variants, text transposed across lines, additional lines, and different rhymes. While the received text contains three reduplicatives typical of the diction of the *Poetry*, the manuscript has none. According to its preface in the *Mao Poetry*, "Cricket" was directed against Duke Xi of Jin, who ruled in the late ninth century BCE, for his excessive frugality; in the manuscript, the

[53] Not including the comments by Kongzi and the "noble man."

[54] See Li Xueqin 2010, 150, and plates 67-8. Together with other texts, "Qi ye" was presumably looted from a southern tomb. It was purchased on the Hong Kong antiquities market and "donated to" Qinghua University in Beijing.

poem is performed (extemporized?) by the Duke of Zhou at a banquet two centuries earlier.

Much ink has been spilled on deciding whether we are looking at two versions of a single text or two different poems (and on the question of which of the texts may be the "more original" one), but these seem to be the wrong questions. Clearly, the texts are related yet also too different to surmise that one, somehow, had evolved from the other. It is more productive to see the two poems as separate instantiations of a shared topic and repertoire of poetic expression that was available to be organized in multiple ways. Unless the manuscript is a forgery, "Cricket" is, hence, the first case to compare an entire multi-stanza poem from the received anthology with an ancient parallel version. Perhaps such different versions were the kind of "duplicates" that Kongzi, according to Sima Qian, had removed to trim the corpus of three thousand down to three hundred poems. In the process, one version was chosen (and further edited) and the other rejected; moreover, that choice was also one between two different historical contextualizations and, hence, interpretations. This explains how a "single" poem could be referred to in entirely different ways. The same is the case with the famous example of "Zhongzi, Please!" (Mao 76 "Qiang Zhongzi"):

> Zhongzi, please! / Do not leap into our hamlet, / do not break the willow trees we have planted. / How would I dare to care for them, / yet I am fearful of my father and mother. / Zhongzi is truly to be loved, / yet the words of father and mother / are also truly to be feared.
>
> Zhongzi, please! / Do not leap across our wall, / do not break the mulberry trees we have planted. / How would I dare to care for them, / yet I am fearful of my older brothers. / Zhongzi is truly to be loved, / yet the words of my older brothers / are also truly to be feared.
>
> Zhongzi, please! / Do not leap into our garden, / do not break the sandalwood trees we have planted. / How would I dare to care for them, / yet I am fearful of the many words by the people. / Zhongzi is truly to be loved, / yet the many words by the people / are also truly to be feared.

According to its *Mao Poetry* preface, the poem satirizes Duke Zhuang of Zheng who in 722 BCE had failed to rein in his mother and younger brother, bringing strife and chaos into his state. According to the *Zuo Tradition*, the poem was recited in 547 BCE in order to have the Mar-

quis of Wei released from imprisonment in the state of Jin;[55] and according to the "Kongzi's Discussion of the *Poetry*" manuscript, one must be fearful of the words of "Qiang Zhong[zi]."[56] In the "Five Modes of Conduct" manuscript from Mawangdui, the poem is invoked in a discussion of the rhetorical device of "using sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety," where it is paraphrased through a series of rhetorical questions asking whether someone would copulate in front of his parents, brothers, or neighbors. Much later readings by Zheng Qiao (1104-1162) and Zhu Xi (1130-1200) take the received poem as "the words of a licentious eloper," while modern readers see it as the words of a young woman who fears that her lover's impetuosity will compromise her social reputation.[57]

The case of "Zhongzi, Please!" may appear extreme, but it is not; pre-imperial and Han interpretations of the first and most famous of the "Airs," "Ospreys" (Mao 1 "Guanju") are just as diverse, taking the poem as (a) praising King Wen, (b) criticizing King Kang (r. 1005/3-978 BCE), or (c) another example of "using sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety," ironically placing what in the *Mao Poetry* is one of the most notorious poems, "Zhongzi, Please!," side by side with the paramount expression of exemplary virtue, "Ospreys."[58] These are not merely differences in interpretation of the same text; they are readings of different texts as the poems were constituted only by way of their commentaries and applications, which, on the most basic textual level, could involve different choices among homophonous characters of potentially vastly different, even opposite, meanings. Poems such as "Ospreys," "Cricket," or "Zhongzi, Please!" came into being only over time, and then repeatedly in changing configurations through continuing processes of composition, performance, rhetorical application, historical contextualization, fixation in writing, and literary interpretation. In each case, there would not have been any single original poem to begin with—instead, each of these titles signified a circumscribed repertoire of expressions and meanings that could be actualized in different ways under different circumstances. While key lines of the

[55] Xiang 26; Yang Bojun 1992, 1117; Legge 1985, 525.

[56] Huang Huaixin 2004, 97-9.

[57] For full discussion, see Kern 2010, 47, passim; further Kern 2007b.

[58] See Kern 2010 and 2007b for extensive discussion and references to earlier scholarship.

poems proved stable (as attested in manuscripts), an entire poem like "Cricket" could be configured in various ways.

These observations, made possible by the very recent manuscript finds, profoundly destabilize our traditional assumptions about the origins and authorship of the "Airs." They also throw into relief some of the deepest contradictions in the interpretation of these poems over time. The Kongzi of the *Analects* states that "the three hundred poems may be covered in one phrase: no wayward thoughts" (*Analects* 2.2), and Sima Qian notes that Kongzi, when selecting the poems, "chose [only] what could be matched to the principles of ritual"; but commentators across two millennia have struggled with the fact that entire sections of the *Poetry*, especially the "Airs of Zheng" that include "Zhongzi, Please!," appear as expressions of inappropriate sexual desire.[59] We cannot establish the identity of the poems found in the received *Mao Poetry* with whatever was quoted or referenced under the same title before the formation of the anthology. We do not know whether or not the poems were based on a "moral orthodoxy",[60] as claimed in the *Analects*, and how such orthodoxy might have manifested itself in their literary diction. Both the "Five Modes of Conduct" and "Kongzi's Discussion of the *Poetry*" signal that modern readings of the poems, as readings of the literary surface of texts whose original form we do not know, are fundamentally inadequate: while the manuscripts, the *Mao Poetry*, and the Han dynasty "Three Schools" readings all diverge, they agree on one principle, which is also noted in *Mencius* 5A.4: the meaning of a poem is encoded below its literary surface and can only be retrieved by a sophisticated hermeneutical procedure. This procedure unfolds not in the interpretation of a pre-existing text but in the process of performance and application that constitutes the poem ever anew, and in changing semantic configurations. This is evident from Kongzi's dictum that to master the *Poetry* means to know how to apply its verses as coded communication in diplomatic intercourse (*Analects* 13.5), and, in reverse, from those moments of failure in the *Zuo Tradition* narrative where a persona proves unable to grasp the import of what is being recited to him.

This conclusion finally leads us back to the question of the origins of the "Airs" as folk songs. Aside from ideological constructions both

[59] For a convenient survey, see Wong and Lee 1989.
[60] Yu 1987, 49.

ancient and modern, we must not confuse the poetic persona and voice within the text with the author outside of it. Nothing suggests that poems singing of the toils and sorrows of the people were actually composed by *hoi polloi.* And if they were, it would not matter: the earliest moments where we encounter the poems are already moments of reception, interpretation, and reconfiguration. For more than two millennia, there has never been an "original text" available whose "original meaning" could be grasped, nor will any newly discovered manuscript ever take us *ad fontes*.

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