

Oracle Poems
Ritual Awareness, Symbolism and Creativity
in *Shi Jing* 詩經 Poetics

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Oracle Poems:

Ritual Awareness, Symbolism and Creativity in *Shi Jing* Poetics

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1/ Reading the Winds:

Ancient and Modern Approaches to the *Shi Jing*

For more than two thousand years, the collection of poetry simply referred to as the *Shi Jing* 詩經, (“The Classic of Poetry”, “Book of Odes” or “Book of Songs”), has shaped the Chinese literary landscape. The classic is one of the central influences on the development of later Chinese poetry, and can appropriately be considered a major contributor to the habits of expression, imagery and structure which remained dominant until the nineteenth century.

The text is also closely intertwined with moral Confucianism, beginning with Confucius’s famous but obscure seal of approval that the poems contain “nothing heterodox in thought” (思無邪)¹, or, in the memorable translation of Ezra Pound, that the message of the *Shi Jing* is: “have no twisty thoughts!”² Unsurprisingly, given the broad range of material found within it, and the essential cultural importance attributed to it due to the supposition that Confucius was involved in its formation, the *Shi Jing* has been at the centre of the moral and intellectual lives of various schools of interpretation, and has been used in discussion and debate in educated China for millennia. Indeed, reference to sections of the received text of the *Shi Jing* also precedes Confucius, as, for instance, in the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, “The Zuo Commentary [to the Spring and Autumn Annals]”, attesting to the

¹Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed. *Shi san jing zhu shu* 十三經注疏 [Annotated edition of the Thirteen Classics], Volume 8, *Lun Yu Xiao Jing Er Ya Meng Zi* 論語孝經爾雅孟子. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan yinhang, 1815; Photo reprint Minguo 74 [1985], p. 16a. All translations from Chinese are my own.

²Ezra Pound. *Confucius: The Unwobbling Pivot, The Great Digest, The Analects*. New York: New Directions Paperbacks, 1969, p. 197.

significance of a tradition of interpreting and commenting on the *Shi Jing* possibly as early as the mid sixth century BCE, if the *Zuo Zhuan* is indeed contemporaneous with the events described within it.

As a result of the text's celebrity, from the Han dynasty, the *Shi Jing* was recognised as one of six works with the status of a classic (the others being the *Shu Jing* 書經, "The Classic of Writings", the *Chun Qiu Jing* 春秋經, "The Spring and Autumn Annals", the *Yi Jing* 易經, "The Classic of Changes", the *Li Ji* 禮記, "The Classic of Rites", and the (now lost) *Yue Jing* 樂經, "The Classic of Music").³ Set as a pedagogical tool for Confucian education, the importance of the text was thus established and propagated. The *Shi Jing* is itself something of a composite text, conventionally divided into four parts, the most extensive of which is the *Guo Feng* 國風, "Airs of the States", which appears to date to the seventh century BCE.⁴ Comprising lyrics apparently collected from fifteen separate regional communities, the *Guo Feng* offers especially fertile ground to contests about the "true meaning" of this classic.

Originally, three textual traditions - the "Three Schools of the Poems" (三家詩) of Lu 魯, Qi 齊 and Han 韓 - existed, but their places appear to have been taken in the third century BCE by the Mao 毛 commentarial tradition - the prefaces, interpretations and notes provided by Mao Heng 毛亨 and his son Mao Chang 毛萇, which is the only tradition that has survived into the modern era in its entirety.⁵ This tradition, however, brings together a number of voices, with the Mao commentary coming to include additional material, including the annotations (*jian* 淺) of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200), the phonetic glosses collected by Lu Deming (556-627), and the explications provided by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 in his definitive 652 CE edition *Mao Shi Zheng Yi* 毛詩正義, "The Correct Significance of the Mao Poems."⁶ Of course, this is not to say necessarily that the work of these

³Jacques Gernet. *A History of Chinese Civilization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. p. 86.

⁴W. A. C. H. Dobson. *The Language of the Book of Songs*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968. p. xxi.

⁵Jeffrey Riegel. "Shih-ching Poetry and Didacticism in Ancient Chinese Literature." In *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, Victor H Mair ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. p. 100

⁶Joseph R. Allen. "Postface: A Literary History of the *Shi Jing*." In Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry*, Joseph R. Allen ed. New York: Grove Press, 1996. pp. 336 - 384.

commentators and editors represents a homogenised or identical way of reading the poems of the classic. Certainly, it is easy to differentiate figures within the Mao commentarial tradition due to the particular intellectual focus of each, and the Chinese literary world has always recognised the individual legacies of these scholars. However, they share the same fundamental interpretive tendencies. What binds the Mao commentarial tradition together is, in essence, its conception of the relationship between the text and society. Its general understanding of the poems is that they are historical artefacts, referring to particular, factual events, and that moral and emotional messages arising from the poems are the result of the analogous use of these factual contexts. Bound by the strictures of Confucius's unequivocal endorsement, the commentarial tradition of the Mao editors followed what could be considered an intentional fallacy - the unstated objective being to prove Confucius correct by showing that, if read in the appropriate way, all the poems contain lessons of political and personal morality. This tradition attempts to unlock the allegorical meanings presumed to hide behind the simple and robust rusticity of the *Guo Feng* lyrics. To borrow from the lexicon of the law, the reading is originalist, and, as such, deeply concerned with the identification (and interpolation) of the poems' various historical and contextual details and, from those, the intentions of their authors. In the words of Jeffrey Riegel, "the Mao school reads the songs as records of historical events, supplying the names and details of time and place to which it believes the obscure metaphors, analogies, and other figurative speech allude."⁷

Interestingly, while the Mao school has long been an influential and standard approach to the poems of the *Shi Jing*, and while the pronouncements of the Mao tradition can be considered to be wholly consistent with Confucian morality and Confucianism's preoccupation with the morality of political figures, significantly different interpretations of the poems from equally Confucian viewpoints also exist, some of which antedate the emergence of the Mao school. The excavation in 1973 of the text known as *Wuxingpian* 五行篇 at the Han 漢 dynasty tomb of Mawangdui 馬王堆 revealed a style of Confucian thinking about the *Shi Jing* poems which focuses more on the moral and emotional

⁷Jeffrey Riegel. "Shih-ching Poetry and Didacticism in Ancient Chinese Literature." In *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, Victor H Mair ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.p. 100.

messages evoked by the everyday human situations found in the lyrics, rather than the purported political and allegorical references.⁸ The *Wuxingpian* text is an explication of moral theory, rather than a text primarily dedicated to the interpretation of the poems. The references to poems are in the form of allusions and glosses of individual lines in the course of broader arguments. Nevertheless, these fragments suggest a hermeneutic approach noticeably different from that of the Mao commentary. Jeffrey Riegel draws attention to the *Wuxingpian's* explanation of *Guan Ju* 關雎, "The Ospreys" (Mao 1), as a poem about sexual desire - more specifically, the inherent human moral urge to regulate one's sexual desire to accord with the mores of one's community.⁹ This text provides evidence of an entirely separate Confucian approach to the sort of meaning transmitted by the *Shi Jing* poems. The approach is equally concerned with the business of moral didacticism, but directed to inherent personal morality, rather than the learned morality of blameless or reprehensible political figures, as in the Mao commentary.

Almost fifteen hundred years later, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, heterodox thinkers such as Su Che 蘇轍 (1039-1112), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) opened up entirely different ways of looking at the *Shi Jing*, in particular the rustic lyrics of the *Guo Feng* section. These commentators read certain poems as containing emotional, sexual and moral material which seemed inconsistent with Confucius's endorsement and the civilising power attributed to the text by the Mao editors.¹⁰ However, these discoveries could be absorbed into a new Confucian understanding of the text, in which apparently problematic material would be marginalized or viewed as intentionally admonitory.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Western sinologists and literary scholars began to study the *Shi Jing*. While some of the first, including the Jesuit Seraphin Couvreur, the first translator of

⁸The *Wuxingpian* manuscript is the subject of Jeffrey Riegel's article "Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57, no.1 (June 1997): 143 - 177.

⁹Jeffrey Riegel. *Ibid.*: 149 - 151.

¹⁰ Stephen Jay van Zoeren discusses these and other Chinese scholars who diverged from the orthodox Confucian interpretation of the *Shi Jing*. Stephen van Zoeren. *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991. Chapters 5 and following.

the text into French, persisted with readings based on the Mao school's interpretation, the majority of Western scholarship has sought novel hermeneutic approaches.¹¹

Marcel Granet's magnum opus, *Fêtes et Chansons anciennes de la Chine* [Ancient festivals and songs of China], first published in 1911, forcefully established the notion that these poems had their origins in the verses which accompanied the physical activity of practical rituals. Granet's bold approach of ignoring any of the symbolic meanings which formed the basis of traditional exegesis ("one will reject all symbolic interpretations, and any which assume a refined craft on the part of the poet")¹² suggested that the most meaningful way of understanding the songs lay in recognising their ritual (and perhaps anthropological) significance, rather than their literary art. Granet points out that the symbolic significance assumed to rest in certain poems may, in fact, be a result of changes in the meaning and significance of the rituals to which they act as an accompaniment:

"In particular, the love songs and their themes may have received a new significance due to the evolution, over time, of marriage institutions, or due to those institutions, through the transition from one social class to another, changing their value."¹³

In place of symbolic significance, Granet proposes that the poems of the *Shi Jing* (with a particular focus on the *Guo Feng*) are impersonal works, filled with "lovers, lacking individuality, uniformly experiencing a very generalised love with a ritual background" and that "the impersonal nature of these poems demands that one suppose for them an impersonal origin", namely, the traditional rural gatherings for purposes including formalised courtship at designated seasons of the year.¹⁴

¹¹ Seraphin Couvreur, S. J. *Cheu King: Texte Chinois avec une Double Traduction en Français et en Latin, une Introduction et un Vocabulaire* [*Shi Jing: The Chinese Text with a double translation in French and Latin, an Introduction and a Vocabulary*]. Sien Hien: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1926.

¹² "On rejettera toute explication symbolique ou qui prête au poète un métier raffiné." Marcel Granet. *Fêtes et Chansons anciennes de la Chine* [Ancient Festivals and Songs of China]. Paris: Albin Michel, 1982. p. 27. All translations from the French are my own.

¹³ "En particulier les chansons d'amour et leurs thèmes peuvent avoir reçu une signification nouvelle soit du fait de l'évolution dans le temps des institutions matrimoniales soit du fait que ces institutions, par le passage d'une classe sociale à une autre classe, changeaient de valeur." Ibid. p. 30.

¹⁴ "...amoureux sans individualité ressentant uniformément les émotions les plus générales de l'amour dans un paysage rituel: l'impersonnalité de cette poésie exige qu'on lui suppose une origine impersonnelle." Ibid. pp.90 - 91.

Throughout the mid and late twentieth century, further explanations of the poems and their relationships to the communities apparently responsible for them have proliferated. A significant development is the approach of taking the poems essentially at face value, and thus viewing the *Shi Jing* (and *Guo Feng* section in particular) as a wide-ranging collection of political, ritual, erotic and, importantly, personal poems without a unified political and social morality. Bernhard Karlgren, in his study of the entire *Shi Jing*, notably resists any sense of any overall interpretive theory applicable to all poems.¹⁵ That having been said, Karlgren attempts, wherever possible, to read individual poems as coherent and logically unified. Expressing a striking disdain for the Mao commentarial tradition's obscure and allegorical readings is C. H. Wang, whose 1974 work, *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition*, puts a forceful case for interpreting the poems *prima facie* as art, albeit art with its roots in oral transmission rather than literary composition.¹⁶ Wang applies the Lord-Parry hypothesis of oral composition to the poems, directly contesting the claims of the Mao school that the poems are the product of specific authors referring to specific events in their lives.

The famous English translator of Chinese and Japanese, Arthur Waley, is another who considers the *Shi Jing* as a diverse collection which does not necessarily display a unified function, and, as such, cannot be approached merely with one reading strategy.¹⁷ As with Wang, Waley shares, for the most part, Granet's scepticism as to the traditional exegesis of the *Shi Jing* as political or moral allegory. Waley makes the comment that the traditional position of the poems in the *Shi Jing* in China owes a lot to the "fact that they were used for a variety of social and educational purposes which had

¹⁵ Bernhard Karlgren. *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription and Translation*. Stockholm: The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950.

¹⁶ C. H. Wang. *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974. Obviously, Wang's project proposes a certain similarity between the type of origins of Chinese literature and the literatures of oral traditions such as ancient Greece.

¹⁷ Arthur Waley. *The Book of Songs The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry*, Joseph R. Allen ed. New York: Grove Press, 1996. References to Waley's interpretations of the poems will, wherever possible, be to the updated and completed version edited by Allen, rather than to the original 1954 edition. Some material from the earlier edition, including Waley's appendices is not, however, retained by Allen.

nothing to do with their original intention.”¹⁸ Waley interprets the majority of the poems as songs about the characters and scenes which they describe. In this way, he reads some poems as acting as community ritual pieces and emotional elegies at the same time.

One example will suffice to demonstrate the divergence of key interpretive approaches to the same *Guo Feng* text. The opening poem of the *Shi Jing*, *Guan Ju*, translated, following convention, as “The Ospreys” (Mao 1)¹⁹, has been a particular favourite of commentators of all traditions, and is as useful a comparative tool as any other:

關關雎鳩，在河之洲	“Guan Guan” cry the ospreys, on the islands in the river
窈窕淑女，君子好逑	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, a fine consort for the lord
參差荇菜，左右流之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one picks them
窈窕淑女，寤寐求之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, day and night he seeks her
求之不得，寤寐思服	He seeks her but does not obtain her, day and night he worries
悠哉悠哉，輾轉友側	How awful! how awful! he tosses and turns on his side
參差荇菜，左右采之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one gathers them
窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, the zither and lyre welcome her
參差荇菜，左右芼之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one selects them
窈窕淑女，鐘鼓樂之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, the bell and drum please her.

¹⁸ Arthur Waley. *The Book of Songs*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954. p. 335.

¹⁹ All references to the text of the *Shi Jing* will be to the standard edition Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed. *Shi san jing zhu shu* 十三經注疏 [Annotated edition of the Thirteen Classics], Volume 2, *Shi Jing* 詩經 Tai Bei: Yiwen yinshuguan yinhang, 1815; Photo reprint Minguo 74 [1985], hereafter *Shi Jing*. *Guan Ju* is found on pp. 20b - 22b.

The Mao commentary considers this poem to be an expression of gladness on the part of the queen consort Tai Si 太姒, wife of King Wen 文王 of Zhou (c. 1099 - 1050 BCE), that she has found a maiden suitable to mate with her lord.²⁰ The idea of the perfect mate is taken to be implied by the opening bird image, which, as C. H. Wang comments, “is illustrious for its melodious chattering suggestive of love.”²¹ While the young girl will take her place as the queen herself retires, the queen, according to the Mao commentary, maintains her dignity by “not thinking improper thoughts of the girl’s physical attractiveness” and “not having the intention to wound the good.”²² The poem, from this point of view, captures the emotional restraint of the queen and her unquestioning submission to what is best for the king.

Marcel Granet’s interpretation eschews the world of nobility, reading the poem instead as a record of a rural festival involving girls and boys beginning to court each other. The opening image of birds calling to each other is taken by Granet as a metaphor for the young couples, hiding away to seduce each other in private, “just as the water-birds who, in couples, hide themselves on the islands in the river.”²³ The final sections of the poem, describing musical instruments (*qin* 琴, “zither”, *se* 瑟, “lyre”, *zhong* 鐘, “bell” and *gu* 鼓, “drum”) are, in Granet’s schema, elements of a feast at the end of the festival - a ceremonial conclusion to the rural gathering.

The late twentieth century scholar Qu Wanli 屈萬里 well represents the individualist interpretation - that is, that poems in general indicate the emotions and situations of the persona. Qu summarises *Guan Ju* as a “poem giving congratulations to a newly married person” (祝賀新婚之詩).²⁴ This approach takes the poem *prima facie* as the emotional anxiety and excitement of a man about to be

²⁰ Jeffrey Riegel. “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57, no.1 (June 1997): 158.

²¹ C. H. Wang discusses the reoccurrence of the *jiu* bird in the *Li Sao* by Qu Yuan in “Symbol.” In *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays on Early Chinese Poetry*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988. p. 159.

²² “不淫其色” & “而無傷善之心焉.” *Shi Jing*. p. 19b.

²³ “...comme les oiseaux aquatiques qui s’en vont par couples se cacher sur les îlots du fleuve.” Marcel Granet. op. cit. p. 136.

²⁴ Qu Wanli 屈萬里 *Shijing quanshi* 詩經詮釋 [Annotated *Shi Jing*]. Taibei: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 1983. p. 4.

married, whose wife is greeted at the end of the poem with the ceremonial rites of the wedding (signified by the musical instruments).

While the approaches outlined above are not exhaustive - other readings of the poem include the interpretation of the poem as an explicit account of the conquest of sexual frustration contained in the *Wu Xing Pian*, mentioned earlier - these give an idea of the range of hermeneutic approaches and their fundamental departures from each other.²⁵

In addition, Martin Kern has extended the line of inquiry regarding the cultural contexts of the songs by exploring the way in which certain *Guo Feng* poems appear to act as “performance texts” which provide information about certain cultural practices and rituals at the same time that they enact those rituals.²⁶ Kern argues, using the example of the poem *Chu Ci* 楚茨, “Thorny Caltrop” (Mao 209)²⁷, that poems in the *Shi Jing* were originally scripts involved in “multimedia” performances where song, dance and movement combined to create the meaning of particular occasions. The role of the text - that is, the received wording of the poem - is partly, according to Kern, to retain and transmit self-referential information about how to perform the ritual. The form of the poem is thus mnemonic, marked by repetition and formulae, to retain a durable knowledge of ritual practice in the cultural memory.

While obviously this approach is only applicable to certain poems, Kern’s reading offers useful insights both in regard to comparative hermeneutics and a particular point of *Shi Jing* diction. Kern demonstrates that the interpretive approaches of the Mao school and what we might call his own “anthropological” approach (also represented, in broad terms, by Granet and others), which reads the poems as ritual remnants, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the level of poetic diction, Kern provides an explanation for the propensity of self-referential language (such as questions and

²⁵ Jeffrey Riegel. “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57, no.1 (June 1997): 143 - 177.

²⁶ Martin Kern. “*Shi Jing* songs as performance texts.” *Early China* 25 (2000): 49 - 111.

²⁷ *Shi Jing*, pp. 453b - 459b.

answers within poems of the type “How is X done? / It is done like this”) as a necessary ingredient in the robust transfer of information over time. Indeed, in Kern’s opinion, the Mao tradition, which views poetry as moral commentary based on the lessons of past contexts, is merely an attempt to explain and make concrete why it should be that the role of certain poems is to be ritually performed to transmit cultural knowledge and information. In other words, he considers the Mao school a Confucian rationalisation of ritual performances in which the poems were always employed.

I have surveyed the main existing approaches to the poems in terms of their overall meaning. Perhaps one of the reasons for the diverse range of interpretations which have been developed for this classic is the variety and complexity of its literary ingredients. A feature of the *Shi Jing* is the variety of subject matter presented. Waley’s translation establishes the following topics: Courtship, Marriage, Warriors and Battles, Agriculture, Blessings on Gentle Folk, Welcome, Feasting, The Clan Feast, Sacrifice, Music and Dancing, Dynastic Songs, Dynastic Legends, Building, Hunting, Friendship, Moral Pieces and Lamentations. Within the *Guo Feng*, the most frequently encountered are Courtship, Marriage, Warriors and Battles, and Music and Dancing, all topics which could obviously be key concerns for the community as a whole. The poems present realistic and specific situations in detail, offering memorably idiosyncratic scenes filled with visual, aural and sensational stimuli. At the same time, however, the *Guo Feng* poems evoke feelings of excitement, tragedy and loss through methods which are easily accessible to modern readers, as well as seeming to transmit a recognize confidence in the norms of a particular community. The *Shi Jing* is thus an extensive storehouse of cultural and social practice as well as literary and popular art, with many scenes vividly evoked in detailed and decorative language, while other songs are filled with specific details of names, places and events. More than the major philosophical or historical works of the pre-Qin period, the classic offers a vision of the range of Chinese society, and the practices and situations of its people.

2/ Stirring the Past, Stirring the Emotions:

Approaching the *xing* 興 Technique

Just as the *Shi Jing* charts a course through the various human situations and practices of its time, it also displays a rich and varied language which has provided a model for later Chinese poetics. While at times grammatically challenging to the reader, the *Shi Jing* is never as elliptical as the *Yi Jing* 易經; while rich in sensory and unusual visual detail, it is never as surreal as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, one of the fundamental texts of Daoism. And, as with the contest over the “meaning” of the classic’s poems, its language has also been a focus of debate and close analysis for more than two thousand years.

The Great Preface (*Da Xu* 大序) to the *Shi Jing* 詩經 famously sets out the “six principles” (*liu yi* 六義) of poetry as follows:

故詩有六義焉：一曰風，二曰賦，三曰比，四曰興，五曰雅，六曰頌²⁸

Thus there are six principles found in the Poems: the first is called “song” [*feng* 風], the second called “exposition” [*fu* 賦], the third called “comparison” [*bi* 比], the fourth called “evocation” [*xing* 興], the fifth called “elegy” [*ya* 雅], and the sixth called “hymn” [*song* 頌].

These have traditionally been considered, as by Hu Pu’an 胡樸安 (1878-1947), as divisible into two groups, one consisting of “song”, “elegy” and “hymn”, and one of “exposition”, “comparison” and “evocation.” The first of these groups describes “forms of poetry” (*shi zhi ti* 詩之體), which includes demarcations of style and genre; the second group are the “uses of poetry” (*shi zhi yong* 詩之用), the literary techniques.²⁹

²⁸ *Shi Jing*, pp. 15a - 15b.

²⁹ Hu Pu’an 胡樸安. *Shi Jing Xue* 詩經學 [Studies in the *Shi Jing*]. Shanghai: Shanghai wu yin shu guan, Minguo 17[1928]. p. 32.

While the *Shi Jing* itself observes a separation between the “songs” (the *Guo Feng* section, consisting of one hundred and sixty poems apparently from fifteen states), “elegies” (the *Xiao Ya* 小雅, “Small Elegy”, and *Da Ya* 大雅, “Great Elegy”, sections, themselves made up of shorter poems), and the “hymns” (the *Chou Song* 周頌, “Hymns of the state of Zhou”, and *Lu Song* 魯頌, “Hymns of the state of Lu”, sections), the literary techniques of *fu*, *bi* and *xing* are found scattered among all the poems, and often together within individual poems.

The stylistic feature which has received the most wide-ranging consideration is the *xing*. In many ways the *xing* is the element on which the various interpretations focus as the guide for how the poem should be read. For many poems in the *Shi Jing*, the use of *xing* 興 can be explained (if not necessarily clearly understood) as a method of creating the mood, atmosphere or context within which the remainder of the poem takes place, and which exerts influence over the possible meanings of the rest of the poem’s action. Pauline Yu translates the term *xing* as “opening evocative stimulus”, which conveys something of the role of this figure.³⁰ *Xing* is always considered a technique which seeks to compare or juxtapose different situations, but attempts to find an easy equivalent figure in Western literature fail. Seraphin Couvreur’s view that “in [Chinese] poetic composition, one can identify three elements: description or simple narration, 賦 *fu*, simile or comparison, 興 *xing*, and allegory, 比 *bi*” glosses over the subtlety of features of both Western and Classical Chinese stylistics.³¹ While *xing* is a somewhat comparative figure, the comparison is unmarked (unlike in Western simile or comparison). Importantly though, *xing* seems to establish broad comparisons and juxtapositions which permeate whole poems, and do not merely work with two objects. In addition, what is typically considered *xing* at some times conveys a similarity, and at others an dissimilarity. A number of interpretive options exist to explain a more expansive role for this stylistic feature.

For those following the anthropological reading of Marcel Granet, the *xing* locate the song in a type

³⁰ Pauline Yu. “Allegory, Allegoresis, and the *Classic of Poetry*.” *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 43, no.2 (December 1983): 377 - 412.

³¹ “Dans la composition poétique on distingue trois éléments: la description ou simple narration 賦 *fóu*, la similitude ou comparaison 興 *híng* et l’allegorie 比 *Pì*.” Seraphin Couvreur. op. cit. p. iv.

of communal countryside ritual (based on a literal approach that the natural images indicate a rural setting, typically involving physical activity, and any number of details of apparently ritual significance, such as proximity to rivers). Granet's theory regarding *xing*, which he merely describes as "countryside themes" is that these act as "formulas which one introduces, already made, into a song. They make up a type of standard background and, if they are linked to the feelings expressed, the purpose is not to make them specific, but rather...to connect them to general customs."³² For those, like perhaps Arthur Waley, endeavouring to read the poems as emotional folk songs with a cultural position similar to European folk songs or elegies, the *xing* images set the emotional scene through a sense of the pathetic fallacy, or an indication of a disjuncture (for instance, that between eternal nature and the fleeting life of humans). Waley points out that emotional interpretations of many *xing* images seem "natural" for European readers, such as "that the sighing or sighing of the wind should be interpreted as a sound of sorrow, that showers of fertilising rain should symbolize princely bounties, and that wet leaves should recall tearful cheeks."³³ And for those following the traditional Mao editors' interpretation, an apparent emotional and/or thematic agenda contained in the *xing* may provoke a contextualisation of specific political and historical persons, situations and events. Jeffrey Riegel, in summing up the operation of *xing*, comments that "studying how the lines identified as *hsing* [i.e. *xing*] work within a song suggests that the *hsing* should be considered to serve as a unifying element that determines the choice of figurative and narrative imagery that appears in the remainder of the piece."³⁴

An explanation of *xing* which is very frequently provided is that it uses natural or realistic objects to establish an emotional timbre for the poem. The commentator variously known as Zheng Sinong 鄭司農 and Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (first century CE) offers the following explanation of the literary technique *xing*:

³² "des formules qu'on introduit toutes faites dans la chanson. Ils composent une espèce de paysage obligatoire et, s'ils sont liés aux sentiments exprimés, ce n'est point pour les spécifier, mais plutôt...pour les rattacher à des usages généraux." Marcel Granet. op. cit. p. 90.

³³ Arthur Waley, 1954, p. 14.

³⁴ Jeffrey Riegel. "Shih-ching Poetry and Didacticism in Ancient Chinese Literature" in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, Victor Mair ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.p. 106.

興者，託事於物。則興者，起也。取譬引類，起發己心，詩文諸舉草木鳥獸以見意者，皆興辭也³⁵

As to *xing*, it assigns a state of affairs to a concrete thing. Thus a *xing* is a rising [beginning]. It seeks to compare and draw out the natural kinds, and raise up and manifest the writer's own inner moral nature. In poetic style, the various taking up of plants, trees, birds and animals to make manifest the intended meaning. All these are *xing* phrases.

Many have observed that a significant proportion of the *xing* images employed in the *Shi Jing* poems recur and can thus be considered standard motifs. The twentieth-century scholar Chen Shixiang 陳世驥 asserts that *xing* “stemmed from a common source of old generic convention, and not ‘what the poet saw’ at the moment of individual inspiration.”³⁶ Importantly though, *xing* images, while frequently drawn from the same stock of animal and plant imagery, are traditionally interpreted as particular to the poems in which they are found. Commentators have recognised that, while a common image may be employed in a poem, the image seems to have a connection to the meaning of the remainder of the poem, and cannot be considered as a meaning element which stands alone. The major Neo-Confucian commentator Zhu Xi defines *xing* thus:

本要言其事，而虛用兩句鉤起，因而接續下去，興也³⁷

Fundamentally, when one wants to express a state of affairs, then one first of all uses two lines to raise it up, and, relying on it, carries on [with the composition]: this is what *xing* is.

The *xing* is considered to operate through its connection with the other elements of the poem - qualifying and enhancing meanings - rather than merely as a discrete meaning “key” which provides

³⁵ *Shi Jing*, p. 15b.

³⁶ Quoted in C. H. Wang. *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974. p. 13

³⁷ Zhu Xi 朱熹. Quoted in Hong Yanqiu 洪炎秋 *Wenxue Jilun* 文學概論 [Outline of Literature]. Zhonghua wenhua chubanshan, Minguo 46 [1957]. p. 137.

the informed audience with an indication of the appropriate submerged meaning, or the appropriate emotion to be attributed to the action of the poem.

Part of the objective of this dissertation is to provide another way of understanding the use of *xing* in the *Guo Feng*, which avoids the vagueness associated with interpretations which see this as emotional or somehow atmospheric, while not relying on the (frequently very questionable) allegorical assertions required by readings of the poems as referring to specific historical contexts. I would contend that certain *xing* images in certain *Guo Feng* poems impart consistent meanings, which can determine, to an extent, the subject matter and emotional tone of the poem, but can also react to subject matter and emotional ideas contained in the human action of the poem. While the *xing* taps into a world outside the poem (specifically, as I will demonstrate, the world of ritual), it does not urge an allegorical reading, but rather contributes to both the literal and metaphorical meaning of the poem's subject matter.

3/ Understanding Weirdness:

A Hermeneutic Strategy for Complex *xing* and Ritual Imagery in the *Shi Jing*

In this dissertation, I will focus on three poems from the *Guo Feng*: *Juan Er* 卷耳, “The Cocklebur” (Mao 3)³⁸, *You Hu* 有狐, “There is a fox” (Mao 63)³⁹ and *Nan Shan* 南山, “The Southern Mountain” (Mao 101).⁴⁰ These poems, drawn from different conventional regional groupings, display differences of form, length, style and subject matter, and so illustrate the variety available in the *Guo Feng*. My first task in relation to each poem will be to outline the major interpretive approaches available, since any attempt to shed new light on the poems must first recognise and understand the illuminations of others. The main representative approaches that I will consider are that of the Mao commentary itself, as well as later interpretations which draw on that tradition (including Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰 (1777-1853),⁴¹ Qu Wanli and Cheng Junying 程俊英 & Jiang Jianyuan 蔣見元⁴²), and the individual views of Marcel Granet, Bernhard Karlgren and Arthur Waley, where appropriate.

Working from this basis, elements of the poems will be identified that appear to evade clear explanation from any of the interpretive strategies mentioned above. It is not so much that the existing hermeneutic approaches fail entirely, or are made to appear glaringly insufficient, but rather that these methods of reading are not able to deal with particular elements. The insufficiency, while perhaps not obvious through a superficial reading of some poems, emerges as soon as a critical eye is brought to specific elements of poems which are problematic. It is perhaps a misnomer to class

³⁸ *Shi Jing* pp. 33a - 34b.

³⁹ *Shi Jing* pp. 140b - 141a.

⁴⁰ *Shi Jing* pp. 195a - 197a.

⁴¹ Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰 *Mao shi zhuan jian tong shi* 毛詩傳箋通釋 [Commentary and Expounding of the Mao poems]. [Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan yinhang, 1960].

⁴² Cheng Junying 程俊英 & Jiang Jianyuan 蔣見元. *Shijing Zhuxi* 詩經注析 [Analysis of the *Shi Jing*]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chuban she, 1996

elements of poems as “problematic” merely because existing reading strategies cannot clearly explain them - it will not be the object of this dissertation to try to explain away these interpretative conundrums. Rather, I will point out that areas in poems which appear to lack clarity when accounted for by existing hermeneutic approaches can be seen, both for the purposes of the poem, and objectively, as sites of meaning. (Though perhaps meaning which is more abstract and less referential or descriptive than that assumed by other interpreters). Indeed, in many cases it is the fecundity of meaning at these sites, or the apparent importance of these sites to the meaning of the poem, which exposes the deficiencies of existing interpretative approaches. That these sites are typically the points commonly considered the *xing* imagery indicates the importance of developing a more nuanced and flexible understanding of how some *xing* imagery works and the way in which different poems make use of this technique in subtly different ways.

I will then consider the possibility that pre-existing symbols linked to the world of ritual are present in the meaningful sites of these poems, typically those areas traditionally considered as *xing* images. While many symbols and images in the *Guo Feng* that a modern reader might consider unremarkable may have had special significance in the time of the poetry’s composition, and vice versa, many images that appear highly unusual and likely symbolic to the modern eye may not have been intended as such. The various interpretive traditions read certain imagery as symbolic or allegorical, but it is the work of Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946) in particular which has suggested to me the possible function of symbolism in the *Shi Jing* to make connections to established meanings which may be consistent between poems.⁴³ My classification of an image as a symbol drawn from the world of ritual will be based on two bases: first, evidence of the symbol in the external contemporaneous source, the *Yi Jing* 易經, “The Classic of Changes”, which amounts to a compendium of the symbolism used in divination in classical China; or second, an argument that, if an image is attested

⁴³ Wen Yiduo discusses the imagery of fish in the *Shi Jing*, including the link between this imagery and that found in the *Yi Jing*, in the essay *Shuo Yu* 說魚 [Talking Fish] in Wen Yiduo. *Shi Jing Yan Jiu* 詩經研究 Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2002. Edward Shaughnessy uses Wen Yiduo’s insights as the basis for the essay “How the Poetess Came to Burn the Royal Chamber.” In *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. pp. 221-238.

across a number of poems in the *Guo Feng*, seems to be constant in its meaning or referent between these separate poems, and also appears to display certain other hallmarks of ritual usage (as defined through anthropological theories I will presently discuss), it can be considered a ritual symbol.

Once these symbols have been identified, I will discuss how these symbols are employed in their poems. As part of this project, I will explore relationships of causation (whether the symbol appears to be integral to the ongoing development or progression of the poem, or appears, on the other hand, to constitute a reaction to other information in the poem), and also disconnections between symbols and other information in the poem. As we will find, the symbols present in these poems appear to perform various roles, but the following general attribute will become clear: that symbols (and other connections to the world of ritual) hint at contexts and “back-stories” to the scenes present in poems which imply certain emotional and intellectual responses on the part of readers to whom these back-stories are familiar. Through doing so, symbolic links to the world of ritual add the valency of positive or negative fortune to the simple function of description. I will propose that one function of symbols with connections to the world of ritual (and references carried over from that world) is to add an extra dimension to poems which, apart from these symbolic connections, would seem to merely recount or describe situations and events. This dimension is variously one of moral comment and enhanced emotional response, depending on the poem. In doing this, I will also be offering a new way of understanding the role of *xing* imagery in some *Guo Feng* poetry as a signpost of a poem’s fundamental meaningful connection to the world of ritual.

Through analysing the qualitative legacy (that is, the polar judgement of positive or negative atmosphere) imparted by the world of ritual (especially the world of divination ritual evidenced by the *Yi Jing*), this dissertation adds to the general understanding of the role of ritual and pre-existing components in the composition of the *Shi Jing*. I am not merely suggesting that certain images from the *Yi Jing* should be added to the list of the conventional subject matter of rustic ritual themes which Marcel Granet insightfully considers to lie at the base of so many *Guo Feng* poems. Rather, I

am suggesting that, along with these rustic and profane influences, some *Guo Feng* poems actively draw upon the sacred world of ritual, and, in so doing, bring to bear not only cultural memory of common practice, but positive and negative judgement. I will demonstrate that these poems, through their employment of ritual ingredients, forms and resonances, constitute a type of poetry which is different from that previously identified. Importantly, this innovative analysis suggests a role for poetry as a way of connecting superficially banal and everyday subject matter with the eternal and meaningful realm of religious and sacred ritual.

Armed with this likelihood of connections between these poems and the world of ritual, and building on the findings that the presence and function of ritual symbols in the poems appears to add to their comprehensibility and give logical expansion to their meanings, I will explore what other connections with ritual and divinatory traditions these poems may display. To this end, I will focus predominantly on the structures and dictions of the poems. This does not imply however, that some forgotten ritual lies submerged under these poems: I will demonstrate that the presence of ritual ingredients in the poems I analyse is more likely due to a conscious and creative process.

It is worth, at this point, clarifying what it is that I mean by the terms “ritual” and “the world of ritual.” Broadly speaking, I am taking an anthropological approach, that a ritual is an activity which involves definite and definitely ordered events, and which is marked out from other human activities by specific qualities. Bruce Kapferer states that ritual is both “marked off from or within the routine of everyday life” and presumes “a particular sequential ordering of acts, utterances and events, which are essential to the recognition of the ritual.”⁴⁴ Pascal Boyer sums up these elements as *apartness* and *scriptedness*, and, while these characteristics cover only the generic nature of ritual, I will make use of the notions of *apartness* and *scriptedness* in my discussion of the potential for a ritual flavour to exist

⁴⁴ Bruce Kapferer. *A Celebration of demons: excorcisms and the aesthetics of healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. p. 2.

within some poems.⁴⁵ I use the term “the world of ritual” in the context of the *Guo Feng* to refer to the specific application of the generic notion of ritual in the era contemporaneous with these poems. This explanation, on ritual “first principles”, if you will, constitutes one method I will use to justify my readings of connection with the world of ritual. Another mechanism I will use to prove ritual connections is through analysing links to the *Yi Jing*, both the text itself, and standard interpretations of its symbolic details.

In pursuing a project such as this, which seeks to construct a new hermeneutic technique for some of the most read and best-known literature of all, it is important to recognise that, due to its very nature, ritual poetics and language exists within, and in many ways complementary to, the language of other, more profane, verse traditions, and so the presence of ritual connections is subtle, and the process of identifying them can sometimes be tenuous. This is because, as Bronislaw Malinowski argues in regard to magical diction, which can be considered a particular manifestation of ritual, the language used displays a constant balance between “the co-efficient of intelligibility” and “the co-efficient of weirdness.”⁴⁶ That is to say, language associated with ritual, divination and magic is at once the same as ordinary language and strangely different to it.

Malinowski’s initial formulation of the co-efficient of weirdness occurs in his discussion of the wording of spells used in the magical system surrounding agriculture (especially the cultivation of tubers and root vegetables) in the Trobriand Islands. He argues that it is due to the cultural assumption of the pre-existence of magical rituals that the language used in magical spells is strange and removed from ordinary language: “if the main principle of magical belief is that words exercise power in virtue of their primeval mysterious connexion with some aspect of reality, then obviously we must not expect the words of Trobriand magic to act in virtue of their ordinary colloquial

⁴⁵ Pascal Boyer. “Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism.” In *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism*, Boyer, Pascal ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. p. 38. Boyer goes on to problematize these classifications from the point of view of the cognitive tasks performed by those involved. However, I do not believe that this critique denies the usefulness of recognising and describing ritual with reference to these two basic characteristics.

⁴⁶ Bronislaw Malinowski. *Coral Gardens and their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands, Volume Two: The Language of Magic and Gardening*. New York; Cincinnati; Chicago: American Book Company, 1935. p. 230.

meaning ... Why should such words be as the words of common speech? They are not uttered to carry information from man to man, or to give advice or an order.”⁴⁷ Malinowski points out that many of the words used in the short magical incantations of the Trobriand Islanders are grammatically unusual - “in a way, nonsense words.” The words are “pronounced according to special phonology, in a sing-song, with their own rhythm and with numerically grouped repetitions.”⁴⁸

However, as Malinowski recognises, while the constituent parts of the magical formulae show “a very considerable co-efficient of weirdness, strangeness and unusualness”, the language used is often understandable once the meaning of certain crucial words is revealed and is recognisable on account of its specific hallmarks: “use of metaphor, opposition, repetition, negative comparison, imperative and question and answer.”⁴⁹ The language of magic, according to Malinowski, is obviously marked out from ordinary use, however once its context is recognised and one is initiated into key weird features the transmitted meanings of the spells are able to be identified. Moreover, Malinowski reminds us that, were magical language to be too weird, it would be incapable of transmitting any meaning because the community in which the rituals are performed would not be aware of how the spell ought to be performed and to what it refers, even in a general sense. This necessary link with the everyday is termed the “co-efficient of intelligibility.” According to Malinowski, intelligibility comes both from expressions which are the same as ordinary usage, and from the general outline of ritual utterance, which acts within intelligible boundaries (including those of syntax, context and tone). Malinowski states that “[t]aking the [magical] spells as a whole we see that dogmatically they are classed as a language *sui generis*; but still they are part of language,” and that “even the strangest verbal formations refer directly or indirectly to the matter with which the magic deals.”⁵⁰

Importantly, there is a constant interplay of weirdness and intelligibility, since the more unusual parts of ritual are rendered understandable through the use of intelligible indicators of, for instance,

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 218.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 219.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 221 - 222.

⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 229 & 230.

the function of unusual details, and everyday elements are given the potency of ritual through their relationship with unique and strange forms. Malinowski's ideas that ritual activity is dominated by that which is not understood lead ultimately to an anthropological theory that human society is not at base concerned with abstract understanding, but only with experience, and indeed, that what we consider to be knowledge is in fact merely certainty created through repeated experience.

The dichotomy between weirdness and intelligibility is essentially the same as the balance between "normal" and "pathological" thinking and language, which the French socioanthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss considers to be fundamental to situations of sorcery and ritual.⁵¹ As Lévi-Strauss observes, "normal thought always suffers under a deficit of meaning [*signifié*], however what is called pathological thought (in at least some of its manifestations) passes on a plethora of meanings."⁵² Accordingly, while neither ordinary, wholly intelligible thinking or language can explain the complexities of the world, nor can symbolic, abstract and emotionally resonant thinking and language be sufficiently referential to explain the specific qualities of a situation, the combination of the two divergent types allows for a holistic meaningful experience, which reflects both the simple and abstract. This holistic understanding can appropriately be considered the objective of ritual.

However, if one does not contemplate the possibility of *weirdness* or *pathology*, but rather focusses on *intelligibility* and *normality* at the exclusion of all else, it is possible for the magical/divinatory elements of language to be submerged. I would contend that this may be one of the reasons why ritual connections in these poems have been overlooked by existing hermeneutic approaches to the *Shi Jing*.

Finally, drawing on the evidence of these poems, I will posit a hypothesis that, as well as (and, in cases, together with) other ingredients in the *Guo Feng* such as historical/political comment, mythical stories, emotional expression, and folk action, religious ritual activity may be one of

⁵¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Anthropologie Structurale* [Structural Anthropology]. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1974. pp. 199 - 200.

⁵² "la pensée normale souffre toujours d'un déficit de signifié, tandis que la pensée dite pathologique (au moins dans certaines de ses manifestations) dispose d'une pléthore de signifiant." Ibid. p. 200.

ultimate sources for the material transmitted in the Classic, and, as a consequence, the nature and style of classical Chinese poetics (which imply the origins of much of the poetics that followed in China) may be a result, to a degree, of ancient China's religious and divinatory ritual traditions.

The intended outcome of this project is to suggest a new way of reading those poems in the *Shi Jing* which seem to defy a workable reading using existing hermeneutic strategies. In particular, I would propose that this dissertation will demonstrate how certain poetry in the classic seems to contain a tension between recording factual (or seemingly factual) situation and recording self-contained ritual action, and that the most appropriate way of reading such poetry is not to seek a forced reconciliation of these elements on a referential and descriptive level (thereby explaining away the ritual resonance) or attempt to excavate an underlying ritual apparatus (which would marginalise the evocative and descriptive literary skill). My proposed readings suggest that the poems are structured around thematic ideas, which the descriptive and ritual elements refer to in their own contexts. As a result of their interweaving of referential and ritual elements, each bringing meaningful resonances, strong thematic messages are constructed in the poems. I will suggest that the *Shi Jing* contains evidence of poetry in transition from being a mere record of external stimuli towards the creative management of purely imaginative and non-descriptive poetic ideas such as multi-valent and partial meanings, and implications and resonances which work on a non-referential level.

4/ Bundles of Joy:Ritual Associations of Baskets and Harvesting

I will first consider the poem *Juan Er* 卷耳, "The Cocklebur" (Mao 3)⁵³ :

采采卷耳，不盈頃筐 Gathering the cocklebur - but [I] cannot fill the small basket
嗟我懷人，寘彼周行 I sigh for the man I cherish, and put it down on that
circuit road⁵⁴

陟彼崔嵬，我馬虺隤 I ascend that high peak, my horses, flagging, collapse
我姑酌彼金罍，維以不永懷 Just for a moment, I pour from that bronze jug, so as not to
yearn forever

陟彼高岡，我馬玄黃 I ascend that lofty crag, my horses are sick and yellow
我姑酌彼兕觥，維以不永傷 Just for a moment, I pour from that rhino-horn cup, so as not
to hurt forever

陟彼砠矣，我馬瘠矣 O, I ascend that mound, O, my horses are completely worn
out
我僕痡矣，云何吁矣 O, my servant is exhausted, O, such complete sorrow!⁵⁵

⁵³ *Shi Jing* pp. 33a - 34b.

⁵⁴ A viable alternative interpretation for *zhou hang* would be "highway", with the character *zhou* being used to denote the royal court and thus, by extension, the major roads which lead to the royal capital. Zhu Xi evidently follows this reading in his explanation of the opening of the poem: "Thus [the persona] is not able to gather the plant again, and sets down [the basket] on the great road..." "故不能復采而寘之大道." Zhu Xi. *Shi Ji Zhuan* 詩集傳 [Commentary on the collected Poems]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980. p. 13.

⁵⁵ For the reading of the final line, I follow Cheng and Jiang's glosses: 云，語助詞，無義。何，何等、多麼。吁，憂愁。"Yun" is an expletive, it has no meaning. 'He' is a superlative: 'how great'. 'Xu' is 'sorrow'. Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 12.

The Mao editor prefaces and explains the poem as a plea for appropriate and moral political action:

卷耳，后妃之志也，又當輔佐君子，求賢審官，知臣下之勤勞。內有進賢之志，而無險詖私謁之心，朝夕思念，至於憂勤也⁵⁶

“The poem *Juan Er* [arises out of the] intention of the princess, that there ought be support for [true] gentlemen, pursuit of the worthy, and close examination of officials, and recognition [and reward for] the diligence of lowly vassals. Internally, her intention is to promote wise people, and not have a heart that is reckless or partial. Concentrating on this morning and night, she becomes concerned and diligent.

The Mao interpretation is thus that the princess is so worried with affairs of state that she cannot continue with her task of picking plants - reflecting a Confucian concern that the business of the state is of fundamental importance to all other activity and, as a result, happiness. Such an approach seems unsupported by any evidence to be found within the poem itself - except, perhaps the permeating tone of worry and anxiety, though this is a result which would not seem to presuppose a particular type of cause (like anguish over the fact that true gentlemen are not being promoted). This preface to the poem does not deal with the poem itself, but rather speculates on the situation of its composition. Accordingly, I do not consider that the Mao interpretation assists in understanding what occurs within this poem.

Weight of numbers in terms of interpreters is behind reading this poem as the emotional expression of an individual woman in distress. Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan understand it as “a poem of a wife thinking about her husband, who is travelling far away” (婦女想念她遠行丈夫的詩), a theme which is something of a topos in the *Guo Feng*.⁵⁷ This interpretation takes the opening stanza as a description of the situation of the female persona, with what follows (stanzas two, three and four) a

⁵⁶ *Shi Jing*, p. 33a.

⁵⁷ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 9

fantasy in which that persona imagines herself as the absent husband, who matches her sadness with his own grief. As Cheng and Jiang identify, from line five onwards, the “I, is the poetess styling herself as the husband in her imagination” (我，詩人想象中的丈夫自稱).⁵⁸ The *jian* 淺 commentary to the poem (by Zheng Xuan in the second century CE) has long established this interpretive path with the comment that for the final three stanzas, “I [refers to] my [i.e. the speaker’s] lord” (我，我君也).⁵⁹

Arthur Waley appears to depart from this interpretation in his summary of the poem that “in the first verse it is the lady left at home who speaks; in the remaining verses it is the man away on a perilous journey.”⁶⁰ This would seem to propose that, instead of a single persona who takes on the imagined role of her husband as a secondary persona, the poem contains two entirely separate personae. The intent of Waley’s comment is not particularly clear - nor would it necessarily effect the understanding of this poem as one of human emotion, anchored in the sorrow of a wife left alone, but with that emotional feeling expanded and developed by the complementary emotions (“real” or imagined) of her far-off husband.

Bernhard Karlgren presents a different interpretation in which not only is the entire poem spoken by the female persona, but all the actions are also performed by her. It is the basket-carrier herself, not an imagined (or actual) male persona, who ascends high peaks and drinks to forget her sorrow.⁶¹ I would contend that such a reading resists the natural urge (followed by the vast majority of scholarship in relation to this poem) to consider that the two types of activities presented (the gathering of plants on the one hand, and the riding of horses, possibly as part of a military campaign, on the other) are distinctly gendered.

Granet’s treatment of this poem is indirect - it is included in the group of twenty-two poems classed

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 10.

⁵⁹ *Shi Jing*, p. 33b.

⁶⁰ Arthur Waley, 1996. p. 7.

⁶¹ Bernhard Karlgren, 1950. pp. 3 - 4.

by Granet as “songs of the rivers and mountains” but not afforded expansive explication.⁶² The poem is called into service as evidence of horse-races up mountains as part of rural matchmaking custom, with Granet commenting that a participant in the gatherings would “climb the hills, often in a wagon, as though in a race, until their horses were rendered exhausted.”⁶³ Granet’s view is that the poems he deals with as “love songs”, including *Juan Er*, are improvised choruses from vast countryside communal events where boys and girls would publicly court one another. As a result of this interpretive standpoint, he attaches significance to the rustic subject matter of the poem, its apparent performative quality of including both a female and male “part”, and its cues to physical dramatisation:

“Due to their countryside themes and their rustic subjects, the impersonalness of the feelings which they display, due to their unadorned and direct art, their symmetrical structure, their foot-tapping rhythm, the appearance that they were alternating choruses and the visible actions which their brief spoken pictures presuppose, the love songs of the *Shi Jing* seem like the products of peasants’ improvisation.”⁶⁴

Elements of *Juan Er* certainly seem to fit with this characterisation, but Granet’s approach appears to fall down in two respects: first, the asymmetry created by the lengthy section devoted to the male object (three stanzas) and the brief opening devoted to the female persona (one stanza) seems to depart from Granet’s criteria of naive and symmetrical composition as befits improvised and communal songs; and second, its necessary dismissal of any importance attached to the details of the poem seems somewhat wilful, given that a number of specific elements (such as the basket and the drinking cups) are quite unique and striking. Moreover, the appearance of the bronze jug, rhinohorn cup and accompanying servant hardly point to rustic matchmaking, but to a different world and

⁶² Marcel Granet. op. cit. pp. 95 - 129.

⁶³ “On gravissant les coteaux, en char souvent, à la course, au point d’en rendre fourbus ses chevaux.” Ibid. p. 134.

⁶⁴ “Par leurs thèmes champêtres et leurs sujets rustiques, par l’impersonnalité des sentiments qu’elles expriment, par leur art simple et direct, leur dessin symétrique, leur allure piétinante, par l’air qu’elles ont d’être des choeurs alternés et par la mimique supposent leurs brèves peintures vocales, les chansons d’amour du Che king apparaissent comme les produits d’une improvisation paysanne.” Ibid. p. 94.

different social strata altogether. Due to these difficulties with Granet's interpretation, it can be said that the dominant, and the most defensible, reading of this poem has to be along emotional lines, as outlined above.

On closer inspection then, does the poem yield up anything which would appear an especially meaningful site which might suggest a new direction or potential departures from this dominant interpretation? As outlined previously in this dissertation, *xing* imagery is commonly a realm of meaning, and so it may be advantageous to analyse the operation of the *xing* in this poem. The first two lines of the poem can be considered a *xing* image, presenting a plant scene, but one which implies a human connection (since harvesting requires a harvester) throughout:

采采卷耳，不盈頃筐

Gathering the cocklebur - but [I] cannot fill the small basket.

The Mao commentary describes this opening couplet as “an evocation [*xing*] of sadness/one who is sad” (憂者之興也).⁶⁵ While an appropriate judgement to make on the basis of the entire poem, this image would seem to imply far more options than mere sadness. Could not the image of incomplete harvesting indicate distress distracting from the routine of work? Is not there also a feeling of insufficiency, of lack of fulfilment, and assumptions thwarted? It is, after all, a basket that is not filled, rather than a tool laid aside. The role, indeed the expectation of a basket, is to carry objects, and so notions of thwarted expectation and a departure from what is natural are implied. This opening couplet offers ample interpretive possibilities in addition to the Mao's “sadness.”

While it is attractive, natural and defensible to read the imagery of an unfilled basket as a symptom of an emotional state, it is also, obviously, a literal image of an unfilled basket. Surely it is not too great an indulgence to consider if the image itself contains some meaning, rather than merely acting as a proxy for an emotional state. The poem may present a picture of the sighing woman setting

⁶⁵ *Shi Jing*, p. 33a.

down her task, distracted by sorrow - but it may also, and at the same time, be asking us to focus on the details of the scene (i.e. harvesting, the basket, the thick vegetation, and the words that describe them).

Let me first consider some of the details of the initial image. The first couplet offers a stark disjuncture: the characters *caicai* 采采, while a transitive verb in this line, can also be considered as inscribed with their meaning as a stative verb “greatly flourishing”. The compound *caicai* is reduplicative, indicating an intensification of the act of “gathering” and thus, by implication, an abundance of the plant being harvested. This is contrasted with the image of the basket which the persona does not fill. The relationship between the lines *caicai juan er* 采采卷耳 “gathering the cocklebur” and *bu ying qing kuang* 不盈頃筐 “but [I] cannot fill the small basket” is semantically one of opposition, with the second line disappointing the expectation of successful harvesting created by the first. In addition, then, to any other meaning arising from the opening couplet (for instance, the emotional evocation of sorrow, as in the Mao tradition), there is an atmosphere of non-achievement and insufficiency.

The transitive verbs *caicai* (“gather”) and (the negated) *ying* (“fill”) are used with the noun phrases *juan er* (“cocklebur”) and *qing kuang* (“small [lit. one *qing* unit of measurement] basket”) as their direct objects. The grammar of these opening lines thus implies the presence of a subject (the unspoken persona), which is indirectly revealed soon enough by means of the possessive *wo* 我 in the third line. However, it is worth noting that no explicit mention is made of an agent (or indeed any observable human actor) in the opening two lines. While assumption of an agent (especially a first-person agent) is typical of the economical grammar of four-character lines in the *Guo Feng*, that does not deny that the inanimate objects of the opening stanza of the poem are directly dealt with, and so to marginalise them appears perverse.

Moving now from what is contained within the image itself, it can be seen that the opening couplet

raises a question, viz, why is it that the persona cannot fill her basket? It is not down to the fact that the cocklebur is not abundant enough. And, after all the basket is only one *qing* in volume. We presume then, that it is something affecting the harvester, not the harvest: and indeed, the third and fourth line give an apparently clear reason. The persona's mind is distracted (sighing, indeed) through thoughts of the man the persona cherishes (我懷人) - a man who, if the demonstrative force of *bi zhou xing* 彼周行 ("that circuit road") may be taken as significant, is referred to obliquely by reference to the nearby highway, and thus, we may presume, departed by that road. My reading of *bi*, "that", as a demonstrative qualifying *zhou xing*, "circuit road", rather than as an object pronoun in place of *kuang* 筐, "basket", is suggested by the syntactical parallelism of this line with that which precedes it, in which the single character verb *jie* 嗟, "sigh", is followed by the three-character noun phrase *wo huai ren* 我懷人, consisting of two qualifiers followed by a noun. The character is also used as part of two other three-character noun phrase objects in this poem: *bi jin lei* 彼金罍, "that bronze jug"; and *bi si gong* 兕觥, "that rhino-horn cup."

This contextualisation provides a satisfactory and logical reading of the initial image as an emotional snap-shot which is enriched and fleshed out when the poem presents the situation of the persona's absent lord. The initial picture can be explained as a practical result of the pre-existing human situation (the separation of wife and husband) which is revealed as the poem develops. This function of the opening imagery is thus an explanatory one, since it relates to, and admits a logical frame for, the other ingredients of the poem.

However, as I have shown, the initial couplet of the poem remains a site of meaningful fecundity, and, as such, displays an inherent meaning function as well as an explanatory one. The syntactical construction hints at insufficiency, disjuncture and expectations frustrated, even as the thematic context hints at sorrow and conjugal separation. Let us then refocus on the inherent aspects of the image, which are extraneous to the projected emotional meaning. The specificity of the act of harvesting is one such element, as is the species of plant presented. The notion of sorrowful

distraction from work could be evoked from any picture of disrupted routine - why, we must ask, is this particular harvesting routine used as the catalyst for the poem?

The image of the unfilled basket occurs outside the *Sbi Jing*, in the *Yi Jing* - a text equally fundamental in Chinese tradition, and filled with evocative yet complex images which were the basis for types of divination that were still routine throughout the Qing dynasty two thousand years later.⁶⁶ The divination of the sixth line of the *Gui Mei* 歸妹 (“Maiden being given in marriage”) hexagram contains the following image:

女承筐无實⁶⁷ The woman holds the basket, but there is no fruit.

We find another female with a basket that has not fulfilled its role. The hexagram *Gui Mei* (fifty-fourth in the received text) is concerned with the appropriate and inappropriate marriage acts. The head statement runs thus:

歸妹征凶，无攸利⁶⁸ *Gui Mei* [indicates that] going out is inauspicious, and there is nothing that is deemed beneficial.

The various line statements show different marriage situations (including, memorably the first line’s somewhat bizarre comparison between the marriage of a younger brother’s wife (*di* 娣) and a one-legged person (*bo* 跛)), some apparently symbolic of benefit, some not.⁶⁹ The final line of the hexagram presents a scene of man and woman apparently engaged in some sort of sacrifice, two

elements of which are clearly out of the ordinary and easily give rise to the judgement that they do

⁶⁶ For a revealing study of the “ubiquitousness and persistence of divination” (p. 271) into the Qing dynasty, see Richard J. Smith. *Fortune Tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society*. Boulder; San Francisco; Oxford: Westview Press, 1991.

⁶⁷ All references to the text of the *Yi Jing* will be to the standard edition Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed. *Shi san jing zhu shu* 十三經注疏 [Annotated edition of the Thirteen Classics] Volume 1, *Zhou Yi Shang Shu* 周易尚書 Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan yinhang, 1815; Photo reprint Minguo 74 [1985], hereafter *Yi Jing*. This line is found on p. 119b.

⁶⁸ *Yi Jing*, p. 118a.

⁶⁹ *Yi Jing*, pp. 119a.

not signify good fortune. The full line reads as follows:

上六女承筐无實，士刲羊无血，无攸利⁷⁰

The upper sixth line [indicates] a woman holding a basket, but there is no fruit. A gentleman sacrifices a sheep, but there is no blood. There is nothing that is deemed beneficial.

As Zheng Xuan has observed, this scene is one of ceremonial sacrifice in the ancestral temple,⁷¹ and Gao Heng judges that it “indicates the rites of a wedding.”⁷² Accordingly, the bad omens received in the sacrifice could indicate the breaking of a marriage contract. This contextualisation offers a logical reading which reconciles the presence of this image in a hexagram, all of whose lines relate to marriage situations.

This image thus resembles and appears to relate to the use of the basket image in the poem *Juan Er* in two ways: the fact that the basket is not filled (the *Yi Jing* brings out the logic implication thus: “No fruit’ means that she is holding an empty basket” (无實，承虛筐也);⁷³ and that this is connected to an unexpected disappointment implicating a husband and wife (or failed husband and wife). The image, in addition to being found in the *Yi Jing*, which suggests that it is drawn from the world of ritual, and symbolic meanings, is also, within the *Yi Jing* itself, placed within a sacrifice ritual, and thus doubly infused with symbolic content.

Let us explore the basket image’s possible ritual meaning through another means: the intra-textual evidence provided by other poems within the *Guo Feng*. The poem *Cai Pin* 菜蘋, “Gathering

⁷⁰ *Yi Jing*, p. 119b.

⁷¹ “宗廟之禮.” Zheng Xuan, quoted in Hu Pu’an. *Zhou Yi Gushi Guan* 周易古史觀 [Historical Perspectives on the *Yi Jing*]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986. p. 235.

⁷² “摺婚禮.” Gao Heng. *Zhou Yi Dazhuan Jinzhu* 周易大傳今注 [Large Commentary and Contemporary Edition of the *Yi Jing*]. Shandong: Qilu shushe, 1979. p. 444.

⁷³ *Yi Jing*, p. 119b.

duckweed" (Mao 15),⁷⁴ in the Shao Nan 召南, "Southern Shao", regional grouping of the *Guo Feng* offers some interesting illumination:

于以菜蘋，南澗之濱	O, gathering duckweed, on the shore of the southern gorge
于以菜藻，于彼行潦	O, gathering waterweed, in the channel-waters
于以盛之，維筐及筥	O, packing them. Yea, the square and the round baskets
于以湘之，維錡及釜	O, boiling them. Yea, the one-legged and three-legged pots
于以奠之，宗室牖下	O, making an offering of them, before the window of the ancestral temple
誰其尸之，有齊季女	Who is the object [of this sacrifice]? It is the purified youngest girl. ⁷⁵

This poem would appear to be a very clear example of a ritual, displaying as it does a very clear sense of *scriptedness* in the ordering of its activity - from gathering ingredients, to carrying them, preparing them in specific apparatus, and making a sacrifice in the appropriate place. The fact that this ritual is done for the benefit of the "purified youngest girl" (齊季女) would appear to suggest that this ritual is related to marriage, or perhaps more specifically, preparation for marriage. Such would seem the most appropriate reason for a ritual performed in honour of a young woman. This poem then corroborates the *Yi Jing* evidence of ritual in which gathering plants and placing them in the square basket is related plays some role in readying a woman for marriage. Arthur Waley explains the significance of another pre-marriage harvesting poem (albeit one not featuring baskets) thus: "In [*Cai Lü* 采綠, "Gathering green" (Mao 226)⁷⁶] a girl, about to be married, goes to gather plants with which to make green and blue dyes for her trousseau-dresses. She fails to fill her basket, which is a

⁷⁴ *Shi Jing*, pp. 52a - 53a.

⁷⁵ The presence of the term *ji nü* 季女, which literally designates the youngest sister of a family, though it is used of the youngest woman of any group, establishes the fact that the poem deals with a hierarchy. The kinship hierarchy is mapped into the public sphere, which implies a closeness within this female community. The older women (presumably already married and possessed of children) perform the ritual activity to initiate and pass on their situation to their junior "little sister."

⁷⁶ *Shi Jing*, pp. 512b - 513b.

bad omen. Sure enough, the man does not turn up on the wedding-day.”⁷⁷ Waley identifies the negative resonance of the failed gathering and gives a literal context for the act of gathering.

However, as I will go on to demonstrate, the activity of gathering plants before marriage may, at base level, have a less pragmatic association than collecting dyes for the wedding dress.

This prompts the question: why would a ritual involving baskets and plants constitute a part of the preparation for a woman’s marriage? Is such a ritual merely an attempt to assure some generalised beneficial outcome? Or does it refer to something more specific? Again, looking within the *Guo Feng* may provide answers to these questions. Let us consider the poem *Fou Yi* 芣苢, “The Plantain”, (Mao 8)⁷⁸ which also opens with an image of harvesting a flourishing plant:

芣苢芣苢，薄言采之	Thick grows the plantain - let’s gather it
芣苢芣苢，薄言有之	Thick grows the plantain - let’s take it ⁷⁹
芣苢芣苢，薄言掇之	Thick grows the plantain - let’s pick it
芣苢芣苢，薄言捋之	Thick grows the plantain - let’s pluck it
芣苢芣苢，薄言袪之	Thick grows the plantain - let’s lift it in our skirts
芣苢芣苢，薄言褫之	Thick grows the plantain - let’s tuck it in our skirts

The activity of *Fou Yi* is vividly literal, and the poem’s practical application in a ritual (which includes the self-referential function of recounting/transmitting knowledge about a ritual, just as Martin Kern demonstrates elsewhere) accompanying the harvesting of plantain is easy to observe. The clear practical activity of the poem is reminiscent of that found in *Cai Pin*, while the opening line uses a very similar diction to that of the initial image presented in *Juan Er*. Indeed, the clarity of the scene created could lead one to agree with Wen Yiduo 聞一多 that “aside from a type of mechanical rhythm, [one] searches in vain for “poetry” within *Fou Yi*” (除了一種機械式的節奏之

⁷⁷ Arthur Waley, 1996. p. 215.

⁷⁸ *Shi Jing*. pp. 41a - 41b.

⁷⁹ In translating *you* with a transitive verb, I follow Qu Wanli: 有，取也, “have’, [indicates] ‘take.’” Qu Wanli. op. cit. p. 14.

外，你並尋不出《采芣苢》的“詩”在那裡。)⁸⁰ However, though we may conclude that the poem *Fou Yi* leaves something to be desired in the artistic sphere, and is probably better considered as a kind of “work song” accompanying activity, its rustic simplicity fulfils interesting and illuminating roles.

The similarity between both the poems just presented is initially obvious in the physical activity described - that of the harvesting of plants. Both *Cai Pin* and *Fou Yi* use the word *cai* 采 (though I would concur with Wen Yiduo and others that the binome *caicai* found in *Fou Yi* is acting as a stative verb qualifying the noun *fou yi*, rather than a transitive verb as in *Cai Pin*).⁸¹ This shared central subject matter is a vividly physical and realistic activity, the significance of which I will shortly discuss. Obviously, *Cai Pin* describes more than merely the act of gathering plants - it recounts an entire ordered process - while *Fou Yi* gives only a scene of harvesting.⁸² As I will go on to explain, this does not mean that the poems address entirely different material, but rather it appears that *Fou Yi* offers a snapshot of part of the overall activity which is described in its entirety and all its stages in *Cai Pin*. Further similarity lies in the fact that the actors in each poem’s physical scenes appear to be women. Qu Wanli asserts that *Fou Yi* is a “poem which sings of wives gathering plantain” (詠婦人採芣苢之詩).⁸³ The presence of female clothing (*jie* 袿 and *xie* 褰, both types of skirt, here used as ergative verbs) is proof of this position. In the poem *Cai Pin*, the hierarchical term *ji nü* 季女, “youngest girl”, which, as discussed earlier, implies the presence of a community of older women, is internal textual evidence of a female context. Thus, a further degree of similarity and specificity emerges: it is women picking plants. It is the specific plant *Fou Yi* which allows us to realise some unifying significance of these coincident elements, and to chart what exactly the activity might be that both these poems seem to be describing.

⁸⁰ Wen Yiduo. “Kuang Zhai Chi Du 匡齋尺讀” [A Letter from the Studio of Rectitude] in *Shijing Yanjiu* 詩經研究 [Studies in the *Shi Jing*]. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2002. p. 40.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² While I use the term harvesting, I do not mean to necessarily equate this activity with agriculture or cultivation of plants. Indeed, in *Cai Pin* the presence of water plants would seem to argue against premeditated cultivation, but rather gathering of wild and naturally-flowering vegetation.

⁸³ Qu Wanli. op. cit. p. 14.

Arthur Waley and others claim that the plantain was a herb favoured in ancient China for its assistance in childbirth.⁸⁴ It would appear likely that some commonly-acknowledged connection between the plantain and fertility/childbirth lies behind the Mao commentary's interpretation of *Fou Yi*'s meaning:

芣苢，后妃之美也。和平則婦人樂有子矣⁸⁵

The poem *Fou Yi* is in praise of the princess. When the world is at peace, wives rejoice that they have sons.

Let us then piece together the type of activity which appears to be captured in these sources. Women, acting communally gather wild plants - including one commonly recognised as a fertility charm. Once picked, the plants are then put into a receptacle; it is noteworthy that both poems mention this step, whether through the improvised pouch (*xie* 褊) or the more sturdy baskets (*kuang* 筐 and *ju* 筥). Following this (we now rely on *Cai Pin* to carry on the description) the plants are prepared and used in sacrifice at the appropriate religious site for the benefit of a “purified young woman” (a description which establishes that the woman is at the right age to be married). The ritual thus can easily be read as a communal one performed by older (presumably married) women to ensure the fertility of a young woman. This “little sister” of theirs is of marriageable age (or perhaps even a young bride, since marriage would be the key reason for a ritual of purification and fertility in honour of a young woman), and they seek to pass on to her the fertility of the natural world which the picked plants symbolise. When the above is explicated, the ritual reconstructed through these poems seems logical and meaningful, not to say obvious.

⁸⁴ Arthur Waley, 1996. p. 9. Pan Fujun 潘富俊 also states “The picking of plantain by the wives in the *Zhou Nan* poem *Fou Yi* is a type of ancient long-held custom. At that time, the people believed that the eating of plantain made it easy to fall pregnant” (《周南·芣苢》篇中婦女采集車前草是一種由來已久的習俗，當時民間相信食用車前草容易懷孕生子). Pan Fujun. *Shi Jing Zhiwu Tujian* 詩經植物圖鑒 [Survey of *Shi Jing* plants]. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chuban she, 2003. PAGE NUMBER

⁸⁵ *Shi Jing*. p. 41a.

It is appropriate at this point to digress momentarily to consider the possible resonances of the plant name *juan er* 卷耳, “cocklebur.” As Bernhard Karlgren identifies, the basic meaning of the character *juan* 卷 in this pronunciation is “to roll up.”⁸⁶ Divergent pronunciations of the same character have related meanings, such as the noun meaning “volume” or “bundle of documents”, indicating perhaps a fundamental connotation that the verb of rolling up aims at producing a bundle.⁸⁷ Would not the “little rolled up” plant be an appropriate one to be mentioned in the opening line of a poem with a relationship to fertility and pregnancy rituals? The meaning of the character *er* 耳, however, is less easy to divine. Often found in compounds both in classical and modern Chinese, this is a versatile and flexible graph, which may or may not literally imply the base meaning “ear”. A number of other plant names contain *er* as the second character in a two-character compound (cf. *mu'er* 木耳, a type of edible fungus, and *shu'er* 鼠耳, literally “mouse ears”, to which the much later (c.1615 CE) *Zi Hui* 字彙 likens the plant *juaner* itself).⁸⁸

Taking this into account, it would seem that the meaning of the unfilled basket image in the poem *Juan Er* is that the marriage of the central female character has failed, and that that failure is associated with a failed pregnancy. The basket image both encapsulates a direct symbolism of the empty womb, and evokes the expansive matrix of associated marriage ritual. That the basket is empty, and ultimately put down (and thus perhaps un/miscarried), summons up direct and implied messages of metaphorical failure to match the literal failure of the physical activity of harvesting. The initial scene of *Juan Er* not only depends, for its meaningful construal, on a conventional ritual scripting, and figuratively exploits these details for a metaphorical meaning, it is also a literal departure from the scripted physical actions which constitute the ritual, and in so doing, departs from the implied outcome of the ritual. It is crucial to recognise that it is the connection with the

⁸⁶ *Juan* (226a) in Bernhard Karlgren. *Grammata Serica Recensa*. Kungsbäcka: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1972. p.75.

⁸⁷ “書卷.” Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次 *Dai Kanwa jiten* 大漢和辭典 [Large Chinese Dictionary]. Tokyo: Taishukon Shoten, 1955 - 1960. p. 633.

⁸⁸ “葉如鼠耳.” The *Zi Hui* 字彙, quoted in Morohashi. op. cit. p. 634. This plant name *shu'er*, apparently equivalent to *juaner*, is later attested in compendia of media medica. The descriptors of “profuse flowers” (厚華) and “thick stems” (肥莖) would certainly not be inappropriate for a signifier of fertility. Shang Zhijun 尚志鈞 & al ed. *Tang Xin Xiu Ben Cao* 唐新修本草 [The Tang “Newly Revised Materia Medica”]. [Anhui]: Anhui kexue jishu chubanshe, 1981.p. 506.

world of ritual, through the links that this imagery maintains with the *Yi Jing*, which gives the poem this explanatory function. The initial tableau assumes a divinatory ritual, and, through this, the poem broadcasts a negative and pessimistic judgement. Without the implication of ritual activity, the poem would merely describe a sad situation, rather than also providing an explanation for the human characters' tragedy.

Not only would it appear that the poems *Fou Yi* and *Cai Pin* detail and transmit information regarding this ritual, and *Juan Er*, in presenting a poetic development towards more creative verse, refers to and implies this ritual information - I would contend that they further suggest ritual through their very structure and forms. If, as Bronislaw Malinowski points out, language from the world of magical ritual is marked by the presence of *weirdness*, the poem *Fou Yi* would seem a good case study in the idiosyncrasies of ritual usage. The complex formula which concludes each line, *bao yan* verb *zhi* (薄言 verb 之), is typically almost dismissed in many commentaries as “grammatical words” (*yuci* 語詞).⁸⁹ The formula underscores the ordered nature of the poem, dominated as it is by its rhythm. This reveals the poem's instrumental role - its rhythmical elements can easily be imagined as an accompaniment to ritual action, rather than necessary only a recollection or description of it.

There is more to observe however. The element which links these poems, and the ritual rehearsed within them, to the poem *Juan Er* and the image found in the *Yi Jing* (itself a snapshot of a ritual involving a married or soon-to-be married woman) is the preoccupation with what *carries* the natural ingredients for the ritual. Across the three poems and the image in the *Yi Jing*, the round basket (*ju* 筥) occurs once, and the square basket (*kuang* 筐) three times, while, in *Fou Yi*, the gatherers form makeshift pouches (*xie* 褊 used as an ergative verb) with their skirts. In addition, in the poem *Cai Lü* 采綠, “Gathering Green” (Mao 226)⁹⁰, the failed harvesting is expressed in the same verb (*bu ying* 不盈) as in *Juan Er*:

⁸⁹ Qu Wanli. op. cit. p. 14.

⁹⁰ *Shi Jing*. pp. 512b - 513b.

終朝采綠，不盈一 筥⁹¹ Gathering green all morning, [but] it is not sufficient for
[carrying with] two hands at once.

Thus a constant focus in the poems which show evidence of this apparent ritual is the fact that the women engaged in ritual activity *carry* the plants, and *fill* (or fail to fill) their receptacles with the fruits of their harvest. The imagery of women carrying the plants involved in a fertility ritual is strikingly literal. Bearing the charms of childbirth, just as they aspire to bear children, the women symbolize the ritual at the same time as they perform its practical activities. Thus, the basket, or the pouched skirts (significantly, at the loins), in place of the (filled) womb, play the dual role of being both constituent elements of a larger ritual and also a synecdochic link to the entire ritual.

While there is a conceptual connection between the above-mentioned poems due to their shared referent, that is not to say that there are not also generic differences between them. *Juan Er* does not echo *Fou Yi*'s broad community reference, but rather, at its base, addresses a situation for a specific couple. The difference between the folk tradition captured in *Fou Yi* and the intimate scene found in *Juan Er* is emphasised in terms of the social milieu in which the poems operate. While the skirts used as makeshift aprons in *Fou Yi* point to a rustic scene of manual labour, the details of concluding section of *Juan Er* indicate a different social class altogether, as Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan point out:

詩中寫她丈夫上山有馬、有僕，飲酒用金壺、兕觥，可見夫婦都是貴族⁹²

Within the poem it is written that the husband of the woman [who initially appears] when ascending the mountain has both a horse and a flunkey, and that, to drink, he uses a bronze jug and a rhino-horn cup. [From this] it can be seen that the man and woman are both aristocrats.

⁹¹ *Shi Jing*, p. 512b.

⁹² Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 9.

These differences prompt the question of whether the poem *Juan Er* could itself be a song involved in the fertility ritual that I have identified. Because the contents of *Juan Er* are so easily explained in reference to such a ritual (and explained so deficiently without this connection), the poem suggests a conscious interaction with the world of ritual, and that it relies on this world to fully transmit its meaning. However, *Juan Er* does not appear to fit into the communal folk atmosphere found in *Fou Yi* and *Cai Pin*.

To further investigate whether there is an underpinning connection to the world of ritual in the poem *Juan Er*, it is worthwhile considering with what ritual actions, if any, the second, third and fourth stanzas display links. These stanzas describe the actions of the apparently absent husband: travelling on horseback in the mountains, accompanied by a servant, and privately drinking. Both activities are characterised by Granet as indicators of rustic courtship activity - horse racing and feasting. As might be expected, the drinking of wine occurs more frequently in certain types of poems in the *Shi Jing*, predominantly those classified by Arthur Waley as “Blessings on Gentle Folk”, “Feasting” and “Sacrifice”, though it is significant these many of these poems are outside the *Guo Feng* section.⁹³ Indeed, as we will see through looking at other poems containing the drinking of wine, the situation apparently contained in *Juan Er* is highly unique. Ritual drinking in the *Shi Jing* typically occurs in the context of a large feast and acts essentially as an indicator of prosperity, thanksgiving and generosity, as in this extract from *Liu Yue* 六月, “The Sixth Month” (Mao 177)⁹⁴, which celebrates a successful military campaign⁹⁵:

吉甫燕喜，既多受祉	Ji Fu feasts and is happy, so many blessings have been received
來歸自鎬，我行永久	“I have arrived, returned from Hao, I travelled for such a long time

⁹³ These classifications are used in Arthur Waley, 1954. “Blessings on the Gentle Folk.” pp. 173 - 187; “Feasting.” pp. 198 - 202; “Sacrifice.” pp. 209 - 217.

⁹⁴ *Shi Jing*, pp. 357a - 360b.

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the historical campaigns of the Zhou dynasty King Xuan 宣王 (827 - 782 BCE) in this and six other poems, see C. H. Wang, “Barbarism.” In *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays in Early Chinese Poetry*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988. pp. 115-153.

飲御諸友，魚鮓膾鯉

[Now I] drink with the imperial nobles and friends, [eating]
roast turtle and minced carp.”

侯誰在矣？張仲孝友

And what noble was with him? Zhang Zhong, pious and
friendly.

The drinking poems of the *Shi Jing* consistently present the activity as communal, enjoyable and associated with the positive: triumphant returns, as above, or a general Horatian urge to ‘harvest the day’, as in this extract from *Kui Bian* 頌弁, “The cap is tall” (Mao 217)⁹⁶ :

有頌者弁，實維在首

There is a cap so tall, worthy to be on the head, O!

爾酒既旨，爾殽既阜

Your wine so good, your meats so splendid

豈伊異人？兄弟甥舅

Surely one wouldn’t give them to strange men? [Rather]
brothers, nephews, uncles.

如彼雨雪，先集維霰

Like those rains and snows, which first gather together sleet,
O!

死喪無日，無幾相見

Death and loss have no certain date, for no certain years will
we see each other

樂酒今夕，君子維晏

Enjoy wine this night, the lord feasts, O!

Not always communal, sometimes the drinking of fine wine appears merely one of many signifiers of prosperity and taste. The following extract from *Sang Hu* 桑扈, “Mulberry Finch” (Mao 215)⁹⁷ concludes a description of a “lord” (君子) who is both “happy and at ease” (*yuexu* 樂胥) and a “model for a hundred chiefs” (百辟為憲):

兕觥其觶，旨酒思柔

His drinking horn high-curving, his good wine so soft

⁹⁶ *Shi Jing*, pp. 482b - 484a.

⁹⁷ *Shi Jing*, pp.480b - 481b.

彼交匪教，萬福來求 No self-glory, no pride, so that all blessings he wins.

The use of wine in specific ritual contexts is also evidenced in the *Shi Jing*. The poems *Chu Ci* 楚茨, “Thorny Caltrop” (Mao 209)⁹⁸ and *Xin Nan Shan* 信南山, “Truly the southern hills” (Mao 210)⁹⁹, for instance, recount a formal context for the use of wine as a religious libation. What this amounts to is an indication that the presence of drinking and wine in the poem *Juan Er* is not in keeping with the other representations of such activity within the *Shi Jing*. The drinking of wine in the poem *Juan Er* is associated with sadness, not happiness as elsewhere; it is a private activity, rather than a communal activity as it is often found elsewhere; and the wine does not appear to be handled in the manner of a ritual libation, but rather a private indulgence. Accordingly, we must conclude that, while the imagery of harvesting and baskets appears connected to and meaningfully dependent on a ritual involving those aspects, the lines carrying imagery of drinking do not display any similar ritual connection, and do not appear more meaningful when considered in the light of otherwise typical use of such imagery.

The riding of horses or driving of chariots is less frequent, and when it occurs in the *Guo Feng*, such as in *Da Shu Yu Tian* 大叔于田, “Great Shu in the Fields” (Mao 78)¹⁰⁰, and *Zai Chi* 載馳, “Riding in the Chariot” (Mao 55)¹⁰¹, it is made clear that the rider is one of high social standing. The fact that male characters are riding horses in these poems marks them out from the ordinary world as prosperous gentlemen, rather than tragic journeyers as in *Juan Er*. These factors cast doubt on Granet’s assumption that these activities are merely the ordinary elements of standard communal courtship. Clearly, the character of the absent lord in *Juan Er*, and his activities, do not draw on a standard ritual frame of reference, as the activity associated with females harvesting plants appears to.

In what follows, I seek to reconstruct the possible form of the poem *Juan Er* which might be

⁹⁸ *Shi Jing*, pp. 453b - 459b.

⁹⁹ *Shi Jing*, pp. 459b - 462b.

¹⁰⁰ *Shi Jing*, pp. 163a - 164a.

¹⁰¹ *Shi Jing*, pp. 124b - 126a.

expected were the poem to actually be inscribed with a ritual “performance text.” This act of fanciful textual criticism will demonstrate two contrasting facts about the received *Juan Er*: namely, that while its elements display a generic similarity to the details and forms of ritual verse (and thus do not merely record a factual activity), they are too far removed from consistency of meaning or ritual context to constitute a holistic ritual unit. This observation directs us towards another way of reading *Juan Er* and of understanding how it can be that specific ritual imagery ingredients (such as the basket), seemingly ritual symmetry (for instance, the male/female character balance) and (at least partially) logical ritual meanings (the implied barrenness or particular failed pregnancy) can exist within the poem, without the poem itself being an actual scripted record of ritual. I propose that this poem demands to be read as a syncretic text combining pre-existing material of three types: the specific intertextual image drawn from the meaningful divinatory tradition represented by the *Yi Jing*; more general intratextual references to the world of ritual seen in other parts of the *Shi Jing*; and conventional assumptions about ritual dialogue between men and women.

However, the combination of this material is not merely opportunistic and artless. Rather it occurs for a creative reason, resulting in a poem which is vivid and unique in the scene it describes, but taps into a world of rich and indirect meanings. The resonances of the world of divinatory ritual, while not consistent when one examines them in detail, create a superficial wash of moral and religious gravitas which accentuate the obvious tragic emotions offered on the poem’s literal level. This ability to suggest multiple meanings (or perhaps multiple layers within the same general meaning) represents an identifiable departure from verse as a mere record of external detail (such as ritual). Instead, I believe it indicates a burgeoning poetic sensibility, in which the richness and multi-valency of the text may be considered an end in itself, since it cannot be reconciled as a record of either a factual situation or a ritual activity.

To explore the potential for *Juan Er* as a ritual poem in itself, let us bring to bear on it the anthropological apparatus for identifying the hallmarks of ritual, as well as Marcel Granet’s notions

about structured ritual action in ancient China. On the one hand, an analysis of the structure of the poem yields up interesting possibilities which appear to fit with the *scriptedness* of ritual, while on the other, the types and operation of the formulas through which the poem progresses seem to display the requisite balance of Malinowskian *intelligibility* and *weirdness* to grant the poem ritual *apartness*. When discussing the signs of ritual, we must ensure that we do not mistake poetics for ritual since poetry, in all its forms has formulaic elements. Indeed, this is often the clearest indication that some literary composition *is* poetry. But equally we must not dismiss all that is formulaic as poetic, and we must not confuse *scriptedness* with poetics, and thus ignore the possibility of a ritual context or influence on the poem's composition.

The structure of *Juan Er* is, as has been mentioned above, asymmetrical. For the final three quarters of the poem, the persona (albeit likely an imagined one) is the absent husband, resulting in more time spent in the poem on the tragic emotions of this character in his unpleasant surroundings, drinking to overcome his heartache, than on the female persona. Despite this structural imbalance, this female persona can be considered prioritised to a degree given that the poem begins in reference to her (and thus the memory of her situation permeates all that follows). In particular, the *xing* imagery relates to her, however it may be that interpreters might seek to explain the ultimate meaning of this *xing*. The stanzas devoted to the assumed absent husband each contain an opening couplet which describes the ascent of a mountain and the sickness of the character's horse(s):

陟彼崔嵬，我馬虺隤	I ascend that high peak, my horses, flagging, collapse
...	
陟彼高岡，我馬玄黃	I ascend that lofty crag, my horses are sick and yellow
...	
陟彼朶矣，我馬瘡矣	O, I ascend that mound, O, my horses are completely worn out

The action is the same in all cases, with only minor, essentially synonymous, variations within the same rhyme scheme. Such a structure is certainly not uncommon in the poems of the *Shi Jing* - indeed one could say that one of the hallmarks of the poems that Granet identifies as having their origins in communal folk activity is their repetition with only incremental variation. However, it is interesting to observe that even as the subject matter of these three lines give the impression of quite dramatic and conclusive action - mountains being climbed, horses failing - the structural repetition locks this subject matter of the poem into a pattern in which no progress is possible. The structure of repetition with minor variation only admits description of essentially equivalent situations, and so, due to the limitations imposed by its structure, no progress is actually made on the level of human action throughout the poem, despite the apparently dynamic journey described. The same mountains are climbed, and the same fates befall the same horses three times over. Interestingly, though, the final stanza of the poem, while sharing a general similarity with second and third stanzas, presents an important departure, which demonstrates a clear, if still only notional, sense of progress and recognition of its position in terms of what has gone before. The difference in the final stanza is easily seen in the closing couplets of each of these stanzas:

我姑酌彼金罍，維以不永懷 Just for a moment, I pour from that bronze jug, so as not to
yearn forever

...

我姑酌彼兕觥，維以不永傷 Just for a moment, I pour from that rhino-horn cup, so as not
to hurt forever

...

我僕痛矣，云何吁矣 O, my servant is exhausted, O such complete sorrow!

The line lengths of the second and third stanzas reflect a parallel (and expansive) syntax, whereas the final stanza retains the four-character line found in every other couplet in the poem. Indeed, the diction is even more restricted, with the tragic proclamations of the persona retreating to just three

characters of real meaning per line, the fourth, the character *yi* 矣, which is not found elsewhere in the poem, a grammatical particle, which I consider likely to be the (qualitative rather than temporal) aspectual particle (that is, a particle which imparts to a verb completion to an exceptional degree rather than completion in time).¹⁰² That the particle adds an atmosphere of culmination and total completion strengthens this feeling of finality. Moreover, the concluding exclamation *yun he hu yi* 云何吁矣, “O such complete sorrow!”, reinforces the atmosphere of finality though adding a desperate note, after which, one might consider, nothing else can be said.

What is to be made of the seeming lack of progression in the second and third stanzas, coupled with a conscious change and sense of finality in the fourth stanza, even though, on the level of the poem’s action, still nothing has really changed at that point? What is to be made of the apparent fact that these stanzas would, due to their minor incremental variation within repeated structures, seem appropriate for a poem underpinned by repetition of action and symmetry, when the poem *Juan Er* is asymmetrical?

I would propose that a simple manipulation of the received version of the poem would both solve these inconsistencies, while at the same time offering a refreshing insight into potential operation of the poem as ritual, namely, to understand the opening stanza, featuring the female persona, to be repeated between the second and third stanza and the third and fourth stanza. This construction, which takes the stanza as a repeated refrain, gives the second, third and fourth stanzas more explicable roles. The second and third (male) stanzas present similar repeated scenes in response to the situation of the (female) initial stanza, with the fourth stanza performing this function as well as providing a clear structural and grammatical signal of the end of the poem. Each of the “male” stanzas begins in the same manner to allow for an easy introduction to the altered scene - something required when this scene is juxtaposed with the very different scenario of the “female” stanza, but unnecessary in a three-stanza long consistent scene of the same expedition for the absent husband -

¹⁰² I do not consider that an interpretation of *yi* as an aspectual (perfective) particle is tenable in this poem, given the poem’s final exclamatory line, for which a reading such as “[I] sorrowed so greatly” strikes me as a perversion of the direct emotion offered by a continuing aspect.

and the recognisable opening line *caicai juaner* 采采卷耳, “gathering the cocklebur”, clearly marks out the transition to the “female” refrain stanza.

On the basis of this interpretation, the poem becomes a dramatic dialogue between the female and male persona, in which the female persona’s sadness, which is based on a recognition of her infertility (symbolically transmitted by the basket image and elliptical reference to the plant-gathering fertility/pregnancy ritual), is answered by the male persona’s distress, as he, experiencing pitfalls on a journey, remembers his barren wife at home. The *scriptedness* of the poem is found in this exchange, accompanied, as it seems, by the specific physical actions of the verbs *caicai* 采采, “gathering”, and *zhi* 寘, “put [the basket] down”, for the female persona, and *zhuo* 酌, “pour [out] from”, in reference to two distinct objects, the bronze jug and rhino-horn cup, for the male persona. Marcel Granet draws attention to the vivid physical actions that are described in many poems in the *Shi Jing* as evidence of the poems being acted out as performed rituals. This could be taken as an indication that *Juan Er* is a performable ritual poem insofar as *scriptedness* is concerned.

The use of language in the poem *Juan Er* provides evidence of an interplay between that which is intelligible and that which is highly unusual, which appear to exist outside the common stylistic parameters of a merely poetic context. Looking first at poetic form, it is obvious that *Juan Er* contains one seeming aberration: the presence of two couplets of eleven characters each (divided into lines of six characters and five characters each) embedded within a string of four-character lines. The overwhelming tendency of songs in the *Zhou Nan* regional grouping of the *Guo Feng* (and the usual characteristic of the poems in the entire *Guo Feng*) is that each line contains four characters (one *Zhou Nan* poem, *Zhong Si* 螽斯, “The Locusts” (Mao 5),¹⁰³ contains lines of three characters and seven characters). The departure from the standard four-character line is thus significant and unusual, especially given that this line deals with a described activity (pouring out from the bronze jug/rhino-horn cup) which, as I have pointed out above, may be equivalent to the physical acts that Granet considers indicative of ritual and performative origins.

¹⁰³ *Shi Jing*, pp. 35b - 36a.

Edward Shaughnessy discusses the place of certain poems from the *Zhou Song* 周頌, “Hymns of the state of Zhou”, section of the *Shi Jing* in specific religious rituals associated with royal and dynastic observances.¹⁰⁴ He notes the prevalence of inconsistent line lengths in what he calls the “Martial [*Wu* 武 (Mao 285)¹⁰⁵]’ song-and-dance suite” - the poems *Wu*, *Lai* 賚, “Gift” (Mao 295)¹⁰⁶, and *Huan* 桓, “Outstanding” (Mao 294)¹⁰⁷ - and in poems from the *Zhou Song* which recall that tradition. This poetry is generally considered the earliest poetry in the *Shi Jing*, drawing heavily from ritual composition and context (“liturgy”, in Shaughnessy’s words).¹⁰⁸ Shaughnessy’s observation of an early liturgical tradition of arrhythmic and unrhymed verse, while made in relation to the different type of poems found in the *Zhou Song* section, should be borne in mind when seeking to understand what the metrical inconsistencies in the *Guo Feng* may be recalling.

Although the lines of unusual length in *Juan Er* fit within the rhyme schemes of their respective stanzas (in each of which the first, second and fourth lines rhyme), I would suggest that the metrical inconsistency may indicate an attempt to recall the verse style of early Chinese ritual with which Shaughnessy is concerned. The fact that these lines which may call to mind, or may have their origins in, arrhythmic ritual phrases are the very lines which describe specific physical acts which may be ritualised in some way gives a logical credibility to this contention.

However, I do not consider that this apparent similarity to some ritual diction indicates conclusively an actual ritual origin, rather than a conscious imitation of the conventions of ritual language. Other evidence suggests a poetic sensibility which is fully aware of ritual style, and seeks to employ that style towards the creative ends of the poem. The male lines of *Juan Er* seem to support a reading which ironically plays off conventions of ritual diction. Martin Kern states that “by definition, a

¹⁰⁴ Edward Shaughnessy. “From Liturgy to Literature: The Ritual Contexts of the Earliest Poems in the *Book of Poetry*.” In *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

¹⁰⁵ *Shi Jing*. pp. 737b - 738a.

¹⁰⁶ *Shi Jing*. pp. 754a - 754b.

¹⁰⁷ *Shi Jing*. pp. 753a - 754a.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Shaughnessy. op. cit. p. 178.

ritual performance needs to be what it has always been, and it also needs to expose its nature to repetition.... [S]acrificial hymns not only constitute the ritual situation and celebrate the core ideology of lineage continuity, they also, by their very linguistic structure, represent ritual coherence and continuity as such. The ubiquitous closing prayer of bronze inscriptions, “May sons and sons, grandsons and grandsons forever treasure and use [this vessel/bell]” (子子孫孫永寶用) reflects the guiding ideological principle in a nutshell.”¹⁰⁹ To summarise Kern’s view then, continuity and repetition (on both the conceptual and textual levels), are key ritual traits.

But what we observe in the male lines of *Juan Er*, which superficially seem filled with ritual paraphernalia (the various drinking vessels), ritual acts (drinking itself - though not in its logical or usual ritual context), and ritual structural repetition, is a reaction against continuity so pronounced as to seem actively ironic. While communities inscribe on bronze ritual objects a hope that coming generations “forever treasure and use” (永寶用) them, the male persona in *Juan Er* drinks “so as not to yearn/hurt forever” (維以不永懷/傷). His mock ritual (ironic in that it bathetically replaces the communal and joyous ritual drinking festivities with a tragic and lonely scene) is aimed at obliterating memory (in a vivid manner of drunkenness) and bringing a halt to the repetition of his tragic situation. And all this is contained within lines and an overall stanzaic structure which call to mind (but ultimately confound comparison with) the incremental repetition of scripted performance texts. The employment of mock ritual acts in the male lines appears bitterly ironic and sarcastic.

Close analysis of the poem *Juan Er*, in particular the apparent meaningful references to the world of fertility ritual, as well as the lack of meaningful references to a definite ritual tradition for the male drinking imagery, coupled with an unpacking of the structure and form of the poem, which points towards incremental repetition and dialogue, possibly in a balanced female/male symmetrical format, reveals an interesting contradiction. The poem seems at once intimately connected to the world of ritual, and fashioned in full recognition of the traditions, symbols and standard forms of ritual observance, yet it seems inexplicable as a ritual itself. The disconnection between the female and

¹⁰⁹ Martin Kern. op. cit.: 66.

male personas is highly problematic: the female clearly relates to a meaningful and specific ritual, while the male, though aping ritual forms, is unconnected to the female's ritual, or even, it seems, any other world of ritual. The roles do not seem able to coexist in a single ritual context - their features are not attested together, nor are the male features able to be assumed to be legitimately drawn from the world of ritual. Moreover, what would be the meaning of a ritual of the sort possible performed by the theoretical reconstruction above? Whereas a communal ritual involving the harvesting and symbolic treatment of herbs to promote fertility seems a logical religious action, a formal performance of the apparently private grief (of an upper class couple) over lack of success in pregnancy has no such clear purpose. It might be argued that the transmitted meaning of such a performance would be a very strong warning against infertility, and thus that the ritual has a role in the tutoring of society.

The evidence suggests however that the poem *Juan Er*, while strongly linked in certain parts and in certain stylistic ways with the world of ritual as preserved in other poems of the *Guo Feng* and the divination imagery of the *Yi Jing*, is not so much a homogenous ritual composition as a patchwork of ritual material brought together in a different manner. While much of the meaning and much of the power of the poem is a legacy of the world of ritual to which it elliptically refers and which it superficially imitates, the poem is not itself a ritual, but rather an emotional poem. It appears that the author or authors of the poem have pieced together ingredients, including ingredients from ritual, to create an individual poem which, though heavily indebted to and mindful of the world of ritual and its meaning imagery, is separate from it. As such, the poem can be considered an indication of a departure from the sort of poetry found in *Fou Yi* and *Cai Pin*, and indicates the beginnings of a style of poetry which is truly imaginative and creative, though still well versed in ritual ideas, symbols and forms. The poem *Juan Er* appears to give evidence of a crossroads in the early development of classical Chinese poetics - where mere records of songs give way to imaginative and purposefully poetic compositions. As traditional songs were supplemented by newly composed poetic pieces, key elements of the traditional style were maintained, but *Juan Er* demonstrates the

experimental bringing together of different existing elements in new ways.

The poem *Juan Er* can therefore be characterised as a text which employs ritual material - its symbology and its generic stylistic features - in a conscious, at times ironically knowing, way. The resonances carried over from this world, for instance the specific evocation of (in)fertility, as well as the more general sense of scripted ritual expectations overturned, which is produced by the manipulation of ritual forms, transmit a meaning which is thematic. I have shown that strict referential readings of the poem *Juan Er* fail because they require coherence and unity on the level of the poem's narrative. I have also demonstrated that an anthropological-ritual reading is also insufficient because, while the poem is filled with ritual material, it does not plot a unified or logical ritual utterance. The unity of meaning for the poem *Juan Er* lies instead in its thematic meaning: this poem is about the tragic emotional feeling of disappointed expectation which arises from infertility. It is about the tragic human feelings of inadequacy and inescapable shame provoked when one fails to fulfil the overwhelming expectations of one's own culture and society.

Thus, through a careful examination of the contents and style of the poem *Juan Er*, using the outlines for defining what constitutes ritual diction provided by Pascal Boyer, Bronislaw Malinowski and Claude Lévi-Strauss, I have established that the poem can be characterised as a hybrid of ritual ingredients. Due to this, meanings drawn from ritual resound in the poem, providing an explanatory and qualitative superstructure in which the actions of the poem take place, but the poem does not itself reveal some consistent underpinning ritual. The nature of the poem suggests that it was consciously composed as an amalgam of resonant ideas tied to a basic human situation. And through recognising this creative act, the poem emerges as truly poetic, linking the described experiences of humans to eternal forces of destiny and heaven's favour and disfavour.

In this analysis, I have also demonstrated that *Juan Er* illustrates what I contend to be a crucial influence of the world of divinatory ritual: that is, a more complex and dynamic application of the

xing technique than is commonly considered to be the case. The *xing* imagery with which the poem begins defies adequate explanation through traditional interpretations and contextualisations, but rather establishes a strong connection with a specific image in the divinatory oeuvre which injects unambiguous and explanatory meaning (lament over a failure to have a child) to an otherwise elliptical description. This amounts to a specific and dynamic use of the *xing* image as both a metonymic link to a particular ritual, and a metaphoric encapsulation of the meaning of that ritual, which is in opposition to traditional interpretations of *xing* imagery as evoking either frequently tenuous allegorical contexts (which seek to locate the writing of poetry to events within recorded history) or general emotional responses (which are conditioned by a conventional secular symbology).

5/ The Hesitant Fox:
Rituals of Life's Liminal Events

A second poem which would appear to display structural and meaningful connections with the world of ritual is *You Hu* 有狐, "There is a Fox", (Mao 63)¹¹⁰ the opening *xing* of which presents an image which is vivid, memorable and a fecund site of ritual meaning:

有狐綏綏	There is a fox, shuffling along
在彼淇梁	Near that dam on the river Qi
心之憂矣	Oh, the anxiety in my heart!
之子無裳	[My] lord has no tunic.

有狐綏綏	There is a fox, shuffling along
在彼淇厲	Near that ford on the river Qi
心之憂矣	Oh, the anxiety in my heart!
之子無帶	[My] lord has no belt.

有狐綏綏	There is a fox, shuffling along
在彼淇側	Near that bank of the river Qi
心之憂矣	Oh, the anxiety in my heart!
之子無服	[My] lord has no cloak.

The overall meaning of this poem is far from clear at first reading. The Mao commentary interprets this as a song about social propriety becoming unravelled under adverse economic conditions. The

¹¹⁰ *Shi Jing* pp. 140b - 141a.

Mao preface to the poem states that “in ancient times, the country experienced a terrible crop failure, and so they cut back on the rites and there were very many marriages” (古者國有凶荒，則殺禮而多昏).¹¹¹ The Mao commentary takes the poem as an indirect criticism of a society which displayed an anti-traditional move towards smaller families and many less formal marriages, while focussing on a particular situation in which a marriage did not occur (of which the fox is taken to be a symbol). This reading seems quite presumptuous, and draws unexplained conclusions about the lack of commitment to the traditional family model (“the ‘my lord’, is a man without a family” (之子，無室家者)).¹¹² Arthur Waley also categorises this song as one which deals with courtship and marriage, but also avoids an explanation (or even a rationalization) of the recurring fox image.¹¹³ I would suggest a different interpretation, which stems from the universal or prophetic quality that emerges when the poem is considered in the light of ritual. This interpretation does not depend on a specific historical circumstance and, allows for an explanation of the particular *xing* image, which demands a ritual contextualisation.

The *xing* image of the fox by the edge of the water is, at first glance, both specific and mystifying. Perhaps it is due to this complexity that some commentators have given the image only cursory attention, making at times baffling assertions of the image’s symbolism. Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan relate the Mao commentary’s judgement that “[since] the fox is a latent symbol of the male, this is a poem [regarding] a woman’s love for her man” (狐隱喻男子，是女愛男的詩)¹¹⁴ - perhaps a case of the apodasis dictating the protasis. Chen and Jiang also suggest that “the poet sees the fox walking slowly and hesitantly, and associates this with the beloved, who wanders forlorn and homeless” (詩人見狐慢吞吞地走，聯想愛人的流離失所)¹¹⁵ - a non sequitur that is ambitious to say the least.

¹¹¹ *Shi Jing*, p. 140b.

¹¹² *Shi Jing*, p. 141a.

¹¹³ Arthur Waley, 1996, p. 54.

¹¹⁴ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 189.

¹¹⁵ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 190.

Surely an analysis of the elements of the image itself, rather than a conjecture on its role in the psychology of the poet, would be more likely to do justice to this enigmatic *xing*. However, all attempts to explain this image as somehow “setting the emotional tone” of the poem through a natural evocation of emotion would appear to me to be inadequate. One conceivable strategy of understanding this image could be that the *xing* of a fox moving slowly summons up a nervous feeling of an impending attack, as implied by W. A. C. H. Dobson’s translation of the term in *The Language of the Book of Songs*.¹¹⁶ Closely allied with this interpretation is that of Bernhard Karlgren, who views the fox in this poem as symbolic of an aggressively pushy prospective husband. According to Karlgren, “the ode [is] an expression of pity with a young and poor girl who has no means of resisting the fox who slyly wants to catch her: being quite destitute, she has to accept what marriage can be offered.”¹¹⁷ Such a rationalisation of the *xing* would, however, give no explanation of what makes the image most memorable - the fact that the fox is beside the river Qi, and, especially, near the works (the dam and ford) which allow the river to be crossed. I would also contend that interpreting the image as definitely summoning up a feeling of impending disaster seems to over-read the meaning of the binome *suisui* 綏綏. While it may be attractive for ease of meaning for this reduplicative to have a meaning like “to stalk” or “to prowl about,”¹¹⁸ given the fact that this reduplicative form is only attested twice in the *Shi Jing*, and both times used to describe a fox, such a reading would appear to be so self-fulfilling as to be of little use. It would also seem that a reading that attaches such an atmosphere to the image of a fox, without corroborating evidence elsewhere in contemporaneous literature, reflects a European (and perhaps specifically Anglophone) judgement of foxes in general, or judges the meaning of this ingredient according to an unsupported assumption of the poem’s overall tone.

The fallacy of assuming a reading of impending doom associated with the fox image is demonstrated by the long existence of other interpretations even within the scope of traditional hermeneutics. The

Mao commentator offers *pi xing mao* 匹行貌, “walking side by side with a mate” for *suisui* an

¹¹⁶ W. A. C. H. Dobson, op. cit. p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Bernhard Karlgren, 1950, p. 43.

¹¹⁸ W. A. C. H. Dobson, op. cit. p.11.

interpretation which could imply that there are more than one fox present, or which might be creating a drama of the fox on one side of the river, walking in parallel with the travelling lord, or perhaps the persona.¹¹⁹ This image is an interesting one, but again would seem to be predicated on an idiosyncratic reading of the binome, which imposes a qualitative or intentional meaning onto observational description. Making things more complicated, further layers of intentional fallacy, such as the reading that *suisui* not only implies walking in company, but walking in the manner of looking for company - “pursuing a matching mate” (追隨匹偶貌), have since accrued in the Mao interpretative tradition.¹²⁰ The contemporary scholar Yu Yufei 于宇飛 even goes so far as to read the opening scene of *You Hu* as featuring “very many foxes, following one after the other” (很多的狐狸，一個跟著一個).¹²¹ Ma Ruichen rebuts the interpretation of *suisui* as referring to more than one fox walking side by side by pointing to two other examples in which *suisui* are encountered in conjunction with a fox:

齊風雄狐綏綏吳越春秋塗山歌綏綏白狐皆指一狐言不得謂綏綏為匹行貌¹²²

“The Airs of Qi say ‘The male fox *suisui*’; the song ‘Mount Tu’ in Wu Yue’s Spring and Autumn Annals says ‘*Suisui* the white fox.’ Both these examples indicate a single fox, for which one cannot render *suisui* as ‘walking side by side’.

Ma Ruichen instead suggests that the meaning of *suisui* is more simple - merely referring to slow movement. Qu Wanli summarises Ma’s opinion as *xing huan mao* 行緩貌, “walking at a relaxed pace”, which I take as the basis of my translation “shuffle.”¹²³

It is striking that this rarely-encountered reduplicative binome is attested in a variety of sources as

¹¹⁹ *Shi Jing*, p. 141a.

¹²⁰ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 274.

¹²¹ Yu Yufei 于宇飛. *Shijing Xinyi* 詩經新譯 [A New Translation of the Book of Songs]. Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua shuju, Minguo 61 [1972], p. 174.

¹²² Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰 *Mao shi zhuan jian tong shi* 毛詩傳箋通釋 [Commentary and Expounding of the Mao poems]. [Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan yinhang, 1960], p.353.

¹²³ Qu Wanli. op. cit. p. 116

referring to a fox. While it is quite likely that later uses (such as the example in Wu Yue's Spring and Autumn Annals) may be drawing on the detail of this *Guo Feng* poem itself, the fact that another *Guo Feng* poem attests this fox-specific description indicates that the notion of the fox acting in this manner is independent of this poem, with a separate and inherent meaning.

It is unusual that, given the apparent difficulty experienced by commentators in accounting for the significance of the fox image, no mention has been made of the potential for a link with the existing storehouse of imagery, the *Yi Jing*, a number of the hexagrams of which contain the image of a fox crossing a river. The image as it appears in *Wei Ji* 未濟, the final hexagram in the received text is as follows:

未濟亨，小狐汔濟，濡其尾，无攸利¹²⁴

Wei Ji ["not quite across the river"], undivided: A small fox is almost across the river, it wets its tail, there is nothing that is deemed beneficial.

Even if one were to accept that, in the abstract, this *xing* could meaningfully evoke an atmosphere in its own right, the similarity of the image of the fox by the river in this poem to the "fox that has nearly crossed the stream" in the *Wei Ji* hexagram is striking. This hexagram, as its name ("not yet crossed the river") suggests, is interpreted in the *Yi Jing* as a bad omen indicating lack of accomplishment. On the literal level in the *Wei Ji* divination, the fox has tried to cross the unnamed river, and, just before it has passed to the other side, "it wets its tail" (濡其尾).¹²⁵ Such an image is clearly inauspicious - "there is nothing that is deemed beneficial", (无攸利), as the *Yi Jing* puts it¹²⁶ - albeit not approaching the level of tragedy encountered elsewhere in the *Shi Jing*.

In *You Hu*, the fox, explicitly positioned throughout on the far side of the river (*bi* 彼 in each stanza), injects a similar sense of incompleteness, and dramatises the unfulfilled connection between

¹²⁴ *Yi Jing*, p. 137a.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

the poem's persona and the absent lord. The human situation which constitutes the second half of each stanza offers an interpretation of the obscure *xing* of the fox slowly moving near the river. This initially puzzling scene is explained through human action which follows, and thus a reason is offered for the fox's situation: that it, much like the speaker of the poem, desires to transcend its physical boundaries and make a connection to an object far away. The construal of the *xing* is therefore dynamic, relying on the explanatory human action; but the symbol of the fox takes on an extra level of meaning when it is considered as an evocation of ritual contained in the *Wei Ji* hexagram. For just as the title of the hexagram assumes that completion will arrive at some point even as it deals with the disappointment of currently unfulfilled aspirations, so too does the poem offer up elements (to a reader willing to receive them) which transmit frustration but not extreme grief (not least of them the key verb in the poem - *you* 憂, which connotes sorrowful concern, rather than, say, abject desperation).

Firstly, while the fox is isolated on the far side of the river, it has neither suffered any harm, nor is it irrevocably lost. Indeed, continually present in the poem are the methods of river-crossing that exist: *liang* 梁 and *li* 厲. These characters, occupying the emphatically significant positions in the incrementally varied rhyme scheme of the poem, are allowed to accentuate the images of the dam and ford. The third character in this pattern, *ce* 側, also conveys the dominant sense of frustrated proximity rather than distant separation, since it would appear to strictly refer to the slanting bank - the very edge of the river. The fox is as close as possible to crossing the river, and opportunities exist for it to achieve its goal, and so, while the fox's situation is disappointing, it is not hopeless. The image evokes an atmosphere of potential perpetually frustrated rather than entirely lacking. This atmosphere in turn mirrors the persona's own situation, which is chronically disappointing rather than acutely tragic.

It is clear then that the meaningful resonance of the fox image, drawn from its position in the *Yi Jing*, operates to clarify and reinforce two elements of this poem: first, the emotional atmosphere of the

described human scene; and second, the existence of a key liminal experience being referred to. The world of ritual, understandably, is preoccupied with life's major liminal events. Marriage, as already discussed with reference to *Juan Er* and other *Shi Jing* poems, is one of these, as is death and the act of going into battle. But what is the potential ritual meaning being summoned up in the poem *You Hu*'s use of the imagery of river crossings? To answer this question, it is useful to again look to evidence contained in other *Shi Jing* verses, to seek to ascertain whether the appearance of river-crossing imagery appears to have constant implications and associations. This may facilitate an interpretation of *You Hu* which recognises both the centrality and inherent resonances of the river imagery (those being the notions of liminality and frustrated/postponed desire), and the cultural context of interpretation of such imagery elsewhere.

One example is found in the poem *He Guang* 河廣, "The River is wide", (Mao 61),¹²⁷ works elliptically, posing a series of intriguing questions and answers under which the poem's subject appears to lie:

誰謂河廣？一葦杭之	Who would say that the River is wide? On a single reed one can cross it
誰謂宋遠？跂予望之	Who would say that Song is far off? On tip-toes, I see it far off
誰謂河廣？曾不容刀	Who would say that the River is wide? There is no room in it even for a boat
誰謂宋遠？曾不崇朝	Who would say that Song is far off? It could not take as long as a morning

Before moving to look at the individual questions posed and answered in *He Guang*, it is important to recognise that the entire poem is structured as an elliptical response to an assumed state of affairs.

¹²⁷ *Shi Jing*, pp. 138b - 139a.

The questions in *He Guang* are not simple interrogative statements, but rather appear to be prompted by received experience. The lines of the song do not ask “Is the river wide?”, but “Who would say that the river is wide?”, which implies that the poem seeks to query received wisdom, or perhaps a rhetorical position taken in an internal psychological dialogue. We may recall that Martin Kern points out that ritual diction includes questions and answers, which might lead us to assume that the poem *He Guang*, made up entirely of questions and answers, obviously betrays a ritual origin. While the question of the ritual origins or otherwise of this poem are not directly related to our inquiry into the compositional imperatives for the poem *You Hu*, *He Guang* provides a useful example of the way in which certain aspects of language may indicate a conscious reference to the conventions of ritual, rather than an unconscious or submerged genetic link to any particular ritual context. *He Guang* could be considered performative insofar as it establishes a dynamic dialogue between two positions, the interrogator and the character who provides answers (some literal, some metaphorical). Performative potential, as Kern and Marcel Granet remind us, can be judged an indicator of a formalised context, such as ritual. Equally, the poem could be an example of self-interrogation, with the persona displaying two opinions (the difficulty and the ease of travelling back into Song) in an ongoing debate. That reading could also suggest that the poem is playing off conventions of performance to perform a metaphorical and internal dialogue. However, I would suggest that the nature of the answers provided, which entirely negate, sometimes in an exaggerated manner, the questions asked, renders this poem a conscious and ironic engagement with ritual convention, but not a continuation of actual pre-existing ritual forms. These questions and answers do not confirm ideas as a way of repeating and emphasising ritual messages, as Malinowski and Kern suggest ritual questioning does. Instead, these answers confound, mock and marginalise rhetorical positions, positions possibly reflecting conventional assumptions. In other words, the questions and answers in *He Guang* overturn the conventions of ritual poetic dialogues even as the answers offered almost sarcastically send up certain propositions.

The poem’s parallel construction sets up an equivalency between these two statements, which

suggests a conceptual progression, in keeping with that seen in poems above, from a *xing* drawn from the natural world (and infused with the specific significance of omens in the divination tradition) to a situation in the mortal world. Familiarity with the *Yi Jing* lends the symbol of the river particular force: many hexagrams contain pronouncements relating to the auspiciousness or otherwise of crossing the “great river” (*da chuan* 大川) in their opening statements.¹²⁸ This poem would then seem to be presenting a picture of the particular auspiciousness and ease of crossing the river. But the question *shui wei Song yuan* 誰謂宋遠 “who would say that Song is far off?” anchors this verse in a specific physical location, and thus requires a contextualisation of some kind.

On the surface of the poem, there is no indication regarding whether the journey to Song lies in the future or in the past. The poem has traditionally been considered to be a song of longing for the homeland of Song, composed by one sequestered in the state of Wei. The Mao preface to the poem attributes it specifically to the mother of Duke Xiang 襄公 of Song 宋: “the mother of Duke Xiang of Song went as a bride to the state of Wei. She longed [for her home] incessantly, and as a result, wrote this poem” (宋襄公母歸於衛，思而不止，故作是詩也).¹²⁹ The case for such specificity is not clear, and a number of scholars have taken a broader approach. Wang Zhi 王質 (1127-1189) considers the poem to be “the creation of a native of Song temporarily residing in the land of Wei” (宋人僑居於衛地者所作),¹³⁰ a reading followed by the twentieth-century editor Yu Guanying 余冠英.¹³¹ While the poem (and perhaps the poet) is oriented towards Song, the interpretation that the state of Song acts as a locus of memory for a song in the “thinking of home” (思鄉) genre cannot be proved conclusively. However, a number of the qualities of the poem, when taken together, appear to locate it squarely in the realm of a marriage situation - and seemingly one in which the liminal moment of marriage is regretted, just as is the departure from home.

¹²⁸ See hexagrams five, six, thirteen, eighteen, twenty-six, forty-two, fifty-nine, sixty-one and, as already discussed, sixty-four.

¹²⁹ *Shi Jing*, p. 138b.

¹³⁰ Quoted in QuWanli. op. cit. p. 113.

¹³¹ “這是宋國人僑居衛國者思鄉之作” (This is written by a man of Song temporarily residing in Wei and thinking of home.) Yu Guanying 余冠英. *Shi Jing Xuan Yi* 詩經選譯 [Selections from the *Shi Jing*]. Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1956. p. 55.

Looking specifically at the nature of the answers offered, it is striking that a clear separation between absurdity and banality is observed. The images used to demonstrate the ease of crossing the river (that it can be crossed on a single reed, and that it cannot physically accommodate a boat) are generally recognised as greatly exaggerated details.¹³² On the other hand, the answers regarding the state of Song, while perhaps exaggerated, appear, if not entirely possible, to be grounded in the real world. They give a certain realistic comfort through recognising that Song is “far off” to a degree (as implied by the verb *wang* 望, which has a meaning such as “to gaze at in the distance”), but that it can soon be reached after a night’s travel.

This dichotomy and interplay between the absurd and the banal equates to a balance between Malinowski’s *weirdness* and *intelligibility* and Lévi-Strauss’s *pathological* thought and *normal* thought - a tension which is a defining quality of ritual diction. Through the use of absurd answers in relation to the partly metaphorical river boundary, the poem leaves behind the physical plane and moves into the psychological. This transcendence of the normal and intelligible physical world allows for a deeper metaphorical meaning to be transmitted, adding significance to the poem just as weirdness and pathological thought adds extra meaning to ritual. Yet, without the framework created by the intelligible and normal illustrative imagery of the journey to Song (and the literal function of the river), we would have no guidance in our construal of the weird and pathological thought.

The poem downplays the qualities of the river (breadth) and the state of Song (remoteness) which the questions assume. By doing so, it indicates that these physical barriers are not the main concern of the persona. As a result, as the Mao commentary points out, “the persona’s lack of travel is directly due to their intention not to travel, and is not due to the [state of Song] being far away.”¹³³ As the obstacles posed by the wide river and the remote state of Song are marginalised, a further question is provoked: what is holding the persona back from the journey that is implied throughout

¹³² Qu Wanli explains *yi wei* as an “extreme way of referring to an easy crossing” (極言易渡也). op. cit. p. 113.

¹³³ “我之不往，直以義不往耳，非為其遠。” *Shi Jing*, p. 139a.

the poem? With possible physical barriers thus discounted, it would be appropriate to consider that the journey is disallowed by a psychological, customary or emotional barrier, the Mao commentary's "intention not to travel."

Marcel Granet states that the poem contains "themes of crossing water and exogamic marriage,"¹³⁴ as he considers the river to be the key locus for rustic courtship ritual. Such an interpretation, while initially perhaps obscure, is difficult to fault, since it accommodates the generalised atmosphere of psychological boundaries on the one hand with the specificity of traditional commentators who consider this poem a regretful memory of a departure from Song to Wei.¹³⁵ The river acts as both a literal and metaphorical crux: on a spatial level it represents, through synecdoche, the site of courtship and marriage; it marks the boundary between the assumed land of the husband and the homeland of the wife; and it implies, on the temporal level, the key life-changing moment of marriage, after which the unmarried past is unattainable. This rich matrix of meaning summoned up by the river imagery, which is both a rather practical element of ritual, and a metaphorically meaningful symbol, all appears to relate to the theme of marriage.

Another apparent example of the river as a metaphor for marriage can be found in the poem *Zai Qu* 載驅, "Riding and Galloping" (Mao 105),¹³⁶ in which the well-omened journey of the bride is reflected in the river Wen. The two concluding stanzas of the poem are as follows:¹³⁷

汶水湯湯，行人彭彭 The waters of the Wen are broad; the escort's [horses] are
excellent

¹³⁴ "Thèmes du passage de l'eau et de l'éloignement exogamique." Marcel Granet. op. cit. p. 101.

¹³⁵ The reference to exogamy, which Granet makes from an anthropological perspective, provides an interesting possible origin of the liminal theme of this poem. Exogamic marriage, in which individuals travel outside their home community to marry into another, has obvious genetic advantages. If indeed exogamic marriage - marriage which crosses the physical boundaries between different communities (which often follow physical barriers like rivers and mountains) - had a valued social in ancient China, this provides a further reason for the prevalence of liminal symbology accompanying matters of marriage in the *Shi Jing* and *Yi Jing* (that is, further to the ease with which these physical markers can be metaphorically employed to indicate temporal life markers, such as the rite of passage of a wedding).

¹³⁶ *Shi Jing*. p. 199b - 202b.

¹³⁷ *Shi Jing*. p. 201a.

魯道有蕩，齊子翱翔	The Lu road is easy and wide, the maiden of Qi has a pleasant journey
汶水滔滔，行人儻儻	The waters of the Wen rush headlong, the escort's [horses] are swift
魯道有蕩，齊子遊敖	The Lu road is easy and wide, the maiden of Qi has love and courting.

Armed with this corroboration of the ritual and conventional link between the image of crossing a river and the notion of marriage, let us consider again the poem *You Hu*. The poem seems to imply that a frustration or failure (the ill-omen of the shuffling fox) exists in relation to a marriage (the as-yet uncrossed river), with a sad persona left worrying about her absent lord (who is presumed to be suffering privations). The poem contains no particular rehearsal of marriage ritual, but an understanding of the conventional symbolism of the world of ritual (the fox imagery associated, in the *Yi Jing* tradition, with major life events, including marriage, and the river image specifically linked to the practically and metaphorically significant ritual journey of a prospective bride to the homes of her groom) is crucial to the meanings of *You Hu*. Yet a knowledge of ritual symbolism can only explain a certain amount of the significance of the poem, for *You Hu* also contains a creative and individual emotional plot which, while appropriating the resonances of ritual, is not subordinate to them.

The concern on the part of the poem's speaker for her absent lord is transmitted in the homely and bathetic indirection of worry about the lord's clothes:

之子無裳	[My] lord has no tunic.
...	
之子無帶	[My] lord has no belt.
...	

之子無服

[My] lord has no cloak.

These items of clothing do not themselves appear linked to the world of ritual: the names are generic, and the clothing detail frequently encountered in ritual poetry in the *Shi Jing* (for instance, the variety of fabric) is not to be found here. But the structure of their presentation betrays a formal evocation of ritual style, which may or may not be recalling a particular ritual practice. The order in which the items of clothing are presented would appear to dramatize a series of *scripted* physical activities using particular (and non-interchangeable) objects, implying perhaps some kind of dressing rite. The first stanza concludes with the character *chang* 裳, the second with *dai* 帶, and the third with *fu* 服. The progression from the tunic to belt and then cloak/overgarment is the logical one for the script to a performance of putting on clothes, whereas this order is the reverse of what would naturally come to mind if these lines were purely objective: that is, if they only transmitted the persona's worries regarding the imagined situation of the absent lord of the poem. Surely in that circumstance, assuming the persona to be anxious about her lord being cold or uncomfortable, the layers of clothing would be referred to from the outside in so as to increase the intensity of discomfort. A performative rite, whether real or imaginary, would seem an appropriate evocation in a poem also displaying ritually resonant markers of marriage. And the failure of the dressing rite (the fact that the absent lord is feared *not* to be readying himself for the wedding) is fitting for the overall atmosphere of the poem as a perpetually frustrated and perpetually postponed wedding.

However, if indeed the final two lines of each stanza in this poem transmit some sort of ritual utterance, such as the dressing performance outlined above, this ritual aspect of the poem bears no connection to the ritual resonance of the fox imagery. It would merely be the case that two separate ritual notions were collocated in the same poem - namely, on the one hand, the meanings of anxiety, liminality and frustration associated with the fox/river image, and, on the other hand, a formal structure indicating a practical physical ritual associated with clothing, and, especially, dressing (whatever the referent of that action may be). The coupling of these two ritual elements (essentially

one of substance and one of form) appears opportunistic rather than logical; the lamenting and emotional poem seems to be given the depth of apparent ritual resonance and connection without necessarily being a coherent ritual utterance in itself. It would seem that poem *You Hu* makes use of connections with the world of ritual, but does not itself arise out of a particular ritual origin nor display a consistent ritual function.

Interestingly, though, while the ingredients of *You Hu* clearly display a thematic unity, they seem too disjointed to be necessarily considered part of an underlying ritual. While incrementally varied, the contents of the poem do not appear directed towards any particular objective. The roles of the fox and the persona in the poem do not betray a connection other than the metaphorical. And although the poem employs ritual resonances and recalls ritual forms, it does not contain the detailed description required for it to actually transmit information about a certain ritual activity. As a result, *You Hu* can be considered an opportunistic amalgamation of ritual (or seemingly ritual) aspects, in both form and content, which imparts the weight of religious and conventional meaning to the apparently individual tragedy of the poem's persona.

The internal contradiction within the poem between, on the one hand, a descriptive function which is incoherent and an amalgam of the literal and the metaphorical, and, on the other hand, an apparently ritual nature but without a logical or consistent script for any particular ritual act, necessitates a novel interpretation. I contend that the most appropriate way of reading the poem *You Hu* must be to consider it in thematic terms as a meditation on a general idea: namely, the tragic anxiety associated with key rites of passage, and the uneasy suspicion that they will not be successfully fulfilled. This generalised liminal anxiety, to which the general symbology of the poem refers (employing ritual liminal details such as the fox and the river, as well as a framework in ritual style of unfulfilled rites, such as the unsuccessful dressing rite) is considered through the example of an anxious prospective bride. As the general sense of liminal failure and frustration is repeated within the poem (the fox which can never quite cross; the dressing rite which is scripted but not

performed), a tragic implication emerges on the narrative level for the female persona (the dawning realisation that the marriage is not likely to be successfully joined). This powerful and nuanced unifying meaning is only accessible through a balanced appreciation of the different (narrative, formal and symbolic) material from which the poem *You Hu* is crafted.

The poem *You Hu* thus illustrates my contention that connections with the world of divinatory ritual (in this case the imagery of the fox near the river, and the related imagery of the river itself in divination, as evidenced in the *Yi Jing* and other *Shi Jing* poetry) are fundamental contributing factors to the meaning of some *Guo Feng* poetry. In addition, the positioning of imagery from the divination tradition as the repeated *xing* in this poem demonstrates a use for this language technique outside the scope which is traditionally ascribed to it. The image of the fox by the river in *You Hu* provides the basis for physical, metaphorical and symbolic discussion, while, I would contend, not providing for some of the atmospheric and emotional interpretations which have at times been asserted. This world of ritual helps to explain the human situation contained in the poem and provides a conclusive judgement where the poem's persona cannot. This liking for specific and meaningful ritual ingredients is mirrored by a general tendency towards a ritual style in terms of the poem's structure, which is evidenced by a dynamic interplay of the weirdness/intelligibility, pathological thought/normal thought dichotomies. Indeed, this basic characteristic of ritual expression is internalised in *You Hu* (and the similar poem *He Guang*) through the treatment of the imagery of the river, which, while it is an ordinary and intelligible example of a restricting boundary, is at the same time a metaphorical and symbolic invocation of psychological liminality. Through understanding the way in which symbols and ideas from the world of divinatory ritual are combined in *You Hu*, we can approach meanings which are elusive on a superficial reading, such as the potential reference of the poem to frustrated marriage. To arrive at a conclusive understanding of the symbology of foxes, rivers and marriage, however, more poems will need to be examined.

6/ The Fox Gets Married:Diverse Ritual Ingredients with a Specific Referent

While the poem *You Hu* deals elliptically with the theme of marriage, the *Qi Feng* 齊風 is home to a poem featuring the similar ritual ingredient of a shuffling fox and a far more explicit reference to marriage and a particular wedding - *Nan Shan* 南山, "The southern mountain" (Mao 101):¹³⁸

南山崔崔，雄狐綏綏	On the southern mountain so high, the male fox shuffles by
魯道有蕩，齊子由歸	The road to Lu is flat, the maiden of Qi is on the way to be wed
既曰歸止，曷又懷止？	Now that she has gone to her new home, how can one still yearn?
葛屨五兩，冠綏雙止	Five pairs of cloth shoes and cap tassels in pairs
魯道有蕩，齊子庸止	The road to Lu is flat, the maiden of Qi uses it
既曰庸止，曷又從止？	Now that she has used it, how can one still follow?
蓺麻如之何？	Planting hemp, how is it done?
衡從其畝	Crossways and up and down one lays it out
取妻如之何？	Seeking a wife, how is it done?
必告父母	One must tell her father and mother
既曰告止，曷又鞠止？	Now that one has told her parents, how can one push the boundaries so?

¹³⁸ *Shi Jing*, p. 195a - 197a.

析薪如之何？	Cutting firewood, how is it done?
匪斧不克	If not for an axe it would be impossible
取妻如之何？	Seeking a wife, how is it done?
匪媒不得	If not for a matchmaker, she cannot be obtained
既曰得止，曷又極止？	Now that she is obtained, how can one go to extremes?

The Mao commentary considers this poem to be an act of censure directed at the sexually improper Duke Xiang of Qi (r. 697 - 685 BCE), composed by the great officials of the state of Qi in objection to the Duke's incestuous relationship with his younger sister, who, in the course of the poem, marries into the state of Lu.¹³⁹ The Mao commentator advises that Duke Xiang displayed "the behaviour of birds and wild animals, and acted improperly even towards his own sister" (鳥獸之行，淫乎其妹).¹⁴⁰ Such a reading obviously relies on the assumption of a significant degree of contextual detail, but it may have its roots in the sense of customary conduct which the questions and answers of the final two stanzas draw out. The specificity and obscurity of the object and reason for censure, however, are in no way suggested by the content of the poem itself. But for adherents to the Mao interpretation, the very lack of explicit connection between content and assumed context is taken as proof of their position. Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan, for instance, argue that the obscurity of the message of the poem is understandable and necessary, commenting that "since it criticises and denounces the leader of the state [in which it was written], it is thus written in a rather covert manner" (由于這是諷刺斥責本國的君主，所以詩寫得比較隱蔽).¹⁴¹ The Mao commentary assumes than an incestuous relationship between Duke Xiang and his sister continued even after she had travelled to Lu as a bride. References to this apparent scandal, and the Duke's severe treatment of those who called it to light, are found in earlier sources, such as the *Zuo Zhuan*, lending strength to the claims of Cheng and Jiang regarding the necessity of the issue being only covertly referred to in *Nan Shan*.

¹³⁹ *Shi Jing*, pp. 195a - 195b.

¹⁴⁰ *Shi Jing*, p. 195a.

¹⁴¹ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 274.

Taking an entirely different approach is Bernhard Karlgren, who reads the poem as the internal self-analysis of an unsuccessful suitor who looks on as his sweetheart, the maiden of Qi, goes to marry a successful suitor from the state of Lu. “A lover who has lost her is grieved, but is admonished: he should not be desperate and continue to think of her or try to follow her. All the proper rites required have been duly carried, and the fact is irrevocable.”¹⁴² This interpretation provides a specific “speaker” of the poem, who is the same character as the unsatisfied lover to whom the rhetorical questions, urging a stop to the romantic intentions, apply. This is in contrast to the Mao commentary’s view that the poem represents a third-party reaction to the situation of the unsatisfied lover (Duke Xiang), the impropriety of whose continuing amorous intentions is shown up through the reoccurring rhetorical question formula.¹⁴³ This difference in the object of the rhetorical questions notwithstanding, the same basic approach - that this poem plots the emotional responses of a small number of human actors in a mini-narrative - is found in the approaches of both Mao and Karlgren. Indeed, the possibility exists that the Mao reading merely represents an application of a particular set of historical details to a pre-existing vague narrative schema proposed by Karlgren.

The hermeneutic approach of the Mao commentary should not, however, be dismissed out of hand. In this particular case, it would appear that the traditional interpretation helps us understand some of the seemingly unexplained elements of the poem. The definiteness of location found in the poem *Nan Shan* - the “road to Lu” and “maiden of Qi” - begs a definite contextualisation. The fact that the same locative descriptors occur in *Nan Shan* as in the poem *Zai Qu*, “Riding and Galloping” (Mao 105),¹⁴⁴ which lies in the same regional grouping as this poem, would seem to point towards a shared, and specific context. The physical location *nan shan* has commonly been considered to be an alternative name for *niu shan* 牛山, an actual landmark in ancient Qi.¹⁴⁵ As such, its presence adds a

¹⁴² Bernhard Karlgren, 1950. p. 65.

¹⁴³ The idea of the poem being written by a concerned third party stems from the *Zheng Yi* commentary, which specifies a putative author of the *dafu* 大夫 (“grandee”) class: “A grandee of the state of Qi, seeing Duke Xiang acting improperly in this way, composed the poem as a criticism of him” (齊大夫見襄公行惡如是，作詩以刺之). *Shi Jing*. p. 195a.

¹⁴⁴ *Shi Jing*. p. 199b - 202b.

¹⁴⁵ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. p. 274.

certain specificity. On the other hand, C. H. Wang points out that the term *nan shan*, which he renders as “South Mount,” is a generalised and indirect way of referring to a location, even if that location is the definite landmark of *niu shan*, and may indicate the generality which is a feature of oral poetry composition.¹⁴⁶ The contextual detail supplied by the Mao interpretation, however, provides a defensible explanation of the significance of the locative elements: historically, the sister of Duke Xiang - the “maiden of Qi” - was to travel to be married to Duke Huan of Lu (r. 711 - 693 BCE), hence “the road to Lu” would figure as the hoped for escape from her current situation. With the assistance of the Mao interpretation’s historical contextualisation, which provides an identity for the main female character, the aspects of the poem which relate to a seemingly specific wedding event (lines 3 & 4, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10) can be meaningfully read as historical descriptive detail.

That having been said, the physical markers can be more generally interpreted. The term *nan shan* appears to be a significant place in the Qi mindset, given its multiple occurrences. However, at the same time as it has specific significance, the detail also carries a metaphorical meaning which is not necessarily tied to its physical characteristics. The towering (崔崔) mountain begins the poem, and numerous commentators have sought to divine an allegorical or symbolic reference for it. I would propose however that the metaphorical meaning of the southern mountain is more closely tied to its physical implications. It is an imposing physical barrier, which at the same time implies a psychological barrier between different communities. It is worthy of note that, in the third line of the poem (魯道有蕩), the way is easy once the imposing barrier of the mountain is syntactically left behind. It is thus a significant threshold, which, on the physical level, acts a boundary or barrier in Qi, but at the same time indicates, on the metaphorical level, the barrier between the current (improper) situation in Qi and a ritually-appropriate wedding which will transfer the maiden of Qi to the state of Lu. I would suggest that the presence of the southern mountain in the opening line establishes, from the outset, a theme of liminality and the well-known change in life (well-known just as the mountain is famous) which a wedding implies. The import of this liminal event was perhaps particularly significant for the Chinese bride of this period, for whom the act of *gui* 歸,

¹⁴⁶ C. H. Wang, 1974, pp. 69 - 70.

“going to the matrimonial home,” specifies a major change in her way of life.

While the Mao reading appears defensible in relation to the wedding referred to in the poem, it also assumes a specific referent for the enigmatic presence of the fox in the second line: namely, the villainous figure of Duke Xiang. Such an interpretation provides a meaningful consistency in the reading of *Nan Shan*, but it seems to arise from a reading which forces specific images into a preordained overall meaning. Interestingly, while one would not usually consider the interpretive strategy of Bernhard Karlgren to mimic that of the Mao tradition, Karlgren seems also to read the fox image in service of his overall characterisation of this poem, producing the specific (and somewhat contorted) comment that “the male fox, i.e. the successful husband, has stepped slowly (cautiously and slyly). He has committed no breach of the rules which could invalidate the marriage.”¹⁴⁷ The elusive binome *suisui* is thus taken by Karlgren to imply calm and appropriate action on the part of the unimpeachable figure of the successful husband (and is thus required to carry an entirely different connotation to that carried by the same words in the poem *You Hu*, which Karlgren, as we will remember, took to symbolize the “sly man who has managed, by his clever plans, to marry a young lady, to the despair of her true lover”).¹⁴⁸

I would suggest that, in interpreting a complex image such as that of the fox, one should follow the reverse hermeneutic path: teasing out the specific meanings and resonances of the constituent elements of the poem, and then constructing an overall meaning (if indeed that is possible and desirable) which these elements support. Both the Mao tradition and Bernhard Karlgren fit the fox into their respective scenarios, arriving at opposite conclusions: according to Mao, the fox is the sly, unnerving presence of Duke Xiang, while according to Karlgren, it is the successful and ritually unimpeachable suitor. I do not consider that the fox image should necessarily be assumed to operate within the narrative frame if there are other significant resonances of such an image, for which evidence can be found in other contemporaneous contexts. Accordingly, perhaps at the same time

¹⁴⁷ Bernhard Karlgren, 1950. p. 65.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 43.

that this fox imagery can be read as referring to the specific personage of the Duke, it also demonstrates a connection (whether conscious or unconscious) to the world of ritual, including the world of divinatory symbolism as attested by the *Yi Jing*. As such, the poem *Nan Shan* may, like the poem *Juan Er* represent a poetic composition which draws on specific religious ritual symbolism for some of its meaningful impact.

Let us look in detail then at the way in which the fox image operates in *Nan Shan*. A frequently encountered type of interaction between a *xing* image and the lines which follow it in a poem is for the structure of the *xing* lines to be replicated through syntactical parallelism, but for the semantic elements expressed within that parallelism to diverge. This technique can highlight the divergence of the situation of human characters from that of the natural world described in the *xing* because the formal similarity in the lines cast focus on the differences on the referential level. However, this explanation of the opening lines of *Nan Shan* does not cover the image of the fox. The verb phrases associated with the parallel actors of fox and maiden (*suisui* 綏綏, “shuffles by”, and *you gui* 由歸, “is about to be wed [lit. go home]”, respectively) do not offer an explicit contrast. On the surface, there does not seem to be any contextual similarity, nor any particular emotional interaction. This lack of emotional connection is due partly to the apparent lack of necessary or inherent positive/negative connotations for the binome *suisui*, as well as to the ambiguity surrounding the journey of the maiden to be married. Given that many poems deal with the anguish of young brides leaving their homes, while others offer praises of happy and virtuous newlyweds, the emotional tones of these couplets, and the question of how these tones interact (that is, whether they correlate directly or act as counterpoint to each other) lacks clarity. Such confusion is not the hallmark of *xing* imagery, since its function is commonly described as that of clearly establishing the atmosphere which permeates and gives appropriate meaning to the poem’s ensuing human activity.

If, however, as we have seen in *You Hu*, the fox imagery in *Nan Shan* imports the ritual meaning of frustration at the almost obtained key liminal experience, it is possible to see a meaningful

connection with both the liminal activity of the poem (the wedding) and the frustrated desires of the indecent Duke Xiang, or the frustrated suitor in Karlgren's less specific reading. The opening of the poem, using the imagery of the fox to summon up these ritual resonances, announces two key elements of the text, which fit well with the historical/contextual interpretation of the Mao tradition. The fox imagery announces a poem dealing with a key liminal act (just as in ritual the fox is consistently associated with the crossing of a river), but it also imparts an ominous and partly pessimistic flavour (the omen in the *Yi Jing's Wei Ji* hexagram, let us remember, indicates "nothing that is deemed beneficial" (无攸利)),¹⁴⁹ which is appropriate both for a specific reference to the unwanted influence of the figure of Duke Xiang over the proceedings, or merely a general anxiety associated with the type of situation the poem describes.

These poems confirm two fundamental elements seemingly inseparable from the image of the shuffling fox - that which is liminal (be it the literal river in *You Hu*, or the key life mark of marriage in *Nan Shan*, and likely implicated in *You Hu* also) and a degree of difficulty in the crossing of that threshold (the lack of preparedness in the absent lord of *You Hu*, the problematic presence of, perhaps, Duke Xiang in *Nan Shan*). Importantly, these ideas, and the general atmosphere of anxiety which permeates both *You Hu* and *Nan Shan* are due to a connection to a specific fox image in the ritual tradition, and not to some broad notion that foxes inherently demonstrate some particular meaning. This difference is observable through considering the fox imagery in the *Shi Jing* poem *He Cao Bu Huang* 何草不黄, "What plant has not grown yellow?" (Mao 234):¹⁵⁰

何草不黄 何日不行 What plant has not grown yellow? What day do [we] not march?
 何人不将 经营四方 What man is not led [into battle] and keeping look-out over the four
 directions?
 何草不玄 何人不矜 What plant has not grown black? What man is not without his wife?
 哀我征夫 独为匪民 Alas for us campaigning soldiers, we alone are made to be not men

¹⁴⁹ *Yi Jing*, p. 137a.

¹⁵⁰ *Shi Jing*, pp. 527b - 528a.

匪兕匪虎 率彼曠野 But neither are we rhinos or tigers, who navigate this windswept
wilderness

哀我征夫 朝夕不暇 Alas for us campaigning soldiers, day and night we have no rest

有芄者狐 率彼幽草 The bushy [tailed] fox, he navigates these thick plants

有棧之車 行彼周道 But we have bamboo carts and trudge on the circuit road.

The fox in this poem is presented without the details which I have previously discussed - namely, binome *suisui* or the location near a river. The fox (together with the rhinos and tigers), and its ease in the thick plants of the wilderness, is juxtaposed with the situation of the campaigning soldiers in whose voice the poem is spoken, they who are unaccustomed to the harsh surroundings. While the atmosphere of the poem is one of difficulty and arduousness, this is not a result of the fox image. Indeed, the fox and the other animals are seemingly able to transcend the difficulty of the situation. This treatment is significantly different from that found in either *You Hu* or *Nan Shan*, in which the fox imagery is inextricably linked to the human emotive atmospheres, not contrasted to it. *He Cao Bu Huang* thus demonstrates that foxes do not, per se, necessitate a traditional anthropomorphic reading or symbolic association.

Foxes can evidently be exploited in the *Shi Jing* for figurative purposes, divorced from their ritual associations, which are inscribed in particular accompanying phrases and scenes. In this poem, the role of the fox image is to act in juxtaposition with the human world, emphasising the difference between the situation of an animal which is naturally suited to the conditions and that of soldiers for whom the harsh winter is foreign and unfamiliar. The figure, located from the initial couplet of the poem, where *xing* imagery is usually found, is, if you will, an anti-analogy, a foil to the human world, which negates similitude. This is in direct opposition to the way in which the fox imagery operates in the opening *xing* lines of *You Hu* and *Nan Shan*, where it is clear (and accepted) that the fox's situation has some sort of metaphorical or analogous connection to the human world (partly as a result of its very presence in each poem's opening lines).

This clear difference in treatment demonstrates that fox imagery in *You Hu* and *Nan Shan* is exploited for other implications, and that there must be other meaningful elements to the treatment in those poems. As we have observed, that extra meaningful information is provided by a connection to a ritual context - a contention that the negative evidence of *He Cao Bu Huang* would appear to confirm, in that it provides a context which appears unconnected with ritual. Logically speaking, there would seem no obvious function for a ritual recalling the privations of a military campaign. The song does not display ritual echoes such as distinct repeatable physical actions, nor is its form (with five interrogative phrases in the first stanza and none in the second) evocative of repetitive and balanced ritual diction. *He Cao Bu Huang* shows how an unadorned fox image in a poem without (actual or imitated) ritual resonances does not summon up the key notions of liminality or frustrated achievement. Those meanings are only accessible through connection to the imagery of foxes which is found in the divinatory ritual tradition, and which is accompanied by a particular apparatus of attendant detail (including the river and/or the *suisui* binome).

The imagery of the fox appears in only one line of the poem *Nan Shan*; the poem displays a greater number of clear links to an externally-attested world of ritual associated with marriage. The literal reference to the wedding can be found in the lines *Qi zi you gui* 齊子由歸 (“the maiden of Qi is on the way to be wed”) and *qu qi ru zhi he* 取妻如之何 (“seeking a wife, how is it done?”). Yet the marriage is just as clearly inferred from the presence of the practical evidence of a wedding: the five pairs of cloth shoes (葛屨五兩) and one pair of cap tassels (冠綉雙止) - exactly the sort of cloth gifts which, according to Qu Wanli, were traditional wedding tokens.¹⁵¹

Interestingly, as the Mao commentary suggests, these practical details may represent two different sets of wedding tokens, separated on the grounds of social class. The Mao commentary glosses *ge ju* 葛屨 as “in terms of clothes, the humble ones” (服之賤者) and *guan rui* 冠綉 as “in terms of clothes,

¹⁵¹ Qu Wanli, op. cit. 171.

the highly esteemed ones” (服之尊者).¹⁵² The conclusion to be drawn from these paired tokens from different social milieu is, according to Cheng and Jiang, that the “poet uses cloth shoes and cap tassels to illustrate that for all people, whether from hoi polloi or rich clans, there is a definite mate” (詩人用葛屨、冠綉比喻不論人民或貴族都各有一定的配偶).¹⁵³ C. H. Wang, considers that the divergence and seeming inconsistency of the ingredients in the poem indicate that this poem arises from spontaneous (and therefore necessarily “vague” and “inaccurate”) oral composition.¹⁵⁴ I propose, however, that the generalised significance of the physical details in *Nan Shan* indicates not a laxness of composition, but rather an intentional generalness of theme. Clearly marriage in general, rather than necessarily the specific details of the wedding of Duke Xiang’s sister (or any other marriage, for that matter), is the overall object of these lines.

Regardless of the social class implied by the use of these details, their use as symbols of a wedding is unambiguous. The same tokens constitute the subject of the poem *Ge Ju* 葛屨, “Cloth Shoes” (Mao 107),¹⁵⁵ the first stanza of which indicates the care and specific skill required to create these opulent details of a wedding:

糾糾葛屨，可以履霜	Fibre shoes tightly woven, are good for walking upon the dew
摻摻女手，可以縫裳	A girl’s fingers, long and slender, are good for sewing clothes
要之襪之，好人服之	Hem them, seam them; the loved one shall wear them. ¹⁵⁶

The physical act of binding cloth around and around (糾糾) would seem to metaphorically reinforce

¹⁵² *Shi Jing*, p. 196a.

¹⁵³ Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 275.

¹⁵⁴ C. H. Wang, 1974. p. 72.

¹⁵⁵ *Shi Jing*, pp. 206b - 207b.

¹⁵⁶ Not everybody takes this poem to refer to the preparations before a wedding. Seraphin Couvreur explains the poem thus: “the poet criticises the greed of a rich man who obliges his wife to work immediately after their wedding celebration, and hastens to put on the clothing when it is not finished being constructed” (“Le poète blâme l’avarice d’un homme riche qui oblige sa femme à travailler aussitôt après la célébration de leurs noces, et sa hâte de mettre des vêtements dont la confection n’est pas terminée.”). Seraphin Couvreur. op. cit. p. 113. This reader, which is at base a divergence of the relationship between the girl and the “loved one” does not appear to me, however, to have a bearing on the use of the practical detail of the fabric shoes as synecdochic reference to marriage.

a connection with the binding of man and woman in marriage (a connection to which Chinese idiom refers in the common term for marriage, *jie hun* 結婚, attested in the Han 漢 dynasty, which uses the verb *jie* 結, “to bind”).¹⁵⁷ Moreover, as the twentieth-century scholar Gao Heng 高亨 observes, the fact that both the shoes and cap tassels come in pairs implies the partnering of humans in marriage.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the presence of these tokens describing the practicalities of wedding traditions, the second half of the poem *Nan shan* is constructed in a formulaic manner, using structural parallelism and a question-and-answer format to apparently transmit the folk wisdom about the proper process of betrothal:

蓺麻如之何？	Planting hemp, how is it done?
衡從其畝	Crossways and up and down one lays it out
取妻如之何？	Seeking a wife, how is it done?
必告父母	One must tell her father and mother
既曰告止，曷又鞠止？	Now that one has told her parents, how can one push the boundaries so?
析薪如之何？	Cutting firewood, how is it done?
匪斧不克	If not for an axe it would be impossible
取妻如之何？	Seeking a wife, how is it done?
匪媒不得	If not for a matchmaker, she cannot be obtained
既曰得止，曷又極止？	Now that she is obtained, how can one go to extremes?

The utterances above are a vivid example of the employment of ordinary subject matter in formulaic structures. The parallel questions in each stanza, the first of which refers to an aspect of ordinary life

¹⁵⁷ The idiom is found in the *Gong Yang Zhuan* 公羊傳 commentary to the *Chun Qiu Jing*. Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風 ed. *Hanyu Dacidian* 漢語大辭典. Vol. 9. [Shanghai]: Hanyu dacidian chu ban she, 1992. p. 808.

¹⁵⁸ “The poem uses the fibre shoes making pairs, and the cap tassels making pairs as an analogy for the husband and wife making a couple...” “詩以葛鞋成兩，帽穗成雙比喻夫妻成對” Gao Heng 高亨 *Shi Jing Jin Zhu* 詩經今[Contemporary Commentary on the *Shi Jing*]. [Shanghai]: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1980. p. 134.

and the second to the courtship, at the same time draw out clear answers and give the impression of an easy and natural equivalence between the two spheres of human life: work and love. The same urge to compare courtship with the world of everyday activities, and in the same questioning format, is to be seen in the poem *Fa Ke* 伐柯, “Chopping an axe-handle’ (Mao 158).¹⁵⁹ As Arthur Waley points out, the poem *Fa Ke* goes on to show “the popular view that marriage was a very simple matter, and a match-maker by no means necessary”, thus problematising the wisdom dispensed by *Nan Shan*.¹⁶⁰ However, the first stanza of *Fa Ke*, in setting up the assumption of the need for a match-maker, notably uses almost exactly the same diction as is used in *Nan Shan*:

伐柯如何?	Chopping an axe-handle, how is it done?
匪斧不克	If not for an axe it would be impossible
取妻如何?	Seeking a wife, how is it done?
匪媒不得	If not for a matchmaker, she cannot be obtained.

This indicates that either one of these poems plays off the other in its coincidence of marriage and axe imagery, or both poems play off some existing conventional way of thinking about, and, in particular (given their shared diction), talking about marriage. It is quite possible that this convention could also be associated with a convention of ritual. The use of axes is a vividly physical and visual act - elements which, as we will recall, Granet considers indicative of and fundamental to performative ritual.

Let us recall the importance (identified by Malinowski in regard to the general anthropological theory of ritual, and Martin Kern for the *Shi Jing* in particular) of self-referential questions and answers as an indication of ritual context since they serve to reinforce and promote the remembering of details of the ritual performance. The questions and answers in the closing stanzas of the poem *Nan shan* providing the repeated folk wisdom of how to secure a spouse are of this type. The

¹⁵⁹ *Shi Jing*, pp. 301a - 302a.

¹⁶⁰ Arthur Waley, 1996. p. 127.

questions and answers fit together in an inextricable relationship: the questions seek only specific information of a consistent type (here, the method or instrument), while at the same time providing information of a consistent type (the objective). This mnemonic device, which injects the dynamic (and inherently performative) “call and response” structure while transmitting cultural knowledge, is exactly equivalent to the ritual poetics which Kern discusses. However, this section of *Nan Shan* is a discrete fragment, and its poetics (which indicate origins in performative ritual) are not at all consistent with those of the preceding sections of the text.

Importantly though, the imagery mentioned above (and the ritual activity, if indeed it is implicated), is grounded in the quotidian. This concluding section of the poem *Nan Shan* deals in general folk wisdom, whereas the initial parts are specific, and possibly associated with the specific upper-class referents of Duke Xiang and his sister. A disjuncture exists between the refined and specific ritual detail of the first half of *Nan Shan*, and the generalised folksy aphorisms of the second. The relative specificity of the poem’s opening, which locates the poem in space and in reference to a particular wedding event, is fused with a very formulaic (and apparently, as we have just observed, very common) set of words. The poem thus constitutes an amalgam of ritual sections, and ritual influences, collocating the obscurity and complex resonance of *Yi Jing* imagery in the opening couplet with the profane everyday folksiness of the courtship and matchmaker rhymes. The last lines of each of the two final stanzas of *Nan Shan*, repeating the rhetorical questions of the earlier parts of the poem, re-anchor the sense in the specific space related to the characters of the “maiden of Qi” and her journey to the state of Lu. This ironic juxtaposition between ordinary and common-sense expectations and the specific goings-on of specific characters is a result of this creative and amalgamating compositional strategy.

Through a reading strategy sensitive to the (substantive and formal) connections between *Nan shan* and the world of ritual, we thus arrive at a number of conclusions. First of all, the many references that this poem displays to ritual are wide-ranging, including specific literal descriptors of wedding

rituals (the clothing, which act as a synecdochic indicator of all marriages), traditional religious symbolic markers of liminal experience (the fox image), and folksy question-and-answer formulae which perpetuate traditional assumptions. However, it is also obvious, due to the unusual shift in the poem's structure and tone, and the hybrid stanzaic forms found in its latter half, that *Nan Shan* does not represent a holistic ritual utterance, but a conscious amalgam of ritual ingredients. This rich patchwork cannot be logically read as a record of any particular ritual event - it is too disjointed and inconsistent to be characterised as such, given the ease with which actual verse records of ritual can be identified.

These findings in turn prompt the question of why such an amalgam exists, and what poetic purpose this creative synthesis serves. I would propose that the answer to this is most easy to identify by looking at the impact of grafting the provocative rhetorical formula which dominates the second half of the poem. The constant use of the rhetorical question in the form *ji* + Verb + Object + *zhi*, *he you* + Verb + *zhi* (既 + Verb + Object + 止, 曷又 + Verb + 止) is a unique and distinctive feature of *Nan shan*, which seems to be constantly appealing to the reader for a judgement or opinion. In the Mao interpretation of the poem as a veiled criticism of the assiduous lasciviousness of Duke Xiang even after his sister has travelled to the state of Lu to marry, it is assumed that the grammatical subject of the second line of each question couplet (which I have translated as "one" to reflect the empty subject in the Chinese), is Duke Xiang himself:

既曰歸止，曷又懷止？ Now that she has gone to her home, how can one still yearn?

...

既曰庸止，曷又從止？ Now that she has used it, how can one still follow?

...

既曰告止，曷又鞠止？ Now that one has told her parents, how can one push the boundaries so?

...

既曰得止，曷又極止？ Now that she is obtained, how can one go to extremes?

The rhetorical question therefore asks how it could be possible for Duke Xiang to be unable to recognise the punctuation provided by the rites of the wedding. In the words of the commentators Chen and Jiang, “the final couplet of each stanza use a method of establishing questions which are not answered, leaving the reader to ponder, producing a result in which the ‘speaker has no blame’, by which the critical force of the poem is strengthened even more.”¹⁶¹ Alternatively, in the interpretation of Bernhard Karlgren and others, the rhetorical questions are read as having a more general referent. Regardless of the interpretation of this grammatical issue, the rhetorical questioning emphasises the assumption that the romantic yearning must be brought to a halt. The resonance of ritual propriety provided by the mention of key points of the wedding script (such as journeying to the husband’s state, the nuptial gifts, asking the parents) increase the liminal force of the situation. The implication of the unanswered question concluding the first two stanzas of *Nan Shan* is that, given that the appropriate ritual acts have been undertaken, it should be obvious to all that the marriage is sealed (and that, therefore, in the Mao reading, Duke Xiang’s sister is now completely off-limits to the Duke’s incestuous desires), and that it is inconceivable that someone might not understand this.

The second half of the poem, in which the same form of rhetorical question is grafted onto a call-and-response formula which, as we have seen, is a pre-existing convention (and does not conventionally include the provocative final rhetorical question), reinforces this idea of a departure from what is commonly accepted. The folksy formulae in the final two stanzas of *Nan Shan* bring the discourse of the poem down to the level of apparently obvious common sense. Just as the answers to the questions of how one cuts an axe or how one finds a wife have answers which are culturally obvious (reinforced by a traditional and oft-repeated series of couplets), the implication of *Nan Shan* is that the answer for the unanswered rhetorical questions is similarly obvious: when the poem asks

¹⁶¹ “每章末句均用無答的設問式，留給讀者去思考，既收到『言者無罪』的效果，又可加強詩的諷刺力量”。 Cheng Junying and Jiang Jianyuan. op. cit. p. 274.

“How can one go to extremes?”, it seeks an answer such as “Surely one cannot!” The essence of folk knowledge, as Malinowski has outlined, is that it is repeated, consistent and therefore incontestable. This sense of the inarguable authority of convention is transferred from the world of communal ritual to the provocative and apparently critical questions which are grafted onto it. The result is that the arch and veiled criticism conveyed through the rhetorical questions on *Nan Shan* is given added potency through links to the world of wedding ritual and to traditional knowledge. The world of wedding ritual is called into service to mark out the appropriate course of action, in which extra-marital desires must be curtailed, using the weight of ritual propriety to produce criticism, while the world of folk wisdom further legitimises the critical intentions of the poem with the endorsement of apparently obvious common sense. The fundamental energy of this poem is the tension it identifies between ritual and reality, in which the banal and folksy assumptions about the way in which all things associated with marriage occur are juxtaposed with the impropriety of the apparent case in question.

The role of the connection to the world of ritual, in its various forms, is to enhance and legitimise the poem’s critical objective. Importantly, this interpretation of the reason why the poem combines and amalgamates pre-existing ritual information does not rely entirely on the admissible, yet methodologically questionable, Mao interpretation of the poem as critical of Duke Xiang. The poem certainly seems critical of someone who does not recognise the accepted meaning of marriage and its implication that external romantic desire must be curtailed. But the reading strategy I have outlined, through focussing on what is contained within the poem, rather than an attempt to link it to a specific historical context, allows for broader interpretations in keeping with the same theme. Assuming that the rhetorical questions in the poem retain a female grammatical subject, the poem can be interpreted as a criticism of a woman who does not submit to the restrictions of marriage, and can also be generalised to refer, less concretely, to anybody who fails to afford marriage its ritual and cultural role as a key liminal moment (and thus a moment represented by the liminal icon, the shuffling fox), which irrevocably changes the lives of those involved and disciplines their youthful

and/or transgressive romantic urges.

This reading strategy is applicable to a broad range of poetry within the *Shi Jing* and is not at all limited to the small selection of poems I have analysed in detail. As an example, let us briefly reconsider the famous poem *Guan Ju*, the interpretations of which have been many and diverse, as outlined at the beginning of this dissertation. While it is perhaps hubristic to suggest it, I propose that the reading strategy set out in this project offers an innovative and meaningful addition to the interpretations of the famous opening of the *Shi Jing*:

關關雎鳩，在河之洲	“Guan Guan” cry the ospreys, on the islands in the river
窈窕淑女，君子好逑	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, a fine consort for the lord
參差荇菜，左右流之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one picks them
窈窕淑女，寤寐求之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, day and night he seeks her
求之不得，寤寐思服	He seeks her but does not obtain her, day and night her worries
悠哉悠哉，輾轉友側	How awful! how awful! he tosses and turns on his side
參差荇菜，左右采之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one gathers them
窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, the zither and lyre welcome her
參差荇菜，左右芼之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one selects them
窈窕淑女，鐘鼓樂之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, the bell and drum please her.

Firstly, once the assumption of a unified narrative (an assumption shared by the allegorical Mao

interpretation and the various individualist approaches of Waley, Karlgren and the *Wuxingpian* hermeneutic viewpoint) is dispensed with, the heterogeneous nature of the verse becomes clear. A vivid, self-contained natural scene, commonly considered to be a *xing* image opens the verse: “Guan Guan” cry the ospreys, on the islands in the river” (關關雎鳩，在河之洲). The poem then rehearses formulaic lines, drawn from particular and mutually-exclusive contexts. In *Guan Ju*, as in *You Hu*, two separate formulaic lines, from completely different and literally unrelated frames of reference, alternate. One set of formulaic lines refer to a male and female relationship:

窈窕淑女，君子好逑	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, a fine consort for the lord
...	
窈窕淑女，寤寐求之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, day and night he seeks her
...	
窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, the zither and lyre welcome her
...	
窈窕淑女，鐘鼓樂之	Gentle and calm the honourable woman, the bell and drum please her.

The other set of formulaic lines describe, in vividly physical and tangible action, the rustic world of harvesting plants, incrementally varying the key verb of physical activity, as in *Fou Yi*, and other similar songs of harvesting ritual work:

參差荇菜，左右流之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one picks them
...	
參差荇菜，左右采之	Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one gathers them

...

参差苻菜，左右笔之 Uneven are the water grasses, left and right one selects them.

These elements seem steeped in ritual in terms of both form and subject matter: the explicit ritual ingredients of zithers, lyres, bells and drums on the one hand, and the physical scripted acts of harvesting on the other. In addition to this, and negating any characterisation of the poem as acting out an underlying unified ritual in its entirety, the structure of *Guan Ju* (like the poem *Juan Er*) is asymmetrical and reflects neither the referential and contextual consistency of actual ritual verse, nor their clear and scripted symmetry. The self-contained narrative lines (He seeks her but does not obtain her, day and night he worries / How awful! how awful! he tosses and turns on his side) intrude into the schema, indicating a conscious addition.

These cues of style and structure raise the possibility of a creative and artful amalgamation of elements drawn from existing traditions. But to what end? The poems *Juan Er*, *You Hu* and *Nan Shan* have been shown to be thematic meditations on particular life matters. Can a reading sensitive to ritually aware and creative poetics offer a thematic centre for *Guan Ju*, and if so, what would that be?

Reading the substance of the opening *xing* imagery, it is striking that again the physical detail of a river is present in a poem ostensibly dealing with a wedding. Potential exists for reading this key liminal symbol as setting the focus of the poem, from the outset, on marriage. The specific ritual apparatus of a wedding (the musical instruments) confirms this later on, and a more general focus on a male-female relationship permeates the poem. However, the specific scene contained in the *xing* lines perhaps indicates a nuanced take on the marriage theme. The unique aspect of the *xing* image is that the birds are not merely near the river but in the midst of it, “on the islands in the river” (在河之洲). The birds, making the *guan guan* call (which some commentators consider to refer to a mating call), are placed on the symbolic threshold between unmarried and married life. They are

placed within the river, and significantly, they are not on the other side, the symbolic space where married life occurs.

This sort of precise modification to a general symbol also occurs with the activity surrounding the picking of plants, which, as we have seen, is a stage in various rituals. These plants, the water grasses which grow in the river's marshy shallows, explicitly demonstrate interaction with the river. In *Guan Ju*, the river is not a far-off barrier, but one which is already encroached upon and made the location for various activities well before the apparent occurrence of the formal wedding in the concluding stanzas of the poem which the musical instruments indicate.

An aspect of both *Nan Shan* and *Guan Ju* worthy of comparison is the extreme emotional (and sexual) yearning which they convey. On the level of the narrative elliptically found in each poem, a male character yearns for the female object of his desire. In the case *Nan Shan*, this yearning cannot be resolved; indeed, given that the wedding of the object of his desire has taken place, the yearning cannot lead to a resolution, since that would defy the punctuation established by ritual and common cultural practice. In contrast, the movement of *Guan Ju* creates a resolution of the male character's overpowering emotional and sexual yearning, bringing it into a codified and sanctioned framework through the correct ritual and cultural rights of marriage being observed. Notwithstanding the ultimately divergent resolutions of these two poems, it is interesting to consider the way in which similar thematic material is addressed using a similar array of poetic techniques.

I would proposed that this brief assessment indicates a clear thematic focus for the poem *Guan Ju*: the issue of indulging in what is meant to be the preserve of marriage just before the actual wedding has occurred. In other words, the poem meditates indirectly on pre-marital sexual relations, a theme which has been proposed by the *Wuxingpian* commentator and Marcel Granet centuries apart, albeit in different ways. This juxtaposition between ritual and reality, the expectation of sanctioned human activity as opposed to actual human desires and situations, is a familiar one following the

consideration of, in particular, *Juan Er*, where the expectations of fertility are tragically let down by the actual human situation, and *Nan Shan*, where expectations of decorum following marriage seem likely to be transgressed.

7/ Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have examined the use of particular imagery contained in the *xing* lines of the *Guo Feng* poems *Juan Er*, *You Hu* and *Nan Shan*. From this initial focus, additional images from these three poems, along with imagery contained in other, thematically similar, *Shi Jing* poems has been analysed, with the result that meaningful functions can be ascribed to ostensibly abstruse imagery (the unfilled basket in *Juan Er*, the fox and river in *You Hu*, and the shuffling fox again in *Nan Shan*), for which the major interpretive schools have not easily accounted. The key innovative development of this dissertation is the recognition that certain *Guo Feng* poems appear, through both their contents and form (here using fundamental anthropological ideas about the constituent elements of ritual activity), to indicate that they were composed awash in the world of ritual - not merely the rustic traditions which Marcel Granet posits as the origins of the *Shi Jing*, but also the specific context of divinatory ritual, as contained in the divinatory handbook, the *Yi Jing*. I have demonstrated that one way left to us for understanding these poems thus lies in understanding the inter-textual resonances and the pre-existing meanings inscribed in this imagery from the divinatory ritual tradition.

Through this reconstruction of the ritual elements implied, I have exposed various submerged themes within these poems, which rely on a recognition of meaningful resonances of ritual tradition. This has led to more coherent meanings for these poems, for which readings merely concerned with either the literal, metaphorical or atmospheric messages do not seem adequate. Interestingly though, while the meanings of these poems can, through this dissertation's reading strategy, be accessed, the ritual material contained in each individual poem is, when examined closely, incoherent. It would appear that these poems combine diverse ritual ingredients in a rich patchwork, avoiding merely

recording in words complete and external ritual utterances.¹⁶² This combination of ritual elements (by which I mean both the symbology of the *Yi Jing* and the ritual structures I have identified according to the formulations of Pascal Boyer, Bronislaw Malinowski and Claude Lévi-Strauss) is opportunistic, but not clumsy or artless. Indeed, the fashioning of deeply emotional verse out of seemingly conventional metrical songs, which is at once personal and connected to universal (and eternal) concerns (both practical, such as marriage and childbirth, and psychological, such as grief and hope), indicates a truly poetic sensibility at work. This approach, as I have demonstrated, plots a course for poetry between mere ritual documentation (which has limited emotional and intellectual impact on those outside the group in which the ritual is performed) and freely imaginative symbolism (which can not guarantee any connection between the meanings intended and the meanings evoked).

My reading strategy presents a novel alternative to the various hermeneutic approaches of the Mao tradition, Bernhard Karlgren, Arthur Waley and others, which see the poems as internally-consistent creations related to specific narrative referents (whether they be, as per Mao, didactic allegories referring to scenes drawn from history, or, following Karlgren and Waley, emotional descriptions of invented (or traditional) human situations). I have suggested a reading strategy for these poems - one which may be more widely applicable throughout the *Shi Jing* - which considers them to be meditations, using various traditional and standard ingredients and forms, on key thematic ideas - namely, the idea of infertility (*Juan Er*), the idea of anxiety regarding rites of passage, specifically marriage, (*You Hu*), and the idea of the changes in life wrought by marriage (*Nan Shan*). With a thematic concern, the poems reveal a compositional technique which mediates among several types of discourse, including the work-song, divination utterance, ritual script, folk wisdom and discrete expressions of individual emotion.

At the same time as it departs from the assumptions of Mao, Karlgren, Waley, Cheng and Jiang et

¹⁶² This type of poetry can thus be contrasted with poems, such as *Chu Ci* in Martin Kern's reading discussed above, which reveal an unadulterated yet hidden ritual script.

al. that the poems of the *Shi Jing* aim, at least on one level, to display descriptive realism, the hermeneutic that I have formulated also differs significantly from the approach which considers poetry in the *Shi Jing* an unconscious extension of formalised language (an approach which underpins the work of Marcel Granet, Edward Shaughnessy, C. H. Wang and Martin Kern). I have established that, rather than merely repeated ritual forms, some poems can be considered to employ both formal and substantive hallmarks of ritual in a way which can be considered conscious since it has no precedent in ritual diction and produces specific results in terms of the overall meaning of the poem.

Unlike other attempts at excavating and explaining the symbology and origins of the *Shi Jing* (notably the ground-breaking work of Marcel Granet in rustic performances and C. H. Wang in the oral tradition), which sought merely to identify the extant evidence of pre-existing traditions in the poems, this dissertation has tracked the dynamic way in which external ingredients operate within each poem, both establishing tones and reacting to described actions. The ritual nature of these poems provides literal cues for the described action of the poem (such as the literal ideas of harvesting for the ingredients of pre-marriage rites and river crossings for marriage journeys), a metaphorical framework in which psychological ideas can be explored (such as the psychological emptiness of a failed pregnancy and the unrecoverable boundary between youth and married adulthood) and a pervasive emotional/atmospheric timbre which is a result of the polar judgement (that is, the in/auspiciousness) which the symbols carry over from the world of divination. At the same time, these ritual elements seem naturally implied by the human action; the harvester's distraction - and the attendant symbolism of this scene - is at least in part in response to the human world's absent lord, much as the ritual liminology of rivers and foxes is evoked by human situations of separation - either from prospective husbands, campaigning husbands, or a maiden's homeland.

More than just rehearsing or referring to traditional ritual and formulaic performances, these *Guo Feng* poems seem to employ the world of divinatory ritual in a creative and imaginative way, producing complex poetry which satisfies us intellectually and emotionally. As such, these poems

appear to reflect a conscious and skilful poetic art which, much as the best poetry does all over the world, evokes the eternal, spiritual and moral at the same time as it deals with what is specifically ordinary and human. Thus the world of divinatory ritual, dextrously dealt with by whoever it was that produced these *Guo Feng* poems, plays a fundamental role in the beginnings of the complex and nuanced poetry for which classical China is rightly esteemed.

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