

Lost in Tradition: The Classic of Poetry We Did Not Know

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Prelude

Like no other poetic text in world literature, the Shijing 詩經, or Classic of Poetry, has a continuous history of some twenty-five centuries of reciting, singing, reading, teaching, memorizing, printing, quoting, and interpreting. True to Goethe's definition of a classic, it is a text forever inexhaustible in its meaning. At the end of the Chinese empire, however, the text could barely carry the weight of its own commentarial tradition. When this weight was finally removed in the wake of May Fourth, little seemed left: a body of archaic, bombastic court hymns next to simple, formulaic songs that purportedly express—in however monotonous a fashion—the sentiments of commoners some time before Confucius. One may find these songs charming and innocent, folk songs in Herder's sense of song as the simple—and simple-minded—original language when civilization was still a child. But today, few lovers of poetry will read them for pleasure or inspiration. The classic has become the living dead of Chinese poetry, occupying its mandatory place at the beginning of our anthologies where it blocks, rather than opens, the pathway to those later texts for which alone it is worth learning Chinese. Connoisseurs who today recite the lyrics from the Tang and the Song do not recite the Poetry, or at least not for the same reasons.

We know our text as the Mao Poetry 毛詩, that is, as the text accompanied by its first transmitted commentary, probably from the second century BCE. This Mao text and commentary never went away: solidified and transmitted by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) in the second century AD, it was enshrined in the seventh-century Correct Meaning of the Five Classics (Wujing zhengyi 五經正義), compiled on imperial command; in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, its interpretations were partly rejected by scholars like Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1036-1162), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200); after another five hundred years, it began to be subjected to historical and linguistic scrutiny by Qing philologists; and finally, since the May Fourth Movement in the early twentieth century, the Mao explanations were tossed aside. For the longest time, the

terse words of the Poetry had disappeared into and behind an ever-proliferating commentarial tradition. Arguably, this tradition ended not in China but in Europe, namely, with Bernhard Karlgren's (1889-1978) copious glosses, published between 1942 and 1946, that were then translated and published in Chinese in 1960.¹ Yet when Karlgren, utterly disinterested in poetic style and diction, was done with his rigorously philological review of traditional Chinese scholarship, he had eviscerated the ancient songs of their poetic flow, leaving behind a carcass of awkward English translations that few would recognize as songs. To Karlgren, the Poetry was primarily a source text in the philological study of Chinese antiquity even though he professed some interest in the anthology itself.²

*At the same time, twentieth-century Chinese scholars writing in the wake of the May Fourth movement laid their own claims to the text. Intent to free the pre-imperial songs from their imperial hermeneutic traditions, they appropriated the Poetry for twentieth-century political needs where the court hymns served as an expression of ancient "feudalism" and the "Airs of the States" (guofeng 國風) as the authentic voices of the common folk living (and suffering) under said "feudalism." This early and mid-twentieth century Chinese search for the true nature of Chinese antiquity—a search no longer burdened by tradition—was paralleled by the work of Western sociologists, foremost among them Marcel Granet (1884-1940), the author of *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine* (1919),³ to whom the songs confirmed newly developed European ideas about primitive societies. As throughout the two millennia of the Chinese empire, the Poetry was there, but it was barely itself. Formerly overwhelmed by the commentarial tradition, it now served particular political and academic functions.*

Yet just after the anthology had finally expired as a Confucian Classic, it once again proved itself the most resilient of texts Chinese, unexpectedly rising from its tomb—or its many tombs: not the dark chambers of philology and sociology but the brilliant ones of the ancient Chinese aristocratic elite. With the discovery of Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb no. 3 near Changsha (Hunan) in 1973, the excavation of Shuanggudui 雙古堆 tomb no 1. in Fuyang (Anhui) in 1977, the finds of Guodian 郭店 tomb no. 1 in Jingmen (Hubei) in 1994, the purchase of the Shanghai Museum bamboo slips on the Hong Kong antique market in the same year, and—finally so far—the cache of bamboo slips acquired in 2008 by Qinghua University, no other text of ancient China has surfaced as frequently, and in as many different forms, from newly discovered Warring States and early imperial manuscripts as the Poetry: quoted in the Guodian and Shanghai Museum "Black Robes" (Ziyi 緇衣) bamboo texts, in the "Five Modes of Conduct" (Wuxing 五行) manuscripts from Guodian (bamboo) and Mawangdui (silk), and in the Qinghua bamboo slips;⁴ discussed in the Shanghai Museum

“Confucius’ Discussion of the Poetry” (Kongzi shilun 孔子詩論) bamboo manuscript and in the Mawangdui “Five Modes of Conduct” silk manuscript; and finally, in the badly damaged and incomplete Shuanggudui bamboo manuscript that contains the Poetry, or significant parts of it, as the anthology close to how we know it from the tradition. With the Guodian, Shanghai Museum, and Qinghua University bamboo slips tentatively dated around 300 BCE and the Mawangdui and Shuanggudui tombs closed in 168 BCE and 165 BCE, respectively, we now have a constantly increasing record of the Poetry in southern Chinese tombs spanning a period of about 150 years in addition to the Mao Poetry from presumably the second century BCE and to the fragments of the so-called Three Schools (sanjia 三家) Poetry interpretations from around the same time.

As a result of these finds—some of them coming from archaeologically controlled excavations, others looted from unknown sites and then sold to prestigious institutions that nevertheless vouch for their authenticity—we live, with the Poetry, in a time like no other time. Gradually, a Poetry before the Mao Poetry is emerging, and with it a “new”—if in fact earliest known—approach to the ancient songs. For scholars, today is a defining moment in the history of the text, a moment on par with the Mao determination of the text, the Song challenge, the Qing inquiry, and the May Fourth departure. Yet our moment goes beyond these: we are not confined to the Mao recension as our ultimate source; we can, for the first time since the versions of the Three Schools were lost in early medieval times, have access to fragments, however incomplete, of a strikingly different early hermeneutic tradition of the Poetry, and with it a different text of the songs. Because of the fragmentary nature of our evidence, we have more questions than answers, but our questions are getting better with every excavation (or, with lesser trust, purchase of looted grave goods). Those willing to make space for these questions “know” much less about the Poetry than our forebears. Those still under the sway of the traditional readings, including the May Fourth reading, have yet to grasp the magnitude of the challenges posed by the ancient manuscripts. The present deliberations illustrate some of the perspectives and paradoxes opened by the newly found manuscripts.⁵

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Hermeneutically, the most difficult and also most interesting songs in the *Poetry* are the 160 “Airs.” Unlike the court hymns, they do not advance unambiguous messages, nor does any of them contain a sustained historical narrative. None of them offers a hint regarding its authorship, and only one—“Yellow Bird” (Huang niao 黃鳥 [Mao 131])—refers to specific

situational circumstances.⁶ Moreover, their archaic language, filled with repetitive formulae that on their surface describe simple images in nature or human interactions, rarely develops a continuous line of thought or narrative. The resulting fundamental uncertainty about many of the “Airs” enabled and indeed demanded sophisticated hermeneutical procedures to “uncover,” or construct, the presumed meaning of each song that was hidden below its textual surface. Yet what might appear as a weakness turned out to be the actual strength of the “Airs”: since the time of Confucius regarded as classical and supremely authoritative expressions of the human condition,⁷ their semantic vagueness allowed a potentially infinite range of interpretations and situational applications while never reducing the songs to any single meaning or use. In this, the “Airs” were always above and beyond their actual, individual explications, invocations, and performances, constituting a general mode of expression that could be directed to any specific event in the full range of human experience. A song could be related to a particular situation, but it was not tied to it and hence could not be impeached for it. From this perspective, it is no longer surprising that all of the “Airs” remained anonymous. In order to exert their force as universally applicable, any trace of their original authorship or moment of composition was erased. No original author had ever owned the songs, and hence no song could be discredited by finding fault with its author. In reverse, following Foucault’s insight that true authorship implies accountability and potential punishment for the text, no author could be blamed for a song.⁸

While the semantic openness and general applicability of the “Airs” is on full display in pre-imperial sources such as the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 that mention numerous instances of their individual recitation, it was only with the Western Han readings—and most forcefully with the Mao reading—that individual songs were understood as political commentary and placed in specific historical circumstances that provided them with an original compositional context, historical date, and more or less specific authorship. This reading is related to the famous dictum “poetry expresses what is on the mind” (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志)—first found in the *Shangshu* 尚書 and then fully developed in the “Great Preface” (Daxu 大序) to the *Mao Poetry*—that has remained the single most influential statement on the production and purpose of Chinese poetry ever since.⁹ In the Mao reading, the “Airs” were moral witnesses of their own time and could be organized in terms both chronological and ideological. Thus, the Mao prefaces that accompany each song individually take the first twenty-five songs of the anthology—that is, the pieces in the “Zhou nan” 周南 and “Shao nan” 召南 sections—as coming from the glorious days of the early Western Zhou and praising the virtue of the members of the royal house. By contrast, for

example, all but the first of the twenty-one “Airs of Zheng” (Zheng feng 鄭風) criticize the various lords of Zheng. Overlooked in this, and now coming to light in the newly discovered manuscripts, is the fact that this author- and production-centered view of poetry ran diametrically against the pre-imperial views and uses of the “Airs.” The two manuscripts that include explicit interpretations of individual songs—the “Kongzi shilun” and the Mawangdui “Wu xing”—never assign such historical or political meanings to them.

The fragmentary “Kongzi shilun” on twenty-nine mostly broken bamboo slips containing slightly over one thousand characters offers the most extensive comments on the *Poetry* from pre-imperial times. Far from trying to determine, and hence limit, the meaning of specific expressions, it assigns broad semantic categories to the songs. Through this instruction in the *Poetry*,¹⁰ the songs could easily be remembered under their respective characterizations and then be called upon in a wide range of diplomatic and other situations that we know, for example, from the *Zuo zhuan*.¹¹

Consider the following section that, in the original arrangement by the Shanghai Museum editors,¹² is found on slips 10, 14, 12, 13, 15, 11, and 16. In the revised order first offered by Li Xueqin 李學勤 and subsequently slightly modified by Huang Huaixin 黃懷信,¹³ this passage constitutes the first part of the existing (however fragmentary) manuscript. In my following translation, I divide the passage into three paragraphs:¹⁴

(§ 1) The transformation of “Guanju,” the timeliness of “Jiumu,” the wisdom of “Hanguang,” the marriage of “Quechao,” the protection of “Gantang,” the longing of “Lüyi,” the emotion in “Yanyan”—what of these?

(§ 2) It is said: “As they are set in motion,¹⁵ [these songs] all surpass what they put forth initially.” “Guanju” uses [the expression of] sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety [. . .] the pairing [?], its fourth stanza is illustration. It uses the pleasures [one derives] from the zithers as a comparison to lustful desire. It uses the delight [one derives] from the bells and drums as {a comparison to}¹⁶ the liking of [. . .] As it returns to ritual propriety, is this not indeed transformation? In “Jiumu,” good fortune is with the gentleman. Is this not {indeed timeliness? “Hanguang” teaches not to pursue what cannot} be achieved, not to tackle what cannot be accomplished. Is this not indeed knowing the constant way? In “Quechao,” [the young woman] departs with a hundred carriages. Is this not indeed still leaving [her family behind]? That in “Gantang” {one longs} for the man and cherishes his tree is because [the Duke of Shao’s] protection [of the people] was

magnanimous. The cherishing of the Gantang tree is {because} of the Duke of Shao [. . .] emotion, is love.

(§ 3) The transformation of “Guanju” is about [the man’s] longing being excessive. The timeliness of “Jiumu” is about [the man’s] good fortune. The wisdom of “Hanguang” is about knowing what cannot be obtained. The marriage of “Quechao” is about [the woman’s] departure being [. . .] {The protection of “Gantang” is about the longing for} the Duke of Shao. The sorrow of “Lüyi” is about longing for the ancients. The emotion of “Yanyan” is about [the man’s sentimental] uniqueness.

(§ 1) 《關雎》之改，《樛木》之時，《漢廣》之智，《鵲巢》之歸，《甘棠》之報，《綠衣》之思，《燕燕》之情，曷？

(§ 2) 曰：動而皆賢于其初者也。《關雎》以色喻于禮【。】兩矣。其四章則喻矣。以琴瑟之悅擬好色之願，以鐘鼓之樂{擬}【。】好。反納于禮，不亦能改乎？《樛木》福斯在君子，不{亦有時乎？《漢廣》不求不}可得，不攻不可能，不亦知恆乎？《鵲巢》出以百兩，不亦有離乎？《甘棠》{思}及其人，敬愛其樹，其保厚矣。《甘棠》之愛以召公{之固也。}【。】情，愛也。

(§ 3) 《關雎》之改，則其思益矣。《樛木》之時，則以其祿也。《漢廣》之智，則知不可得也。《鵲巢》之歸，則離者【。】{《甘棠》之保，思}召公也。《綠衣》之憂，思古人也。《燕燕》之情，以其獨也。¹⁷

While the lacunae in §§ 2 and 3 leave us with some uncertainty, the overall formulaic and repetitive nature of the passage suggests a tightly coherent text and supports Li Xueqin’s re-arrangement of the order of the slips. Most likely, the third lacuna in § 2 that follows the discussion of “Gantang” and ends before “emotion, is love” (情, 愛也) contained discussions of both “Lüyi” and “Yanyan,” with the remark on “emotion” ending the comment on the latter.

Nothing in this passage advances the kind of historical and political interpretation we know from the *Mao Poetry*. Instead, the text works like a catechism, characterizing each song with a single word and then rhetorically asking what it is about. The introductory “it is said” (or perhaps “[master xy] has said”) is a gesture of authority that points back to a preexisting understanding and leads to the core formulation of a hermeneutical principle that is then valid for all the individual songs discussed in the following: “As they are set in motion, [these songs] all surpass what they put forth initially” (*dong er jie xian yu qi chu zhe ye* 動而皆賢于其初者也). In other words, the songs mean more than they say.

The most prominent piece mentioned in this passage is “Guanju” 關雎 (“Fishhawks”), the very first song in the *Poetry* analogy. Yet the way the “Kongzi shilun” speaks of the song does not go well with the Mao statement that “Guanju is about the virtue of the queen” (*Guanju houfei zhi de ye* 關雎後妃之德也); instead, it resonates with the reading of the song in the Mawangdui “Wu xing” silk manuscript as well as with *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) 3.20 and statements on the “Airs” in the *Xunzi* 荀子 and by Liu An 劉安 (r. 179-122 BCE), King of Huainan 淮南:

The Master said: “‘Guanju’ [expresses] pleasure but does not lead to licentiousness, [expresses] sorrow but does not cause harm.”

子曰：關雎樂而不淫，哀而不傷。(Analects 3.20, “Bayi” 八佾)

As for the “Airs of the States” expressing fondness of sexual allure, a tradition says: “They satisfy the desires but do not lead to the transgression of the correct stopping point.”

國風之好色也，傳曰：盈其欲不愆其止。(Xunzi, “Dalue” 大略)¹⁸

The “Airs of the States” express fondness of sexual allure but do not lead to licentiousness.

國風好色而不淫。(Liu An, “Lisao zhuan” 離騷傳)¹⁹

If [his desire] is as deep as this, would he copulate next to his father and mother? Even if threatened with death, he would not do it. Would he copulate next to his older and younger brothers? He would not do it either. Would he copulate next to the countrymen? He would not do it either. {Being fearful} of father and older brother, and only then being fearful of others, is ritual propriety. Using [the expression] of sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety is to advance [in moral conduct].

如此其甚也，交諸父母之側，爲諸？則有死弗爲之矣。交諸兄弟之側，亦弗爲也。交{諸}邦人之側，亦弗爲也。{畏}父兄，其殺畏人，禮也。由色諭於禮，進耳。(Mawangdui “Wu xing”)²⁰

It is impossible to date the statement attributed to Confucius in the *Analects*; it may or may not be the earliest of the series cited here.²¹ Like the one in the *Xunzi*, it appears completely isolated and without context; in neither case is it part of an overall discussion of the *Poetry* but rather appears as an accepted piece of traditional lore. In the third-century BCE *Xunzi*, this impression is given by two facts: first, the grammatical structure

of *guofeng zhi haose ye* 國風之好色也 turns the aperçu “The ‘Airs of the States’ express fondness of sexual allure” (*guofeng haose* 國風好色) into the topical phrase “As for the ‘Airs of the States’ expressing fondness of sexual allure,” that is, a statement of received wisdom. Second, this topic is then elaborated upon by reference to “a tradition” (*zhuan* 傳), that is, another pre-existing authority that has already followed the initial comment on the “Airs.” At least rhetorically, the *Xunzi* does not advance a new interpretation of the songs but affirmatively cites what is already established. The same must then also be true for Liu An who in 139 BCE—roughly a century after the *Xunzi*—returned to the phrase “The ‘Airs of the States’ express fondness for sexual allure” and extended it to “but do not lead to licentiousness,” presumably borrowing from the statement attributed to Confucius “‘Guanju’ expresses pleasure but does not lead to licentiousness.”²²

What may distinguish both the statement in the *Analects* and that by Liu An from the one in the *Xunzi* is their emphasis on the effect of “Guanju” and the “Airs,” respectively. *Bu yin* 不淫 (not licentious) is not a quality of the songs themselves but a quality of their effect on the audience: while the songs express pleasure and desire, they do not stir licentious behavior. So what do they do? The answer is now found in the “Kongzi shilun” and Mawangdui “Wu xing” manuscripts: they “use [the expression] of sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety” and in his bring about “transformation” (“Kongzi shilun”) or the “advance [in moral conduct]” (“Wu xing”).

Leaving the possible date of the *Analects* passage aside—if anything, its *le* (“pleasure”) appears like a milder and more general rephrasing of the raw and explicit *haose* (“fondness of sexual allure”)—the available evidence places the “Kongzi shilun” chronologically first among all these pronouncements. Yet even there, the dictum is not necessarily presented as an original thought but rather as the first and most prominent example of the preexisting idea “As they are set in motion, [these songs] all surpass what they put forth initially.” This idea, furthermore, is introduced with “it is said”—a formula that, like “a tradition says” in *Xunzi*, gestures at existing authority. Likewise, the long discussion of “Guanju” in the Mawangdui “Wu xing” manuscript does not stand on its own but is offered as an example for the rhetorical principal of “illustration” or “analogy” (*yu* 諭) in the context of a discourse on self-cultivation. Invoked to prove a particular point, the statements in both “Kongzi shilun” and Mawangdui “Wu xing” presuppose that their reading of “Guanju” is already accepted; they themselves are not in need of proof.

All this suggests an understanding of the “Airs,” and of “Guanju” as their principal example, that was widespread from at least the late fourth

through the late second centuries BCE but was subsequently lost in tradition. We cannot determine whether or not this understanding was the earliest in the history of the *Poetry*, but it is the earliest we now know. Like the reciters in the *Zuo zhuan* who in their poetic exchanges could confidently presume an existing agreement on how to interpret the songs from the *Poetry*, the statements cited above present both the songs and their interpretation as tradition. In this tradition, the discourses of history, authorship, and poetic production as political commentary—the hallmarks of the Mao reading—are conspicuously absent. Instead, the principal concern with the *Poetry* lies in the applicability of traditional verse to situational circumstances, a point that is emphasized in *Analects* 13.5 (“Zilu” 子路) where Confucius insists that knowing the songs by heart is insufficient unless one knows how to employ them on diplomatic occasion. Answering to the challenge posed in *Analects* 13.5, what the “Kongzi shilun” offers is not instruction in the past origins of the songs but guidance for their use in the present.²³ The Mao concern with authorial origin and intent is irrelevant.

The proper application of a given song rested on the ability to identify its core meaning, that is, the meaning, or semantic category, for which the song could be invoked. An example of distilling such categories from the individual songs may be found in another section of the “Kongzi shilun” that comprises slips 17, 25, 26, 28, 29, and possibly 23 of the original arrangement by the Shanghai Museum editors:

“Dongfang weiming” contains incisive phrases. Of the words in “Qiang zhong,” one cannot not be afraid of. In “Yang zhi shui,” the love of the wife is strong. In “Caige,” the love of the wife is [. . .] “{Junzi} yangyang” is about a petty man. “You tu” is about not meeting one’s time. The final stanza of “Datian” shows knowing how to speak and to conduct oneself according to ritual. “Xiaoming” is about not [. . .] loyal. “Bozhou” in the “Airs of Bei” is about depression. “Gufeng” is about grief. “Liao’e” is about having a filial mind. In “Xi you changchu,” one has obtained [a family] but regrets it. [. . .]²⁴ speaks of detesting without pity. “Qiang you ci” is about guarded secrets that cannot be told. “Qingying” is about knowing [. . .] “Juan’er” is about not knowing [how to judge] people. “Shezhen” is about the cutting off. “Zhu’er” is about a serviceman. “Jiaozhen” is about a wife. “Heshui” is about knowing [. . .]²⁵

《東方未明》有利詞。《將仲》之言，不可不畏也。《揚之水》其愛婦烈。《采葛》之愛婦【。 . .】《{君子}陽陽》小人。《有兔》不逢時。《大田》之卒章知言而禮。《小明》不【。 . .】忠。《邶柏舟》悶。《鼓風》悲。《蓼莪》有孝

志。《隰有萋楚》得而悔之也。【。。。】言惡而不憫。《墻有茨》慎密而不知言。《青蠅》知【。。。】《卷而》不知人。《涉溱》其絕。《著而》士。《角枕》婦。《河水》知。
26

A passage like this might be the answer to the confusingly wide range of situations to which the “Airs” are applied in early historiography. It may also explain why there is no case where a song from the “Airs” is quoted in full, leading to the pejorative characterization that the ancient reciters “cut off stanzas to (arbitrarily) generate meaning” (*duanzhang quyì* 斷章取義). Thus, according to the “Kongzi shilun,” a text like “Juan’er” would fit *any* situation that involved the judging of people; and in order to do so, it did not need to be quoted in full. As it happens, the second out of the song’s altogether eight couplets is cited in the *Zuo zhuan*:

Ah, our cherished men,
placed in the ranks of Zhou.

嗟我懷人
寘彼周行

The Mao preface to the song states that “‘Juan’er’ expresses the intent of the royal wife” (*Juan’er houfei zhi zhi ye* 卷耳后妃之志也); from here, the preface elaborates on her desire to assist her husband in seeking out worthy men for office. Toward this overall interpretation of the song, Mao glosses the term *zhou hang* as “the ranks of Zhou.” This matches how the couplet appears in the *Zuo zhuan* where it is cited in the context of placing the right people into office;²⁷ and the same understanding is then found in two other quotations of the same couplet in the *Xunzi* 荀子 and the *Huainanzi* 淮南子.²⁸

Zhu Xi, while also attributing the song to the royal wife (possibly King Wen’s wife Taisi), believes that the text expresses the woman’s longing for her husband traveling afar.²⁹ Some modern scholars have generalized this interpretation by taking it as the expression of some woman (not the queen) thinking of her traveling husband;³⁰ others see the song as expressing the emotions of the traveler himself, longing for his wife back home,³¹ or they understand the song as dialogical, attributing the different stanzas to both husband and wife, respectively.³² Either way, these readings concern not just the song as a whole but lead to a completely different understanding of the couplet under discussion.³³ Remarkably, recent studies of the “Kongzi shilun” have sided with the interpretation of the song as an expression of love and longing. Ma Yinqin 馬銀琴, who otherwise seems eager to identify similarities between the Mao prefaces and the characterizations of the songs in the “Kongzi shilun,” lists “Juan’er” as an example where the two stand in mutual opposition.³⁴ Huang Huaixin goes so far as to call the Mao preface “close to nonsense” (*jinhu hushuo badao* 近乎胡說八道),

suggesting that the song represents a dialogical argument between a husband and his wife and that “not knowing people” refers to a misunderstanding between them.³⁵

While most often, it remains doubtful that the Mao preface matches an earlier understanding of the respective song, the case of “Juan’er” seems different. Apart from the introductory sentence regarding the royal wife,³⁶ Mao’s concern with the recognition of worthy men for office is perfectly in line with how the text was understood by the authors of the *Zuo zhuan*, the *Xunzi*, and the *Huainanzi*. Thus, the rejection of the Mao reading by the modern scholars cited above (and to some extent also by Zhu Xi) extends to all three early sources while their own interpretations are based on much later, purportedly more “natural” approaches to the poem’s “original meaning” (*benyi* 本義)—an intellectual position that I find dubious at best.

It is uncertain how “not knowing men” (or “not knowing a man”) relates to the ancient reading that we have transmitted in no less than four sources; likewise, we do not know how the individual lines of “Juan’er” would have been interpreted by the “Kongzi shilun” author. It seems clear, however, that the “Kongzi shilun” cannot have been a text that was to be read on its own. Considering its extremely elliptic pronouncements and its element of catechistic instruction, it must have been embedded in a context of oral teaching and learning. In such a context, the shorthand formula “not knowing men” may just have been interchangeable with “knowing men”—that is, in reference to situations where “knowing men” was the goal, while “not knowing men” was the initial point of departure. If this was the perspective advanced in the “Kongzi shilun,” then “Juan’er” could be drawn upon in any context that required recognition of worthies. While this might be a stretch—after all, the text could also represent a different teaching tradition—it aligns the “Kongzi shilun” with all other early comments on “Juan’er,” including those of the *Xunzi* and of the *Huainanzi* (compiled under Liu An’s name), the two early sources with which the “Kongzi shilun” also agrees on “Guanju.” Such a scenario seems decidedly more plausible than the projection of a Song dynasty or later interpretation of “Juan’er” into a manuscript from 300 BCE—a projection, moreover, that is based exclusively on a Song dynasty or later reading of the song’s literal surface.

I consider the Song and modern reading of “Juan’er,” and with it the wholesale rejection of the Mao prefaces and other early readings altogether, a fallacy born out of ignorance and arrogance. It is simplistic to believe that we have direct access to the “original meaning” of any of the “Airs” when our earliest sources—that is, before Mao—indicate that the true meaning of a song rested in its proper application and hence was generated in ever new ways through the flexible adaptation to various contexts. The readings of

“Guanju” in the “Kongzi shilun” and Mawangdui “Wu xing”—with phrases such as “using [the expression] of sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety” or “As they are set in motion, [these songs] all surpass what they put forth initially”—explicitly state that the understanding of a song does not rest in the literal surface of its words but depends on hermeneutic procedures that involve the audience as much as the reciter. To claim that somehow, we understand the songs better than the ancients who were actively engaged with them is a folly. One does not need to, as some scholars currently do,³⁷ attribute the “Kongzi shilun” to Confucius’ disciple Zixia 子夏 in order to note that the modern belief in the literal surface of the “Airs” runs counter to not only the Mao prefaces but also to *any* early reading of the *Poetry*, including the one of the “Kongzi shilun” that claims to follow Confucius’ own views of the songs. To stay with “Guanju” as our best-documented example: no early reader or reciter took it as the simple song of courtship and marriage that modern interpreters believe it to be.

Beyond the different approaches—the earliest sources concerned with application, the later ones since Mao with authorship and original intent—looms a fundamental methodological problem. A comparison of the *Poetry* quotations in early manuscripts with both the Mao texts and the fragments of the Three Schools versions reveals a high percentage of character variants both among the same passages in different manuscripts and in comparison to their counterparts in received texts; yet more than ninety per cent of these variants are homophonous or near-homophonous with one another.³⁸ This strongly suggests that the *Poetry* was a text without a single definite written version; instead, it was a text memorized by the cultural elite that got written down in different and mutually independent forms whenever a particular occasion—be it a teaching context or the need for grave goods—called for it.

Taken together, the flexibility of the early writing system, the large number of homophone words, and the archaic and poetic language of the *Poetry* allowed for numerous choices of meaning. This situation was further exacerbated with the “Airs” that even in their received versions, in contrast to the sacrificial odes and court hymns, have remained notoriously open to various interpretations. Lacking historical context and narrative structure while being filled with archaic expressions, including repetitions of reduplicative (and to a lesser extent also rhyming and alliterative) binomes that are descriptive only in the vaguest of senses, the very words of the texts, written with a range of character choices, had to be determined. A reader who did not already know the song would not be able to make sense of it—or he or she would be able to come up with numerous parallel interpretations because of far too many variables in any of them. This is the situation both the “Kongzi shilun” and the Mao commentary respond to,

albeit with radically different approaches: here by briefly capturing the essence of a song evoked for its potential application, there with detailed glosses intended to arrest the meaning of the individual graphs and to develop a specific interpretative perspective on the whole song. It is not clear whether the Mao prefaces to the individual songs were the result of these interpretations, whether the glosses made the songs conform with an already existing hermeneutic tradition as it is now represented in the prefaces, or whether both developed alongside one another.³⁹ Yet while the “Kongzi shilun” took the overall meaning of an individual song for granted without determining the meaning of specific words, the Mao glosses did precisely this: create a text of a *certain* meaning. Strictly speaking, there was no early version of the *Poetry* outside or independent of its different hermeneutic traditions. It was only in these traditions that the songs, wide open to diverging and even mutually exclusive interpretations, were constituted in their meaning.

To illustrate the situation, it is useful to return to “Guanju” as our best-documented example. In Waley’s translation, the first stanza reads as follows:

“Fair, fair,” cry the ospreys
On the island in the river.
Lovely is this noble lady,
Fit bride for our lord.⁴⁰

關關雎鳩
在河之洲
窈窕淑女
君子好逑

Likewise, Legge translates:

Kwan-kwan go the ospreys,
On the islet in the river.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:—
For our prince a good mate she.⁴¹

Just about everything in this reading is constructed by commentary and interpretation. Waley’s translation of the reduplicative binome *guanguan* 關關 as “fair, fair” is not supported by any early source. Legge, as most other readers, takes the binome as onomatopoeic of the bird’s cry. In Mao’s gloss, *guanguan* is a “harmonious sound” (*hesheng* 和聲), which other Han texts expand to “the melodious sound being harmonious” (*yinsheng he ye* 音聲和也). Further early sources gloss the single word *guan* as “entering” (*ru* 入), “connecting” (*tong* 通), or “conjoining” (*jiao* 交), with the reduplicative form *guanguan* then representing the sounds of two birds singing their mutual enjoyment 鳥聲之兩相和悅也.⁴² The English choice of “ospreys” for *juju* 雎鳩 is an educated guess. Ospreys, or sea hawks, are large birds

of prey that can be found around the world. Feeding mostly on fish, the birds usually mate for life.⁴³ The early commentators, in a flurry of pseudo-zoological glosses, describe the birds as monogamous and faithful to each other even after the death of the partner (*si bu zai pi'er* 死不再匹二); furthermore, the birds are said to virtuously “dwell separately” (*you bie* 有別)—in an anthropomorphically moral separation of the sexes!—while calling each other.

There is nothing predating the Han readings of “Guanju” to support any of these glosses on the two binomes *guanguan* and *juju* in the first line of the song. What sustains all of them, however, is the idea that the birds are an analogy to the pure and virtuous union of a human couple, or, in the received commentaries, of a lord and his wife. Already in Han times, these became historicized as King Wen 文, the hallowed founder of the Zhou, and his queen. The second line of the couplet is rather straightforward, merely completing the nature image of the birds dwelling in their natural habitat. (The simplicity of the line has not stopped traditional commentators from elaborating at some length on the imagined trees on the island that provide an environment of virtuous seclusion and separation). The same pattern of an obscure first and relatively clear second line is repeated in the second couplet of the stanza. The first line (and third overall in the stanza) again consists of two binomes: *yaotiao* 窈窕 and *shunü* 淑女. A number of Han texts—including the Mao commentary—follow the *Erya* 爾雅 glossary of possibly the third century BCE⁴⁴ that glosses *shu* 淑 as *shan* 善 (“good,” “virtuous”), firmly establishing *shunü* as “virtuous lady.” The problem, however, is the word *yaotiao*, glossed by Mao as *youxian* 幽閒, “pure and secluded”—which is the obvious source of Legge’s “modest, retiring.” More than any other, this gloss defines the character of the lady and the relationship with her partner.

When the Mawangdui “Wu xing” manuscript cites “Guanju,” *yaotiao* (*ʔiəwʔ-gliawʔ) is written *jiaoshao* 菱芍 (*kəraw-tiawk).⁴⁵ Yet while the near-homophonous characters in *yaotiao* and *jiaoshao* are writing the same word, the meaning of “pure and secluded” cannot be extended to the sexual reading of “Guanju” in both “Wu xing” and “Kongzi shilun.” Furthermore, “pure and secluded,” a meaning not documented before the Mao commentary, conflicts with the use of *yaotiao* in other early texts. For example, the song “Mountain Spirit” (Shangui 山鬼) of the “Nine Songs” (Jiu ge 九歌) section in the *Recitations of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) begins as follows:

There seems to be someone in the winding
mountain,
[She is] covered in fig-leaves, girdled with
lichen yarn.

若有人兮山之阿
被薜荔兮帶女羅

Now a teasing gaze, next a well-formed smile— 既含睇兮又宜笑
 “You, lady, refined in your allure, desire me.”⁴⁶ 子慕予兮善窈窕

While the traditional commentators strenuously explain *yaotiao* by way of reference to the Mao gloss on “Guanju,” the erotic context of the preceding line—which matches the language of desire in other pieces of the “Nine Songs”—leaves little doubt that the word must mean something else here. Another example is found within the *Poetry* itself, namely in “The Moon Comes Out” (Yue chu 月出; Mao 143) from the “Airs of Chen” (Chen feng 陳風). The song consists of three brief stanzas:

The moon comes forth, how bright, 月出皎兮
 The beautiful girl, how adorable! 佼人僚兮
 At leisure she is in her sensual allure— 舒窈糾兮
 My toiled heart, how anxious. 勞心悄兮

The moon comes forth, how brilliant, 月出皓兮
 The beautiful girl, how lovely! 佼人憫兮
 At leisure she is in her beguiling charm— 舒優受兮
 My toiled heart, how troubled. 勞心慄兮

The moon comes forth, how radiant, 月出照兮
 The beautiful girl, how vibrant! 佼人僚兮
 At leisure she is in her enchanting appeal— 舒夭紹兮
 My toiled heart, how haunted. 勞心慘兮

It is worth providing the phonetic reconstruction of the entire poem:⁴⁷

Stanza 1				
1	月 ɲjuat	出 khljuat	皎 kiaw?	兮 gi
2	佼 kəraw?	人 ɲjin	僚 riaw(?)	兮 gi
3	舒 hlja	窈 ʔiəw?	糾 kjaw?	兮 gi
4	勞 raw	心 sjəm	悄 ʔsjaw?	兮 gi

Stanza 2				
1	月 ɲjuat	出 khljuat	皓 kəw?	兮 gi
2	佼 kəraw?	人 ɲjin	憫 Crəw?	兮 gi
3	舒 hlja	懷 ʔjəw?	受 djəw?	兮 gi
4	勞 raw	心 sjəm	慄 ʔsəw?	兮 gi

Stanza 3				
1	月 ɲjuat	出 khljuat	照 tjaw	兮 gi
2	佼 kəraw?	人 ɲjin	療 riawh	兮 gi
3	舒 hlja	夭 ʔjaw	紹 djaw?	兮 gi
4	勞 raw	心 sjəm	慘 ʔsaw?	兮 gi

It is immediately apparent that the entire poem is dominated by the two vowels -ə and -a; the only recurrent exceptions to this pattern are the words “person” or “girl” (*ren* 人 / *ɲjin) and the rhythmic particle *xi* 兮 (*gi). Stanzas 1 and 3 rhyme on *-aw while stanza 2 rhymes on *-əw. All three stanzas begin with the verb-object phrase “The moon comes forth” (*yue chu* 月出) that, despite its syntax, sounds like a rhyming binome (*ɲjuat-khljuat). The meter of this song is lively: in lines 1, 2, and 4 of each stanza, it is dum-dum dum *xi*, but the third lines are all dum dum-dum *xi*. This latter form matches the typical rhythm of the “Nine Songs” (as in the two couplets quoted above from “Mountain Spirit”).

Moreover, each line varies only with one character—or one binome—from the corresponding lines in the other two stanzas. In line 1, the moon is characterized as “bright” (皎), “brilliant” (皓) and “radiant” (照); in line 2, the woman is described as “adorable” (佼), “lovely” (憫), and “vibrant” (療); in line 3, she is further described with her “sensual allure” (窈窕), “beguiling charm” (懷受), and “enchanting appeal” (夭紹); and in line 4, the singer’s heart is said to be “anxious” (悄), “troubled” (慄), and “haunted” (慘). These are the words that matter; all others are the repetitive framework around them. Their correspondences can be shown as follows:

		Stanza 1	Stanza 2	Stanza 3
Line 1	The moon	皎 (*kiaw?) bright	皓 (*kəw?) brilliant	照 (*tjaw) radiant
Line 2	The lady	僚 (*riaw(?)) adorable	嫵 (*Crəw?) lovely	療 (*riawh) vibrant
Line 3	The lady	窈窕 (*ʔiəw?- kjaw?) sensual allure	擾受 (*ʔjəw?- djəw?) beguiling charm	天紹 (*ʔjaw- djaw?) enchancing appeal
Line 4	The heart	悄 (*ʔsjaw?) anxious	慄 (*ʔsəw?) troubled	慘 (*ʔsaw?) haunted

Both semantically and phonetically, these essential words form a tight net throughout the poem. First, they closely correspond to one another between the three stanzas; second, because of their positions as the rhyme words in each line, they match one another within each stanza. The effect is an astonishing sound pattern that must have lent itself to an impressive performance at once coherent and variegated, aurally fusing into one the appearance of the moon, the captivating air of the woman, and the male speaker's tormented emotion. Yet even within this pattern, not all expressions are equal—clearly, because of its binomial form and the resulting different meter, the three phrases in line 3 of each stanza form the true core of the entire song. While the words in lines 1 and 2 of each stanza create semantic and phonetic correspondences between the moon and the lady, lines 3 and 4 leave the nature analogy behind. Instead, they create the stimulus (line 3) and sympathetic response (line 4) between the lady and the speaker that this song is all about.

As soon as one represents the binomes of line 3 phonetically, their coherence becomes apparent: they do not express three different qualities of the lady but say the same thing in three different ways. The individual graphs in these binomes are utterly irrelevant; as has long been noted, such descriptive rhyming, alliterative, or reduplicative binomes cannot be decoded based on the meaning of each character. Instead, they constitute indivisible words.⁴⁸ Abundant evidence for the same phenomenon is now furnished by the *Poetry* quotations in early manuscripts. While graphic variation is common across almost all types of words of these quotations, it is particularly intense in descriptive binomes.⁴⁹

One example of this phenomenon is the word *yaotiao* 窈窕 (*ʔiəw?-gliaw?) in “Guanju” that is written *jiaoshao* 菱芍 (*kəraw-tiawk) in the “Wu xing” manuscript from Mawangdui. What is more, I believe that the sexual reading of “Guanju” in the “Wu xing” and “Kongzi shilun” manu-

scripts confirms the observation by the Qing scholar Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰 (1782-1835), namely, that the characters *yaotiao* 窈窕 in “Guanju” write the same word that is written *yaojiao* 窈糾 (*ʔiəwʔ-kjawʔ) in “Yue chu”; and this word, furthermore, corresponds closely to *youshou* 憂受 (*ʔjəwʔ-djəwʔ) as well as *yaoshao* 夭紹 (*ʔjaw-djawʔ) in the same song.⁵⁰ In other words, on grounds both semantic and phonetic, the manuscript evidence has now established a direct connection between the key words in “Guanju” and “Yue chu”—two songs that in the Mao prefaces are placed at opposite ends in the moral discourse of early China: the former purportedly praising the virtue of the queen, the latter “criticizing being fond of sexual allure/desire” (*ci hao se* 刺好色) and directed against those in office who “are not fond of virtue but delight in glorifying sexual allure/desire” (*bu hao de er yue mei se* 不好德而悅美色). Or phrased in a different way: the Mao reading of *yaojiao* in “Yue chu” matches the implied meaning of *yaotiao* or *jiaoshao* in the “Kongzi shilun” and “Wu xing” manuscripts. In this perspective, a couplet from “Guanju” can finally be placed next to one from “Yue chu”:

“Alluring is the fair lady Awake and asleep I desire her.” (“Guanju,” stanza 2)	窈窕淑女 寤寐求之
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At leisure she is in her sensual allure— My toiled heart, how anxious. (“Yue chu,” stanza 1)	舒窈糾兮 勞心悄悄
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To remove any doubt, the Mawangdui manuscript comments on the line in “Guanju” that it expresses “sexual desire” (*si se* 思色).

“Yue chu” is one of the ten “Airs of Chen” in the *Poetry*. Without exception, the Mao reading finds them sexually suggestive and as such serving as political admonition of lascivious rulers. In “Guanju,” by contrast, the same suggestive language is redefined in moral terms; beginning with the individual word glosses (such as “pure and secluded” for *yaotiao*) and ending in the preface, any expression of sexual allure and desire is forcefully suppressed. The manuscripts—and arguably the above-cited passages in the *Analects*, in the *Xunzi*, and by Liu An—take a different path: they recognize the language of desire not as an expression and criticism of depravity but as the most powerful means to advance the audience toward morality and ritual propriety. The fact that this reading is found not only in tiny fragments scattered across several transmitted sources but also in the “Kongzi shilun” of around 300 BCE and the Mawangdui “Wu xing” of more than a century later indicates its wide and continuous acceptance from late Warring States through early imperial times. With the

“Kongzi shilun,” this hitherto nearly invisible hermeneutic tradition is now associated with Confucius himself, the purported compiler and foremost interpreter of the *Poetry*. It redefines a song like “Guanju” as much as one like “Yue chu” and collapses the perceived distance between them.

Another song that the “Wu xing” commentary on “Guanju” draws into the picture is “Zhongzi, Please!” (Qiang Zhongzi 將仲子; Mao 76), one of the notorious, purportedly lascivious “Airs of Zheng” that the tradition after Mao has struggled to reconcile with the *Poetry* as a collection “without wayward thoughts” (*si wu xie* 思無邪; *Analects* 2.2). “Qiang Zhongzi” contains the words of a woman who tries to restrain her lover in his all-too-public advances; through its three stanzas, it admonishes him that while he is truly loved, “the words of father and mother,” “the words of my older brothers,” and “the many words by the people” are “still to be feared” (*yi ke wei ye* 亦可畏也). Compare this to the passage from the “Wu xing” commentary cited above where the text refers to “Guanju” in order to explain the poetic principle of “illustration” (*yu* 諭):

If [his desire] is as deep as this, would he copulate next to his father and mother? Even if threatened with death, he would not do it. Would he copulate next to his older and younger brothers? He would not do it either. Would he copulate next to the countrymen? He would not do it either. [Being fearful] of father and older brother, and only then being fearful of others, is ritual propriety. Using [the expression] of sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety is to advance [in moral conduct].

It is not difficult to see that this passage imagines the male lover in “Guanju” (“Awake and asleep I desire her”) in the very terms of “Qiang Zhongzi” where he is admonished not to give in to his desire in front of parents, brothers, and the people around who all are “still to be feared.” Once again, the difference between “Guanju” and one of the seemingly most indecent songs of the *Poetry* is erased—and so is some of the distance that for all too long has separated us from a recognition of the ancient songs in what might come close to their earliest reception.

Concluding Remarks

There is no question that any *Poetry* reader after the Han had to reckon with the Mao recension of the text, as the competing Western Han Three Schools of interpretation gradually lost their influence and, indeed, their texts. According to the “Monograph on the Classics and [Other] Writings” (*Jingji zhi* 經籍志) in the seventh-century *Suishu* 隋書, the recensions of both the Lu and the Qi *Poetry* had disappeared for centuries, and the Han *Poetry* was

no longer taught.⁵¹ Judging from the imperial catalogue, by the seventh century, scholarship of the *Poetry* was completely focused on the *Mao Poetry*. This situation poses a nearly insurmountable problem when seeing *Poetry* quotations in early manuscript that are full of textual variants. Because the vast majority of these variants are merely graphic in nature, writing the same word with a different character, our approach to reading *Poetry* quotations in early manuscripts is invariably guided by, and often limited to, the Mao glosses on the corresponding characters in the received text. These glosses are not only our earliest explanations for the words in question but also have been accepted by the subsequent literary and lexicological tradition. Thus, looking up *yaotiao* in a dictionary will always send us back to the original Mao gloss, however problematic and ideological it may be.

To harmonize possible variant readings in excavated (or looted) manuscripts with their received counterparts means to bury them once again in the very tradition that had lost, and often purposefully excised, them in the first place. As an alternative, I suggest we look for every piece of evidence that has survived somewhere else, cast out of sight, that might offer an alternative to the Mao reading and possibly fit better what we now find in the manuscripts. Such pieces of evidence are the brief comments in the *Analects*, the *Xunzi*, and by Liu An cited above. Even more fruitful, a look beyond the tradition of classical learning might show us a rather different reception of the *Poetry* that only gradually begins to receive proper attention: the use of the “Airs” in later poetry.⁵² It is here where one finds an example such as Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261-303) poetic exposition “Seven Summons” (Qi zheng 七徵), written after the model of Mei Sheng’s 枚乘 (d. 141 BCE) “Seven Stimuli” (Qi fa 七發), where a courtier tries to lure a noble but aloof man back into the world of sensual experience. Speaking of sexual allure and desire, the speaker declaims:

I have heard:

North of the Mei River, there was the longing [of a man] gathering dodder;	蓋聞洙北有采唐之思
On the banks of the Qi River there were the sighs [of a man saying] “accompany me.”	淇土有送予之歎
In “Guanju,” “waking and asleep” leads to troubled thoughts;	關雎以寤寐爲戚
In “Zhen Wei,” “dissolute amusement” leads to pleasure.	溱洧以謔浪爲歡
As for Enchanting consorts and voluptuous women,	若夫妖嬪豔女

One searches the crowd and picks the
exquisite. . . .⁵³

蒐群擢俊

Here, it is only the context that reveals a strongly sexual reading of “Guanju”: the first two lines allude to “Among the Mulberries” (Sangzhong 桑中; Mao 48) in the “Airs of Yong” (Yong feng 鄘風); next, “Zhen Wei” 溱洧 is the title of Mao 95, the final piece of the “Airs of Zheng.” In the Mao reading, both songs are yet other examples of songs where the imagery of allure and desire serves to criticize sexual dissolution. Lu Ji may not have viewed the songs as satire, but, as is clear from the context, he fully recognized their expressions of erotic enticement—and placed “Guanju” squarely into their middle.⁵⁴ Whatever the line on “Guanju” may refer to, it is not the praise of the queen. When Lu Ji, one of the most prominent writers of his age, gave “Guanju” the same sexual reading that we now see in early manuscripts, he must have expected his perceptive audience to smile with appreciation. Not all was lost in tradition. Not all is.

Endnotes

1. The glosses were first published in several installments in the *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* between 1942 and 1946, paralleled by Karlgren’s translations of the entire anthology. Both glosses and translations were reprinted as books in 1950 (translations) and 1964 (glosses) by the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm. The glosses were translated by Dong Tonghe 董同和, *Gao Benhan Shijing zhushi* 高本漢詩經注釋 (Taipei: Zhonghua congshu bianshen weiyuanhui, 1960). In 1996, Li Xiongxi 李雄溪 published *Gao Benhan ya song zhushi jiaozheng* 高本漢雅頌注釋糾正 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1996), collating and correcting Karlgren’s glosses on the *ya* 雅 and *song* 頌 sections of the *Poetry*.
2. In the introduction to his translation *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription and Translation* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), p. 1, Karlgren announces that his translation is “not intended to have any literary merits, I endeavoured, on the contrary, to make it as literal as possible, intending it to serve such students of sinology who wish to acquaint themselves with this grand collection, which has played such an enormous part in the literary and cultural history of China.” To me, such a statement makes little sense. In order to get acquainted with “this grand collection” of poetry, one would

need to get at least some sense of its poetic diction, even though “poetry is what gets lost in translation,” as famously put by Robert Frost.

3. Paris: E. Leroux.
4. The yet unpublished Qinghua University slips contain a different version of “Cricket” (*Xishuai* 蟋蟀; Mao 114) and at least three other songs that are not part of the current version of the *Poetry*; see Chen Zhi, “The Rite of *Yinzhi* (Drinking Celebration) and Poems Recorded on the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips” (paper presented at the “International Symposium on Excavated Manuscripts and the Interpretation of the *Book of Odes*,” University of Chicago, September 12-13, 2009).
5. The current essay builds upon my research of the last several years. I have previously discussed some of the basic textual material in two essays: “Excavated Manuscripts and Their Socratic Pleasures: Newly Discovered Challenges in Reading the ‘Airs of the States’,” *Études Asiatiques/Asiatische Studien* 61.3 (2007): 775-93; and “Beyond the Mao Odes: *Shijing* Reception in Early Medieval China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127 (2007): 131-42. In addition, I briefly draw on “Speaking of Poetry: Pattern and Argument in the ‘Kongzi shilun’,” a paper I presented first at the “International Symposium on Excavated Manuscripts and the Interpretation of the *Book of Odes*,” University of Chicago, September 12-13, 2009, and then at the international conference “Literary Forms of Argument,” Oxford University, September 16-19, 2009.
6. The historical event of three brothers being buried alive with Lord Mu of Qin 秦穆公 in 621 BCE is elaborated upon in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, “Wen gong” 文公 6 (621 BCE).
7. With this, I do not necessarily mean to follow Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 85 BCE) who sees Confucius as the editor of the *Poetry* as a defined collection (*Shiji* 史記 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982] 47.1936). However, recent manuscript finds fully corroborate that by the late fourth century BCE, a century and a half after Confucius’ death, he was uniquely associated with the songs and seen as their most authoritative teacher and interpreter.
8. Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” (1969), English “What Is an Author,” here cited from *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 141-60.
9. I strongly suspect that initially, this statement was not about the composition of poetry but about its recitation, invocation, and perform-

- ance. However, the “Great Preface,” presumably composed in the first century CE, unambiguously assigns it to the moment of textual production.
10. I consider the “Kongzi shilun” not an abstract discussion of the *Poetry* but a specific, and possibly local, teaching and study manual for how to apply the songs in various contexts.
 11. Among many other studies on the topic, a comprehensive account of *Poetry* citations in the *Zuo zhuan* is given in Zeng Qinliang 曾勤良, *Zuo zhuan yinshi fushi zhi shijiao yanjiu* 左傳引詩賦詩之詩教研究 (Tapei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1993); in addition, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 147-76, and David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), pp. 72-78, 234-42, passim. For examples of the flexible interpretation of the *Poetry* see the excellent study by O Man-jong 吳萬鐘, *Cong shi dao jing: Lun Maoshi jieshi de yuanyuan ji qi tese* 從詩到經：論毛詩解釋的淵源及其特色 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), pp. 16-43.
 12. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (yi)* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書(一) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), pp. 13-41, 121-68.
 13. Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu “Shilun” jieyi* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書《詩論》解義 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2004), pp. 1-22. Li Xueqin’s rearrangement of the slips was only one of several such attempts within months of the original Shanghai Museum publication; see Xing Wen, “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 39.4 (2008): pp. 7-10.
 14. In the present essay, I shall not burden the reader with extensive philological notes on the original text. Following the original publication of the text in December 2001, an avalanche of textual criticism emerged in dozens, if not hundreds, of publications in Chinese. Excellent surveys of the more relevant discussions may be found in Liu Xinfang 劉信芳, *Kongzi shilun shuxue* 孔子詩論述學 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2002) and Chen Tongsheng 陳桐生, “Kongzi shilun” yanjiu 《孔子詩論》研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004). In my translation and representation of the Chinese text, I selectively adopt readings from an array of studies, combined with my own reasoning. Furthermore, I offer the Chinese texts according to these interpretations and transcriptions into later standard characters, replac-

ing the often different characters in the original bamboo manuscripts. Readers who might benefit from detailed discussions of specific words and characters are referred to the original publication edited by Ma Chengyuan and to the subsequent books by Liu Xinfang and Chen Tongsheng.

15. As an alternative, the word *dong* 動 here might be understood as “as they move [the listener].” Furthermore, some scholars have suggested to read the character in question as *zhong* 終 (“in the end” or “as they end”), which is a possible but phonologically inferior choice.
16. Throughout this essay, I am using { } parentheses for tentative suggestions of missing words in the text. I often follow Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu* “*Shilun*” *jieyi*.
17. Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu* “*Shilun*” *jieyi*, pp. 23-50.
18. Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 19.336.
19. *Shiji* 史記, 84.2482 (“Qu Yuan Jia sheng liezhuan” 屈原賈生列傳) where the comment is without attribution. See, however, Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1.49 where it is quoted and properly attributed to Liu An in Ban Gu’s 班固 (32-92) “Preface to the ‘Li sao’” (Li sao xu 離騷序).
20. See Liu Xinfang 劉信芳, *Jianbo Wu xing jiegou* 簡帛五行解詁 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 2000), pp. 158-60; Wei Qipeng 魏啓鵬, *Jianbo “Wu xing” jianshi* 簡帛《五行》箋釋 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2000), pp. 126-28; Pang Pu 龐樸, *Zhubo “Wu xing” pian jiaozhu ji yanjiu* 竹帛《五行》篇校注及研究 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2000), pp. 82-83; Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, *Maôtai Kanbo hakusho gogyôhen kenkyû* 馬王堆漢墓帛書五行篇研究 (Tokyo: Kyûko Shoin, 1993), pp. 533-45; Jeffrey Riegel, “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57 (1997): 143-77; Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 366-67. As with the “Kongzi shilun” quotation above, I transcribe the text as interpreted in modern characters.
21. I do not subscribe to the idea that the *Analects* can be stratified into different chronological layers, not to mention that such layers can then be dated. Instead, I accept the competing view that the text was compiled in the Western Han out of a multiplicity of statements attributed to, and anecdotes involving, Confucius; see John Makeham, “The Formaton of *Lunyu* as a Book,” *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996): 1-

- 24; Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚, “Lunyu jieji cuoshuo” 論語結集臆說, *Kongzi yanjiu* 1 (1986): 40-52; and Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Confucius and the *Analects* in the Han,” in *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, ed. Bryan Van Norden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 134-62. This view of the *Analects* is strongly substantiated by Michael J. Hunter’s (Princeton University) dissertation currently in progress.
22. According to *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 44.2145, Liu An wrote his commentary on the “Li sao” on the occasion of his statutory visit to the imperial court in 139 BCE, reportedly in just one morning.
23. Again, in this I do not posit that *Analects* 13.5 precedes the “Kongzi shilun.” It could reflect a more generally available piece of early lore, or it even could be a later summary of the kind of recitation practiced in the *Zuo zhuan* and taught in the “Kongzi shilun.”
24. Huang Huaixin assumes that the comment following the missing characters refers to “Xiang shu” 相鼠; see *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu* “*Shilun*” jieyi, pp. 127-29.
25. Here, slip 29 breaks off. It is not clear to me whether or not the section continues onto slip 23, as Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu* “*Shilun*” jieyi, pp. 143-53, assumes.
26. Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu* “*Shilun*” jieyi, pp. 94-153.
27. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), p. 1022 (“Xiang gong” 襄公 15).
28. See Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie*, 21.265; Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 (*Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 2.78.
29. Zhu Xi, *Shi jizhuan* 詩集傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), pp. 3-4.
30. See Cheng Junying 程俊英, *Shijing zhuxi* 詩經注析 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), pp. 9-12.
31. Gao Heng 高亨, *Shijing jinzhu* 詩經今注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1987), pp. 4-6.
32. Qu Wanli 屈萬里, *Shijing quanshi* 詩經詮釋 (Taipei: Lianjing, 1983), pp. 8-9.
33. Legge’s translation of the first two couplets captures the reading by Zhu Xi: “I was gathering and gathering the mouse-ear, / But could not fill my shallow basket. / With a sigh for the man of my heart, I placed it there on the highway.” See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Vol. IV: The She King* (repr. Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), p. 8.

The translation of Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, p. 3, proceeds along the same understanding: “I gather the kuan-er plant, but it does not fill my slanting basket; *I am sighing for my beloved one; I place it here on the road of Chou.*”

34. Ma Yinqin, “Shangbo jian ‘Shilun’ yu ‘Shixu’ shishuo yitong bijiao: jianlun ‘Shixu’ yu ‘Shilun’ de yuanyuan guanxi” 上博簡《詩論》與《詩序》詩說異同比較—兼論《詩序》與《詩論》的淵源關係, *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 (2002-2003): 98-105.
35. Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu “Shilun” jieyi*, p. 134.
36. Strictly speaking, the first sentence of the preface is separate from the following and probably represents a different textual layer; on this structure of the “upper” and “lower” parts of the prefaces, see Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 92-95. Van Zoeren argues that the “upper” parts of the prefaces—usually the first one or two sentences—are chronologically earlier than their subsequent elaborations, or commentaries, in the “lower” parts. In the case of “Juan’er,” I would argue, however, that the two parts represent two separate teaching traditions, with the “lower” part quite likely predating the “upper” one.
37. The authorship of the “Kongzi shilun” has become an obsession in certain circles. Li Xueqin and others who believe in Zixia’s authorship refer to Confucius’ brief praise for his expertise in *Analects* 3.8 (“Bayi” 八佾) and to three later statements on Zixia’s teaching of the *Poetry* that range from the *Hanshu* “Monograph on Arts and Letters” to Lu Deming’s 陸德明 (556-627) *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 preface—that is, sources postdating Confucius (or Zixia) by five hundred to one thousand years. On this extremely tenuous basis, Xing Wen has stated as recently as in 2008: “According to the transmitted textual evidence available to us, Zixia is very likely the author of the bamboo ‘Shilun.’” See his “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 39.4 (2008): 6. *Pace* such strong convictions, I completely agree with scholars like Chen Tongsheng, “Kongzi shilun” yanjiu, pp. 85-88, who has argued that we cannot identify the author of the manuscript beyond the general observation that he was a Warring States man learned in the *Poetry* and influenced by contemporaneous discourses on self-cultivation.
38. For an analysis of all these variants see Kern, “The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern

- (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 149-93.
39. To complicate matters further, the chronological relation between the “upper” and “lower” prefaces (see above) is uncertain.
 40. Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, ed. (with additional translations) Joseph R. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 5.
 41. Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Vol. IV: The She King*, p. 1.
 42. For the full discussion of the early commentaries on “Guanju,” see Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shi sanjia yi jishu 詩三家義集疏* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), pp. 4-16; see also Karlgren, *Glosses on the Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1964), pp. 86-87.
 43. See the excellent article in Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osprey>), last accessed December 27, 2009.
 44. The date is based on Karlgren, “The Early History of the *Chou Li* and *Tso Chuan* Texts,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 3 (1931): 44-54.
 45. All phonetic transcriptions after Axel Schuessler, *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987).
 46. *Chuci buzhu 楚辭補注* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 79.
 47. Transcriptions after Schuessler, *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese*. Strictly speaking, Schuessler—like other historical linguists—does not offer phonetic transcriptions but rather a highly complex notation system of phonological distinctions within early Chinese. We do not know whether the words sounded the way they are transcribed; what we do know from these reconstructions (especially for the main vowels and finals of the words, although with less certainty for their initials) are the distinctions and correspondences between the words. It is therefore valid, as I do in the following, to speak of phonetic relations between words because these relations are real; what is not necessarily real (but also less important) is the way they are transcribed.
 48. See George A. Kennedy, “A Note on Odes 220,” in *Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren Dedicata: Sinological Studies Dedicated to Bernhard Karlgren on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Søren Egerod and Else Glahn (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1959), pp. 190-98; David R. Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 3-12.
 49. See Kern, “The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts,” pp. 175-76.
 50. Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰, *Mao shi zhuan jian tongshi 毛詩傳箋通釋* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), pp. 417-18.
 51. See Kern, “Beyond the *Mao Odes*,” pp. 131-33.

52. An outstanding example among a number of new books on this topic is Wang Zuomin 汪祚民, *Shijing wenxue chanshi shi: Xian Qin—Sui Tang* 詩經文學闡釋史（先秦—隋唐）（Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 2005).
53. *Lu Shiheng wenji* 陸士衡文集 (*Sibu congkan* ed.), 8.9a-b. Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), “Quan Jin wen” 全晉文 98.2a, notes “Seven Diminutives” (Qi wei 七微) as a variant title. See also the discussion in Wang Zuomin, *Shijing wenxue chanshi shi: Xian Qin—Sui Tang*, pp. 280-81.
54. Furthermore, a variant reading of the first two lines, preserved in the eighth-century literary compendium *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985, 57.1031-33), suggests an additional allusion to “A Fellow” (Meng 氓, Mao 58), another song from the “Airs of Wei” (Wei feng 衛風) that according to Mao criticizes improper seduction and licentious mingling. For a fuller discussion, see Kern, “Beyond the Mao *Odes*.”