
Das andere China

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Eroticism in Early Chinese Poetry.
Sundry Comparative Notes¹

I

Introduction

This is part of a series of studies in early Chinese *histoire des sensibilités*². In this exploratory paper I want to consider the matter of erotic sensibilities in ancient China from various comparative angles. The present paper is based on papers read to a non-specialist audience. My subject is vast and treacherous. I treat it as a philologist and as a cultural historian, not as a literary critic.

I propose to concentrate on ancient interpretations of the notoriously erotic *Airs of Zheng* (*Zheng feng*) from the *Book of Songs* (ninth to sixth century B.C.). I shall not try to present new readings of these songs themselves³. Rather, I shall consider the history of their reception and their reinterpretation in China, seen against the background of some European interpretations of the *Song of Songs* (Chapter I). I shall then present some comparisons and juxtapositions between ancient Chinese love poetry and contemporary erotic poetry in ancient Europe, particularly Greek and Latin (Chapter II). By and large I shall limit my attention to pre-Buddhist Chinese lyrical poetry and roughly contem-

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- 1 I wish to thank the following for advice and criticism of earlier drafts of this paper: Hans Barstad, Oslo; Michael Benskin, Oslo; Jean-Pierre Diény, Paris; Elisabeth Eide, Oslo; Hans Frankel, Yale; David Keightley, Berkeley; Stephen Owen, Harvard, and Wilhelm Voßkamp, Cologne. This work has been completed and brought into its present shape while I was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin in 1990/91.
 - 2 In two recent articles on humour I have argued that there is a close relation between humorous sensibility and intellectual creativity. I have tried to show in detail that Confucius had a subtle sense of humour, and that humour played a significant part in early Chinese philosophy. Cf. C. Harbsmeier, "Confucius ridens: Humor in the Analects", in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1990 (vol. 50.1) pp. 131 – 161, and "Humor in ancient Chinese philosophy" in *Philosophy East and West* (Hawaii) 39.3 (1989) pp. 289 – 310.
 - 3 I shall quote the poems in the renderings by Ezra Pound, who has inspired my interest in the *Book of Odes*. The best literal and philological translation (utilized by Ezra Pound) is Karlgren, 1950. My literal paraphrase is based on Karlgren's work, with certain modifications.

porary European works, with only occasional excursions into the prolific later development of Chinese lyrical poetry.

Here, then, to begin with, are some samples of erotic poetry from the *Airs of Zheng*. I juxtapose the readings or recreations of the twentieth century poet Ezra Pound with Bernhard Karlgren's translations and with the orthodox comments on these poems in the so-called *Mao Preface* (*Maoshi xu*) perhaps of the second century BC⁴ which remained in China the generally accepted orthodox interpretation until the twentieth century. The lyrical subject very often is a wo man:

In the levelled area of the East gate,
The madder is on the bank;
When it comes to the house then that is near;
The man is very far.

[By] the chesnut-trees at the East gate
There are low-walled houses.
How should one not think of you?
[But] you do not come to me.

East gate's level stretch of land,
madder on bank there, easy to hand,
so near his home, and he so far.

By the east gate chestnuts grow
over garden walls so low.
There I ever think of thee,
and thou comest ne'er to me.⁵

The *Mao Preface*: "The song is directed against prevailing disorder. There were men and women who eloped with each other in defiance of ritual."⁶

In *Airs of Zheng* no. 2 the speaker is again a woman, but here her advice goes the other way:

[I] beg of [you], Zhòngzǐ
Do not leap into my hamlet
Do not break the *qí*-willows I planted
How should I dare to be stingy about them
I am afraid of father and mother.
Zhòng is worth caring for.

4 A reliable text of the *Mao Preface* will be found in Chen Huan, 1939. A convenient bilingual edition is in Legge, 1979, vol. IV, pp. 34 – 81. The date and origin of the *Mao Shi Xu* has long been controversial, but its authority among most traditional scholars is beyond doubt.

5 Ode 89, *Airs of Zheng* no. 15, Ezra Pound, 1974: 42.

6 Legge, 1979, IV: 51.

But the words of father and mother
Are surely worth fearing.

[I] beg of [you], Zhòngzǐ
Do not leap over my wall
Do not break the mulberry trees I planted.
It is not that I am stingy with them,
[I] fear my elder brothers.
Zhòng is worth caring for,
[But] the words of the elder brothers
Are surely worth fearing.

[I] beg of [you], Zhòngzǐ
Do not leap over my garden-wall
Do not break the *tán*-trees I have planted
How should [I] dare to be stingy about them?
I fear that others will talk a lot.
Zhòng is worth caring for
[But] others' talking a lot
Is surely worth fearing.

Ezra Pound's translation, at this point, seems uncongenial. But here it is:

Hep-Cat Chung, 'ware my town,
don't break my willows down.
The trees don't matter
but father's tongue, mother's tongue,
Have a heart, Chung,
it's awful.

Hep-Cat Chung, don't jump my wall
nor strip my mulberry boughs,
The boughs don't matter
But my brothers' clatter!
Have a heart, Chung,
it's awful.

Hep-Cat Chung, that is *my* garden wall,
Don't break my sandalwood tree.
The tree don't matter
But the subsequent chatter!
Have a heart, Chung,
it's awful.⁷

7 Ode 76, Pound, 1974: 37. Cf. the more romantic version by the German Orientalist, Rückert, 1833: 88 which is based on the Latin of Julius Mohl, 1830:

Tschong-Tse, was ich dich bitte:
Geh nicht so frey durch unsres Dorfes Mitte,
Den Zaun von Weiden nicht zerbrich!
Wie dürfte ich
Denn lieben ich?

Mao *Preface*: "The song is directed against Duke Zhuang. The duke could not manage his mother and injured his younger brother. That younger brother, Shu, was going on badly and the duke did not restrain him. Zhong of Cai remonstrated, but the duke did not listen to him. Thus by his want of resolution when little effort was needed, he produced great disorder."⁸

In the ancient poem itself we have the classic and familiar opposition between sensitive lovers and the insensitive environment of family and society at large.

There are open but apparently unrequited ancient Chinese invitations to secret love, as in *Airs of Zheng* no. 13:

If you generously think of me
I shall lift my skirt and wade the Zhēn.
If you do not think of me
How should there be no other people?
[You are] the most foolish of foolish youths.

If you generously think of me
[I shall] lift my shirt and wade the Wěi river.
If you do not think of me,
How should there be no other gentleman?
[You are] the most foolish of foolish youths.

Die Eltern muß ich scheuen;
Tshong-Tse, bedenke das in Treuen!
Der Eltern Worte schrecken mich.
Tschong-Tse, was ich dich bitte:
Steig' auf die Mauer nicht mit kühnem Schritte,
Die Maulbeerzweige nicht zerbrich!
Wie dürfte, sprich,
Dich lieben ich?
Die Brüder muß ich scheuen;
Tschong-Tse, bedenke das in Treuen!
Der Brüder Drohung schreckt mich.

Tschong-tse, was ich dich bitte:
Den Garten laß, verletze nicht die Sitte,
Die zarten Ranken nicht zerbrich!
Wie dürft' ich dich
Wol lieben, sprich?
Den Leumund muß ich scheuen;
Tschong Tse, bedenke das in Treuen!
Der Leute Reden schrecken mich.

The Mao Preface provides a detailed political interpretation of this song which is conveniently laid out in M. Granet, 1919: 73.

⁸ Legge, 1979, IV: 49.

Be kind, good sir, and I'll lift my sark
and cross the Chen⁹ to you,
But don't think you are the only sprig
in all the younger crew.

Think soft, good sir, and I'll lift my sark
and cross the Wei to you;
But play the pretentious ass again, and
some other captain will do.¹⁰

The Mao *Preface* tells us: "The *Jianshang* (i. e. *Airs of Zheng* no. 13) expresses the desire of the people of Zheng to have the condition of the state rectified."¹¹

I find it hard to believe that privately Confucians in general believed this to be a natural and historically plausible reading of the original purpose of the Ode. In any case, I believe that the following anonymous folk song, which I stumbled across as I tried to orientate myself in a large anthology, gives a much more adequate impression of how this poem was traditionally perceived though not always publicly described:

Plucking flowers in Tian
Mountains and rivers are in their different places,
but plants and trees still have the same spring-time.
It's like the places around the Zhen and Wei,
naturally there will be those who pick flowers.¹²

This song, when the places Zhen and Wei are properly understood with their literary resonances, has an erotic content.

Clearly, in some cases the lovers do not wait in vain, as in *Airs of Zheng* no. 20, where the lyrical subject is, again, a woman:

In the open grounds there is the creeping grass
The falling dew is plentiful
There is a beautiful person
The clear forehead is attractive
Carefree we met each other
[And that person] satisfied my wishes.

In the open grounds there is the creeping grass
The falling dew is ample.
There is one beautiful person
How attractive his clear forehead!

9 I. e. Zhen, a place which became notorious for its erotic licentiousness.

10 Ode 87, Pound, 1974: 42.

11 Legge, 1979, IV: 51.

12 Guo Maoqian, 1937, *juan* 73: 839. See our discussion below of the erotic works attributed to Sima Xiangru for further literary evidence on the perception of Ode 87.

Carefree we met each other
 With you, together, we shall be well.

Mid the bind-grass on the plain
 that the dew makes wet as rain
 I met by chance my clear-eyed man,
 then my
 joy began.

Mid the wild grass dank with dew
 lay we the full night thru,
 that clear-eyes man and I
 in mutual felicity.¹³

Mao *Preface*: "The song expresses longing for a proper season of meeting. No favours from the ruler flowed down to the people who were exhausted by the constant hostilities. Males and females missed their proper time for marriage and wished that they might come together without previous arrangements."¹⁴

Airs of Zheng no. 16, again with a female speaker, may be taken to celebrate erotic togetherness in a hostile environment:

The wind and rain are cold
 The cocks crow in unison.
 Since I have seen my lord
 How should I not be at ease?

The wind and rain are chilly
 The cocks crow together.
 Since I have seen my lord
 How should I not be cured?

The wind and rain make it like darkness
 The cocks crow without stopping.
 Since I have seen my lord
 How should I not be pleased.

Cold wind, and the rain,
 cock crow, he is come again,
 my ease.

Shrill wind, and the rain,
 and the cock crows and crows,
 I have seen him, shall it suffice
 as the wind blows?

13 Ode 94, Granet, 1919: 39, Pound, 1974: 44.

14 Legge, 1979, IV: 52.

Wind, rain and the dark
 as it were the dark of the moon,
 What of the wind, and the cock's never-ending cry;
 Together
 again
 he and I.¹⁵

Preface: "The song expresses the longing to see a superior man. In an age of disorder, the writer longs for a superior man, one who would not change his rules of life."¹⁶

To illustrate the point that love poetry is not at all limited to the *Airs of Zheng*, here is one of the many love poems from another part of the *Book of Odes*, this time with a male speaker:

The girl in repose is beautiful
 She is waiting for me at the corner of the city wall.
 I love her but do not see her.
 I scratch my head and hesitate.
 The girl in repose is pretty
 She has given me a red pipe.
 The red pipe is bright
 I am pleased and delighted with the girl's beauty.

From the pasture ground she gave me a young shoot,
 It is truly beautiful and remarkable.
 It is not for your being beautiful.
 You are the gift of a beautiful person.

Lady of azure thought, supple and tall,
 I wait by nook, by angle in the wall,
 love and see naught; shift foot and scratch my poll.

Lady of silken word, in clarity
 gavest a reed whereon red flower flamed less
 than thy delightfulness.

In mead she plucked the molu grass,
 far as streamlet did she pass.
 "Reed, art to prize in thy beauty,
 but more that frail, who gave thee me."¹⁷

Preface: "The song satirizes the times. The marquis of Wei was without principle and the marchioness was without virtue."¹⁸

15 Ode 90, Granet, 1919: 41, Pound, 1974 p. 43.

16 Legge, 1979, IV: 51.

17 Ode 42, Pound, 1974: 20.

18 Legge, 1979, IV: 43.

The love poetry of the *Book of Songs* is rich and delicate. It has parallels with early medieval poetry, but it also has its own very special and delicate, Chinese, poetic style. I find in this poetry a simplicity and a sensibility which would surely have delighted Jean-Jacques Rousseau and I strongly suspect that the open-minded eroticism of this poetry has always been privately and quietly enjoyed in all its innocent licentiousness by traditional scholars, in spite of the Confucianist orthodox readings recommended by the moralizing *Prefaces*. Many uses of the imagery in certain Odes in later Chinese poetry provide vivid evidence of this.

Given that the *Prefaces* were composed as part of the general scheme of creating a Confucian ideology with canonical texts, what *could* the orthodox Confucian commentators have said about this love poetry, given that Confucius insisted so strongly on the moral importance of the *Book of Odes*? The authors of the *Preface* did their best under the circumstances to explain how the offending Odes might be incorporated into a Confucianist, moralizing, scheme of things. I refuse to believe that Confucian scholars privately presumed this to be the whole story, whatever they said when they were talking or writing Confucian ideology. (And here the case of Communist Party officials in contemporary China does come to mind; where the distance between public stance and private sensibility is also striking.)

The theme of the dawn song is, of course, much older than this in Europe. We have, for example, a Greek example by Meleager (ca. 140 – 70 BC):

Loveless dawn, why do you rise so swiftly over my bedroom, where till this moment
I felt the warmth of dear Demo's skin?

If only you reverse your swift course and be Hesperos,
you who shed the sweet light that is so bitter to me!

Indeed once before you went backwards for Zeus and Alcumene!
It's not at all as if you didn't know how to turn around!¹⁹

Note the free and natural physical sensuality which is also found in the Greek piece. (In Chinese poetry there tends to be not warm skin but rather, as in the poem attributed to Sima Xiangru which I quote below, "a body soft and moist like ointment") and the playfulness in the use of Greek mythology which is so characteristic not only of Greek comedy but also of all manner of philosophical and poetic rhetorics in ancient Greek culture. At this point I want to turn to a comparison not with Greek sensibilities but with the *Old Testament*.

19 *Anthologia Graeca*, 1938, V: 172.

Just as the Chinese *Book of Odes* has its discreetly amorous *Airs of Zheng*²⁰ so the *Old Testament* has its openly erotic *Song of Songs*²¹.

*Western interpretations of the Song of Songs*²²

Consider the opening poem of the *Song of Songs*:

O for your kiss! For your love
More enticing than wine,
For your scent and sweet name –
For all this they love you.

Take me away to your room,
Like a king to his rooms –
We'll rejoice there with wine.
No wonder they love you!²³

The standard *Preface* in the Authorized Revised Version instructs us on the meaning of this poem, viz.: "The Church's love unto Christ."

The origins of the allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* in terms of Jahwe's relation to his people, the Jews, are rabbinical. In the popular Christian editions of the *Old Testament* today there tends to be a profusion of little prefaces or headings enjoining the reader to interpret this text allegorically as referring to the love shared by Christ and the Church, Christ and the soul, or even God and the soul. We have here a clear case of positive sublimation (see *infra*).

20 A comparison between the *Book of Odes* and the *Song of Songs* was first made, as far as I know, by Zheng, 1957, V:37. Cf. Zhang, 1987: 212.

21 These are commonly divided into between 18 and 32 brief poems. The most detailed survey of the various ways of dividing up the *Song of Songs* is to be found in Tournay, 1982: 21 ff. My appreciation of the *Song of Songs* is based on modern translations only and on a reading of *Vulgate* and *Septuagint*. It is, perhaps, a consolation that the historically important versions of the *Old Testament* during the historical period that I am mainly concerned with were indeed the *Vulgate* and to a lesser extent the *Septuagint*.

22 Works on the *Song of Songs* have been most recently surveyed in Pope, 1977: 89 – 229. The Jewish background is explored in Vulliaud, 1925 and in Riedel, 1898. The early history is traced in detail in Ohly, 1958. It is pursued further in Goebel, 1914 and Kuhl, 1937. Research between 1937 and 1966 is surveyed in Würthwein, 1967. As Marcia Falk 1982: 62 puts it: "Probably no book in the Hebrew Bible has been the subject of more controversy concerning its literary classification than the *Song of Songs*."

23 Marcia Falk, 1982: 13.

Origen (3rd cent. AD) knew these Jewish traditions when he composed his *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum*²⁴. Origen argued that the *Song of Songs* was about the love between the Word (*logos*) and the Christian soul, or between Jesus Christ and the believer. The *Song of Songs* was considered as a complex and dramatic account of a spiritual love affair where we have a Platonically inspired Christian erotic ascension transposed from the philosophical mode of the *Symposion* and the *Phaidros* into the mode of religious mysticism²⁵. (Do we find forms of erotic ascension²⁶ in pre-Buddhist China? We know of shamanistic celestial amorous pursuits from such books as the *Songs of the South* (fourth to second century BC), but do pre-Buddhist Chinese gods fall in love with mortals? The point is worth investigating²⁷.)

During the 12th century especially, the *Song of Songs* became the focus of devotional religious eroticism in one of the finest works by Bernhard of Clairvaux, his *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*²⁸. This was the beginning of an important commentatorial vogue of the *Song of Songs*. A singularly entertaining and readable detailed commentary from the 12th century is Guillaume de Saint Thierry, *Expositio super Cantica Canticorum*²⁹ where the *Song of Songs* is celebrated at length as a natural focus for the articulation of *amor dei* "Love of God", in both the grammatically possible readings of that phrase. The allegorical reading of the *Song of Songs* remained predominant until the twentieth century³⁰.

Like the Chinese, the Christians were eager to impose a regular, conjugal, interpretation upon the clearly irregular erotic relations described in their texts. As we have in Christian devotional literature we find the *sponsus*, "bridegroom" and the *sponsa*, "bride", rather than lovers, so too in China there exists a tendency to reinterpret such poems as are recognized as dealing with love, if not in a connubial way, then at least as songs of nuptial delight, as epithalamia

24 Baerens VIII: 61 – 241. Cf. also Rousseau, 1954.

25 Note Jerome's comment: "While Origen surpassed all writers in his other book, in his *Song of Songs* he surpassed himself," referred to in Zhang, 1987: 197.

26 For a fine philosophical analysis of the erotic ascent in Plato see Foucault, 1984: 251 ff.

27 Note that divine procreation of children on earth is not the issue here. The Holy Spirit, for example, did not have to literally fall in love with the virgin Mary in order to make her pregnant.

28 Cf. Leclercq, 1957 and Leclercq, 1958 as well as Leclercq, 1962, Herde, 1967, and H. Riedlinger, 1958.

29 Déchanet et al., 1962.

30 Compare the case of *Ovidius moralizatus* as described in Munatori 1960: even Ovid's erotic works were reinterpreted in the same manner as the *Song of Songs*, both in Latin and in French.

or "wedding songs". This is a technique which was already widely used with respect to the sensual and intensely personal love poetry of Sappho. However, even the subject of conjugal love was not in China generally judged worthy of the attention which love is accorded in the *Airs of Zheng*. In Europe, as in China, there were concerted efforts to link the offending amorous escapades to historical personalities. While Christian theologians saw in them celebrations of King Solomon's nuptial bliss involving one or more brides, the Chinese interpreters saw on the contrary intra-marital or extra-marital debauchery of the kings and subjects of Zheng.

Reactions to such eroticism in poetry may vary. We can find:

1. natural acceptance
2. positive sublimation
3. negative reinterpretation
4. moralistic rejection.

The predominant tendency in the interpretation of the *Song of Songs* was to provide a positive sublimation, a reinterpretation of the text as *spiritually* erotic. The eroticism is accepted, but elevated to a higher level. In general, the strategy among Christians and Jews alike tended to be one of hermeneutic allegorical sublimation rather than of rejection or of negative reinterpretation of the erotic poetry as satire on debauchery. Moralistic rejection was rare.

Confucius on love songs in the Odes

The Confucianist later interpretation of the Odes as exemplified by the possibly early Han (second century BC) *Mao Preface* must be carefully distinguished from the attitudes attested for Confucius himself. Confucius refers to the Odes no less than eighteen times in the *Analects*. He recommends the use of the Odes repeatedly³¹. But Confucius could in no way regard the Odes as a Confucian classic. He had neither the notion of "Confucian", nor that of a "classic" in his intellectual repertory. But Confucius did look upon the odes principally from his moral point of view:

Confucius said: "There are three hundred odes. They may be summed up in one phrase:

They do not swerve from the right path."³²

Considering the common theme of love and even of pre-marital love in the *Book of Odes* this is a somewhat surprising generalisation. It describes the way

31 *Analects* 8.8, 16.13, 17.9, and 17.10.

32 *Analects* 2.2. Cf. *Book of Odes* no. 297.

in which Confucius intended the Odes to be understood: as celebrating the ritual and the morality of what he saw as the golden age of antiquity. The fact that some of these odes celebrated, for example, free love was an obvious embarrassment. Let us see how he coped with the problem.

Here is Confucius' comment on the first Ode, a poem about a love affair:

The Guanju Ode is about joy without excess, grief without harm.³³

For Confucius, the performance of the ode celebrates decorous love. There is no suggestion that he attached any political or historically concrete significance to the ode. His is the perspective of the moralist. The crucial point is that he also takes an aesthetic view of the music:

Confucius said: "When the Master Musician Zhi begins to play, then at the final refrain of the *Guanju* Ode, how the music floods the ear!"³⁴

Confucius speaks not of the text, but the whole production of the *Guanju* Ode as orchestrated by a great music master. The music and the words belong together. They are parts of one and the same thing. We should remember that in assessing the Odes it is as if we were to assess an opera on the basis of its libretto alone. In this crucial sense we do not know what we are talking about when we discuss the Odes.

However, even the music of the words alone has clearly flooded the ear of Ezra Pound:

Guānguān cries the *sūjiū* bird,
On the islet in the river.
Beautiful is the good girl
Is a good mate for the lord.

Tangled up is the *xìng* waterplant
To the left and to the right we catch it.
The beautiful and good girl
Awake and asleep he sought her.
He sought her but could not get her.
Awake and asleep he thought of her.
He longed for her and longed for her,
Tossed himself from one side to the other.

Entangled is the *xìng* waterplant.
On the left and on the right we pick it.
Beautiful is the good girl
Guitars and lutes befriend her.

33 *Analects* 3.20. My numbering refers to that in Lau, 1983.

34 *Analects* 8.15.

Entangled is the *xīng* waterplant.
 To the left and to the right we pluck it.
 Beautiful is the good girl,
 Bells and drums cheer her.

"Hid! Hid!" the fish hawk saith
 by isle in Ho the fish hawk saith:
 "Dark and clear,
 Dark and clear,
 So shall be the prince's fere"

Clear as the stream her modesty;
 As neath dark boughs her secrecy,
 reed against reed
 tall on slight
 as the stream moves left and right,
 dark and clear,
 dark and clear.

To seek and not find
 as a dream in his mind,
 think how her robe should be
 distantly, to toss and turn,
 to toss and turn.

High reed caught in ts'ai Grass
 hearten her.
 So deep her secrecy;
 lute sound in lute sound is caught
 touching, passing, left and right.
 Bang the gong of her delight.³⁵

The Mao *Preface*: "The *Guanju* is about the virtue of the queen. ... The moral influence of the *Guanju* and the *Linzhi* Odes exhibits the influence of someone who is a true king. Thus they are linked to the Duke of Zhou."³⁶

Confucius was evidently fond of the "gong" of this musical delight. However, he morally disapproved of what he called the "music of Zheng", the pop music of his time:

"Get rid of the music of Zheng! Keep glib talkers at bay! The music of Zheng is lewd. Glib talkers are dangerous."³⁷

"I detest purple for displacing vermilion. I detest the music of Zheng for corrupting classical music. I detest clever talkers who overturn states and noble families."³⁸

35 Ode 1, Ezra Pound, 1974: 2.

36 Legge, 1979, IV: 37.

37 *Analects* 15.11.

38 *Analects* 17.18.

The music of Zheng was perhaps the worst, but the music of Wei was almost as bad:

"Only when I returned from Wei to Lu was the music correct. The (dignified) *Ya* and the *Song* odes each were (at last) accorded their proper place."³⁹

It is clear that Confucius preferred the classical *Ya* and *Song* parts of the *Book of Odes* which generally maintain a more dignified courtly tone. The reference of his expression "music of Zheng" is to the music attached to the relevant parts of the *Book of Odes*. Such has been the professional view of this matter expressed by Huan Tan (43 BC to 28 AD), Music Prefect in the service of Emperor Xiao Cheng of the Han dynasty. Huan Tan disagrees with Confucius concerning the music of Zheng and makes some rather natural remarks:

It is very easy to be pleased by shallow things, but the profound can be understood only with difficulty. It is natural that one does not like the court odes and delights in the tunes of Zheng.⁴⁰

I understand Huan Tan here to refer to the *Airs of Zheng* as a typical example, indeed as the archetypal examples of his expression "tunes of Zheng"⁴¹. These *Airs* were indeed something like the "court pop" of ancient times: despised by the some in the educated élite, but much appreciated by almost everyone else. As we have noted above, the Odes were quite generally inseparable from the music used in their performance⁴².

The musicologist Laurence E. R. Picken has pointed out that the line length of the *Airs of Zheng* is more irregular than that of the rest of the *Book of Odes*, and he links this phenomenon to the special features of the music of Zheng⁴³. For the musicologist Picken, as for his earlier colleague Huan Tan, the music of Zheng involves, for example, the use of the texts like the *Airs of Zheng*.

Confucius' disapproval of the *Airs of Zheng* is different from that of later Confucians. There is no attempt to explain away the eroticism by some allego-

39 *Analects* 9.15.

40 I quote the translation in Pokora, 1975: 66 f.

41 For a good detailed account of the notion *Zheng sheng* "tunes of Zheng" and related expressions see Diény, 1968: 17 – 40.

42 It would not be necessary to dwell on this if it was not denied by later Confucians and even modern scholars such as Yang Bojun, a leading modern specialist of the *Analects*. Yang states categorically: "The 'music of Zheng' and the 'songs of Zheng' are not the same thing." (Yang 1965: 171). Yang meticulously mentions some Ming and Qing authorities for his point of view.

43 Cf. Picken, 1977.

rical or historical reinterpretation superimposed upon the literal one. On the contrary, we shall see that Confucius appears to understand the poems as erotic, and to disapprove of them as such. The interesting thing is that he none the less uses love poetry himself by way of rhetorical *plaisanteri*.

Observe how Confucius interprets the following two lines from an ancient love song which is not from Zheng but from that other place of notoriety, Wei:

Zi Xia asked:

"Her entrancing smile dimpling,
Her beautiful eyes glancing,
Patterns of colour upon plain silk.' (Ode 57)

What is the meaning of these lines?"

Confucius replied: "There is first the plain silk. The colours come afterwards."

"Does the practice of the rites likewise come afterwards?"

"It is Zi Xia who inspires me! With him one can definitely start talking about the Odes!"⁴⁴

Confucius expounds the significance for him of the passage from the *Book of Ode*, and he takes the Ode as a starting point for a philosophical reflection. There is no hint here that Confucius was denying that that the text he thus used was in fact a love song. On the other hand he does use the love song for his own purposes.

Confucius makes use of the love songs in the *Book of Odes*. I am not convinced that Confucius thought the Ode was originally intended to make the point he reads into it. Rather, he seems to me to explain what we can learn from the Ode, how we can apply it to our lives. He seems to follow Goethe's advice "... und legt ihr's nicht aus, so legt was unter"⁴⁵. This application to the concrete is called *wei* in classical Chinese. When in pre-Han texts one says *ci zhi wei* the meaning is certainly not that "this is what was (originally) meant by the text". Rather the phrase must be taken as "the text can be applied to

44 *Analects* 3.8.

Zi Gong said: "Poor without being obsequious, be wealthy without being arrogant.' What do you think of this saying?"

Confucius said: "That will do, but better still is 'When you are poor you should still delight in the Way; when wealthy you should still observe the rites.

Zi Gong said: "The Ode says:

Like bone cut, like horn polished,

Like jade carved, like stone ground.

Is not what you have said a case in point?" (Ode 55)

Confucius said: "Si (personal name of Zi Gong), with a man like you one can definitely discuss the Odes. One tells you one thing and you can see the next thing." (*Analects* 1.15)

45 "... and if you do not interpret it, read something into it."

this situation". The meaning of a text in ancient times was not – so to speak – an archeological matter. Texts were read as of current relevancy⁴⁶. Examples of this are legion. Very often, a text is said to refer an historical event which occurred long after the composition of the text concerned, an event about which the original authors could have known nothing.

There is one archaic-sounding love song preserved in the *Analects* which Confucius adds an intriguing psychological comment:

The flowery branch of the wild cherry
How swiftly it flies back!
It is not that I do not love you,
But your house is far away!

Confucius commented: "She did not (really) love him"⁴⁷. If he had there would be no distance worth speaking about."⁴⁸

Zhu Xi (1130 – 1200) quotes unusually high praise on this particular passage from one of his admired masters:

"This saying is extremely pregnant with meaning, its significance reaches far."⁴⁹

Confucius does not pretend that this is anything other than a love song. He does not attempt an allegorical, historical or satirical interpretation. Instead, he remarks on the very substance of the love affair, emphasising the emotion of love itself as paramount: physical proximity becomes unimportant by comparison – a point which is of a broader doctrinal significance for Confucius.

When one truly loves a person, one is so close to that person that the physical distance becomes unimportant, it is suggested. The case is similar to that of loving goodness (*ren*) which the Master here implicitly compares with a lover.

"Humaneness far away? When I desire humaneness it has already come to me!"⁵⁰

This is connected with *Analects* 9.18 and 15.18 where Confucius emphasizes his regret that he has never seen anyone who loves moral strength as much as sex (or female beauty, *se*), and with *Analects* 1.7 where he recommends that one should appreciate talent as much as sex/female beauty. Confucius is a moralist, but unlike later Confucians not perhaps quite so prudish.

46 Compare the use of Biblical texts by Christians.

47 One might translate "He did not (really) love her". But given the preponderance of women as locutors in ancient Chinese love poetry this would seem to be a less likely reading.

48 *Analects* 9.31.

49 *Sishu jizhu*, 1985: 145.

50 *Analects* 7.30.

In one instance Confucius quotes from Ode 188, a poem where a woman complains that she is being rejected by her husband who has taken a new wife. Confucius says:

"When you love a man you want him to live. When you hate him you want him to die. If you want him to live and you want him to die, you are in two minds. (As the Ode says:)

If you did not do it for the sake of riches,
You surely did it for the sake of a change!"⁵¹

In this seemingly banal comment Confucius uses the love poetry of the Odes to illustrate psychological incoherence by referring to a change of heart. His comparison is logically problematical, but the general meaning seems clear enough. Significantly, it was not always recognized by Confucian commentators, who were, after all, not generally inclined to look upon their Master as a witty and humorous conversationalist. Even Zhu Xi, following a suggestion from the Cheng brothers, suspected that this piece of poetry was irrelevant in this context.

Confucius here recognizes and subtly alludes to the original erotic content of the Ode he quotes. But the recommended and proper use of the Odes is, in his view, ceremonial, diplomatic and rhetorical⁵².

Later Confucians on the Love Songs in the Book of Odes

The earliest complete set of interpretations of the *Airs of Zheng* is contained in the *Mao Preface*⁵³ from which I have quoted extensively. Its hermeneutic approach of the *Preface* is brought out effectively at the outset:

Through the airs those above educate those below, and those below satirize those above. The *Airs* stress elegance and they remonstrate indirectly. He who uses them will be guilty of no crime. But he who hears them will be in a position to take the warning.⁵⁴

51 *Analects* 12.10, cf. Ode 188.

52 "Suppose a man knows all the three hundred Odes by heart, but when given administrative responsibility he fails, and when sent to foreign states on missions he is incapable of making creative replies, then what use are the Odes to him, however many they are?" (*Analects* 13.7)

"If you have not learnt the Odes you cannot conduct (diplomatic) talks." (*Analects* 16.13, cf. also *Analects* 17.9)

53 These comments are conveniently available in bilingual form in Legge, 1979, IV: 34 – 81.

54 Legge, 1979, IV: 35.

The Mao *Preface* commends the use of the genre *feng* "air" for its usefulness in diplomatic discourse. It is plausible that some *Airs of Zheng* were used in this way. The singing of Odes as well as of other songs in a satirical spirit is attested in the *Zuozhuan* (ca. 4th century BC). The Mao *Preface* probably explains a very real use of these *Airs*, and it explains this use very well, although the possibility remains that our literary sources exaggerate the uses of poetry in diplomatic practice. This use is in accordance with later Confucian principles, but it certainly is not in accordance with the practice of Confucius himself.

Marcel Granet, inspired by Emile Durkheim, provides an anthropological perspective of the poems by relating them to mating festivals in ancient China and trying to reconstruct a sociological and anthropological background for them. He provides comparative evidence from South East Asia and the Far East⁵⁵.

In China – as generally in Europe – there was a need for conformist readings of the offending songs. A common strategy was to declare the lovers properly married, or when this proved to be too improbable and obviously inappropriate, deem the poems to be epithalamia or wedding songs⁵⁶.

Sublimation, on the other hand, has tended differently in China and the West: in China, it was neither *amor dei* "love of God", which was in question, nor *amor domini*, "love of the Lord" in the theological sense. It was either *amor conjugae*, "love of one's wife" or *amor virtutis civilis*, "the love of civil virtue" which tended to be the focus of attention, almost in a Roman fashion, or indeed it was *amor domini*, in the secular sense "love of the ruler"⁵⁷.

By contrast with the exegetic history of the *Song of Songs* there was a pronounced tendency to look upon the love affairs seemingly described in the *Airs of Zheng* in a negative way, to reject them emphatically as an improper subject of emulation, to regard the *Airs* as warnings against what they describe, as exemplars of dissuasion, to insist that the *Airs of Zheng* indirectly attack what they openly celebrate: erotic infatuation.

55 Granet 1919.

56 Compare the interpretation of Sappho in the West as discussed below.

57 Incidentally, the Chinese would have read Roman reactions to Greek culture with profound sympathy and understanding. Cicero's attitudes towards Greek culture, as expressed in his *Tusculanae Disputationes*, are in a way very Chinese. He says of the Greeks: "Geometry held among them a place of honour, and nothing was more illustrious among them than mathematics. We, on the other hand, have only concerned ourselves with this art in so far as they were useful for the measuring and calculating of things." (*Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.5. The translation is my own.)

The *Airs of Zheng* were interpreted as satirizing "natural" love as a prime example of what a civilized person should avoid. In general, the strategy in China was one of political allegorical sublimation and of emphatic, albeit often implicit, moralistic rejection. It explained the declarations and descriptions of love as defamations and proscriptions of debauchery. In the history of the *Song of Songs* I have yet to come across a single suggestion that it was ever read as a satirical attack on debauchery. This is one crucial difference. There is another interesting difference: the *Song of Songs*, being part of God's Word to mankind, the Holy Bible, could not easily be rejected as immoral, although there were some isolated attempts to do this, and there was a powerful need in the West for hermeneutic sublimation and mystification of the love relationships in the West. By contrast, the *Airs of Zheng* were subject to direct attacks, from Confucius' time onwards. Zhu Xi, for one, considered most of them simply as debauched and lewd songs. However, Zhu Xi was polite enough not to probe too deeply the question why, in that case, these songs were contained in one of the classics to be learnt by heart by all educated people. Zhu Xi is said to have remarked that Confucius must have collected these songs as a moral warning against the lascivious attitudes they represent⁵⁸.

But does one really collect dozens of love songs in order to warn against debauchery? Why, we must insist on asking, were so many lewd and improper songs included in the *Book of Odes*? The answer is straightforward, though not generally acknowledged: these lewd songs were popular and widely used both for ritual and for entertainment purposes at the time of the compilation of the *Book of Odes*. And there are no indications whatever in the *Book of Odes* itself that this anthology was compiled by a person with the priggish taste of a "Confucian".

"Duke Wen of Wei (reigned 424 – 387 BC) asked Zi Xia: "When, dressed in my regular garment and wearing my ceremonial hat with pendants made of jade I listen to ancient songs I am always afraid that I should fall asleep. But when I listen to the music of Zheng and Wei I can never get tired of it. Let me ask you: why is the old music like that? Why is the new music like this?"

Zi Xia replied: "... What you, my ruler, are so fond of are indulgent songs."

Duke Wen asked: "May I ask where the 'indulgent songs' come from?"

Zi Xia replied: "The songs of Zheng are fond of profligacy and they make the will lascivious. The songs of Song celebrate women and they drown the will (in sensuality). The songs of Wei are fast-moving and they make the will confused. The songs of Qi are boisterous and make the will arrogant. All these four (kinds of songs) are made

58 *Zhuji yulei*, 1985, VI: 2108.

lascivious by themes of sex/female beauty (*se*), and they do harm to moral strength. Therefore they are not used in sacrifices.⁵⁹

Kong Yingda (574 – 648), commenting on this passage, refers to the customs of boys and girls meeting on the Zhen and Wei rivers in Zheng (cf. Ode 87) and singing songs to arouse each other, which he claims to find described in the *Jinwen Lunyu* "New Text *Analects*."

The dry and solemn systematic description of the administration of the Zhou dynasty, the *Zhou Li* provides surprising evidence:

In the second month of spring the Master Go-Between orders that the boys and girls should assemble. At that time those who elope are not prevented. If there are those who without proper reason fail to conform to the rule, these are punished.⁶⁰

Whenever a state is established (the grand music official) forbids the lewd music, the excessive music, the pernicious music, and the extravagant music.⁶¹

One might think that this implies that the *Airs of Zheng* and the *Airs of Wei* were banned in proper states.

Sun Yirang (1848 – 1908), desperate to explain why the *Airs of Zheng* still form a part of the corpus in spite of Confucius' criticisms, in spite of later Confucian attitudes, elaborates in an almost Jesuitic spirit:

Whenever the music of Zheng or the music of Wei are declared lewd this refers to the music, not to the songs. Therefore, although the songs of Zheng and Wei speak of women they are not within the category of forbidden things.⁶²

Like many of the arguments of the Jesuits, this is not entirely without its historical base: *zheng sheng* "tunes of Zheng" did at some stage come to have

59 *Yueji pizhu*, 1976: 59, Couvreur, 1913, II: 86 ff.

60 Lin Yin, 1974: 144. Lin Yin adds in a note that the term *ben* "elope" does not refer to illicit intercourse but rather a failure to be able to afford or live up to the formal ritual requirements of marriage. Even this twentieth century scholar could not tolerate the licence evidently ritualized and apparently prescribed in antiquity.

61 Sun Yirang 1932, XII: 53 ff. The *Discussions of the White Tiger Hall* by Ban Gu (32 – 92 AD) explains: "Why does Confucius say that the music of Zheng is lewd? In the state of Zheng the peasants live in the mountains, and when they draw water in the valleys men and women mix freely and perform the music of Zheng to amuse one another. Thus the music of the evil and the deviant is always music about lewdness and sex." (*Baihu tong*, 1980: 12.) Xunzi (third century BC) explains the harm of the *Airs of Zheng*: "Beautifully made-up faces and the music of Zheng and Wei cause men's minds to become lascivious. ... Therefore the gentleman does not listen to lascivious music, he does not look at women's faces, and he does not use vulgar words." (*Xunzi* ch. 20) "The true king will reject all music which is not dignified and elegant." (*Xunzi* ch. 9)

62 In a similar vein Liu Baonan (1791 – 1855) reports that one mistaken understanding of the *Analects* 15.11 passage was to take "music of Zheng" to refer specifically to the *Airs of Zheng* and then to blame Confucius for having included in the *Book of Odes* works which were lewd. (Cf. Liu, 1933, IV: 12)

a much wider meaning than the set of poems referred to as *Zheng feng* "Airs of Zheng". But the crux here is that however we understand the term *Zheng sheng* "tunes of Zheng" this term will in any case have to include the *Zheng feng* "Airs of Zheng" as a standard example. I conclude that Sun Yirang is definitely mistaken.

The historically significant point is this: only when it was thought that Confucius was responsible for the selection of the material in the *Book of Odes*, and only when the *Book of Odes* was misappropriated as a Confucian classic, did the need to justify the presence of the *Airs of Zheng* become pressing. Then and only then was it necessary arose to exempt the canonized text of the *Airs of Zheng* from Confucius' explicit strictures. Moreover, it became imperative to impose upon the *Airs of Zheng* an interpretation consonant with later Confucian moral ideals.

Of course, this Confucian *Sprachregelung* concerning the *Airs of Zheng* was far from being observed by everyone. The poet Ruan Ji (210 – 263) explains in his treatise on music:

The custom of Zheng and Wei is to be fond of lasciviousness. Therefore the people are habitually frivolous and profligate. ... Since they are frivolous and profligate there are songs like the *Sangjian* and *Pushang*.⁶³

Ruan Ji explains the existence of the *Airs of Zheng* and the *Airs of Wei* in terms of the characteristics of the people of these regions. He certainly does not read these poems as satirical attacks on lewdness. On the contrary he reads them as evidence of lasciviousness:

Each people sing of what they love, and they chant of what they aim for.⁶⁴

This was a common and a commonsensical view which coexisted with the (en)forced Confucian ideological reinterpretation. It is often indirectly evident in Chinese poetry, but more rarely directly expressed in Confucian ideological literary criticism of the *Book of Odes*.

However, the Confucian scholar Cui Shu (1740 – 1816) asks some very pertinent questions:

Why is it that poems from men to women are so few and that poems from women to men are so many? Are we to think that those who could write poetry in Zheng were all lewd women?⁶⁵

63 Ruan Ji ji, 1983: 40.

64 Ibidem.

65 Cui Dongbi yishu, 1983: 558.

We may try to answer Cui Shu's question by a preliminary reflection on some possibly crucial psycho-logical presuppositions built into the notion of erotic infatuation. It seems to me that this infatuation is normally linked to an idea on the part of the lover that the beloved is free to respond positively or negatively to the lover's feelings. The lover's insecurity and vulnerability is an important factor in the pathology and etiology of erotic infatuation.

To the extent that males were freer in their choice of partners than females, one might expect the females to have been more prone to continuous infatuation than males. After all, at least after marriage, males did not expect their partners to find other lovers, whereas females were acutely aware that their beloved males might find other partners⁶⁶. As far as Chinese lyrical poetry is concerned there is no doubt that women are extremely well represented among the speakers in (though not necessarily the authors of) love poetry⁶⁷.

However this may be, the tradition the love poetry of women found in the *Airs of Zheng* is continued in China notably by the justly famous *Ziye ge* attributed to a girl Ziye of the third or fourth century AD and notable for their delicate (but always delicately impersonal) eroticism.

In spring the forest is filled with lovely flowers,
The birds of spring have filled me with sad thoughts.
How romantic is the wind of spring!
It's blowing open my thin silk skirt.⁶⁸

Love poetry speaking with a woman locutor is known not only from the folklore of many peoples of the Far East, as Marcel Granet has pointed out, but also, for example, from India and from the Middle High German *Frauenrede* which, incidentally, was by no means always composed by poetesses⁶⁹.

Cui Shu goes on to speak his mind on the old Mao *Preface*:

The misleading character of the *Prefaces* to the Odes is nowhere stronger than in the *Airs of Zheng*. ... If after Zhu Xi most scholars have still followed the *Prefaces* and have rejected Zhu Xi that was because they considered that the Odes were all edited by Confucius and that he would not have allowed such lewd and profligate words, that is all. ... Odes like nos. 83, 84, 86, 87, 94, 95 are all plainly songs about illicit relations between men and women. What need is there to seek different explanations and to make contorted explications? If you do not ask about the words, and you do not ask about the intended meaning, but only insist on keeping the thought in your mind that there are no lewd songs, how can this be an adequate way of explaining the

66 One reason why men fell so desperately in love with boys in ancient Athens was that the boys were entitled to reject their suitors' advances.

67 Cf. Rexroth and Chung 1972.

68 Frodsham, 1967: 101.

69 Cf. Fischer, 1934; Mergell, 1940; and Frings, 1957.

Odes? Moreover, who said that Confucius edited the Odes? Confucius never said any such thing. *The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)* says so, that is all⁷⁰. Confucius does say: "The music of Zheng is lewd" and that means that the *Airs of Zheng* are lewd. ... The scholars do not believe in what Confucius himself said but they do believe in what others (i. e. Sima Qian⁷¹) say. This is truly amazing! ...

There is a tale about Ma Sheng who showed a poem of his to other people and was laughed at. He then faked a poem which he attributed to a "graduate Kang Hai", and everybody praised it. Afterwards when they learned it was by Ma they were tongue-tied and had nothing to say.

When the Confucians of our time hear that the Odes are edited by Confucius they go on to think that there cannot be any lewd songs there. That is the same sort of thing.

Thus when Zhu Xi considered these as lewd songs one cannot say that he was wrong. But of course the songs were not necessarily all written by the lewd person figuring as the author in them. Probably there are among them those that were given as presents by boys and girls who were fond of each other. There are also songs which in a fictitious way represent love messages between men and women.⁷²

Cui Shu gives us a gut reaction which (in the formal exegetic literature on the *Book of Odes*) has remained an eccentric view in the minority among Confucian scholars until the twentieth century. But it is important to notice that such minority views did exist. There is no monotonous unanimity – even in their public writings – among Confucian scholars, and certainly not among the scholar poets. There is a living but subdued dialogue within Confucianism and within Chinese culture on the proper way of understanding the erotic parts of the *Book of Odes*.

Traditional Confucian commentaries on the *Book of Odes* explain that text ought to be understood in the context of orthodox Confucianism. The allusions to the Odes in traditional poetry, on the other hand, show how these Odes were actually understood by practitioners of the art of dignified poetry. The references to the Odes in Chinese jest books and in narrative literature show the perceptions of a wider literate or semi-literate public.

The folklore enthusiast Feng Menglong (1574 – 1646), in any case, goes considerably further than Cui Shu in the introduction to his *Shange* "Mountain Songs" (ca. 1609 – 1616):

70 "In ancient times the Odes were over three thousand in number. When it came to Confucius he removed the repetitions and picked out the ones that were conducive to Ritual and Duty." (Sima Qian, 1956: 69.) If Sima Qian is right the *Odes* must have been an extraordinarily lewd and libertine example of the+ genre, considering the nature of what Confucius selected.

71 Cf. B. Watson, 1961.

72 Cui Dongbi *yishu*, 1983: 558.

What articulates the feeling of the common people must not enter into poetry⁷³, and it is therefore separately called *shange*. A peasant's prattle to express his feelings is not a subject of discourse among the learned. Simply because these songs were not recognized as poetry and because people of status and learning did not speak of them, the evaluation of these songs has become ever lower, and the frame of mind of these (popular) poets forever simpler. Those which today are still common, are all erotic songs.

But even the *State Odes* allude to Mulberries by the River Pu (a place notorious for its free erotic practices).⁷⁴ Since they were incorporated (by Confucius into the *Book of Odes*) these feelings (of love) have been accepted and are not to be rejected. For aren't the *shange* "mountain songs" in the tradition of the *Airs of Zheng* and the *Airs of Wei*?⁷⁵

In essence, Feng Menglong adopts a similar attitude to that of the modern liberal theologian Helmuth Gollwitzer who declared that the very inclusion of the *Song of Songs* into the Bible was a demonstration of a positive attitude towards sensuality⁷⁶.

Concluding Remarks

There is sound reason to believe that songs like the *Airs of Zheng* were used in mating festivals in Zheng, as ancient sources maintain and as Marcel Granet has tried to show.

There is also no doubt that the kind of songs so used became popular with the ancient Chinese aristocracy and became something of a vogue of entertainment at the courts of ancient China. At a later stage they were also used in Patronage, which was crucial for the preservation and the elaboration of what we have: *honus alit artes, omnesque incenduntur ad studia gloria*⁷⁷. The *Airs of Zheng*, may well be the result of the kind of polishing up and recording that came with the use of these songs in aristocratic circles along with other more dignified hymns and odes.

73 This comment explains many special features of traditional Chinese poetry. For example the scarcity of openly rude poetic insult, and the paucity of frolicking frivolity and humour in traditional Chinese poetry. There is a fairly pervasive dignified, ethereal restraint in what the traditional Chinese regarded as their best poetry and the only kind of poetry worth attention.

74 Cf. Diény, 1978: 63 – 99, and particularly p. 72.

75 Cf. Feng Menglong's brief introduction Feng 1962, and Töpelmann, 1973: 69.

76 Gollwitzer, 1978.

77 "Honour nourishes the arts. Everyone is encouraged towards effort by glory." Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, 1.4.

The very popularity of the *Airs of Zheng* among the aristocracy secured a place for them in the *Book of Odes*. Along with other songs these were used for the subtle and indirect expression of personal or official views.

The Confucians imposed a moralising interpretation on most of the Odes they quoted in their work. In the time of the Warring States they began to read the love songs either as political allegory or satire directed at specific rulers of Zheng, and also as social satire of current amorous practice.

During the early Han period this allegorical and political reading of many of the Odes was systematically expounded in the *Mao Preface*. Other interpretative traditions have survived in less complete shape. The *Mao Preface* defined the dominant tradition in the interpretation of the songs down to the twentieth century, but dissenting voices existed. Even the authority of Zhu Xi as the systematiser of Neo-Confucianism did not ensure that his divergent, more naturalistic, view of the *Airs of Zheng* as plain love songs gained any wide acceptance. Opinions like that of Cui Shu remained isolated until the twentieth century, but have recently gained considerable ground even in China. The case of the folklorist Feng Menglong, who argued that the *Airs of Zheng* lent precious poetic support for the joys of love within the framework of Confucianism, was entirely marginal.

The readings of the *Mao Preface* summarized an approach to the Odes, and a use of the Odes, which had become common from about the fourth century onwards and which is well documented in such books as the *Xunzi* (3rd cent. BC). The *Preface* accurately describes a strategy whereby the *Book of Odes* as a whole could stand as a work with a strong positive moral message consonant with that of State Confucianism. When the notion of a classic (*jing*) arose, and when the idea of the canonisation of the *Book of Odes* as a Confucian classic was accepted, the need arose for systematicness in the Confucian reinterpretation of the Odes. Before then it was sufficient to quote and casuistically to reinterpret such passages as appeared useful in a Confucian context.

There is therefore a clear historical reason for the emergence of the *Preface* at the time of the rise of State Confucianism during the Han dynasty. There is nothing absurd or mistaken about the interpretations in the *Preface*. They constitute a systematic, dogmatically necessary attempt to properly integrate the erotic parts of the *Book of Odes* into the Confucian corpus, to justify the *Book of Odes* as a Confucian classic, as indeed David Hawkes pointed out some three decades ago⁷⁸.

Sexual practices were cultivated extensively with medical aims (as a cure against advancing old age) in China from Warring States times onwards. As

78 Hawkes, 1957: 9 f.

recent archeological finds have confirmed, the tradition goes back to pre-Han times⁷⁹. The area of the erotic as such, as opposed to that of the sexual and of the medical/hygienic, was not cultivated as part of the recognized mainstream of early or pre-Buddhist culture. Instead, erotic literature remained a sub-culture in China, marginalised by a higher culture which tended to relegate the domain of the erotic and sexual to the realm of the largely trivial pursuits of the affluent and profligate, and to the realm of the ultimately unerotic sexual alchemy and (geriatric) medicine. The repression, one is strongly tempted to speculate, must have helped to reinforce and enhance the vitality of private eroticism in China. Taboos make for excitement.

Chinese love poetry after impact of Buddhism is beyond the scope of this paper. Anyone who suspects that there is a general lack of overt eroticism in later Chinese lyrical poetry is hereby advised to refer to Feng Menglong's previously mentioned collection *Mountain Songs (Shan'ge)*⁸⁰ as a most remarkable piece of evidence on popular erotic sensibilities beyond the control of the high culture. These folk songs are every bit as free in sexual and erotic matters as any collection of folk songs Europe. The erotic traditions in Chinese poetry from Tang times onwards evidently deserves close study, comparatively and historically⁸¹.

Erotic reticence in Chinese high culture does not seem limited to the sphere of obscenity or indecency. Chinese discretion basically involves purely emotional attachment. But Jean-Jacques Rousseau's form of spiritual eroticism, culminating as it does in psychological union undefiled by physical sexual indulgence⁸², is absent in early China and seems hard to find in China's later erotic literature. I would like to find traditional examples of it. Physical desire

79 Harper, 1987.

80 This book is conveniently presented in Töpelmann, 1973.

81 Attitudes towards the erotic varied widely in different areas of China. There is reason to believe that folk songs such as those collected by Feng Menglong are more representative of general popular sensibilities than the Confucian commentaries on the *Airs of Zheng*. Indeed, the *Airs of Zheng* themselves are more representative of these sensibilities than their Confucian interpretations.

However, as far as generally accessible publications go, *Les mémoires de Casanova de Seingault* (Casanova, 1966) of the eighteenth century, or Frank Harris's five volumes *My Life and Loves* (Harris, 1948) certainly have no parallel in China even today, as is also the case with the eleven volumes of *My Secret Life* (Anonymous, 1966) by a mid-nineteenth century author.

82 Rousseau writes to the lady he adores: "Le crime est déjà cent fois commis par ma volonté. S'il l'est dans la vôtre, je le consomme, et je suis le plus traître et le plus heureux des hommes." Rousseau, 1984, II: 1644. *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is a celebration of what one might call the "union spirituelle des sexes".

seems organically linked to emotional infatuation in traditional Chinese culture. Platonic detachment of the union of souls from the union of bodies seems unheard of in pre-Buddhist China. The Chinese of pre-Buddhist times not only had no instinct for truly Platonic metaphysics that they lacked the instinct for truly Platonic infatuation.

Concerning modern sensibilities, Chinese perceptions of the psychology of Jean-Jacques Rousseau might provide an important clue, as might the reception of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* might provide another useful test case. There certainly was, in the China of the modern period, a receptiveness for the sentiments celebrated by Goethe and suffered by Rousseau. But what were the traditional Chinese precedents or antecedents for this sensibility?

In the West there was natural acceptance of the *Song of Songs* in addition to a great deal of positive enthusiastic positive sublimation, very little negative reinterpretation, and the sporadic, outright rejection on moral grounds of the erotic heritage in the *Song of Songs*. In the case of the *Airs of Zheng* in China there were only isolated cases of natural acceptance, scarcely any positive sublimation, an overwhelming tendency towards negative reinterpretation and a considerable amount of rejection on moral grounds.

However, erotic poetry was very common in the *Book of Odes*, and the later suppression of open eroticism into the realm of the medical (cum geriatric) on the one hand, and the realm of subcultural pornography on the other is nothing congenitally Chinese. It is the result of a long series of cultural and ideological choices, and repression celebrated its greatest triumphs first during the highly restrictive Manchu Qing dynasty.

II

Comparative Notes on Erotic Poetry in Pre-Buddhist China and in Pre-Christian Europe

Sigmund Freud thought that understanding a person's erotic sensibilities is important for understanding that person far beyond his or her sexual behaviour. I suspect that the case of cultures may be similar: the way the ancient Chinese cultivated eroticism matters far beyond the immediate range of sexual life in ancient China.

Consider the case of mythology, for example the tales about the highest gods in China and Europe. We observe that Zeus or Jupiter – unlike Uranos, the Greek God of Heaven – was said to show a very physical erotic weakness for certain mortals, sometimes even of the same sex, as was claimed in the

case of Ganymede. One such divine love affair concerns Alcumene, the wife of Amphitryon, and is alluded to already in Homer⁸³. It has given rise to a wealth of later dramatisations by such authors as Plautus, Molière⁸⁴, and Heinrich von Kleist⁸⁵. A full account of Zeus's love affairs on earth would fill a handsome volume. Hera, his wife, knew what she was so jealous about.

Goddesses could not only be jealous. Like Calypso and Circe in the *Odyssey* they might well fall in love with attractive men, for example men like Ulysses. Homer gives us a vivid picture of these amorous goddesses. I am looking forward to a study of divine eroticism in Chinese mythology which would spell out the evolution of erotic sensibilities attributed to Chinese gods first in pre-Buddhist times⁸⁶, and then the later transformations under the impact of the overwhelmingly rich Buddhist mythological heritage. It is evident that Chinese gods did have love lives, and that they felt they needed to be provided with beautiful young girls. But when and where did they begin to fall in love on earth?

Consider the problematisation of love in different cultures. *Ai* "love" was not a proper subject of discourse in pre-Han China. We might say with Michel Foucault that it was not "problematised" and it was most certainly not personified. There is no Chinese god of love like Eros or Cupid. There is not even a remote parallel to the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* which begins thus:

Tell me, Muse, of the workings of the all-golden Aphrodite
who infuses the gods with sweet longing
and who so dominates the generations of mortal men,
and also all flying birds as well as all beasts,

83 *Odyssey* 11.266 f.

84 Jupiter explains to Amphitryon in Molière's *Amphitryon* III.10

Et c'est moy, dans cette aventure And it is me who in this tale
Qui, tout dieu que je suis, dois estre le jaloux. Though being a god, must be jealous.

85 Here is Jupiter's report on the psychopathology of life on the Olymp in Kleist's masterpiece *Amphitryon* (II.5):

Ach Alkmene!
Auch der Olymp ist öde ohne Liebe.
Was gibt der Erdenvölker Anbetung
Gestürzt in Staub, der Brust, der lechzenden?
Er will geliebet sein, nicht ihr Wahn von ihm.
In ewge Schleier eingehüllt,
Möcht er sich selbst in einer Seele spiegeln,
Sich aus der Träne der Entzückung wiederstrahlen. Kleist, 1966: 223

Oh, Alcmene! | Even the Olymp is desolate without love. | What is the use of the devotion of mankind | Prostrated in the dust, for a yearning heart? | *He* wants to be loved, not her image of him. | Wrapped in eternal veils! He wants to mirror himself in a soul. | To be reflected back in her ravished tears. |

86 For the ancient Chinese shaman's celestial love affairs see Hawkes, 1974.

and everything that the land and the sea nourishes:
they all obey in their deeds Aphrodite of Kythera. ...⁸⁷

An Anacreontic poem like this one would be most extraordinary in a Chinese context for its programmatic insistence on the primacy of eroticism in poetry, while in Greek it verges on the trite:

I want to speak of the sons of Atreus,
I want to sing of Kadmos,
but my lyre with its cords
only resounds with the echo of Love.
Recently I changed the strings
I changed even the whole lyre,
to sing about the contests of Herakles.
But the lyre would only reverberate with Love.
Farewell, then, you heroes,
for my lyre
will only sing of Love.⁸⁸

The story of the amorous youth who fell desperately in love with Praxiteles' statue of naked Aphrodite and spent the night with her is very Greek⁸⁹. One can hardly imagine such an aberration even in the case of a statue of the (large-footed!) Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin⁹⁰.

The tradition of Chinese biography, with a few notable exceptions like the romantic tale of Sima Xiangru of the Han dynasty, generally disregards the erotic and affective sides of the lives of notable Chinese along with other private aspects of life⁹¹. Plato's *Symposium* includes a vivid account of the homosexual love life of Socrates⁹². We even learn from this text what suppos-

87 Weier 1951: no. 5. This Homeric hymn (which is much later than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is well over 250 lines long. The inept translation from the Greek is my own.

88 Crusius, 1914: no. 23, p. 351. The prosaic translation is my own.

89 Lucian, 1979, VIII: 174. The *Erotes*, from which this story is taken, is not a genuine work of Lucian but dates probably from the third century AD.

90 And yet it is important to note the Tantric notion of Guanyin descending on earth as a beautiful girl prostituting herself to mortals and in this way passing on her wisdom from the holy books. Cf. Chou, 1945, and Van Gulik, 1951, I: 102. The history of erotic narrative literature in ancient Greece is laid out in a masterly fashion in Rohde, 1914. A brief survey of Chinese erotic literature will be found in Franke, 1984.

91 A comparison between Sima Qian's treatment of the First Emperor of China and Plutarch's treatment of Alexander the Great will illustrate this point, and so will a comparison between the biographies of Alcibiades and, say, Duke Huan of Qi.

92 *Symposium* 215a – 219e. Alcibiades, having told us how he tried to seduce Socrates in all sorts of ways, continues:

"Well, by this time I felt that I had shot my bolt, and I'd a pretty shrewd idea that I'd registered a hit. So I got up, and, without giving him a chance to say a word, I wrapped my own cloak round him – for this was in the winter – and, creeping under his shabby

edly went on between Socrates and Alcibiades under the blanket. The contrast with Chinese accounts of Confucius could not be greater. Greek conversationalists cultivated an often frivolous freedom of public erotic discourse which is unheard of in proper public Chinese speech as recorded in our sources⁹³.

I find that Xenophon begins his own *Symposium* as follows:

And it does seem to me that it is worth while to relate not only the serious work of great and good men, but also their light-hearted actions.

Certainly no one has said anything to this effect in pre-Buddhist China.

Plutarch's biographies of notable Greek and Roman personalities generally show a much greater interest in the private lives and in the love lives of his subject than Chinese biographers like Sima Qian. Diogenes Laertius, again, shows a natural curiosity, sometimes verging on a prurient interest, for intimately private detail of this sort. Diogenes Laertius, in the many bibliographic lists contained in his biographies, mentions a large number of works concerned with the erotic. Fortunately, much of Plutarch's work has survived. In it we find three pieces:

1. Advice to the bride and groom.
2. Erotic tales
3. Theoretical considerations on eroticism⁹⁴.

old mantle I took him in my arms and lay there all night with this godlike and extraordinary man – you can't deny that, either, Socrates. And after *that* he had the insolence, the infernal arrogance, to laugh at my youthful beauty and jeer at the one thing I was really proud of, gentlemen of the jury – I say 'jury' because that's what you're here for, to try the man Socrates on the charge of arrogance – and believe it, gentlemen, or believe it not, when I got up next morning I had no more *slept* with Socrates, within the meaning of the act, than if he'd been my father or an elder brother. ...

"As Alcibiades took his seat there was a good deal of laughter at his frankness – especially as he seemed to be still in love with Socrates. But the latter said, I don't believe you're as drunk as you make out, Alcibiades ...

"Oh, it's always the same, said Alcibiades bitterly. No one else gets a look in with the beauties when Socrates is there. Look how easily he trumped up an excuse for Agathon to sit next to him." Plato, ed. Hamilton, 1987: 570.

I quote this at length as an example of (also syntactically!) free discourse of the kind that is common in recorded Greek literature and comparatively rare in ancient Chinese recorded literature.

- 93 There is no need to speculate on what was privately said in ancient China. We are interested in what was publicly cultivated.
- 94 Cf. Plutarch, 1928 ff. volumes II, IX and X. Henderson, 1975 lists no less than 106 expressions for the male reproductive organ and 91 expressions for the vagina used in classical Greek literature, particularly Aristophanes. Partridge, 1968 shows that public obscenity was as common in Elizabethan England as it was in Aristophanes' Greece. Rubinstein, 1984 provides a very detailed and well-documented analysis, although being a dictionary it is less readable than Partridge's popularizing account. There was

It is significant that pre-Buddhist Chinese prose has a proper room only for a medical (and – so one often finds oneself suspecting – a geriatric) perspective⁹⁵. Theoretical works on eroticism as opposed to sexual medical practice and medical metaphysics do not seem to exist. Openly erotic tales, though they exist, are rare. The Greek novelette *Lucius or the Ass*⁹⁶, with its Latin imitation by Apuleius, has no parallel in pre-Buddhist China. There is no pre-Buddhist Chinese comedian of eroticism and obscenities like Aristophanes.

The word *ai* "love" is rarely used as a noun in pre-Han Chinese. When *ai* is used as a verb it often connotes miserliness, stinginess as well as ownership, as when the king protests in *Mencius* that he does not "love (*ai*)" the buffalo he cannot bear to see slaughtered⁹⁷.

Pseudo-Lucian argues:

Now men's intercourse with women involves giving like enjoyment in return. For the two sexes part with pleasure only if they have had an equal effect on each other – unless we ought rather to heed the verdict of Tiresias that the woman's enjoyment is

room in ancient Greek and in Elisabethan cultures for "free discourse" on erotic matters in public. In China there was no such room for erotic free discourse in public. I am eagerly awaiting a monograph on eroticism in *The Tale of the Western Chamber*, or a book entitled *Dong Jieyuan's Bawdy*. Stephen West seems poised to write it. The forthcoming annotated translation of the *Xixiang ji* by Stephen West and Wilt Idema will in any case explore problems of the poetry of eroticism in philological detail. There was no doubt room in Chinese drama from the Yuan dynasty onwards for a certain amount of bawdiness, though not for personal erotic lyricism.

95 Here is a versified piece:

The recipe for whenever one will be conjoining Yin and Yang.

Grip the hand, spit on the Yang side of the wrists.

Stroke the elbow chambers.

Go under the side of the armpits.

Ascend the stove frame.

Go under the neck zone.

Stroke the receiving canister.

Cover the encircling ring.

Descend the broken basin.

Cross over the syrupy-liquor ford.

Skim the Spurting Sea.

Ascend Mount Constancy.

Enter the dark gate.

Ride the coital sinew.

Suck the essence and spirit upwards.

Then one can have enduring vision and exist in unison with heaven and earth.

I quote Harper, 1987: 566. This rhymed passage probably dates to the third century BC.

96 Cf. *Lucian*, 1979, VIII: 47 – 147.

97 *Mencius* 1A7. Van Gulik, 1951 and Van Gulik, 1961 remain the most useful books for orientation on sexual practices in ancient China. Ishihara, 1969 contains a singularly useful annotated bibliography.

twice as great as the man's. And I think it honourable for men not to wish for a selfish pleasure or to seek to gain some private benefit by receiving from anyone the sum total of enjoyment, but to share what they obtain and to requite like with like. But no one could be so mad as to say this is the case with boys. No, the active lover, according to his view of the matter, departs after having obtained an exquisite pleasure, but the one outraged suffers pain and tears at first, though the pain relents somewhat with time and you will, men say, cause him no further discomfort, but of pleasure he has none at all.⁹⁸

We must not simply *assume* that the love relation in pre-Buddhist China was symmetric. We need to look for cases of neglected *husbands* to parallel the *Baitou yin* "White Hair Complaint" from Han times where the female poet declares a standard female sentiment:

I wish I could find a man of one heart,
to grow white-haired with, unseparated.⁹⁹

We evidently need to study early Chinese erotic sensibilities not in terms of what they were short of or lacked completely. An account of these sensibilities in terms of deficiencies of various kinds, in comparison with the Greek pattern of sensibilities, is ultimately disappointing. However, such a one-sided comparison does raise some natural questions which it would be good to have a solid and richly documented answer to: what was it in terms of erotic sensibilities that the ancient Chinese had lots of and that the ancient Greeks fell short on or lacked completely? What kinds of poetic devices and emotional complexities and preferences within the realm of the erotic characterized the ancient Chinese when compared to the ancient Greeks? Our two most important sources on early Chinese erotic sensibilities are these:

1. the *Book of Odes*
2. the *Zuo Zhuan*.

The *Zuo Zhuan* is rich in historical accounts of (mostly illicit) sexual affairs viewed from the point of view of their political significance. There is something almost pre-Confucian and archaic about the treatment of sexuality and eroticism in the *Zuo Zhuan* which is in clear contrast with other sources such as *Guoyu*, *Zhanguoce*, *Shuoyuan*, *Xinxu*, *Xinshu*, and *Xinyu*. I am hoping to devote a separate paper to this important subject¹⁰⁰. One striking example of the kind of perspective on eroticism that was current must suffice. We are told that the aristocrat Ejunzixi found himself ferried across some stream by a maid

98 Lucian, *op. cit.* p. 193.

99 Huang, 1961: 49, Diény, 1968: 155.

100 I am currently writing a study on "The erotic dimension in early Chinese historiography: the case of the *Zuo Zhuan*".

who sang him a song in the Yue language, and of which he understood nothing until it was translated for him into a beautifully discreet love song dedicated to him. The song certainly achieved its purpose, for the nobleman conveyed his sexual favours on the girl on the boat. The comment provides a good historical analysis:

Ejunzixi was the younger brother of the King of Chu's mother. His official position was that of a prime minister, and his rank was that of someone who holds the gui jade. And a mere person in charge of the rowing of ferries managed to have her pleasure with him to her heart's content. Shuoyuan 11.13, ed. Xiang Zonglu (Peking, Zhonghuashuju, 1987) p. 178

The focus is political. The erotic aspect serves to illustrate a political point.

In pre-Buddhist Chinese erotic poetry there is a discreet distance between the poet's concrete life and his song. The poet remains anonymous in more senses than one. We find, of course, nothing like the erotic affectation which characterizes later Anacreontic verse of which we have seen an example above, or like that Palace Style poetry which became a rage in China later under Emperor Jianwen (503 – 551)¹⁰¹ and remained popular into Tang times. This kind of poetry tended to treat of women as just another delicately attractive palace fixture, along with the other birds, and the catamite. Nor do we, for example, find such improper subjects as homosexual love even hinted at in the ancient Odes¹⁰². The comparison with the rise of poetry in ancient Greece is instructive. Among the (very poetically so-called) *Adespota* sometimes attributed to Sappho we find a truly Chinese and personally discreet piece:

The moon has gone down,
and the Pleiads. It is
midnight. Time passes,
and I lie alone.¹⁰³

Significantly, the piece is generally regarded as spuriously attributed to the poetess.

Compare a famous early example of this common type in Chinese lyrical poetry, possibly from the first or second century AD:

The bright moon, oh how white it shines,
Shines down on the gauze curtains of my bed!

101 Cf. Marney, 1976 and Marney, 1982.

102 We do have one openly homosexual poem by Emperor Jianwen (*Quan Liang Shi* 2.7b/8: "The Catamite".)

103 For the text cf. Campbell, 1967: 52, who accepts Sappho's authorship. Page, 1965: 128, footnote 4 rejects the attribution on the grounds that the dialect is not Sappho's. The translation is my own.

Racked by sorrow I toss and cannot sleep;
 Picking up my clothes, I wander up and down.
 My absent love says that he is happy,
 But I would rather he said he was coming back.
 Out in the courtyard I stand hesitating, alone;
 To whom can I tell the sad thoughts I think?
 Staring before me I enter my room again;
 Falling tears wet my mantle and robe.¹⁰⁴

Compare now one of Sappho's works. Nothing precious or decorous here. No affectation at all. And an acute sense of painful personal Lesbian sensibility, the bitter taste of compounded jealousy.

Here is the earliest English version by J. Hall (London, 1652), which is difficult to find, but delightful once one has found it:

He that sits next thee now and hears
 Thy charming voyce, to me appears
 Beauteous as any deity
 That rules the Sky.

How did his pleasing glances dart
 Sweet languors to my ravished heart!
 At the first sight thou so prevail'd
 That my voyce fail'd.

I'm speechlesse, feav'rish, fires assail
 My fainting flesh, my sight doth fail,
 Whilest to my restlesse mind my ears
 Still hum new fears.

Cold sweats and tremblings so invade
 That like wither'd flower I fade,
 So that my life being almost lost
 I seem a Ghost.

Yet since I'm wretched I must dare.

Sappho's poem is quoted by pseudo-Longinus as being famous already at that time¹⁰⁵. It is a tribute to the inventiveness of the Western puritanical tradition and the strength of its convictions that this song could be widely interpreted as a wedding song. Sappho was, of course, a heroine of the Western erotic tradition, but she was conceived as a paragon of moral and social virtue in such works as Madame Dacier, *Les poésies d'Anacréon et de Sapphe*, Paris 1681, and F. G. Welcker has defended her against the common prejudice that her

104 *The Nineteen Old Poems*, no. 17, Waley, 1961: 57.

105 Russell, 1964: 14 for the Greek text, and for J. Hall's translation, the commentary p. 100.

poetry was erotic in his famous piece: "*Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurtheil befreyt*"¹⁰⁶. Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century and in Bowra, 1936 as well as in Snell, 1965 Sappho was interpreted as a moralist writing wedding songs and the like. One must emphasize that Sappho was exceptional also in a Greek context. Few poets, if any, have been able to capture the immediacy of her poetic diction and of her physical erotic sensibility. The point is that she became a very famous and widely celebrated exceptional poet. In one fragment in the form of a prim dialogue she shows a delicate awareness of the indecency of her themes. It is useful to quote this piece in order to remind ourselves of the fact that her attitude to the erotic was not a public standard:

"I want to tell you something but what prevents me
is a feeling of shame."

"If your desire were for what is honourable and good,
and your tongue were not concocting something base to say, shame would not be in
your eyes,
but you would be stating your claim."¹⁰⁷

Exceptional Sappho may have been, but she was far from unique. We have Archilochos' (seventh century BC) amorous complains in two important fragments:

...
but, my friend, limb-softening desire has me under its yoke.¹⁰⁸
Miserable, prostrated by desire,
spiritless, pierced to the marrow of my bones
through the will of the gods.¹⁰⁹

Mimnermos (seventh century BC) goes so far as to generalize programmatical-ly:

What life, what joy without golden Aphrodite?
I'd rather die when these are mine no more:
secret love, sweet gifts, and the bed. ...¹¹⁰

Such an obsession remained a characteristic poetic stance in the West. I remember these lines clearly as memorable and symptomatic phrases from my

106 Welker, 1816.

107 Page, 1965: 104, which provides excellent commentary.

108 Campbell, 1967: 8, fragment 118. Note that Archilochos addresses these lines to a friend. The translation from the Greek is my own.

109 Campbell, 1967: 7, fragment 104. The translation from the Greek is my own.

110 Campbell, 1967: 27. The translation from the Greek is my own.

own schoolboy days. Priorities of this sort would always have been felt to be undignified in China.

Conversely, the tale of Narcissus who was to engage in love relations and was condemned to consume himself in infatuation with his own person, obeys a very Greek logic of sensibilities. There is no pre-Buddhist example of Chinese narcissism that I know of, and I do not see how the refusal to fall in love in pre-Buddhist Chinese culture should have been punishable in the first place. We find here a profound contrast in sensibilities between ancient Greece and ancient China. The popularity in Western art history of the Narcissus motif underlines the general historical importance of this contrast.

Bucolic poetry from Theocritus (early third century BC) onwards has celebrated the psychological intricacies and complexities of secret and illicit love. After such an illicit union, for example, one is told that the girl returns to her goats "with shame on her eyes" (*ommasin aidomenois*) but with joy in her heart; and that the boy returns to his cattle "gratified" (*kechareImenos*)¹¹¹.

Sappho, Archilochos and Mimnermos are bound to remain somewhat enigmatic figures because of the fragmentary nature of the evidence we have of their lives and poetry in the seventh century BC. But take a poet like Catullus (ca. 77 – 47 BC), about whom more is known. He became famous for, among many other works, 25 poems addressed to a certain Lesbia (so called by Catullus in memory of Sappho of Lesbos), whose real name, as we are told by Apuleius (second century AD) was Clodia. We can follow the poet's amorous trials, triumphs and tribulations through these 25 poems. Such an improper obsession with a married (and notorious!) woman would have appeared undignified and also ultimately uninteresting to the respectable Chinese literary connoisseur. Catullus' *Odi et amo* "I hate and I love", psychologically endemic in Europe, has no parallel at least in pre-Buddhist China.

Catullus is defiantly indiscreet not only about his affair with Clodia. For example he also reveals a bitter-sweet homosexual affair in a series of four poems addressed to the unfaithful Juventius.

Here is Catullus' witty parody on Sappho's (already then famous) work:

He seems to me like a god
he, possibly, surpasses the gods

111 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1905: 112. Contrast the anonymous Luofu *pastourelle* of the Later Han period (25 – 220 AD) (Diény, 1968: 128 – 136) in which an eloquent woman dismisses her suitor. Diény, 1977 provides a fascinating comparison of the Luofu *pastourelle* with a similar piece composed by the Provençal poet Marcabru around 1140 AD. For further comparison between Provençal and Chinese poetry see Frankel 1963.

who sitting opposite you all the time
listens to you and hears you

as you smile sweetly; and that robs
me of all senses, for as soon as I see you,
Lesbia, I have nothing above...

...
my tongue is numb, under my limbs
sneaks a subtle flame, and with their own sound
my ears ring, my eyes are blinded
by a twofold night.

Idleness, Catullus, is what ruins you:
you indulge in idleness and wallow.
Idleness has ruined kings and happy cities.¹¹²

Note that here, as so often, Catullus addresses himself: "oh Catullus". He not only *is* in love, he also *addresses* himself as being in love. This internal monologue marks a significant feature of his poetic maturity even when it is not explicit but only present as an underlying force.

Catullus' poem is not at all a poem of immediate infatuation. It is a witty comment on Sappho, and it finishes, triumphantly, in a defiantly mundane and prosaic quatrain which refers to a thought-provoking commonplace current in Hellenistic times and traditionally attributed to Theophrast: that love is an emotion of a soul in idleness.

There is also internal dialogue and emotional contradiction in Catullus, again in a piece for which he is famous in the Western tradition:

Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.
Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

"I love and I hate. Why should I do this, you ask, perhaps.
I do not know. But I feel it happens, and I am tormented."¹¹³

In pre-Buddhist China, the complex and contradictory pathology of amorous infatuation and humiliation is not something that was subjected to the sort of intense aesthetic and intellectual attention and analysis which was so typical of politically unambitious poets like Catullus. As in painting, the subjects and scenes tended to be either dignified or at least sentimentally picturesque in China. They had to be delicately beautiful, although they could occasionally be apparently trivial in subject matter. A respectable pre-Buddhist Chinese poet referring to his own reproductive organs, as Catullus frequently does, would be not just a scandal but simply unthinkable.

112 Catullus, poem no. 51, Kroll, 1968: 91 ff.

113 Catullus, poem no. 85. The translation is my own. Kroll, 1968: 259 provides an interesting set of Greek antecedents to this kind of contradictory sentiment.

Catullus, of course, is notorious for this sort of thing to the point that even recent editions of his work have often been puritanically incomplete at certain points. But compare another renowned poet like Martial:

Quaeris cur nolim te ducere, Galla? Diserta es.
saepe solecismum mentula nostra facit.

"You ask why I do not want to marry you, Galla. It's because you are learned. And my cock does often come up with solecisms, you see."¹¹⁴

For Martial being risqué is a matter of policy:

Versus scribere me parum severos
nec quos praelegat in schola magister,
Corneli, quereris: sed hi libelli,
tamquam coniugibus suis mariti,
non possunt sine mentula placere.

"Cornelius, you grumble that I write risqué verses, not the sort a schoolmaster would dictate in class. But these little books are like husbands with their wives – they can't please without a cock." *Martialis* 1.35. tr. Shackleton Bailey 1993: 64

In his introduction in the first book Martial elaborates: *Lascivam verborum veritatem, id est epigrammaton linguam, excusarem, si meum esset exemplum: sic scribit Catullus, sic Marsus, sic Pedo, sic Gaetulicus, sic quicumque perligitur.* "Is for the licence I use in calling a spade a spade, the language of epigram that is to say, I should make apology if the example were of my setting, but that is how Catullus writes, and Marsus, and Pedo, and Gaetulicus, and whoever else is read all through." (Ed. Shackleton Bailey 1993: 41).

Calling a spade a spade naturally involves directness and bluntness of lyrical insult:

Tanta tibi est animi probitas orisque, Sofroni,
ut mirer fieri te potuisse patrem.

"So great is the justness of your soul, Sofronius, and of your mouth, that I cannot imagine how you could manage to become a father."¹¹⁵

114 *Martialis*, book 11, poem 19. The translation is my own.

115 *Martialis*, book 11, poem 103. The translation is my own. There is an interesting bluntness also in Martial's way of addressing the reader:

Quamvis tam longo possis satur esse libello,
lector, adhuc a me disticha pauca petis.
Sed Lupus usuram puerique diaria poscunt.
Lector, solve. Taces, dissimulasque? Vale.

"I should have thought you'd had your fill
By now – this book's too long – yet still
You clamour for couplets. You forget,
My slaves need rations, I'm in debt,
The interest's due ... Dear reader pay
My creditors for me. Silent, eh?"

The poetry of Sappho, Catullus is defiantly private. One might find it indiscreet¹¹⁶. Pre-Buddhist Chinese poetry may sometimes be indirectly or perhaps even directly obscene, and it can occasionally be openly pornographic. But it is, as far as I can see, never in this way overtly and personally indiscreet.

A comparison between epistolography in early China and in Greece and Rome is instructive in this connection. Consider Cicero. Most of his letters to Atticus are intensely personal and utterly informal. They certainly are highly indiscreet. The almost 800 letters from Cicero's hand that we possess provide an intimate portrait not only of Cicero's private feelings, but also of his private style of communication. Love poetry is just another mode of this sort of private communication¹¹⁷. This mode was important in Rome and practically absent in pre-Buddhist China. We have no truly intimate and "indiscreet" exchanges of personal letters from early China, and I have certainly never seen an ancient Chinese letter which begins as informally as this one from Cicero to Atticus, dated 15. May, 51 BC, which I pick out as a random example:

Plane nihil est quod scribam. Nam nec, quod mandem, habeo (nihil enim praetermissum est); nec, quod narrem (novi enim nihil est); nec iocandi locus est; ita me multa sollicitant.

"There evidently is nothing for me to write about, for neither do I have anything to ask for (for everything has been done), nor do I have anything to tell (there is nothing new), nor is this the place for pleasantries, irritated as I am by many things..."¹¹⁸

In a letter dating from March 23, 45 BC Cicero recognizes that the problem has become mutual and chronic:

Et ego ex tuis animadverto litteris et profectu tu ex meis nihil habere nos, quod scribamus; eadem cotidie, quae iam iamque ipsa contrita sunt. tamen facere non possum, quin cotidie ad te mittam, ut tuas acciperem.

The puzzled innocent? Good-day!" Michie, 1978: 172, book 11, no. 108.

Informal poetry of this type is rare in China. The genre of unbuttoned poetry would certainly be worth a close study in its own right.

116 Jean-Jacques Rousseau speaks of "les Ovides, les Catulles, les Martials, et cette foule d'Auteurs obscènes dont les noms seuls alarment la pudeur." p. 10. There is no "foule d'auteurs célèbres et obscènes" in traditional China to take exception to. There only is largely anonymous erotic literature and pornography.

117 Cicero declares he has no time for lyrical poetry: "Negat Cicero, si duplicetur sibi aetas, habiturum se tempus, quo legat lyricos." (Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, ed. Beltrami, 1949, I: 171).

118 Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, ed. Kasten, 1980: 276.

"I notice from your letter and your from mine that we have nothing to write to each other. The same things every day, and more and more they become tiresome. And yet I cannot stop myself from sending daily letters to you so that I will receive yours."¹¹⁹

The disarming normality, informality and unpretentious intimacy of Cicero's personal letters to his friend (echoing as they do the informality of Greek discourse as exemplified in the *Symposium*, and celebrated by Aristophanes), when translated into the lyrical medium, give rise to the informal poetry of a Catullus and a Martial. It allows both for love poetry and for plenty of poetic rudeness and personal insult¹²⁰. At the root of it all is the cultivation of a special kind of deeply articulate personal friendship:

Principio cui potest esse vita vitalis, ut ait Ennius, quae non in amici mutua benevolentia conquiescit? Quid dulcius quam habere quicum omnia audeas sic loqui ut tecum?

"Firstly, what true life is there to speak of, to use a phrase of Ennius, which does not find its resting place in the mutual love of a friend? What is sweeter than to have someone to whom you can dare to say everything as you would to yourself?"¹²¹

Cicero's work *On Friendship* defines and refines a range of sensibilities which are essential to the development not only of Graeco-Roman lyrical poetry, but also of the sort of personal philosophy of life expressed in emperor Marcus Aurelius's *Eis Heauton*, "Soliloquies".

It is this institution of intimate and articulate ("indiscreet") friendship which is at the very core of what I focus on here as the special character of Greek and Roman poetry.

In this intimate and familiar communication matters of the heart and mind are articulated, get said, and get written down which go beyond even what one would say to oneself.

Nam habeo ne me quidem ipsum, quicum tam audacter communicem quam te.

"I do not even have myself to communicate as frankly with as with you."¹²²

Private sensibilities are articulated and cultivated. They become part of the public culture.

The link with the erotic comes out when one considers a letter in which Cicero goes so far as to disclose to his friend Atticus the unwelcome and

119 *Ibid.*, 12.29, Kasten, 1980: 780.

120 There is an important streak of unbuttoned communication in parts of the *Analects* of Confucius as well as in certain parts of the book *Zhuangzi* (third century BC).

121 Cicero, *De Amicitia* 6.22, cf. Billerbeck, 1829: 30 f.

122 *Letters to Atticus*, 12.39, Kasten, 1980: 794.

insistent approaches by his second wife-to-be, Publilia. He concludes on the awkwardness of the whole affair:

Res quam molesta sit, vides. Rescripsi me etiam gravius esse adfectum quam tum, cum illi dixissem me solum esse velle; qua re nolle me hoc tempore eam ad me venire. Putabam, si nihil rescripsissem, illam cum matre venturam. ...

"You can see how awful the thing is. I wrote back that I was even more seriously run down than at the time when I told her that I wanted to be alone, and that I therefore did not want her to come at that time. I was afraid that if I did not write she would be arriving with her mother..."¹²³

Greek and Latin erotic poetry results when this kind of personal communication turns to a larger audience¹²⁴.

Personal friendship with the "disciples" plays an important part, I believe, in the development of Confucius' thought. The personal and intellectual friendship (the joking relationship) with the philosopher Hui Shi was crucial in the intellectual development of Zhuang Zi. Friendship does figure importantly in the later development of lyrical poetry in China, although there is no parallel to Cicero's celebration of the importance of friendship in pre-Buddhist China. In pre-Buddhist China there is something either public or purely practical about writing. None of the early works of Chinese literature are explicitly dedicated to a certain individual as personal communication even in the way that some of Epicurus' letters are. Horace's *Ars poetica* is really entitled *Epistola ad Pisones* "A Letter to the Pisos". It maintains throughout a mode of intimate informality of communication which is quite alien, for example, to Lu Ji's *Wenfu* "Rhyme prose on literature" of the fourth century AD¹²⁵.

The history of personal epistolography in ancient Greece and in classical Roman times highlights what I consider as a very fundamental contrast between European antiquity and pre-Buddhist China¹²⁶.

123 *Letters to Atticus*, 12.34, Kasten, 1980: 786. Cicero goes on to ask for advice on when he would have to leave his house in order to "ut ego evolem (so that I can fly out)".

124 I note incidentally that the origin of the psychological novel in the work of Samuel Richardson (1689 – 1761) is also most intimately linked to the mode of the personal letter. Even Jane Austen began her work, inspired by Samuel Richardson, in the mode of the epistolary novel. See particularly Richardson's novel *Clarissa; or the History of a Young Lady* (1747). We know that Richardson had been an impassioned letter-writer from his youth. It is, after all, no coincidence that both *La nouvelle Héloïse* and *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* are epistolary novels.

125 I have compared these two works and I have found the contrast most striking and pervasive. Cf. Alexeiev, 1968 (in Russian), who provides an inspiring detailed first analysis.

126 Cf. Peter, 1901 for Roman epistolary literature, and Hercher, 1875 for a collection of ancient Greek letters. Koskenniemi, 1956 is a study of the ancient Greek epistolographic tradition. It seems to me that the very fact that the *Seventh Letter* with its insist-

We have noted that Chinese love poetry always tends to be personally discreet, although it could be pornographic in marginal cases¹²⁷. Here is one famous piece which remains well within the bounds of decency, pictoresqueness, and the impersonal poetic perspective, but which retains some of its delicately individual plain eroticism even in translation:

Green, green is the grass by the river,
in garden the willows are all dense and full.
High in the tower a woman so lovely,
she glows in the window, white and so pure.
Rouge on her cheeks, bright in her beauty,
and she puts out a pale and delicate hand.

Once long ago I sang in the barroom,
now I'm the wife of a travelling man.
He travels for pleasure and never comes home now.
A lonely bed can't be kept empty for long.¹²⁸

Note that the girl wears make-up in the absence of her husband, and that she shows herself, bares her hand in the window. What, one might ask, would a seasoned traditionalist scholar make of such a famous poem? The scholar and art critic Zhang Geng – 1760) writes:

ence on the importance of companionship in order to achieve intellectual insight could plausibly be attributed by anyone to Plato at all is in itself significant. No matter whether Plato wrote the letter or not.

127 Bischoff, 1985 describes an exceptional literary event in 353 AD which he interprets as a homosexual literary orgy. Bischoff's ranting account is of interest mostly as an eccentric sinological curiosity. The *Lanting Preface*, as well as the poems supposed to have been produced at the *Lanting* orgy (all of which are conveniently transcribed in Bischoff, 1985), while perhaps partly pornographic in purport, are strictly impersonal in their eroticism and must be seen at best as a deliberately antinomian and outrageous literary exercise. Moreover, the *Preface*, interpreted as outrageously sexual in purport by Bischoff, has been read and reread in an entirely innocent spirit as part of the all-important *Guwen guan'zhi* which was first published in 1695 and has remained until this day the most famous standard collection of the best of ancient Chinese literature. The implication here is not at all that the innocent way of reading this text is correct. The point is that this innocent reading was both eminently possible and extremely widespread in China. Many a seasoned scholar even today, when asked about the *Lanting Preface* will praise the calligraphy and refuse to acknowledge that there could be anything indecent in it. He has the unanimous backing of each and every commentator of the *Guwen guan'zhi* throughout the last three centuries, so far as I know. One could not hope for a more eloquent example of the discreetness of traditional literary Chinese treatments of the erotic.

128 *The Nineteen Old Songs*, no. 2, Waley, 1961: 50 f. I quote the translation in S. Owen, 1989: 20 and refer the reader to Owen's fascinating interpretation of the piece.

This poem is satirical. Although it is not clear what is going on, surely it is concerned with the profligate busbody of a husband. If one takes this to sing a hymn to a whore, how would she be worth singing about and wasting one's brush and ink?¹²⁹

Chinese poetry of the period after the Buddhist impact on Chinese ways of thinking during the third century AD falls outside the scope of this essay. But let us finally indulge in some exceptional pieces of love poetry spuriously attributed to Song Yu (third century BC), who was reputed to have been a bit of rake, and to the poet Sima Xiangru (179 – 117 BC) who became famous for his love affair. These pieces show something of the prevailing atmosphere.

During the time of King Xiang of Chu, Song Yu was taking recreation leave. Tang Le maligned him in front of the King: "Yu is a man of a pleasing appearance, he is capable of subtle formulations, but when he was travelling he made love to his landlord's daughter. When he returns to serve you, you should find out about this."

When Song Yu returned from his leave the King told him that he had a pleasing appearance and that he was capable of subtle words, but that when he was out travelling he had made love to the daughter of his landlord. When you now report back to me for work, how can I fail to despise you?"

Song Yu said: "My pleasing appearance I owe to my parents. The frequent use of subtle words I have learnt from the Sage (Confucius). Once I was out travelling, and my servants were hungry, the horses were tired. Just at that moment the master of the house was leaving, and the old lady went out to the market, so that only the daughter of the landlord was at home. That daughter wanted to put me up above the hall, but that seemed too much of an honour. On the other hand putting me up below the hall was too much of a dishonour. In the end she chose a reed house and asked me to stay there. In that building there was a lute. I picked it up and played the Dark Lotus and the White Snow songs...¹³⁰

Song Yu (or, much more likely, his later imitator) continues to expound how attractive the girl was, and he then goes on to tell the story of how he resolutely refused the beautiful girl's advances!

The second romantic hero, Sima Xiangru is said to have gone further than this. We have, preserved in the collection *Guwen yuan* of the Song dynasty, the *Rhyme Prose On The Beautiful Woman*, implausibly attributed to Sima Xiangru, which contains a most striking example of sensuality and eroticism. For our purposes, the piece is so important that I shall quote most of it in full. By way of an introduction we are told that a certain Zou Yang accused Sima Xiangru of being a womaniser in front of the King of Liang. The King confronts the poet bluntly:

129 Sui Shusen, 1958: 25. This book contains an outstanding collection of traditional comment on *The Nineteen Old Songs*.

130 *Guwen yuan*, 1939, I: 61 f. For another erotic passage attributed to Song Yu see R. Van Gulik, 1951, I: 230.

"Sima Xiangru may be beautiful, but he uses make-up and cuts beguiling faces. Overly attractive people are disloyal. He probably makes attractive speeches in order to win favour, and will roam about in your interior bedrooms. Should you not investigate this matter?"

The King asked Xiangru: "Are you fond of women?"

Xiangru replied: "I am not fond of women."

The King continued: "You may not be a womaniser, but surely you do not abstain in the way of Confucius and Mo Zi?"

Xiangru said: "As for avoiding the company of women in antiquity, the disciples of Confucius and of Mo Zi, when they heard that the state of Qi had sent women, they went into hiding, when from a distance they saw that there were singing performances at court, they turned their carriages away. It is like hiding in a rocky corner when faced with the need to do something about a fire or a flood: they never expose themselves to the desirable thing. How can we conclude that they are not fond of women? As far as I am concerned I grew up in the West (i. e. in Sichuan).¹³¹ I staid all on my own, and I indulged in no illicit pleasures in my large dwellings. In the neighbouring house towards the east there was a girl. She had cloud hair and an exuberant complexion, moth eyebrows and shining white teeth. Her face was rich, her colours were abundant. Her whole appearance was resplendent. She was always on the look-out towards the west, insisting on attracting my attention. She even climbed the wall for a better view. For three years I was exposed to this. But I rejected her and did not accede to her requests.

I was humbly hoping that Your Majesty, following the justice of your ways, would call me to drive towards the east.

On my way eastwards I passed through Zheng and Wei, and I set out from Sangzhong for Zhen and Wei. I spent the night in Shanggong. In Shanggong there was an unoccupied hotel. It was all desolate and empty. The door was closed and latched during the day-time. The place looked haunted. I knocked at the door and entered the hall. There was a delicious fragrance, the curtains were drawn, a woman was there, alone, beautifully laid out on her bed. A strange flower of unsurpassed elegance, of gentle nature but of luscious appearance. When she saw me hesitating she said with a soft smile: "Of what country is the honourable guest? I suppose he comes from afar?" She prepared excellent wine and took out a lute. I struck the strings and played the tunes "Dark Orchid" and "White Snow". The girl then sang the song:

Alone in the bedroom, it seems unbearably lonely,
Thinking of a handsome man, my emotions hurt me.
Why did this charming person tarry in coming?
Time runs out fast, the flower will wither –
I entrust my body to you for eternal love.

She stuck one of her hairpins in the hair under my cap, her silk sleeves brushed past my robe. Then the sun was setting in the west, and darkness filled the room with its shadows. There was a cold breeze outside, and the snow came down in floating flakes. But the bedroom was quiet and close, one did not hear a single sound. Then she

131 This is a crucial remark: archeological finds from Sichuan show that this place was considerably freer in erotic matters than, for example, Shandong. For rich documentation of this cf. *Stories from China's past*, 1987: 131, plate 41.

had made the bedstead ready, provided with the rarest luxuries, including a bronze censer for scenting the quilts. She let down the bed curtains to the floor. The mattresses and coverlets were piled up, the pointed pillow lay across them. She then shed her upper robe to uncover¹³² her undergarment revealing her white body, with thin bones and soft flesh. Then she came and kissed me¹³³, and her body was soft and moist like ointment. Thereafter the blood in my veins had settled, and my heart had become steadied in my bosom. In my heart I made a solemn oath.¹³⁴ We were to be steadfast and faithful. Elated I set off on my distant journey and took my leave forever from this person."¹³⁵

Note that in the real life situation Sima Xiangru conforms to the social norm. His poem elopes into a literary erotic fancy of the imagination. When he arrives in those places made notorious by the lewd *Airs of Zheng* and the *Airs of Wei* he indulges in highly stylized and highly abstract almost supernatural erotic adventure. The sensibility of the *Airs of Zheng* is much intensified and rarefied by the poet. There certainly is sublime sensuality here, but the poem pretends to be apologetic¹³⁶. The romantic Sichuanese Sima Xiangru is forced into a defensive posture when he is abroad in the Far East.

I hasten to add that I do not believe that Sima Xiangru wrote this poem. I find it plausible to assume that the poem we have quoted was created in the circles around the compilers of the New Songs from a Jade Terrace of the mid-6th century AD.

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- 132 R. Van Gulik translates "took off": but how *biao* "show" can mean "take off" is not clear to me at this point, no matter how much Western taste would prefer her to take off her "undergarment" under the circumstances.
- 133 The phrase is *shi lai qin chen*. I do not know why Van Gulik translates "When then we made love..." If indeed *qin* is to be taken as "make love", something that seems uncertain to me, then we would have to translate: "Then she came and made love to me" which is a very attractive thought, of course. But I am not quite prepared to believe that this is what the text says, although I am generally reluctant to disagree with Robert Van Gulik's interpretations.
- 134 Cf. Ode 58, *Airs of Wei* no. 5, last stanza from which this phrase is borrowed.
- 135 *Guwen yuan*, 1939, *juan* 3, pp. 86 ff. Robert Van Gulik, 1961: 68 f whose translation I follow most of the time, only paraphrases the crucial first part with its important nuances, and he inexplicably omits the last few lines of the poem. As for the use of the word *shi* for "then" I must say that I am not aware of such uses of this word from the time of Sima Xiangru or before. To my ear, the usage has a slightly Buddhist hybrid flavour. But this would have to be properly investigated. As for the *Guwen yuan*, ascribed to the Tang dynasty, David R. Knechtges has argued that the compiler of the book may have had access to the collected works of such writers as Yang Xiong of the Han dynasty. For all we know he may well have had access to important sources on Sima Xiangru. (Cf. Knechtges, 1968: 19 ff and 43 ff.)
- 136 Compare the apologetic frame of novels like *Jin Ping Mei* (Lévy, 1985) and *Rou putuan* (Klossowski, 1962).

Peer review JAOS

Thank you for sending me the manuscript "Eroticism in Early Chinese Poetry..." I have read through it now and must advise you that I do not recommend publishing it in the JAOS in its (the manuscript's) present form.

Interesting as the piece is overall, it does not meet what I regard as the traditionally and conventionally accepted levels of scholarly standards. Frankly, it is more a testament to the author's pedantry and whimsy than to the study of poetry, literature, or texts in any form. I think it is rhetorically fulsome and substantively vacuous. What, really, after all, does the history of European interpretations of the Biblical Song of Songs have to do, as background, of all things with the interpretation of the Shijing? It seems very clear that this stuff, like the frequent references to Greek poetry and eroticism, is there just to give the author a chance to show what he or she must conceive of as his or her impressive breadth and cross-cultural sophistication. In fact, the effect is just the opposite: it detracts from any points the author may have regarding the poetry of the Shijing, and makes the whole piece look amateurish.

The manuscript is, in my opinion, a classic example of popularization at the expense of solid scholarship, and it is in this case imbued with an almost insufferable vein of pretense and pedantry, and false humility, that backfires, at least on me, and makes me laugh at rather than be impressed by the author's efforts. It is a parody of scholarship, an injustice to the Shijing, and an affront to the reader who expects to be treated intelligently by the writer.

To choose Ezra Pound's translations as a basis from which to start is to acknowledge right off the bat that no serious Shijing scholarship need be sought in this piece. Whatever "fun" there may be here, it is not the meat of the JAOS, in my opinion, nor of any journal or publisher that respects itself as an instrument of scholarship.