

**THE BOOK OF ODES: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2600 YEARS
CHINESE HERMENEUTIC TRADITION**

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PRELUDE

Shijing or *Shi*, also known as the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Poetry*, or the *Book of Songs*, is a collection of 305 pieces of poems, presumably compiled over a period spanning from early Zhou Dynasty (-1100)¹ to the time of Chunqiu (-722 to -481). Considered to be both poetry and scripture, the *Shijing* is not only the fountain of Chinese literature but also one of the five most sacred Confucian Classics.

Sima Qian wrote in the *Shiji*, "Confucius personally sang all the three hundred and five songs (poems) and played the music on the string instrument to ensure that they fitted into the score of *shao*, *wu* and *ya*, *sung*. Through his efforts, the tradition of ancient rites and music was therefore rescued from oblivion and handed down to posterity, that they may help in carrying out the ideal of King's Way (*wang dao*) and in teaching the Six Arts." ² Confucius's view and his interpretation of the *Shijing* signified the beginning of the *Shijing* hermeneutic tradition.

Based on the methodology and emphasis, the history of the *Shijing* hermeneutics can be divided into four phases: (1) Chunqiu to Qin (-722 to -206), (2) Han to Tang (-206 to +907), (3) Song to Ming (960 to 1644) and (4) Qing to the Republic (1644 to present). During the

first phase, poems in the *Shijing* were frequently cited and discussed in many of the pre-Qin texts, indicating that the *Shijing* was important in education before, during, and after the time of Confucius. In the second phase, moralistic and political elements, which were part of Confucian teaching promoted by the Han scholars, were introduced into the *Shijing* hermeneutics and produced long-lasting impact on the traditional *Shijing* hermeneutics. In the third phase, Song scholars raised doubts on the validity of strict moralistic and political interpretation of the *Shijing*. Nevertheless, the Song-Ming hermeneutics of the *Shijing* was still confined within the framework as defined by Han scholars. It is until much later that the great success of Qing scholars in the fields of textual research (*kaoju*), glyph analysis (*xungu*), and phonology has ushered the *Shijing* hermeneutics into the modern era.

Throughout the history of the *Shijing* hermeneutics, the question on the authorship of the *Shijing* has never been seriously discussed. Li Chendong (李辰冬), a modern literary scholar, published his trail-blazing work, *Shijing Tungshi* (詩經通釋, *General Discussion on the Shijing*) in 1964, wherein he proposed that most, if not all, of the poems in *Shijing* were composed by a noble Yin Jifu (尹吉甫) during the reign of King Xuan of Zhou Dynasty (周宣王-827 to -782). Predictably, Li's book was received with little enthusiasm and, sometimes, downright hostility from his contemporaries. However, Li's hypothesis was formulated based on a set of well-defined hermeneutic rules. Careful examination of these rules would suggest that Li's hypothesis has merit and deserves serious scholarly debate. In this paper, the history of the *Shijing* hermeneutics will be reviewed and Li's work on the *Shijing* will be presented within this context.

THE BEGINNING OF THE *SHIJING* HERMENEUTICS

Zuo Zhuan (*Zuo Commentary of Spring and Autumn Annals*), which retained the original text of *Spring and Autumn Annals*, recorded major historical events occurred during the Zhou dynasty in the state of Lu and other neighboring states over a period of 238 years. It was probably the most valuable source for us to appreciate how people viewed the *Shijing* before the time of Confucius. Over one hundred of poems from the *Shijing* have been cited or mentioned in the *Zuo Zhuan*. It appeared to be a common practice at that time that elite class quoted poems from the *Shi* to make a subtle point or to show off their literary grace and ability. For example, it was recorded in the *Zhuo Zhuan*, " [In the year 27 of the Duke Lu Xiang-Gong (-546)], the Duke of Zheng invited the Duke of Zhao to a banquet held at Chuilong (Zhengzhou, now in Henan Province). [Zheng ministers] Zizhan, Boyou, Zixi, Zichan, Ziaashu, two of Zishi (two persons with the same name) accompanied. The Duke of Zhao said, 'It is a great honor to have a company of you seven distinguished gentlemen. Please sing to complete your favor so that I can also discern your aspirations!'" ³ Each of these seven ministers indeed sang a piece of poem selected from the *Shijing* and the Duke of Zhao made grateful comment to each one of them after he finished his piece. From this and many other examples, it is apparent that citing or singing the poem was a popular act that served certain official function, particularly in diplomatic circle, at the time of Chunqiu (-722 to -484). Thus, nobles and elite cited or sang the poems from the *Shijing* to express their aspiration, emotion, or feeling and the poem was clearly understood between the one who sang it and the intended audience, no further interpretation was necessary. One has to conclude that the *Shijing* was part of the education for the elite class.

Among all the Confucian texts, the *Lunyu* (the *Analects*) is probably the most reliable source for us to examine how the *Shijing* was viewed by Confucius himself. The *Shijing* was mentioned 19 times in the *Analects*. The significance of the *Shi* education in Confucius's mind is illustrated well by his comment, "Young men, why not study *Shi*? *Shi* could elicit *xin* (activated, induced, motivated), *guan* (observe, investigate, reflect), *qun* (communicating in a group, interacting in a group), and *yuan* (let out, complain). *Shi* can be used at home to make family harmonious, and can be used to serve the superior in official functions. Moreover, it helps you to learn the names of trees, flowers, birds, and animals in nature."⁴ Confucius considered the *Shijing* as a valuable educational tool, which was to be accompanied by and integrated with rites (*li*) and music (*yue*), so that, together, they could govern the personal conduct individually and within the context of family, society, and state. The emphasis on the educational value of the *Shijing* was reflected in almost all other major Confucian texts at the time of Warring States, particularly the *Book of Mencius* and the *Book of Hsun Tsu*.⁵

In the *Book of Mencius*, Mengzi (-372 to -289) and his disciples mentioned the *Shijing* 39 times. Mengzi emphasized the importance of searching for the original intention of the poem. When Mengzi discussed with his student Wang Zhang on how to learn from the ancient sage, he said, "If you recite his poems, read his writings, how could you not know that person? Thus, by reading the sage's work you may be able to befriend the ancient sage."⁵ To Mengzi, words are merely messengers, and the ultimate goal of studying the *Shi* is to be able to learn, through the words, the deeds of ancient sages directly. In other words, the *Shijing* was the scripture with profound educational value.⁶

Similarly, Xunzi directly quoted or discussed the poems from the *Shi* numerous times in the *Book of Hsun Tsu*. Xunzi also considered that the *Shijing* reflected the sage's intention and thus the study of the *Shi* allowed one to discern the sage's intention. He was the one who formalized the Confucian teaching by indicating why and how to study each Confucian classic. Within this context, he frequently discussed the study of the *Shi* with other five classics and admonished his students that without reciting the *Shi* or studying the *Shi*, one cannot be considered learned.⁷ Xunzi was credited as a major figure who passed along the teaching of *Shijing* to the posterity.⁸

EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF THE *SHIJING*

It can be certain that the *Shi* at the Chunqiu period was well versed among the elite class. Thus high officials, diplomats, and scholars at that time were able to cite (or sing) the poem (*fu shi*) when and where appropriate, suggesting that the *Shi* was taught as an important subject in the official school (*guan xue* or official learning). The official school was limited only to aristocratic class and royal houses and aimed at officialdom at that time.⁹ Thus, Confucius commented, "[If a person] who learned all three hundred poems, [was] given administrative duties [of a state], failed; [if he was] given diplomatic missions, couldn't converse [with foreign dignitaries]. What is the purpose of learning so much?"¹⁰

One of the major reasons that Confucius was considered the Sage of China was because of his pivotal role in bringing *guan xue* to a wider populace without considering their family background. According to the *Shiji*, "Confucius taught poetry (the *Shi*), history (the *Book of Documents*), ceremony (*li*), and music (*yue*) to 3000 or so students. Among them, seventy two had truly mastered the six arts."¹¹ With the establishment of *si xue* (private

school or private learning), as opposed to *guan xue*, Confucius, together with his disciples, was responsible for transmitting almost all the ancient scriptural knowledge to the future generation. The *Shijing*, together with other classics, became an integral part of Confucian teaching. Through the effort of two great molders of Confucian tradition, Mengzi and Xunzi, the *Shijing* hermenutics during and after the time of Confucius was characterized by the emphasis of its educational function, manifested both at the individual and the societal level. As a medium or vehicle in for human interaction, the major concern was whether the poem cited was appropriate and whether it could generate resonance from the audience. Thus, the *Shijing* hermenutics in the first phase was not so much on how to find the true meaning of a particular glyph, word or sentence in a poem, but rather on how to use practically in one's life, either private or public.

THE SECOND PHASE OF *SHIJING* HERMENEUTICS

After the suppression of Confucianism in the Qin dynasty (-221 to -206) and the subsequent great turmoil that followed the collapse of the Qin Empire, the *Shijing* study went all but underground. Fortunately this hiatus did not last long. After the establishment of the Han Dynasty (-206 to +220), the Confucian teaching was revived with the establishment of the Academic Chairs for Confucian Studies. Emperor Han Wu-Di (reigned -140 to -87) formally installed the Doctors for the Five Classics in -136 by appointing top scholars for these prestigious positions.¹²

Three endowed chairs were given, respectively, to three different *Shijing* commentary schools, Lu, Qi, and Han. Together these three schools were known as the Contemporary Text Schools (*Jinwen Shijing*). Another commentary school, founded by Mao Heng (Great

Master Mao), known as the Old Text School (*Gu wen Shijing*), however, was excluded from the Academy.¹³ These four prominent commentary schools were originated from different states, Lu from eastern Shangdong, Qi, from western Shangdong, and Han from Hebei, whereas Mao was said to be directly derived from Zixia, one of the better known Confucius disciples. What were the differences in their interpretation of the *Shijing*? How were these differences originated? Could these differences be related to the regional history, regional dialect, or other factors? These competing commentary schools on the *Shijing* at the early Han dynasty could have offered a unique window of opportunity to study the comparative hermenutics at that time. Unfortunately, these questions are difficult to answer now since the last of these three Contemporary Text Schools survived only till the Tang dynasty. In contrast, the Mao school survived outside the Academy and became quite popular.

The text used by the Mao school the *Mao Shi Guxun Zhuan* (毛詩詁訓傳) was later annotated by Zheng Xuan (127 to 200) and became known as the *Zheng Annotation of Mao Shi* (*Mao Shi Zheng Jian*, also known as *Zheng Jian* 鄭箋). Zheng's annotation finally anointed the *Mao Shi Guxun Zhuan* as the only version of the *Shijing* to be transmitted to the posterity.

In the *Mao Shi Guxun Zhuan*, each poem was introduced by a preface, known as *Shi-xu* (the Foreword of the *Shi*). There are two parts of *Shi-xu*: the Major Foreword (*Da-xu*) and the Minor Forewords (*Xiao-xu*). *Da-xu* gives an overview of the *Shijing* based on the traditional view of Confucianism and also discusses the art of poetry writing in the *Shijing*.¹⁴ *Xiao-xu* introduces the historical background and provides annotation for each poem, suggesting the political and educational implication of the poem. During the early Tang dynasty, Kong Yinda (574-648) was commissioned to edit the *Wu Jin Zheng Yi* (*Orthodox Interpretation of Five*

Classics). For the *Shijing*, Kong compiled the *Mao Shi Zheng Yi* (*Orthodox Interpretation of Mao Shi*), which included the original *Mao Shi Chuan* and *Zheng Jian* and additional comments and annotations made by contemporary scholars of the Wei, Jin, South-North, and Sui dynasties. Kong's *Mao Shi Zheng Yi* completely retained the view of Mao Heng and Zheng Xuan in that the goal of studying the *Shijing* was to make the family more harmonious, the king more benevolent, and the officials more diligent and loyal.

Why the Han-Tang scholars were so concerned with the historic context and political implication of each poem? One possible explanation is that the attempt of framing every single poem of the *Shijing* within a veritable historical context probably signified the effort to consolidate the validity of the political interpretation of the *Shijing*.

FROM RELAXED INTERPRETATION TO THE CANONIZATION OF THE *SHIJING*

During the first phase of the *Shijing* hermeneutics, diplomats, nobles, and scholars freely cited poems from the *Shijing* to show off their literary grace, to facilitate communication, and to strengthen the argument. Such relaxed hermeneutic tradition persisted till the period of Warring States, but soon disappeared with the canonization of the *Shijing* in the Han dynasty. The introduction of the historical element into the *Shijing* hermeneutics not only justified the moralistic and political interpretation of the *Shijing*, but also codified the orthodox interpretation of each poem in the *Shijing*, making it almost impossible to interpret otherwise. This trend certainly coincided with the recognition of Confucianism as the major moral and spiritual guidance of nation building, and later as the foremost ideological platform for the imperial rule. The establishment of the National Examination in the Tang Dynasty formalized the official teaching and interpretation of all Confucian canons, including the *Shijing*.

SHIJING HERMENEUTICS IN THE THIRD PHASE

The third phase of *Shijing* hermeneutics was dominated by Zhu Xi (1129 to 1200), the great scholar of Song Dynasty, who led the revolt of Song scholars against the strict *Shijing* hermeneutic tradition of Han and Tang Dynasty. The revolt started out with the debate on whether Confucius was responsible for deleting over 2000 poems from the collection¹⁵. As the Han historian Ban Gu wrote, "In ancient times, there were officials who were responsible for collecting poems (or folk songs) for Kings so that they could understand the customs, yearnings, and lives of commoners",¹⁶ this gathering process could represent how the *Shijing* came about. If this was the case, Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), a prominent politician and scholar of the Song dynasty, reasoned that it would make sense that Confucius should have deleted many of them during the editing process. The corollary was that if most poems from the *Shi* were originally folklore, then their interpretation should not have to follow the orthodox official commentaries. The idea that many poems in the *Shijing* could be just folklore prompted Ouyang Xiu, Zhu Xi, and other Song scholars to speculate the validity of strict historical interpretation as advanced in the *Shi-xu* and promoted by Zheng Xuan. Instead, they believed that a new approach should be offered to interpret and to understand the *Shijing*.

REVOLUTION AGAINST THE *SHI-XU*

The question on the validity of the *Shi-xu* led to the publication of the *Shi Ji Zhaun* by Zhu Xi in 1177. In this book, Zhu Xi attempted to remove almost all the influence of the *Xiao-xu* on his interpretation of the *Shijing*. Zhu Xi pointed out many inconsistencies in the *Xiao-xu* with regard to the citing of historical events and stated, "There are so many mistakes in the *Mao Shi Xu*. People saw that each poem was capped with *Xiao-xu* as foreword and dared not to question or challenge their truthfulness, even in the case that when [*Xiao-]**xu*

was complete nonsense, scholars still tried to justify it. *Shi-xu* corrupted the *Shijing* scholarship tremendously!"¹⁷ Just imagine the orthodox status that the *Mao Shi Gu Xun*, including *Shi-xu*, had enjoyed in the Han and Tang dynasties. Zhu Xi's *Shi Ji Zhaun* was a trail-blazing work in the *Shijing* hermeneutics and it replaced the *Mao Zhuan* and *Zheng Jian* as the most influential and authoritative book on *Shijing* for the next thousand years.

The driving force behind Zhu Xi's unrelenting attack of *Shi-xu* was his strong belief that the majority of the *Guo Feng* in the *Shijing* was nothing but folk songs or country-side ditties, which were collected and compiled by officials in various states during -1100 to -600. Thus, he concluded, "I heard [from masters], all poems in the category of the *Feng*, came from streets and alleys (*li xiang*) as folk songs. Youth, male and female, sang to each other, expressing their love and feelings."¹⁸

INTUITIVE HERMENEUTICS

The *Shijing* hermeneutics in the Han-Tang period can be characterized by its penchant for using historical correlation in to consolidate the educational role of the *Shijing*, either politically or moralistically. The *Shijing* hermeneutics in the Song dynasty, however, is characterized by an equally strong penchant in removing that correlation. Instead, the emphasis is on the intuitive reading of the poem itself. Zhu Xi described how he studied and interpreted the *Shijing*, "When I studied the *Shijing*, I read [loudly] the poem itself forty to fifty times. By then I understood about sixty to seventy percent of that poem. Then I looked back to see how other people explained this poem, and compared [that] with my own. With the consensus reached, I re-read the poem for another thirty or forty times, until I was confident that I fully understood the meaning, implication and subtlety of that poem."¹⁹

Zhu's intuitive method and his belief that many *Shijing* poems were simply folk songs, however, had many times led him astray. After all, the *Shijing* was composed at least 1500 years before the time of Zhu Xi. Without the benefit of phonology, philology, archaeology, linguistics, epigraphy and textual analysis, intuitive reading could very well lead to misunderstanding. His folk song theory also hindered any further quest on the authorship of the *Shijing*. Thus Zhu Xi simply assigned many poems in the *Guo Feng* as composed by licentious or promiscuous girls. Even in the most liberal society, which the ancient China was unlikely to be, it is hard to imagine that so many songs made by licentious lady would enter the official collection and become the orthodox scholarly text.

***SHIJING* HERMENEUTICS FROM QING TO THE REPUBLIC**

The progress in the areas of phonology, philology, epigraphy and textual research in the Qing dynasty has helped to bring new insights to the understanding of ancient texts, including the *Shijing*. The advance of sciences such as archeology, anthropology, biology and astronomy in the 19th and 20th century further broadened the scope of *Shijing* research and brought new perspectives to *Shijing* hermeneutics. The four representative scholars in the *Shijing* hermeneutics during this phase are Wang Yinzhi (1766-1834), Ma Ruichen (1782-1853), Wang Guowei (1877-1927), and Wen Yiduo (1899-1946). The following briefly discussed their contribution to the *Shijing* hermeneutics.

Wang Yizhi: Armed with strong background in phonology Wang Yizhi was very good in applying the inductive method to *Shijing* hermeneutics.²⁰ For example, he compared all poems that contain the phrase: *zhong* 終 + noun + *qie* 且 + noun, and concluded that *zhong* is

equivalent to *ji* 既 (already, as well). Similar glyphic analysis has helped to clarify the meaning of many poems in the *Shijing*.

Ma Ruichen: He had applied his considerable knowledge on the Zhou cultural relic and institutions to the *Shijing* research. His work in the *Mao Shi Zhuan Jian Tong Shi* (*Comprehensive Study of Mao Shi Zhuan Jian*) can be considered as the bible for the understanding the landscape and institutions at the time of the *Shijing*. For example, in interpreting *yi che qi xiu* (役車其休) in *Xi Shuai* (Poem 114), Ma argued, with considerable evidence, that *yi che* was conscripted cart used for military purpose, not for farming as claimed in the *Zheng Jian*.²¹

Wang Guowei: Considered to be the last Chinese scholar in true traditional sense, the contribution of Wang Guowei to the classical Chinese study was numerous, including his *Shijing* scholarship. He was the first to point out the common practice of using idioms in the *Shijing*. These idioms could not be understood from reading the individual glyph in the idiom. For example, the idiom *zhi jiang* means "heaven and earth" instead of "ascending and descending" as the individual glyph *zhi* and *jiang* would have suggested. He was also the first to apply the knowledge of bronze vessel inscriptions to the study of the *Shijing*. For example, he demonstrated that the owner and maker of a well-known piece of bronze vessel, Xi Jia Pan, was Yin Jifu, a name that appeared in the *Shijing* and the *Bamboo Annals*.²² This finding provided an important clue for the authorship of the *Shijing* that we will discuss later.

Wen Yiduo : Wen extensively and systematically applied the inductive method to the study of the *Shijing*. He discovered the frequent use of insinuating (or enigmatic) language in

the *Shijing*. This turned out to be a fruitful approach and he was able to generate definitive interpretation of many ambiguous terms. For example, he pointed out the use of pepper to signify fertility in the *Jiao Liao* (Poem 117). He explained that the glyph *hong* 鴻 in *Xin Tai* (Poem 43) referred to toad, not swan goose as all other scholars claimed.²³

GLYPHIC AND TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

Shijing hermeneutics in the 4th phase emphasized the precise glyphic interpretation based on scientific analysis. The importance of precise understanding of every glyph in a poem cannot be overstated. Many times, the meaning of a poem is hinged upon a single word. The interpretation of the glyph *wei* (謂) illustrates this point well. In *Du Ren Shi* (Poem 225), a paragraph reads, “*Bi Jun zi nu, wei zhi Yin Ji* 彼君子女, 謂之尹吉” The glyph *wei* is commonly known as "to be called or to be told". Thus, Arthur Waley translated this line as:

"That lady his daughter

They called her Yin Ji"²⁴

However, Wen Yiduo convincingly demonstrated that *wei* was used as a loan word here and should be read as *gui* 歸 meaning "return" or "to be returned". Wen said, "*wei* and *gui* were not clearly differentiated in archaic phonology. They were of the same meaning. Later, *wei* indicates the direction of the word or meaning whereas *gui* indicates the direction of body or other physical objects. The combined word *wei zhi* in Poem #225 should read as *gui zhi*."²⁵ Thus the poem should be understood as:

"That lady his daughter

To be married to Yin Ji."

Clearly, the correct interpretation of this particular poem hinges on a single glyph. The hallmark of the *Shijing* hermeneutics in this phase is the emphasis of precise understanding of the *Shijing* at the glyphic and textual level. Whether the poems are for political or educational purpose, or whether the poems are folk songs or not is no longer the concern.

A HERETICAL PROPOSAL BY LI CHENDONG

Li Chendong (1906-1983) was a modern literary scholar. His hermeneutic approach to the *Shijing* research was basically similar to that of the four scholars mentioned above. What set him apart from them was his proposal that a single author composed the *Shijing*. Although the proposal is still considered to be heretical, it can be noted that Li had devoted more than thirty years of his life to the *Shijing* research and did not come to this conclusion lightly. Li had his academic training from the Yanjing University and the University of Paris. In an essay about his scholarly career, Li described how, from early on, he was fascinated by J. Spingarn's *The Creative Criticism*, and later influenced by the work of Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) and Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (1828-1893).²⁶ These scholars emphasized the importance of scientific analysis of the literary work in literary criticism, particularly how the author's life and upbringing influenced the aesthetic content and artistic achievement of the literary work. Taine's perceptive articles on Balzac in *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire* became Li's life-long guiding work. Li started his career as a professor of Chinese literature first in the mainland and then in Taiwan until his death. Early in his career he has applied the Taine's approach to analyze the work of several famous Chinese poet, including Tao Yuanming, Li Po, Cao Zijian, and Tu Fu. In each case, he found that the

content and emotion in almost every single poem reflected closely the life of the poet at a certain stage. He then decided to use the same approach to more systematically examine the history of the Chinese literature. Chinese literature arguably began with the *Shijing*, and it was natural that Li started his project with the *Shijing*. Soon he found that the *Shijing* research became his single-minded endeavor and, to the end, he himself voiced surprise that his life-long work should have led to a conclusion that the *Shijing* was composed by a single author. To understand how this could happen, a brief review of Li's hermenutic approach is in order.

Li's hermeneutic approach emphasized accurate glyph and textual interpretation and can be summarized as follows:

1. For each word, idiom, or phrase, find out how many times it appears in the *Shijing*, and whether it has the same meaning in all poems. If there is exception, ask why.
2. Precisely determine the location of places mentioned in the *Shijing*. For example, *Jing Shan* (Mountain Jing) was only referred as a big mountain in the *Mao Zhuan*. This is not acceptable. One should find out precisely the location of *Jing Shan*.
3. When a personage was mentioned in a poem, be sure to find out as much as possible the background and story of that person from other textual sources.
4. For the events mentioned in the poem, try to find out the precise time, place, and personage involved in that event.
5. The repetitive phrases or sentences used in the same poem should refer to the similar event. They should be interpreted accordingly.
6. Pay great attention to the usage of the idioms in the Zhou dynasty.

7. Pay attention to terms related to the Zhou institutions. For example, the terms *liang-ren* 良人, *shi-shi* 師氏, and *xiao-zi* 小子 should be interpreted not based on our current definition of each glyph, but based on their usage at the time of Zhou Dynasty.
8. Try to find out the nature of the plants mentioned in the poems. For example, when did they blossom, what season did they grow and where did they grow.
9. An interpretation of a glyph, idiom, sentence, or term in one poem should also be applicable to other poems in the *Shijing*.
10. Try to put all the glyph interpretation in context and being able to explain the complete text of the poem.
11. Poems containing similar or identical sentences, events, places or personage could be related.

One good example on how these rules may lead to fresh insight is Li's identification of *nan-shan* (south mountain) as the Mountain Taixing (太行山). *Nan-shan*, which literally means the south hill or the south mountain, appeared in ten different *Shijing* poems. Traditional interpretation of *nan-shan* either said that the precise location was unclear, or referred it to the Mountain Zhongnan, south of Xian, Shangxi province). Arthur Waley translated *nan-shan* as the southern hill.²⁷ The question is whether *nan-shan* simply referred to a non-specified mountain in the south (south of what?) or it is the name of a specified mountain. Based on the *Shui Jing Zhu (An Exegesis of the Book of the Rivers)*,²⁸ Li argued, since in the Zhou dynasty the area from Qi county to Ji Yuan county in Henan Province was known as Nanyang, which literally means the south of the South Mountain, and the only mountain in this area is the Taixing Mountain; therefore, *Nan-shan* in the *Shijing* could only refer to the Mountain Taixing. Li's argument is further strengthened by the fact that in the

book the *Yi Lin*, there is a phrase *Nan Shan Da Xing* 南山太行, suggesting that *Nan-shan* was still known as the name for the Mountain Taixing even during the Eastern Han dynasty (ca. 200 AD).²⁹ This argument is also consistent with the fact that a number of place names in the *Shijing*, such as Fuguan (Poem 58), Qi river (Poem 58, 59, 55, 63, 39), Dun Qiu (Poem 58), Jun (Poem 32, 53), Mao Qiu (Poem 37), Jing-shan (Poem 305, 50), Han Quan (Poem 32), all can be found in this area.³⁰ The identification of *nan-shan* as the Taixing Mountain provided a defined setting for many poems in the *Shijing*.

Li's hermeneutic rules listed above also reflected his desire to determine whether the *Shijing* poems were composed with defined purpose, emotion, time and settings or they were mostly generic in nature, written by some amorphous personality. If the former were the case, one certainly would ask who wrote these poems. In this regard, the influence of Taine and other European scholars on Li's approach was obvious. With few exceptions, the authorship of majority of poem in the *Shijing* was traditionally attributed to people anonymous. Those poems with authorship known are because (i) the author mentioned his/her name in the poem; (ii) the author was mentioned in the *Shi-xu*; or (iii) the author was mentioned in other ancient texts, such as the *Zhuo Zhuan*. In the case (i), we have Yin Jifu (Poem 177, 259, 260), Jia Fu (Poem 191), and Meng Zi (Poem 300). In the case (ii) and (iii), we have Yin Jifu (Poem 261, 262), Duke Zhou (Poem 155), Rei Liangfu (Poem 257), Zhuan Jiang (Poem 27, 28, 29, 30), Lady Xumu (Poem 54), Zhao Mu Gong (Poem 253, 255, 263), Zhao Kang Gong (Poem 250, 251, 252), and Qin Kang Gong (Poem 134). With the exception of Yin Jifu, Li was able to make argument to repudiate the authorship of all the other putative authors. For example, he demonstrated the term *fu shi* in the *Zhuo Zhuan* was strictly used to mean "to sing or to cite the poem", and not "to compose the poem". Thus the line "Lady Xumu *fu Zai Chi*" that appeared

in the *Zuozhuan* simply indicated that Lady Xumu sang the poem of *Zai Chi* (Poem 54) and could not be used to implicate Lady Xumu as the author of the poem *Zai Chi*.

Li applied his hermenutic rules to every single poem in the *Shijing* and systematically compared the events mentioned in the *Shijing* (e.g. the war against Xian Yun, a northern tribe that came from central Asia) with that in the *Bamboo Annals* and bronze vessel inscriptions (e.g. Xi Jia Pan). Decades of research led him to conclude that : (1) the styles of poems in the *Shijing* are quite uniform and can be divided into *feng* (ode or ballad style), *ya* (or Song, narrative or chanting style), *song* (panegyric or eulogizing style); (2) there is a high consistency in the language use; identical or similar phrases have been repeatedly used in different poems; (3) there is a high consistency in the style and in the use of rhyme; (4) the description of the ritual, food, clothing, scenery, and other things in many poems was so realistic that it simply did not fit the generic nature of folk songs; (5) the places mentioned in the *Shijing* are consistent with places that Yin Jifu spent his career; (6) the personage or people appeared in the *Shijing* were contemporary and related to Yin Jifu; (7) the time period covered in the *Shijing* correlates with the life time of Yin Jifu; (8) the events mentioned in the *Shijing* were also recorded in the *Bamboo Annals* where Yin Jifu's name was mentioned; and (9) among all these putative authors the only veritable one is Yin Jifu, an aristocratic soldier/scholar living at the later period of the Western Zhou (ca -853 to -775). With this conclusion as the basis, Li published a series of papers arguing that perhaps Yin Jifu was the author of most, if not all, of the poems in the *Shijing*.³¹

With the belief that each poem may stand for a rich story of personal experience at a particular stage of the author's life, Li felt that the duty of the literary critic is to uncover that

story. Toward that goal, Li had made serious attempt to uncover the stories told by the *Shijing*. He has provided a set of rigorous and testable criteria culminated from many years of research. Based on these criteria, he has pointed a new, albeit also controversial, direction for the *Shijing* research, namely, the possibility that the *Shijing* represented a body of work of a single author.

CONCLUSION

In reviewing the history of the *Shijing* hermeneutics from the Chunqiu period to the Republic, one is struck by its utilitarian nature, be it political, moralistic, or educational. With a few exceptions, one finds little discussion on the authorship throughout the history. Indeed, because of the utilitarian nature of the *Shijing* hermeneutics, the question on the authorship is no longer an important issue. In fact, by ignoring the question of the authorship, there is more room for one to interpret the poem and to draw conclusions about the poem as one see fit. Thus, instead of using the poem to express the author's emotion or aspiration, the poems can be used freely by the readers as a sophisticated vehicle to utter their inner feeling.

The traditional *Shijing* hermeneutics has also rarely paid attention to geographic locations of places mentioned in the *Shijing*. For example, *nan-shan* in the *Shijing* can be any mountain because the true location of *nan-shan* would have no impact on the utilitarian function of the poem. Indeed, most of the of places in the *Shijing* were simply considered as generic, not specific geographic location.³² Li Chendong was vehement in emphasizing the importance of the association of place names in the *Shijing* with the geographic locations at the time of the Zhou dynasty. When a place mentioned in the *Shijing* was found to actually represent a specific geographic location within a historic context, there are bound to have an impact on the interpretation of the poem. It is interesting to compare Li' approach with that of

Mao Heng. The attempt of making historical correlation in the *Shi-xu* by Mao appeared to be arbitrary; in many cases lack of any supporting evidence and some times run into direct contradictory evidence. In contrast, Li's use of the *Bamboo Annals* and other ancient texts to correlate historical events described in the *Shijing* followed the good tradition initiated by Wang Guowei. The hermeneutic rules listed by Li for the *Shijing* research were built on the foundation of the earlier work of Qing/Republic scholars from Wang Yinzhi to Wen Yidou. However, his identification of Yin Jifu as the sole author of the *Shijing* and his attempt to correlate the *Shijing* with the life of Yin Jifu reflected his training in Paris. Based on Li's study, it seems that many poems can be correlated with historical events occurred during the reign of Zhou Xuan Wang. Like Zhu Xi's folk song hypothesis, Li's proposal that all of the poems of *Shijing* could be attributed to Yin Jifu is still a hypothesis. However, his hermeneutic approach was logical and scientific, and thus the validity of many of his arguments can be tested. For example, one can ask is *Nan Shan* indeed the Taxing Mountain? Or Did Lady Xumu really write *Zai Chi*?

In summary, the history of the Chinese *Shijing* hermeneutics has gone through four distinct phases during the past 2600 years. In the first phase, the *Shijing* was clearly used for educational purpose, whether in the *guan xue* or *si xue*. However, the interpretation of the *Shijing* poems appeared to be quite individual and relaxed. The second phase was marked by an increasingly strict interpretation of the *Shijing* and the use of the *Shijing*, along with other Confucian texts, to establish Confucianism as the national ideology. In the third phase the strict official interpretation was replaced by the intuitive interpretation of the *Shijing* based on the belief that many poems were just folk songs. Finally, the fourth phase emphasized the use of scientific method to interpret the *Shijing* poems at the glyphic and textual level without any

concern of the ideological or functional role of the *Shijing*, which dominated the *Shijing* hermeneutics from the beginning. Among the distinguished scholars in this phase, Li went one step further. In addition to stressing the importance of accurate reading of the *Shijing*, Li has introduced the discussion of authorship into the *Shijing* hermeneutics. His effort in uncovering the original meaning of each poem in the *Shijing* and his attempt to correlate the stories reflected in the poems led him to believe that enough evidence t was hereto suggest that the *Shijing* may represent a body of literary work written by Yin Jifu. The proposal is indeed heretical, but does represents a fresh and alternative approach for the *Shijing* hermeneutics. In this regard, Li's work deserves further research and scholarly debate. If indeed Li's hypothesis is were proven to be true, or even partially true, the landscape of *Shijing* hermeneutics will be permanently changed.

Notes:

1. Here I follow the lead of Joseph Needham and use plus and minus signs to replace AD and BC, which were deemed provincial (G. Sampson, *Writing Systems*, p. 24). Where it is obvious, the plus sign will be dropped.
2. From the *Shiji*, *Kongzi Shi Jia (The Life of Confucius)*. Translated by Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, p.133, Zheng Zong Books, Taipei, 1994.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, the translation was mine.
- 4, *Lunyu*, 17.9. Translated by Lin Yutang in "*The Wisdom of Confucius*", p. 425, Zheng Zong Books, Taipei, 1994. The other quotes of *Lunyu* were also translated by Lin Yutang.
5. *The Book of Mencius, Chapter Wang Zhang, Part II.*

6. For detailed discussion on the Shijing hermeneutics in this book, see see Mi Wenkai, *The Mencius and the Shijing*, in *Shijing xinshang yu yanjiu* 詩經欣賞與研究, vol. 2, pp. 389-421, San Min Books, Taipei, 1972.
7. Pei Puyan, *The Hsun Tsu and the Shijing*, in *Shijing xinshang yu yanjiu* 詩經欣賞與研究, vol. 2, pp. 422-472, San Min Books, Taipei, 1972.
8. See Lu De Ming, *Jing Dian Shi Wen* 經典釋文, cited by Mi Wenkai and Pei Puxian, *Shijing Xinshang yu Yanjiu*, volume 2, p. 423, 1972 edition, San Min Books, Taipei. According to Lu, the learning of the *Shi* (i.e. *Shijing*) was passed from Zixia (one of Confucius famous students) to Zeng Sheng, then to Li Ke of Wei State, then to Meng Zhong Zi of Lu State, then to Geng Mou Zi, then to Sun Qin Zi (i.e. Xunzi) of Zhao State and Xunzi then passed *Shi* to the Great Master Mao of Lu State. This long list would suggest that among the earlier Confucian scholars, Xunzi played a critical role in upholding the hermeneutical tradition from Confucius down to the Han dynasty
- 9 Chien Mu, "Kongzi yu Chunqiu" in his *Liang Han Jing Xue Jin-Gu Wen Pin Yi* (Taipei, Tong-tai tu-shu, 1971), pp.247-248.
10. Lunyu, 13.5.
11. The six arts are rites, music, shooting, driving, six classics, and mathematics. Alternatively, they refer to the six ancient scripture texts, namely, *Shi* (*Book of Odes*), *Shu* (*Book of Documents*), *Li* (*Book of Rites*), *Yue* (*Book of Music*), *I* (*Book of Changes*), *Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*).
12. Five classics refer to *Shi*, *Shu*, *I*, *Li*, and *Chunqiu*. Each classic was endowed with several Doctoral chairs.

13. The three schools were led by, respectively, Master Shen Pei for Lu School, Master Yuan Gu Shen for Qi School, and Master Han Yin for Han School. Mao school was given a Doctoral chair during the time of Emperor Han Pin-Di (-1 to +6).
- 14 According to *Da-xu*, the art of poetry writing was based on *liu yi* (the six principles): *feng* (風 folklore, influence, educate), *ya* (雅 related to official matter), *song* (頌 celebrating, commending accomplishment), *fu* (賦 expanding a theme), *bi* (比 analogy), *xing* (興 induction).
15. Sima Qian stated in the *Shiji*, "In ancient time, [there were] over 3000 poems, Confucius deleted many redundant ones, compiled the poems from Qi, Houji (ca -2000), including the ones [made] during Yin (Shang Dynasty) and Zhou, until the decadent Kings You and Li."
16. Ban Gu also mentioned in the *Han Shu, Li Yue Zhi (Rites and Musics Annals in the Book of Han Dynasty)* , "Han Wu-Di established the sacrificial ceremony on the four outskirts. He also installed Music Conservatory for collecting and composing poems (folk songs and ballads). There were songs from Yue (Zhejiang province), Dai (Hebei province), Qin (Shang Xi province), Chu (Hunan province)." Thus, the collection of folk songs from various regions of the empire appeared to be a new practice in Han Dynasty. Whether this was the case in the Zhou Dynasty was completely unclear.
17. For example, many poems in the *Zheng Feng (Poems from Zheng State)* were considered by *Xiao-xu* as composed by officials to humiliate and to demean Zheng Zhao-Gong (Lord Zhao of Zheng). Zhu Xi commented, "Simply because his loss of lordship, every poem in the *Zheng Feng* was said to be a satire against him. This is not acceptable. Indeed, Ji Hu (personal name of Lord Zhao) was not the kind of wanton, violent, or licentious Lord."

18. See Zhu Xi, *Shi Ji Zhuan Xu* 詩集傳序 .
19. See Zhu Xi, *Shijing Yi-shuo* 詩經遺說, cited by Li Chendong in *Shijing Yanjiu* 詩經研究, p. 238.
20. The three chapters on the *Shijing* in his *Jing Yi Shu Wen* (經義述聞) provided rich examples on how to use inductive method to clarify the meaning of some difficult or controversial glyphs and idioms.
21. This interpretation was consistent with the status of *liang shi* (良士), a term also appeared in Poem 114, as *liang shi* should refer to officers in the royal army in the Zhou dynasty. Both Arthur Waley and James Legge, however, translated *liang shi* as a generic term, good man. The numbering refers to the traditional order of poem in the *Mao Shi*.
22. Wang Guowei's argument was described in detail in *Xi Jia Pan Ba* 兮甲盤跋, Postscript for Xi Jia Pan. See *Shijing Yanjiu* 詩經研究, p. 290-292, 1982 edition, Shui Niu Publisher, Taipei.
23. See Wen Yidou, *Shi XinTai Hong zi Shuo* 詩新臺鴻字說, *Wen Yidou Quanji* 聞一多全集, volume 2, p. 201, Nan Tung Books, Hong Kong.
24. See Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p. 190. 1988 Edition, Grove Weidenfeld, New York.
- 25 See *Wen Yidou Quanji*, volume 2, p.91.
26. See Li Chendong, *Wo de zhi xue jing-yan* (My scholarly experience) in "*Shijing Yanjiu Fanfa Lun* 詩經方法研究論", pp. 323-346, 1982, Shui Niu Publisher, Taipei.
27. *Nan-shan* was mentioned in ten poems in the *Shijing* and in all cases, it was translated as the southern hills. See Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 1988 Edition, Grove Weidenfeld, New York.

28. *Shui Jing Zhu* 水經注, volume 9, quoted Ying Shao 應劭, *Dili Fengsu Ji* 地理風俗記, cited by Li Chendong. See *Shijing Yanjiu*, p. 17, 1982 edition, Shui Niu Publisher, Taipei.
29. See *Yi lin* 易林, *Da You Zhi Qian* 大有之乾, cited by Li Chendong, see *Shijing Yanjiu*, p. 17, 1982 edition, Shui Niu Publisher, Taipei.
30. Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹, *Du Shi Fan Yu Ji Yao* 讀史方輿紀要, cited by Li extensively. See *Shijing Yanjiu*, p. 19-27, 1982 edition, Shui Niu Publisher, Taipei.
31. Li reached this conclusion in a series of paper compiled in, "*Shi Jing Yan Jiu Fan Fa Lun*". See "On the authorship of the *Shijing*", pp. 113-134, and "Yin Jifu, his life and the *Shijing*" pp. 67-76 in *Shijing Yanjiu Fanfa Lun* 詩經方法研究論 1982, Shui Niu Publisher, Taipei.
32. For example, *Han Quan* (寒泉) was translated as cool spring or cold spring (Poem 32), *Mao Qiu* (旄丘) was translated as high and sloping mound (Poem 37) and *Jing Shan* (景山) was translated as the high hills and lofty elevations (Poem 50). See Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 1988.