

“XI SHUAI” 蟋蟀 (“CRICKET”) AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: ISSUES IN EARLY CHINESE POETRY AND TEXTUAL STUDIES

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Abstract

The present article explores questions about the composition, performance, circulation, and transmission of early Chinese poetry by examining a small number of poems from the received *Mao shi* and their counterparts in recently discovered manuscripts. Starting from a close examination of the poem “Xi shuai” (“Cricket”), the essay briefly discusses the problems we face in dealing with looted manuscripts before advancing toward rethinking the patterns of early Chinese poetic composition and transmission. Instead of taking individual poems as discrete, reified objects in the form we encounter them in the *Mao shi*, it is suggested to read them as particular instantiations of circumscribed repertoires where the individual poetic text is but one of many realizations of a shared body of ideas and expressions. This analysis is informed by the examination of both manuscript texts and the received literature, but also by comparative perspectives gained from both medieval Chinese literature and other ancient and medieval literary traditions. In emphasizing the formation of poetry as a continuous process, it leaves behind notions of “the original text,” authorship, and the moment of “original composition”—notions that held no prominence in the early Chinese literary tradition before the empire.

The Case of “Xi shuai” 蟋蟀 (“Cricket”)

The widely discussed corpus of looted bamboo manuscripts now in the possession of Tsinghua University (Beijing) contains a short text of fourteen bamboo slips—five of them broken and incomplete—that on the

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back of its final slip is named *Qi ye* 耆夜,¹ a title that appears to refer to a banquet in celebration of a military victory over the state of Qi in the initial years of the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 B.C.E.). The manuscript, written in the Warring States period script of the southern state of Chu and believed to come from a southern tomb, has been tentatively dated to around 300 B.C.E.² The brief manuscript text narrates the process of a drinking ritual, in which first King Wu 武王 and then his brother the Duke of Zhou 周公 each present two toasts, each toast accompanied by the performance of a short song. The narrative ends with the text of the Duke's second poem, titled "Xi shuai" 蟋蟀 ("Cricket"), a poem that the Duke either extemporized or sang from memory.³

1. Here and throughout, I follow largely the transcription and interpretation of the individual characters as given in the original publication; see *Qinghua daxue cang Zhangguo zhujian (yi)* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡(壹), ed. Li Xueqin 李學勤 (Shanghai: Zhongxi, 2010), 149–55, and plates 10–13 and 62–72. (All further references to interpretative decisions by the Tsinghua editors are to these pages.) Scholars who are interested in the original graphs may easily consult this source and the excellent photographs there. Empty squares □ in the Chinese text (and the corresponding "... " in the translation) signify lacunae due to broken bamboo slips; each square signifies one missing character. For further studies on *Qi ye*, I have consulted Li Xueqin, "Lun Qinghua jian *Qi ye* de *Xi shuai* shi" 論清華簡《耆夜》的《蟋蟀》詩, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化 33 (2011), 7–10; Li Feng 李峰, "Qinghua jian *Qi ye* chudu ji qi xiangguan wenti" 清華簡《耆夜》初讀及其相關問題, in *Disijie guoji hanxue huiyi lunwenji: Chutu cailiao yu xin shiye* 第四屆國際漢學會議論文集：出土材料與新視野, ed. Li Zongkun 李宗焜 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 2013), 461–91; Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, "Qinghua jian *Qi ye* jue" 清華簡《耆夜》句解, *Wenwu* 文物 2012.1, 77–93; Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮, "Xi shuai zhi 'zhi' ji qi shixue chanshi: jianlun Qinghua jian *Qi ye* Zhou Gong zuo *Xi shuai* benshi" 《蟋蟀》之“志”及其詩學闡釋——兼論清華簡《耆夜》周公作《蟋蟀》本事, *Zhongguo shige yanjiu* 中國詩歌研究 9 (2013), 57–81; Cao Jianguo 曹建國, "Lun Qinghua jian zhong de *Xi shuai*" 論清華簡中的《蟋蟀》, *Jiangnan kaogu* 江漢考古 2011.2, 110–15; Li Rui 李銳, "Qinghua jian *Qi ye* xutan" 清華簡《耆夜》續探, *Zhongyuan wenhua yanjiu* 中原文化研究 2014.2, 55–62; Chen Zhi 陳致, "Qinghua jian suojian gu yinzhì li ji *Qi ye* zhong gu yishi shijie" 清華簡所見古飲至禮及《夜》中古佚詩試解, *Chutu wenxian* 出土文獻 1 (2010), 6–30; Hao Beiqin 郝貝欽, "Qinghua jian *Qi ye* zhengli yu yanjiu" 清華簡《耆夜》整理與研究, M.A. thesis (Tianjin Normal University 天津師範大學, 2012); and others. The most detailed study thus far is Marcel Schneider, "The '*Qi ye*' 耆夜' and 'Zhou Gong zhi qin wu' 周公之琴舞' From the Qinghua Bamboo Manuscripts: An Annotated Translation," Licentiate dissertation (University of Zurich, 2014). For a detailed discussion of the physical properties of the Tsinghua University manuscripts, including "Qi ye," see Xiao Yunxiao 肖芸曉, "Qinghua jian jiance zhidu kaocha" 清華簡簡冊制度考察, M.A. thesis (Wuhan University, 2015). Edward L. Shaughnessy uses the case of "Cricket" to repeat his opinion, no longer new to specialists, about the centrality of writing vis-à-vis all other forms of ancient textual practices. See, "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral versus Written of the *Classic of Poetry*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75 (2015), 331–75. I am not concerned with such rigid dichotomies.

2. More on the questions of dating and authenticity below.

3. While most scholars assume that the narrative presents the Duke as perceptively extemporizing the song upon the sight of a cricket, the wording *zuo ge yi zhong*

footnote continued on next page

This poem in three stanzas is very closely related to a poem of the same title (*Mao shi* 114) in the “Tang feng” 唐風 section of the *Mao shi* 毛詩, the received version of the ancient anthology of the *Classic of Poetry*. According to Han sources, the anthology was compiled by Confucius when he reduced a corpus of “more than 3,000 pieces” (*sanqian yu pian* 三千餘篇) by “removing duplicates” (*qu qi chong* 去其重) to just 305, all of which he sang to string tunes (*jie xian ge zhi* 皆弦歌之).⁴ If the manuscript is authentic, then it represents one of only two cases in early Chinese literature (the other one also in the Tsinghua manuscripts)⁵ where a multi-stanza poem (or some version thereof) from the *Poetry* appears in full outside the anthology itself. While the various received texts from early Chinese literature—both historiographic and philosophical—contain numerous quotations from the *Poetry*, there is only instance, in *Guoyu* 國語, where a full poem is quoted, “Haotian you cheng ming” 昊天有成命 (“Grand Heaven Had Its Accomplished Mandate”; *Mao shi* 271), a song of merely 30 characters.⁶ The longest quotation from the *Poetry* in any received early text is a single stanza of 48 characters from “Huang yi” 皇矣 (“Great Indeed”; *Mao shi* 241), found in *Zuo zhuan* 左

作歌一終 is ambiguous: *zuo* 作 as a transitive verb can mean either “to create” or “to give rise to”; in the latter sense it would suggest “to perform” an already existing song. The phrase *yi zhong* 一終 refers to a self-contained musical unit; see Fang Jianjun 方建軍, “Qinghua jian ‘zuo ge yi zhong’ deng yu jieyi” 清華簡“作歌一終”等語解義 (www.gwz.fudan.edu.cn/Web/Show/2295), accessed on July 20, 2018.

4. *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982), 47:1936.

5. This is the poem “Jing zhi” 敬之 (“Be Reverent”; *Mao shi* 288), a text that in the *Mao shi* comprises 54 characters. The manuscript version of 55 characters is found in the text *Zhou gong zhi qinwu* 周公之琴舞 (The zither dance of the Duke of Zhou) of 17 bamboo slips, with the manuscript title written on the back of the first slip. Sixteen of the 17 slips are complete; only slip 15 is broken off. See *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* (san) 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (叁), ed. Li Xueqin (Shanghai: Zhongxi, 2012), 132–43, and plates 8–11 and 52–67. Like *Qi ye*, the manuscript *Zhou gong zhi qinwu* has received numerous studies. For a thorough and inspiring analysis, see Gu Shikao 顧史考 (Scott Cook), “Qinghua jian ‘Zhou gong zhi qinwu’ ji Zhou song zhi xingcheng shitan” 清華簡〈周公之琴舞〉及《周頌》之形成試探, in *Disanjie Zhongguo gudian wenxianxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 第三屆中國古典文獻學國際學術研討會論文集, ed. Lin Boqian 林伯謙 (Taipei: Dongwu daxue, 2014), 83–99. Another detailed study is Schneider, “The ‘Qi ye’ 耆夜’ and ‘Zhou Gong zhi qinwu’ 周公之琴舞.” The manuscript starts out with a poem “made” or “performed” (*zuo* 作) by the Duke of Zhou, followed by a suite of nine poems (or a poem in nine stanzas) “made” or “performed” by King Cheng 成王. The first of these nine corresponds to the received “Jing zhi” poem. Unlike in the *Qi ye* manuscript, there is no situational context provided to the poems, which are simply written out in sequence. In each of the nine parts, the second half is set off by the additional phrase “The coda says” (*luan yue* 亂曰); the received version of “Jing zhi” does not include this phrase.

6. In *Guo yu* “Zhou yu, xia” 周語下, 3.4; see Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2002), 103.

傳.⁷ By contrast, the manuscript text appears to have contained three stanzas of “Cricket” of altogether 132 characters, of which 108 are still fully legible while twenty-four others are lost to damage.

This article presents a brief comparison of the two versions of “Cricket” and then proceeds to discuss a number of basic methodological issues concerning the study of the manuscript version. The main part of the article is concerned with the nature, composition, and transmission of poetry before the dawn of the Chinese empire.⁸

| | Manuscript version | Mao shi version |
|----|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 蟋蟀在堂，役車其行 | 蟋蟀在堂，歲聿其莫 |
| 2 | 今夫君子，丕喜丕樂 | 今我不樂， |
| 3 | 夫日□□，□□□荒 | 日月其除， |
| 4 | 毋已大樂，則終以康 | 無已大康，職思其居 |
| 5 | 康樂而毋荒，是唯良士之方方 | 好樂無荒，良士瞿瞿 |
| 6 | 蟋蟀在席，歲喬云落 | 蟋蟀在堂，歲聿其逝 |
| 7 | 今夫君子，丕喜丕樂 | 今我不樂， |
| 8 | 日月其減，從朝及夕 | 日月其邁， |
| 9 | 毋已大康，則終以祚 | 無已大康，職思其外 |
| 10 | 康樂而毋□，是唯良士之懼懼 | 好樂無荒，良士蹶蹶 |
| 11 | 蟋蟀在舍，歲喬□□ | 蟋蟀在堂，役車其休 |
| 12 | □□□□，□□□□ | 今我不樂， |
| 13 | □□□□，□□□□ | 日月其愆， |
| 14 | 毋已大康，則終以懼 | 無已大康，職思其憂 |
| 15 | 康樂而毋荒，是唯良士之懼懼 | 好樂無荒，良士休休 |

| Manuscript version | Mao shi version |
|--|---|
| The cricket is in the hall, Like a war-chariot in its movements. Now [you] noble men, be greatly delighted, greatly pleased! The days [... ...] [... ...] dissolution. ⁹ | The cricket is in the hall, The year-star is about to vanish. Now we are greatly pleased, As days and months dissolve. |

7. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 1495 [Zhao 28].

8. Several of the studies mentioned in n. 1 likewise present a comparison between the two versions, albeit without a full discussion of the textual differences and the methodological questions arising from them.

9. Here, I accept the Tsinghua editors' reading of *wang* 忘 (“forgetting”) as *huang* 荒 (“dissoluteness”). In doing so, I am less following the received *Mao shi* version (which has indeed *huang*) than considering the context. The theme in this stanza is clearly not about forgetfulness but about the correctly ritualized way of enjoying pleasure in moderation.

Manuscript version

***Mao shi* version**

Do not be excessively pleased,
and [you] finally will be at ease.
At ease and in pleasure without abandon—
this indeed is the fine man being measured,
measured.¹⁰

Do not be excessively at ease,
Duly mind your proper station.
Enjoying pleasure without abandon,
the fine man is vigilant, vigilant.

The cricket is on the mat,
the year-star is about to set.
Now [you] noble men,
be greatly delighted, greatly pleased!
The days and months will vanish,
They go from dawn to dusk.
Do not be excessively at ease,
and [you] finally will be blessed.
At ease and in pleasure without [...] —
this indeed is the fine man being vigilant,
vigilant.

The cricket is in the hall,
the year-star is about to pass.
Now we are greatly pleased,
As days and months move on.

Do not be excessively at ease,
Duly mind what is beyond [yourself].
Enjoying pleasure without abandon,
the fine man is anxious, anxious.

The cricket is in the house,
the year-star is [...].
[... ..].
[... ..].
[... ..].
[... ..].
Do not be excessively at ease,
and [you] finally will be vigilant.
At ease and in pleasure without abandon —
this indeed is the fine man being vigilant,
vigilant.

The cricket is in the hall,
The war-chariots stand at rest.
Now we are greatly pleased,
As days and months slip by.
Do not be excessively at ease,
Duly mind your proper worries.
Enjoying pleasure without abandon,
The fine man is serene, serene.

10. Here and after the final character of each stanza, the manuscript clearly shows the usual reduplication mark =. While noticing the mark, the Tsinghua editors claim, without further explanation, that its presence here “differs from general usage” (*yu yiban yongfa butong* 與一般用法不同), and that the editors therefore “suspect that it indicates that the line should be read twice” (*yi zhi gaiju ying chongfu du yin zhi gāi jū yīng chōng fù dú* 疑指該句應重複讀). This seems unwarranted speculation. Reduplicatives at the end of a line are among the most common euphonic feature across the *Mao shi*, and there are ten songs in the received anthology (*Mao shi* 6, 7, 13, 49, 58, 138, 148, 189, 237, 245) that include the construction *zhi* 之+ reduplicative, several of them repeatedly. Li Xueqin, the general editor of the Tsinghua manuscripts (sic), treats the reduplication mark in just this conventional sense; see Li, “Lun Qinghua jian *Qi ye de Xi shuai shi*.” Inexplicably, most other scholars have simply eliminated the reduplication from their reproduction of the text, violating a basic principle in manuscript transcription.

About half of the text is different across the two versions. Compared to the received text, the manuscript “Cricket” shows the following differences:

1. Its many textual variants include orthographic variants where different characters are used to write the same words (sounds); lexical variants where different but semantically similar words are written; and lexical variants that differ in meaning, in some cases constituting entirely different lines.
2. Its perspective of speech is different in that it does not include the first-person pronoun *wo* 我. Instead, descriptive sentences attributed to “us” in the received text are addressed as exhortations to “[you] noble men” in the manuscript.
3. Phrases are transposed from one line to a different one.
4. It contains two additional lines per stanza, but not by the simple addition of a couplet. Instead, parts of these additions also exist in the received version, but in contracted form.
5. The final couplet of each stanza has four additional characters, thus violating the tetrasyllabic meter. However, the meter of these couplets can still be reconstructed as tetrasyllabic by removing unstressed particles.¹¹
6. It rhymes differently.
7. It is placed in an entirely different historical context.

To begin with the final observation, here is the *Mao shi* Preface to “Cricket”:

刺晉僖公也。

[“Xi shuai”] criticizes Lord Xi of Jin [839–822 B.C.E.].

11. In each case, one can easily elide the conjunction *er* 而 in the first half of the couplet as well as the demonstrative pronoun *shi* 是, the copula *wei* 唯, and the genitive conjunction *zhi* 之 in the second half, turning an irregular couplet such as *kangle er wu huang, shi wei liangshi zhi fangfang* 康樂而毋荒，是唯良士之方方 into the classical form of *kangle wu huang, liangshi fangfang* 康樂毋荒，良士方方. For a discussion of such “irregular lines” in the received anthology, see George A. Kennedy, “Metrical ‘Irregularity’ in the *Shih ching*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 4 (1939), 284–96, where Kennedy argues that the additional particles are “unstressed” and therefore without effect on the basic tetrasyllabic meter.

儉不中禮。故作是詩以閔之。欲其及時以禮自虞樂也。此晉也而謂之唐。本其風俗。憂深思遠。儉而用禮。乃有堯之遺風焉。

He was frugal but not in accordance with ritual propriety. Thus, [someone?] made this poem to express sympathy for him, wishing that, at the proper time, he would take pleasure for himself according to ritual. [“Cricket” belongs to the state of] Jin, which is also called Tang. Being rooted in local custom, its worries are profound and its longing is far-reaching; [it claims that] in frugality, one relies on ritual. This embodies the surviving customs of [sage king] Yao [of Tang].

Here, the *Mao shi* preface not only dates the poem three centuries later than the manuscript does, but also foregoes any specific notion of authorship. Moreover, it regards “Cricket” as a poem of criticism, while the manuscript views it as a celebratory song. Together, the preface and the poem—the latter through the differences in form and content listed above—raise fundamental issues for our understanding of the composition, transmission, meaning, audience, and purpose of poems such as “Cricket.” In the following, I explore some of these issues. First, however, it is important to address the problem of looted manuscripts and how it severely limits our analysis.

The Problem of Looted Manuscripts

To date, the Shanghai Museum (manuscripts acquired in 1994), Yuelu Academy (2007), Tsinghua University (2008), Peking University (2009, 2010), Anhui University (2015), and possibly others are in the possession of large caches of unprovenanced—recently looted and purchased—bamboo manuscripts from, presumably, Warring States through Han times. None of these manuscripts has been sufficiently and independently tested, but all are claimed to be authentic by the institutions that own them and the scholars who publish them. Within this situation we have not one problem but three: the problem of possible forgeries, the problem of lack of contextual information, and the problem of how to work with stolen goods in ethical and responsible ways. I will briefly address them separately.

According to the Tsinghua editors, the manuscripts were donated by a Tsinghua University alumnus in 2008, after they had surfaced on the Hong Kong antiquities market. The editors give a date of 305 B.C.E. +/- 30 years, based on carbon-14 dating of a single bamboo slip.¹² While most researchers accept the authenticity of the Tsinghua manuscripts, at least one group of scholars claim that the *Qi ye* manuscript is a modern

12. *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian (yi)*, “Preface,” 3.

forgery.¹³ Whether or not one agrees with their (so far isolated) conclusion, it must be noted that the ink of the actual characters has never been tested, and that blank, unwritten bamboo slips from ancient sites exist in considerable quantities. It does seem possible that a modern person—or a collaborative team—deeply familiar with both ancient Chinese texts and Warring States paleography and phonology could produce a Chu-script text like those found among the Tsinghua manuscripts. Claims that such forgeries would be too difficult or impossible remain impressionistic and cannot be proven or disproven. A poor forgery—the widely shunned manuscripts owned and published by Zhejiang University may be a good candidate—does not disprove the abilities of potential forgers; if anything, it only reveals a set of criteria easily known and observed by them. We can never know the skills of the most capable forgers because they remain undetected, but we underestimate them at our own peril. As the most prestigious academic and cultural institutions in Mainland China are now in an arms race to purchase ever more important, more beautiful, and more complete manuscripts on the Hong Kong antiquities market, prices will rise in response to demand, and with them the incentives to create highly sophisticated forgeries. As we study the looted manuscripts available so far and report with great excitement our new insights derived from them, we *believe* them to be authentic, and we surely *hope* so and *want* them to be so, but we do not *know*.

Even if the manuscripts are genuine—looted but not forged—they present enormous ethical, legal, and scholarly problems that have barely been discussed.¹⁴ At this point, the market increasingly encourages and rewards more looting and illegal selling. In recent years, large collections of manuscripts have been archaeologically recovered, but—unlike with the earlier discoveries of the Han dynasty tombs at Yinqueshan 銀雀山 (Linyi, Shandong, excavated 1972), Bajiaolang 八角廊 (Dingxian,

13. Jiang Guanghui 姜廣輝, Fu Zan 付贊, and Qiu Mengyan 邱夢燕, “Qinghua jian Qi ye wei weizuo kao” 清華簡《耆夜》為偽作考, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 2013.4, 86–94.

14. For a laudable exception, see Paul R. Goldin, “Heng xian and the Problem of Studying Looted Artifacts,” *Dao* 12 (2013), 153–60. For broader cross-cultural context, including the texts of the various international resolutions pertinent to engagement with looted artifacts, see Colin Renfrew, *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership* (London: Duckworth, 2006). A number of prominent Chinese scholars have engaged in discussions over the authenticity and possible forgery of looted manuscripts; see the well-annotated discussion by Christopher J. Foster, “Introduction to the Peking University Han Bamboo Slips: On the Authentication and Study of Purchased Manuscripts,” *Early China* 40 (2017), 172–81. A particularly pertinent study is Hu Pingsheng 胡平生, “Lun jianbo bianwei yu liushi jiandu qiangjiu” 論簡帛辨偽與流失簡牘搶救, *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究 9 (2010), 76–108. However, the issue of forgery is separate from the ethical, legal, and scholarly questions concerning looted manuscripts.

Hebei, 1973), Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Changsha, Hunan, 1973), or Shuanggudui 雙古堆 (Fuyang, Anhui, 1977)—most of their contents are now administrative, legal, or technical in nature, as opposed to texts related to the received classical tradition of literary, philosophical, or historical writings.¹⁵ By contrast, most looted manuscripts that have been acquired over the past twenty-five years—the major exceptions so far being the Qin dynasty administrative, technical, and legal texts held by the Yuelu Academy and the Qin technical manuscripts held by Peking University¹⁶—are precisely that: philosophical, literary, or historical texts with received counterparts, or texts of this kind that are more or less directly related to the classical tradition. The situation is particularly grave with regard to pre-imperial (as opposed to Qin and Han) manuscripts: no recent archaeological find has yielded even a fraction of the Shanghai Museum or Tsinghua University texts; even the last major such find, at Guodian 郭店 (Jingmen, Hubei, 1993), is dwarfed by them.

As a result, in working with philosophical, literary, or historical manuscripts we now depend overwhelmingly on looted artifacts as our benchmarks in studying and rethinking early Chinese intellectual and cultural history. Neither the Shanghai Museum nor the Tsinghua University texts provide any kind of context: we do not know from where these manuscripts come, whether or not they are complete, to whom they may have belonged either personally or institutionally, who produced them, who their audience was, what purpose they may have served, what their place was in relation to a possibly much larger body of other (tomb?) artifacts, how they were originally arranged in their physical surroundings, and so on. Instead, we are facing displaced and nearly disembodied texts and ideas whose only remaining connection to their original social context is their own material and visual features. Even if all our looted manuscripts turn out, as we hope, to be genuine, they do not lend themselves to conclusions about their actual *Sitz im Leben*. In consequence, studies on these manuscripts focus mostly on their paleography or on the ideas expressed in them. Yet lacking all context in terms of origin, circulation, and reception, it is impossible for us to reconstruct their place in intellectual history: any such manuscript could be a possible textual

15. There are two major exceptions from recent years: the Western Han texts found at the Haihun hou 海昏侯 tomb (Nanchang, Jiangxi, 2011–16), and, reported in 2016, a set of Warring States texts found in Jingzhou 荊州 (Hubei). Both are awaiting publication.

16. One may note that the manuscripts purchased by the Yuelu Academy in 2008 and those purchased by Peking University in 2010 were acquired only after such local and pragmatic writings had finally risen in prestige, lagging the literary, philosophical, and historical texts by about a decade. Finally, certain excavated collections are mixed in nature, e.g., those from Mawangdui or Yinwan 尹灣 (Lianyungang, Jiangsu, 1997), but the overall trend in the purchases of looted manuscripts is nevertheless clear.

witness within a series of other witnesses, or it could just as well be a random, isolated, and idiosyncratic piece of writing signifying little beyond its own existence. We simply do not know, and we must acknowledge this lack of understanding before advancing generalizations regarding the intellectual history of early China. We also cannot draw conclusions from isolated pieces of evidence across different types of writing: particular practices of text copying of legal, technical, or administrative texts, for example, may have depended on specific institutional structures and demands that, on the other hand, may not have applied to literary or philosophical texts at all. In fact, generalizations may not even be drawn across different texts within a single corpus of looted manuscripts because we do not know whether all these texts indeed originated from a single environment or were cobbled together before they were sold in Hong Kong. Strictly speaking, each looted manuscript can only be studied within its own boundaries; and often we do not even know what these boundaries may have been originally.

Beyond these basic *scholarly* issues with looted manuscripts are, finally, also ethical and legal ones. They implicate every scholar, Chinese or foreign, who validates them through academic research: more recognition generates more demand, and more demand stimulates more supply, that is, more looting. Scholars of early China are well aware of this dilemma: on the one hand, principled arguments exist against participating in this vicious cycle. On the other hand, the historical knowledge possibly gained from some of these manuscripts—even within the limits outlined above—may be too important to ignore. In their accumulation, these newly available sources have the potential to change and expand entire narratives of early Chinese history; to ignore them would mean to willfully perpetuate traditional views that we know are in urgent need of modification. Does the quest for historical knowledge constitute a defensible ethical stance in accepting looted artifacts? Even if so, could it also be ultimately self-defeating as it may encourage further looting, with the profound *loss of knowledge*, outlined above, as the inevitable result?

In my view, there is no single clear answer to these questions. At this point in the history of our field, each scholar must conscientiously choose and defend their position, and these individual choices must be accepted. What I would like to suggest, however, is the following: the destruction of knowledge that occurs when manuscripts are looted from ancient sites deprives these sites, together with their objects *in situ*, from taking the place they deserve in world cultural heritage. Looting is theft from humanity in general and from Chinese civilization in particular. For us, scholars and curators of the ancient past, Chinese and foreign, perhaps the time has arrived to come together, acknowledge the dilemma we share, speak out collectively, and urge the authorities

at every level to double and triple their efforts in fighting the looting. The emergence and subsequent purchase of yet another corpus of looted manuscripts—even under the name of repatriation—is not cause for celebration. It is cause for our collective and public concern in defense of Chinese cultural heritage.

One Poem or Two? Questions About the Composition and Transmission of “Xi shuai”

The majority of studies of the *Qi ye* manuscript “Xi shuai” poem that I have consulted all ask the same question: are the manuscript “Xi shuai” and its received *Mao shi* counterpart two separate poems or just one? Nearly all studies contend it is just one poem, albeit in two versions (without defining the line that separates a “version” from a different text). This inevitably leads to a second question: which of the two is earlier? Implied in this question is further: which one is the “original,” or at least closer to some even earlier “original version,” and therefore also more trustworthy as a representation of how this particular poem looked in the beginning? And how should one date the earlier poem? The scholars cited above¹⁷ have come to different conclusions: most of them believe the manuscript version is the older one; only Cao Jianguo 曹建國 sees the manuscript text as the work of someone who imitated the *Mao shi* poem. Li Xueqin 李學勤 has taken the most extreme position in claiming that the manuscript version reflects the original, early Western Zhou composition by the Duke of Zhou. Other scholars privileging the manuscript text have been more cautious, claiming instead that it represents a Springs and Autumns or Warring States composition. Finally, Li Rui 李銳 has thoughtfully surmised that the two poems may have originated from a single text but then got separated into two mutually independent “textual lineages” (*zuben* 族本), and that it is therefore fruitless to ask which of the two texts is the earlier one.

The *Mao shi* “Xi shuai” appears as the more standardized text in several ways, most importantly in the final lines of each stanza. On the assumption that canonization also involves standardization, the *Mao shi* version may thus appear to be the later text, where—as noted above—the extended final lines of the manuscript text have been transformed without semantic loss into the canonical tetrasyllabic form.¹⁸ But what would this mean for the canonization of the *Poetry* altogether? Did the Tsinghua manuscript stand somehow outside the canonization process,

17. See n. 1.

18. See n. 11.

containing some idiosyncratic version of “Xi shuai” that by 300 B.C.E. was otherwise already replaced by the canonical form similar to the one found in the *Mao shi*? Or had, more generally, the redaction of the *Poetry* in its later-known form not yet occurred by 300 B.C.E., despite its traditional attribution to Confucius and regardless of the fact that in two bamboo manuscripts from Guodian, also dated to c. 300 B.C.E., the *Poetry* is listed as part of the classical curriculum of the “Six Arts” (*liu yi* 六藝)?¹⁹ In the latter case, the *Mao shi* version must be very late indeed, and the result of a graphic and phonological standardization for which William H. Baxter has called it “a Zhōu text in Hàn clothing: both its script and, to some extent, its text have been influenced by post-*Shijing* phonology.”²⁰ Yet under either scenario, we cannot take the received *Mao shi* as altogether representative of the *Poetry* at the time of the Tsinghua manuscript.

What many current readers of “Xi shuai” share, though they do not always make this explicit, is the presumption of a single original moment, and single author, of textual composition that resulted in a written *Urtext* from where the poem began its journey through time along relatively stable lines of manuscript copying. In the Western tradition, this is the model familiar since at least the fourth century B.C.E. when the Alexandrian philologists began to create editions of the Homeric epics where they had to decide between different textual variants found in different manuscripts of the same text.²¹ It was the great German philologists Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) and Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), however, who pioneered the scientific method for establishing critical editions of classical texts.²²

In one way or another, scholars operating on the assumption of direct copying from manuscript to manuscript as the principal form of textual transmission subscribe—whether they know it or not—to the Lachmannian model of the *stemma codicum*, where written texts begin from a single point of origin and from there branch out into separate lineages,

19. Jingmen shi bowuguan, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998), 179 (*Xing zi ming chu* 性命出), 188 (*Liu de* 六德); further 194–5 (*Yucong* 語叢).

20. William H. Baxter, “Zhōu and Hàn Phonology in the *Shijing*,” in *Studies in the Historical Phonology of Asian Languages*, ed. William G. Boltz and Michael C. Shapiro (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991), 30. I will return to the question of standardization and canonization below.

21. Glenn W. Most, “What Is a Critical Edition?,” in *Ars Edendi Lecture Series*, vol. IV, ed. Barbara Crostine, Gunilla Iversen, and Brian M. Jensen (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2016), 168–74.

22. For a thorough introduction, see Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann’s Method*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For a brief account, see also Most, “What is a Critical Edition?,” 175–78.

an idea that, for example, is made explicit in Li Rui’s notion of different *zuben*. In 2002, I offered the following alternative reflection:

My own recent work on textual variants of *Odes* quotations in a series of six excavated manuscripts has led me to assume such a more fluid state of various, mutually independent written instantiations of what is essentially the same—i.e., in its wording largely stable—text. I suggest that while all these versions go back to an *Urtext* that can no longer be recovered, their various written forms do not stem from a single model; strictly speaking, there is no single written original behind the different versions. This is not meant to rule out the possibility that the unrecoverable *Urtext* was initially composed in writing. It only suggests that after the composition, the text was not continuously transmitted along the genealogical lines of the *stemma codicum*. I thus differ from the view that in early China, textual lineages of single works were assigned high prestige first and foremost as *writings* and were primarily transmitted through the process of copying. ... For a single manuscript, we can propose only a single mode of production: it was either copied or not. But this does not preclude the concomitant appearance of manifestly different types of variants in a single manuscript, some resulting from a process of copying (even where the latter remains difficult to prove), others from writing on the basis of memory or oral transmission. The point is that the written appearance of a manuscript may reflect not only the mode of its own production. It may in addition also embody earlier stages in the process of textual transmission and thus constitute an artifact of several chronological layers.²³

Today, I find it no longer meaningful to suggest that “all these versions go back to an *Urtext*”; instead, I would now emphasize even more strongly that “there is no single written original behind the different versions” of a poem. We do not know how to imagine the moment when someone composed the first “Xi shuai” poem, or how any other such poem subsequently derived from it. In thinking about the two “Xi shuai” poems, the question is therefore not which of them might be earlier and which later, nor can we embark on a search for “the original poem.” Instead, we may address the relationship between the two by asking: under what model of textual transmission can we explain how the poem developed from the *Mao shi* version to the manuscript version, or vice versa? Or should we rather reject any such linear development from one to the other?

23. Martin Kern, “Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China,” *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4 (2002), 149–50, 171–72.

A simple model of consistent visual copying from a written original cannot explain why one text has more phrases than the other, why shared phrases and entire lines appear in different places in the two poems, why the two poems differ in their perspectives of speech, why they have different rhymes, why they are contextualized and historicized in different ways, and why they contain phrases and lines of entirely different content. Whatever textual practices led to the two texts we now have (and possibly numerous others we no longer have, or have yet to discover), they must have included acts beyond those performed by faithful scribes. While individual scribes in both medieval Europe and Tang dynasty China, “in the absence of an ideological conception of an original that has a unique, authorizing form, felt free to produce copies that varied from their exemplars at virtually every level,”²⁴ the differences between the two “Xi shuai” texts reflect something more profound altogether: two parallel, separate realizations of a text that are not simply *written differently*, but—far more consequentially—are *writing something different altogether*, namely, texts with different historical contexts and meaning. Here, the question of textual reproduction becomes one of textual transformation and renewed composition that involved something close to authorial agency even though it was performed on some preexisting model. Nothing of this is primarily a question about written or oral transmission; it is a question about conceptions of textual fidelity, fixidity, integrity, authority, and control. What can be ruled out for the two “Xi shuai” poems, however, is clear: there is no direct line from one version to the other where a scribe copied the former from the latter, if by “copied” we mean an attempt to reproduce an existing model with some degree of fidelity. At least one of the two people who wrote the two poems knew of another version—or someone before him had known of it—but chose to compose something new and different. Who these people were, what their overall education was, to which social stratum they belonged, and to what extent they participated not merely in scribal practices but also in the shaping of poems like “Xi shuai” and other literary texts, we have no idea.

However, from the exquisite calligraphy and generous spacing of some of the literary, philosophical, and historical Warring States manuscripts, we may conclude that they were as much meant to be *seen* as to

24. Thomas A. Bredehoft, *The Visible Text: Textual Production and Reproduction from Beowulf to Maus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 63; for the copying of poetry in Tang dynasty China, see Christopher M. B. Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

be *read*. Whoever wrote the *Qi ye* manuscript was trained not just in the writing system but in the execution of beautiful, representative calligraphy. The manuscript was probably valued for its appearance and was possibly created as a display item that conferred prestige on its owner. Equally probable is that such an artifact of writing was not a primary text but a secondary one: among the cultural elite, at least the local elite, its contents will have been known and cherished already.²⁵ In general, this will have been true for manuscripts placed in tombs, and even more so for manuscripts made specifically as burial items. The latter must have existed in an earlier form before, and they were familiar, at a minimum, to the person buried with them. At the same time, we do not know how much authorial or editorial agency we can grant the scribe of such a manuscript. What William G. Boltz has noted for the early *Laozi* 老子 materials is just as true for poetry:

A large part of the evidence of recently excavated pre-Han and early Han manuscripts suggests that to think we will find “originals” of well-known works, which can be identified from the outset as single texts composed by a single author at a single time is an unwarranted presumption. The manuscript evidence suggests instead that early Chinese texts often are not comparable to, for example, early Greek or Latin texts where we typically find a clear authorial identity and a stable compositional structure, whatever internal “corruption” the text may have suffered in the course of its transmission. ... This is so not just for want of sufficient manuscript evidence, but because the circumstances surrounding the compilation and composition of early Chinese texts seem often to have been different from those of the Mediterranean west. For a given received work there may not have been an identifiable original author in the first place.²⁶

Altogether, at stake with the two “Xi shuai” texts are fundamental questions like these: what actually is the textual identity of a poem in early China? How does it come into being? How shall we think about its authorship? Who owns or controls a poem? What are our most plausible models for textual transmission and circulation?

25. Note the parallel to earlier bronze inscriptions which likewise were not primary records but secondary representations and transformations of such records, as noted by Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Issues in Western Zhou Studies: A Review Article,” *Early China* 18 (1993), 162–63.

26. Boltz, “Why So Many *Laozi*-s?,” in *Studies in Chinese Manuscripts: From the Warring States Period to the 20th Century*, ed. Imre Galambos (Budapest: Institute of East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, 2013), 9–10.

Repertoires, Composite Texts, Authorship

In an influential 2005 article, Boltz advanced the notion of “composite texts” made of “building blocks,” that is, smaller textual units that could be flexibly compiled in different contexts.²⁷ This notion fits the available evidence and renders concepts such as “the original text,” “the original author,” or “the time of the poem’s composition” meaningless. Unlike Greek or Roman literature—but very much like most other ancient and medieval literary traditions—early Chinese literature before the advent of the imperial state did not emphasize the notion of individual authorship, ownership, or control of texts. Within the *Poetry*, even in poems such as “Grand and Lofty” (“Song gao” 崧高; *Mao shi* 259) and “The Multitudes” (“Zheng min” 烝民; *Mao shi* 260), which in their final quatrains declaim “Jifu made a recitation, its lyrics are very grand” (*Jifu zuo song, qi shi kongshuo* 吉甫作誦，其詩孔碩) and “Jifu made a recitation, may it be gentle as the clear wind” (*Jifu zuo song, mu ru qing feng* 吉甫作誦，穆如清風), such utterances are not statements of authorship but references to performances that seem external to the poems themselves.²⁸ Likewise, a text such as *Confucius’ Discussion of the Poetry* (*Kongzi shilun* 孔子詩論), a looted manuscript text so titled by its modern Shanghai Museum editors,²⁹ discusses a great many titles from the *Poetry* and yet never once refers to a poem’s moment or purpose of original composition, or to the identity of its author. Probably a teaching manual for how to use poems and their topics in situational contexts, it focuses instead on their core ideas, often captured in a short descriptive phrase or even

27. William G. Boltz, “The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 50–78.

28. Note that in both cases, the final claim about Jifu is formally distinct from the preceding text, separated by a rhyme change; that the claim about Jifu as reciter or author is not related to anything within the poems; that Jifu has no presence or voice in either text; that in both cases, the poems are composite structures, including royal speeches, proverbs, language from administrative documents, poetic phrases found elsewhere in the *Poetry*, and narrative prose; that the poems show a number of parallels especially to other poems that are even more densely modeled on administrative documents and bronze inscriptions; that while quotations of the two poems abound in early sources, these never include the final quatrains; that there is no early reference to the poems that mentions Jifu as their author; that elsewhere in the early textual tradition, Jifu appears as a military leader, but never as a poet or literary author; and that any seemingly self-referential notions of authorship are exceedingly rare in the *Poetry*, indicating that authorship was not an integral property of such texts.

29. *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (yi)* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書（一），ed. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), 13–41, 121–68.

single defining word.³⁰ Finally, and more generally, not one of the literary, philosophical, or historical manuscript texts that have surfaced—looted or excavated—over the past four decades carries the name of its author, nor does any such manuscript name a specific author of any other text.

As in the medieval poetic traditions of China and Europe,³¹ the general lack of emphasis on authorship in early Chinese poetry is directly related to the overall instability—*mouvance* in Paul Zumthor’s terminology, *variance* in Bernard Cerquiglini’s—of poems. In all these traditions, the “author function” (Michel Foucault)³² does not exist as a controlling agency in either the interpretation or the stability of the text, and any effort to retrospectively “reconstruct” or “discover” a particular author or specific historical moment of composition is not merely doomed to fail but is fundamentally misguided in the first place. This is because poems existed not as discrete individual entities but as ever-renewed instantiations of “poetic material” or “repertoires” (Stephen Owen’s terms) of both themes and expressions. Consider Owen’s description of early medieval Chinese poetry:

When we set aside questions of the “original text,” authorship, and relative dating, we can think of each extant text as a single realization of many possible poems that might have been composed. What survives is certainly only a small fraction of all the poems actually composed and of different realizations of the texts that survive. We have textual variants, texts given as “variant versions” of the “same” poem, and poems considered “different” but which have lengthy passages in common. When we think of this as a spectrum of variation, we realize there is no absolute boundary separating another version of the “same” poem from a “different” poem. When we imagine the variations that no longer survive and segments combined in different ways, we begin to think of this as “one poetry,” as a single continuum rather than as a

30. Martin Kern, “Speaking of Poetry: Pattern and Argument in the *Kongzi shilun*,” in *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*, ed. Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 175–200.

31. See the seminal works by Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); and Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006). Further important studies in this field are discussed in Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper*.

32. Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. and trans. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141–60.

corpus of texts either canonized or ignored. It has its recurrent themes, its relatively stable passages and line patterns, and its procedures.³³

This is precisely what we see in numerous examples of early Chinese texts, including—but not limited to—poetry. Such fluidity, which Gregory Nagy has also claimed for the Homeric epics,³⁴ is related to a notion of poetic composition and recomposition in ever renewed contexts and on ever new occasions, be they in oral performance (Zumthor) or in the creation of new manuscripts (Cerquiglini). In other words, the stability of texts is not controlled by acts of visual copying, nor are texts, as in the Lachmannian model, to be lined up on a chronological axis. Instead, there is a constant multiplicity of different textual realizations derived from a circumscribed body of poetic material and expressions (see below). The elegance of this understanding of ancient and early medieval textuality is easy to grasp: first, it explains better than any other model the numerous textual examples both within a number of different cultures and between them; second, it transcends the simplistic dichotomy of “oral versus written” and eschews unfounded ideas about the stability of written texts, or even the desire for such stability;³⁵ and third, it places meaningful limits on the use of general notions such as “building blocks” and “composite texts.”

Let us now return to “Xi shuai” and consider once more the differences between the two versions: one text has more phrases than the other; shared phrases and lines appear in different places in the two poems; the two poems have different perspectives of speech; they have different rhymes; they are contextualized and historicized in different ways; and they contain phrases and lines of entirely different content.

33. Owen, *Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 73.

34. Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Home and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Nagy pushes his model of textual instability of the Homeric epics all the way to c. 150 B.C.E., something that to this extent has been called into question by others. While it is beyond my competence to evaluate the Greek evidence, the comparative data from early China—as well as from various medieval traditions—tend to support his fundamental idea of composition through performance. Neither Owen nor Nagy engage in spurious arguments over the presence of writing or the progression from orality to writing; like Cerquiglini, they talk about textual practices in societies, like Warring States China, where writing had long been developed and was used in a wide range of contexts.

35. It appears that in any ancient and medieval tradition, very few texts—typically legal and religious ones—were deemed sacrosanct enough to be guarded by the “canon formula.” See Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 87–106. In medieval China, as is evident from the manuscripts found in Dunhuang, only texts that for centuries had been formally canonized either by the imperial state or by religious orthodoxy were thus protected, while more recent and especially vernacular ones, including contemporary poetry, were not.

I believe that none of this is most plausibly explained by a process of direct visual copying, nor does it tally with presumptions of individual authorship, or of textual stability of written artifacts over time. Instead, the two “Xi shuai” texts are related through their overall theme, their images, and circumscribed sets of expressions that clearly distinguish them from any other poems: they are mutually independent instantiations of a shared repertoire, or “poetic material.” It is easy to imagine how other “Xi shuai” poems, were they to be discovered, would likewise be different. What does not change in either “Xi shuai” text is their fundamental idea, that is, the appraisal of pleasure in moderation.

Yet even this fundamental idea was apparently subject to variation. The Shanghai Museum manuscript *Confucius’ Discussion of the Poetry* contains repeated series of definitions that appear to capture for each poem its core idea, or rather the idea for whose expression the poem in question may be the one most appropriately applied. The passage involving “Xi shuai” reads as follows:

孔子曰：《蟋蟀》知難。《仲氏》君子。《北風》不絕人之怨。

Confucius said: “Xi shuai” is about understanding difficulty. “Zhong-shi” is about the noble man. “Beifeng” does not cut off the anger of the people.³⁶

Assuming that both the Tsinghua and the Shanghai Museum manuscripts are genuine and come from roughly the same time and geographical region—their regional identity being indicated by their shared Chu-area script—how does this comment on “Xi shuai” square with either the received text or the one in the Tsinghua *Qi ye* manuscript? It does not.³⁷ Instead, we are facing yet another, completely different reading of “Xi shuai”—one that would be incompatible with the historical contextualization of either the Tsinghua or the *Mao shi* text. “Understanding difficulty” may therefore refer to yet another poem under the same title, one that evoked the imagery of “Xi shuai” while conveying a message of both “difficulty” and the awareness of it. This poem we do not know; what we do recognize, however, is the overall lack of a unified “Xi shuai” poem. In other words, there is no single poem; there

36. Slip 27; see Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu Shilun jieyi* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書《詩論》解義 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2004), 69–80. For further discussion of the nature of such passages, see Kern, “Speaking of Poetry.”

37. I leave aside here the hermeneutic acrobatics of Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu Shilun jieyi*, 69–72, who builds speculation upon speculation to connect “understanding difficulty” to the “Xi shuai” text of the *Mao shi*.

are various realizations of poetic material under the title “Cricket” that took shape as multiple parallel, mutually independent texts, allowing for multiple hermeneutic possibilities. The title “Xi shuai” does not signify a single poem; it signifies a multiplicity of poetic expressions or, more precisely, a poetic discourse from which multiple different expressions could be generated. These expressions could exist parallel to one another, defined not by the existence of some reified “original poem” but, instead, driven by a range of situational contexts, demands, and expectations. The individual poem, if such a concept is even appropriate, was not generated by some original authorial intent but, to the contrary, arose in ever new form under specific circumstances.

If this is true of “Xi shuai,” it will also be true of other texts in the *Poetry*. The principles of textual reproduction transcend any particular example as they reflect the larger socio-cultural environment where early Chinese poetry unfolded and took its place. It should therefore be possible to identify other repertoires of poetic material and how these repertoires were realized in particular poems. Given that the model of textual production invoked here is predicated on flexible situational adaptation—as opposed to mechanical reproduction—we should be prepared for a wider range of possible realizations of poetic repertoires.

Indeed, examples are easy to find. The first is the short poem “Jing zhi” 敬之 (“Be Reverent”; *Mao shi* 288) that in the *Mao shi* comprises 54 characters.³⁸ The Tsinghua manuscript version of 55 characters, found in the text *Zhou gong zhi qinwu* 周公之琴舞 (*The Zither Dance of the Duke of Zhou*), not only shows many of the same kinds of differences that are visible between the two “Xi shuai” poems, including entirely different phrases and lines, lines of different length, and an additional line. But two features are particularly interesting: first, the manuscript text is explicitly divided into two halves, with the first being called an “opening” (*qi* 啓) and the second a “coda” (*luan* 亂), perhaps suggesting a shift in musical performance (note that the poem is introduced as a “zither dance”). The second feature that distinguishes the poem in the manuscript text is the fact that, unlike its counterpart in the *Mao shi*, it does not stand alone: it is only the initial section, or musical movement, of a nine-part “zither dance” suite that is explicitly labeled as such. If this is one form in which “Jing zhi” was known as late as around 300 B.C.E.—not as an individual poem but as part of a larger suite with a different title—then its binding canonization as part of the “Eulogies of Zhou” (“Zhou song” 周頌), presumably the earliest section of the entire *Mao shi* anthology, had yet to be accomplished.

38. See n. 5.

Before discussing further examples of poetic repertoires as the source of individual poetic utterances—including what then became discrete poems in their own right—it is necessary to reflect on the possible boundaries of such repertoires as well as on the range of possible variation. In an essay published in 2005,³⁹ I calculated the percentage of variants between the *Mao shi* on the one hand and six pre-imperial and early imperial manuscripts with text fragments from the *Poetry* on the other. Of the six manuscripts, two were from Guodian and two others were part of the Shanghai Museum corpus of looted texts (the Tsinghua texts were only published years later). The total number of characters of *Poetry* quotations in these four (presumably) pre-imperial manuscripts is 464, and the total number of variants (of any kind) is 181, or 39.0 percent. It should be noted, however, that of the 464 characters, there is significant overlap between the Guodian *Black Robes* (*Ziyi* 緇衣, with 193 characters from the *Poetry*) and its near-identical counterpart in the Shanghai Museum corpus (with 157 such characters). In other words, of the 464 characters from the *Poetry* in pre-imperial manuscripts before the discovery of the Tsinghua manuscripts, 350 come from what is essentially a single text: *Black Robes*, with more than half of these characters in duplicate. Moreover, this text as a whole, including the *Poetry* fragments, has a received counterpart in the *Liji* chapter of the same title.⁴⁰ Thus, *Poetry* quotations in previously unknown texts—the *Five Modes of Conduct* (*Wu xing* 五行) from Guodian and the *Confucius' Discussion of the Poetry* from the Shanghai Museum corpus—amount to merely 114 characters, of which 44 (38.6 percent) are variants, if compared to the *Mao shi*.

In a further step, I then calculated the percentage of variants between the *Mao shi* and the reconstructed fragments of the Western Han “three lineages” (*san jia* 三家) versions of the *Poetry* for the same set of *Poetry* fragments found in manuscripts. Here, instead of the average variant ratio of about 39 percent between the *Mao shi* and the manuscripts, the ratio is only 5.23 percent. What do these data suggest? To begin with, we may be overstating the number of manuscript variants by misconstruing the significance of particular graphs. Specifically, Chu manuscripts such as those from Guodian or in the Shanghai Museum corpus represent a distinct regional writing style whose characters do not always correspond to the standardized *kaishu* 楷書 forms known from the received

39. Martin Kern, “The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 151–58.

40. For my analysis of the manuscript *Black Robes* text and its comparison with the received version, see Martin Kern, “Quotation and the Confucian Canon in Early Chinese Manuscripts: The Case of ‘Zi Yi’ (Black Robes),” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 59 (2005), 293–332, with further references to other studies.

tradition. In other words, a Chu character may *appear* to be a variant when compared to its *Mao shi* counterpart but in fact may simply represent a particular regional way of writing. Such slippage alone, however, cannot account for a variant ratio in the manuscripts that is seven to eight times higher than what the transmitted *san jia* variants show, nor does it explain the variants between different preimperial manuscripts in Chu script. Some other forces must be in play.

The so-called *san jia* fragments, attributed to the exegetical lineages of the Qi, Lu, and Han versions of the *Poetry* anthology, were culled from nearly thirty transmitted texts of early China, but they are not the only *Poetry* fragments altogether; they are a distinct minority. A far larger group of *Poetry* parallels and quotations—those consistent with the *Mao shi*—can be found across many more early texts preserved in the received tradition. Yet considering the very high ratio of variants in manuscripts—including between manuscripts from the same geographical region and historical period—it is inconceivable that *Poetry* citations across a wide range of pre-imperial texts from different centuries and places would have accorded consistently with the received *Mao shi*. Instead, they must be the result of retrospective (Han and post-Han) standardization.⁴¹

But what about *Poetry* fragments and quotations in recently discovered manuscripts? If the received *Mao shi* poems were but one of many actualizations of larger poetic repertoires, should we not expect to find a larger range of lines that do not match the particular *Mao shi* poems? According to my earlier analysis, the high variant ratio in manuscripts, compared to the *Mao shi*, overwhelmingly reflects differences in writing, but not differences in sound: while words were written with different graphs, phonologically these graphs are close enough to one another to be interchangeable and hence simply reflect different ways of writing the same (or nearly the same) sound, which in most cases, presumably, would also have been the same word.⁴² In short, the fragments and quotations from the *Poetry* by and large cohere phonetically—and hence probably also semantically—with the received text of the *Mao shi*. Would this general coherence not suggest that the individual poems of the *Mao shi* were indeed the same as those that are quoted in manuscripts?

This question is useful for delineating the range of *variance* and *mouvance* across the different actualizations of poetic repertoires. In my view, the available evidence puts clear limits on *variance* and *mouvance*—limits that are reflected well in the “Xi shuai” and “Jing zhi” poems—but it

41. As suggested in Kern, “The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts,” 181–82.

42. This is not a foregone conclusion: given the high number of homophones and near-homophones in early Chinese, it is possible that different audiences understood different words when hearing the same sounds.

does not contradict the notion of repertoires. First, as can be seen in the “Xi shuai” and “Jing zhi” poems, even different realizations from the poetic repertoire still share a very significant number of phrases. Second, when a poem is quoted, it is rarely identified by title but, instead, is called upon with a more general signifier such as “the *Poetry* [or: a poem] says” (*shi yue/yun* 詩曰/云) or “the Major Court Hymns [or: a Major Court Hymn] says” (*daya yue/yun* 大雅曰/云). In all these instances, we do not know *prima facie* to which poem the quoted lines belong. The very fact that, in most cases, poems are invoked not by titles but by generic signifiers (the *Poetry*/the “Major” or “Minor Court Hymns,” etc.) itself suggests a looser concept of poetry that is not defined by individual titles of discrete poems. (Note here that there is no difference between the expression “a poem” and “the [anthology of the] *Poetry*.”) And third, references to and quotations from the *Poetry* are highly uneven in their distribution.⁴³ Poems are not quoted randomly: some signature lines are quoted frequently, while most other lines are never quoted at all.

For example, the poem “Shi jiu” 鶉鳩⁴⁴ (“Cuckoo”; *Mao shi* 152) comprises ninety-six characters in twenty-four lines.⁴⁵ These are arranged into four stanzas of six tetrasyllabic lines each. Quotations of this poem can be found in about twenty-three different passages in received Warring States and Han texts,⁴⁶ and in addition also in the Guodian and Shanghai Museum manuscripts. The three longest quotations—one in *Xunzi*, the other two in the Han texts *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 and *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記—contain six lines of altogether twenty-four characters; all three quote exactly the same six lines, which means that these quotations themselves may be interrelated. In their vast majority, quotations from “Shi jiu” amount to one or two lines, and very rarely four. Altogether, of the twenty-four lines, only fourteen are quoted, that is, a total of fifty-six out of ninety-six characters. Of these fourteen lines, several are repeated within the *Mao shi* poem. Meanwhile, how is the poem quoted in manuscripts? Two lines are quoted in the *Black Robes* texts from Guodian and in the Shanghai Museum corpus; the same two lines are quoted in the Guodian and Mawangdui *Five Modes of Conduct* manuscripts

43. For an easy (albeit not complete) overview, see Ho Che Wah and Chan Hung Kan, *Citations from the Shijing to Be Found in Pre-Han and Han Texts* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004).

44. The name of a bird; Legge translates it as “turtle dove,” while Waley gives “cuckoo.” Karlgren simply transliterates.

45. This case is also discussed in Wu Wanzhong (O Man-jung) 吳萬鐘, *Cong shi dao jing: lun Mao shi jieshi de yuanyuan jiqi tese* 從詩到經：論毛氏解釋的淵源及其特色 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001), 19–30; see further Paul R. Goldin, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 25, 166, n. 30.

46. Ho and Chan, *Citations from the Shijing*, 97–98.

(the Mawangdui text dating from before 168 B.C.E.); two more lines are quoted in the Shanghai Museum *Confucius' Discussion of the Poetry*; and one more line is quoted in the Mawangdui *Five Modes of Conduct*. Altogether, only five lines from “Shi jiu” are quoted in these five different manuscripts.⁴⁷ All five lines are part of the first stanza of the *Mao shi* poem and are also contained in the three longest quotations (of six lines each) of *Xunzi*, *Lienü zhuan*, and *Da Dai Liji*.

What does this mean? First, we cannot reconstruct any such poem from its quotations in either early transmitted sources or recently discovered manuscripts. And second, while a considerable number of quotations of lines appear in the received *Mao shi*, these quotations also are highly selective: across a wide range of texts, they tend to invoke the same lines over and over again—the signature lines with which a given poem is identified. These, of course, are not just the signature lines of that poem; they are the lines that express the core idea of the respective poetic repertoire to which the poem belongs. From the very concept of poetic repertoires, we would expect precisely what we see in these quotation patterns: a focus on a limited set of phrases that define the repertoire and are frequently repeated in most or all of its actualizations.

Let us look at “Shi jiu” more closely to consider why all manuscript quotations come from what in the *Mao shi* version is its first stanza. The poem, like so many of the “Airs of the States” (“Guofeng” 國風), is highly repetitive across its stanzas:

鳴鳩在桑，其子七兮·
 淑人君子，其儀一兮·
 其儀一兮，心如結兮·

鳴鳩在桑，其子在梅·
 淑人君子，其帶伊絲·
 其帶伊絲，其弁伊騏·

鳴鳩在桑，其子在棘·
 淑人君子，其儀不忒·
 其儀不忒，正是四國·

鳴鳩在桑，其子在榛·
 淑人君子，正是國人·
 正是國人，胡不萬年·

47. Kern, “The Odes in Excavated Manuscripts,” 161, 168–71.

The cuckoo is in the mulberry tree, its young ones are seven.
 The virtuous man, the noble man, his deportment is unfailing.
 His deportment is unfailing, his heart is like tied.

The cuckoo is in the mulberry tree, its young ones are in the plum tree.
 The virtuous man, the noble man, his girdle is of silk.
 His girdle is of silk, his cap is black-mottled grey.

The cuckoo is in the mulberry tree, its young ones are in the jujube tree.
 The virtuous man, the noble man, his deportment is flawless.
 His deportment is flawless, he rectifies the states of the four quarters.

The cuckoo is in the mulberry tree, its young ones are in the hazel tree.
 The virtuous man, the noble man, he rectifies the men of the state.
 He rectifies the men of the state, how shall he not have ten thousand years!

Lines 1 and 3 are repeated in each stanza. Line 1 triggers line 2: in the first stanza, line 2 numbers the young ones; in the following three stanzas, they are sitting in different trees. Line 3 is a statement on the virtuous person, which triggers line 4 in different ways: his “deportment” is “unfailing” or “flawless,” “his girdle is of silk,” “he rectifies the men of the state.” Line 5 of each stanza is anadiplosis, repeating line four; thereafter, line 6 concludes the stanza: “his heart is like tied,” “his cap is black-mottled grey,” “he rectifies the states of the four quarters,” “how shall he not have ten thousand years.”

In other words, the composition is modular; each stanza repeats the overall structure while introducing minor new elements in lines 2, 4 (repeated in 5), and 6. The single image taken from nature is that of the cuckoo and its young ones; the single person lauded is “the virtuous man, the noble man” who does what a virtuous, noble person does: he wears his ritual cap, is correct in his behavior, and rectifies others. To bring the poem to an end, the final line presents the common formulaic wish for longevity. While the four stanzas differ in some of the details, they are nothing more than variations on one another. If there were another three stanzas, they would do just the same; if a stanza went missing, nothing would be lost. In short, the entire poem can be seen as four different takes on a single repertoire, and stanza one, for reasons we do not know, ended up both in the beginning of the *Mao shi* poem and provided the gist of the text for the versions we now find in manuscripts. This does not privilege the *Mao shi* as “original”; it may simply mean that the formulas of the first stanza were the ones everyone knew. Thus, to quote a couplet from stanza one was, in effect, to quote what the entire poem was all about. That the *Mao shi* version

ended up with four stanzas instead of just two or three does not mean that this is how the poem was known. Instead, variations of the same kind were always possible as long as the same basic structure remained in place.

From quotation patterns such as those for “Shi jiu,” and from the actual examples of the “Xi shuai” and “Jing zhi” poems, we can thus develop an idea of the constraints under which the composition of individual poems from larger poetic repertoires operated. Let us now review further examples within the received literature in order to reduce our reliance on looted manuscripts of uncertain authenticity. First, consider the case of the “Martiality” (“Wu” 大武) dance suite as it is described in a narrative *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 entry nominally dated to 597 B.C.E. In the following passage, I identify the corresponding poems in the *Mao shi*:

武王克商，作頌曰。載戢干戈，載櫜弓矢。我求懿德，肆于時夏。允王保之。又作武。其卒章曰。耆定爾功。其三曰。鋪時繹思，我徂維求定。其六曰。綏萬邦，屢豐年。夫武，禁暴，戢兵，保大，定功，安民，和眾，豐財者也。

When King Wu conquered the Shang, he made a sacrificial eulogy, which says: “[He?] gathered and stored the shields and dagger-axes, gathered and encased the bows and arrows. We strive for admirable virtue, to be dispensed across this [land of] Xia. Truly the king will preserve it!” (“Shi mai” 時邁; *Mao shi* 273) He then made “Martiality.” Its final stanza says: “[You?] made firm your merits!” (“Wu”; *Mao shi* 285) Its third stanza says: “[He?] spread out this abundance; we proceed and seek for this to be established.” (“Lai”; *Mao shi* 295) Its sixth stanza says: “[He?] pacified the myriad states, made bounteous harvest-years come in succession.” (“Huan”; *Mao shi* 294) In general, “Martiality” is about [the sequence of] suppressing violence, putting weapons to rest, protecting greatness, consolidating military merits, giving peace to the folk, harmonizing the multitudes, and [creating] bounteous riches.⁴⁸

Without question, “Martiality” (or “Great Martiality” [“Da wu” 大武], as it is called elsewhere) was part of Eastern Zhou cultural memory and as such was repeatedly performed to reenact mimetically the mid-eleventh century B.C.E. Zhou conquest of the Shang. In the “Records of Music” (“Yueji” 樂記) chapter of the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記), Confucius himself is quoted as saying “So did the Way of Zhou reach throughout the

48. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 744–6 [Xuan 12].

four quarters, as ritual and music were communicated and penetrated the realm—is it not appropriate that ‘Martiality’ was performed in slow, long-lasting moves?” (若此，則周道四達，禮樂交通。則夫《武》之遲久，不亦宜乎)。⁴⁹ Moreover, the dance suite was itself part of a larger performance repertoire that also included various versions of King Wu’s 武 battle speech(es) or “harangue(s)” (*shi* 誓) that could be called upon when so desired. In the following *Zuo zhuan* account for the year 538 B.C.E.,⁵⁰ the Chu minister Jiao Ju 椒舉 advised his ruler, King Ling of Chu 楚靈王 (r. 540–529 B.C.E.), on how to host the regional lords:

臣聞諸侯無歸，禮以為歸。今君始得諸侯，其慎禮矣。霸之濟否，在此會也。夏啟有鈞臺之享，商湯有景亳之命，周武有孟津之誓，成有岐陽之搜，康有酆宮之朝，穆有涂山之會，齊桓有召陵之師，晉文有踐土之盟。君其何用？宋向戌、鄭公孫僑在，諸侯之良也，君其選焉。王曰：吾用齊桓。

“I have learned that ritual is the only thing that the regional lords submit themselves to. Now, you will receive the regional lords for the first time, and thus you must be cautious about ritual. Whether or not you will achieve hegemony will depend on this meeting. [King] Qi of Xia held the banquet at the Terrace of Jun; [King] Tang of Shang claimed the Mandate at the grand capital of Bo; [King] Wu of Zhou performed the harangue at the Ford of Meng; [King] Cheng reviewed his troops at the southern slope of Mount Qi; [King] Kang gave audience at the Palace of Feng; [King] Mu held his assembly at Mount Tu; [Lord] Huan of Qi marshaled his troops at Shaoling; and [Lord] Wen of Jin issued the covenant at Jiantu. Which of these ceremonies will you use? Xiang Xu of Song and Gongsun Qiao of Zheng are there, the finest men of the

49. Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 1023–29; James Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites* (New York: University Books, 1967), vol. 2, 121–25. On the song and dance suite “Martiality,” see Wang Guowei 王國維, *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林 (Taipei: Shijie, 1975), 2.15b–17b; Sun Zuoyun 孫作雲, *Shijing yu Zhou dai shehui yanjiu* 詩經與周代社會研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1966), 239–72; C. H. Wang, *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays in Early Chinese Poetry* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988), 8–25; Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 165–95; Du Xiaolin 杜曉勤, “*Shijing* ‘Shang song,’ ‘Zhou song’ yunlü xingtai jiqi yu yuewu zhi guanxi” 《詩經》“商頌”、“周頌”韻律形態及其與樂舞之關係, *Kyūshū daigaku daigakuyin jinbun kagaku kenkyūyin* (*bungaku kenkyū*) 110 (2013), 1–28.

50. See Martin Kern, “The ‘Harangues’ in the *Shangshu*,” in *Origins of Chinese Political Thought: Studies in the Composition and Thought of the Shangshu* (Classic of Documents), ed. Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 281–319, especially 303–11.

regional lords. You shall make your choice." The king said: "I will use [the ceremony of Lord] Huan of Qi."⁵¹

What we have here for both King Wu's harangue(s) and the dance suite attributed to him is not a privileging of the written record—there is no mention at all of any writings—but, instead, an account of a performance culture where existing repertoires of earlier performances and texts could be selectively reenacted. This, of course, is how ritual and cultural memory worked in premodern societies—and continue to work in contemporary religion—where defining moments of a society's past were and still are today continuously reimaged, reperformed, communicated, and perpetuated.⁵² If genuine, the *Qi ye* and *Zhou gong zhi qinwu* manuscripts themselves were part of this culture of memory where practices of performance and writing constantly interacted and evolved together over time.

Most interestingly, the *Zuo zhuan* passage on King Wu's compositions mentions first a "eulogy" (*song* 頌) and then *in addition* "Martiality"; altogether, it quotes four poems from the "Eulogies of Zhou," three of them as "stanzas" of "Martiality." However, in the anthology of the *Poetry*, these quotations are *not* in stanzas of a single piece titled "Martiality" (which there is a poem of just twenty-eight characters in seven lines); instead, they all belong to different poems, each one with its own title. Considering that the *Zuo zhuan* passage mentions both a "sixth" and a "final" stanza, the suite must have contained at least seven stanzas altogether. For more than a century, modern scholars have wondered which poems from the "Eulogies" were included in the "Martiality" suite, with at least a dozen different proposals. But this Rankean quest of *wie es eigentlich gewesen* may itself be misguided: we do not know which songs were included and in what sequence they were performed. Instead, we should recognize that *Zuo zhuan* and *Mao shi* organize the texts of the "Eulogies of Zhou" in fundamentally different ways, and that this difference is not a problem to be solved

51. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 1250–51 [Zhao 4].

52. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*; Stanley J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 123–66; Martin Kern, "Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shangshu*, and the *Shijing*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang Through Han (1250 BC to 220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 143–200. In drawing on comparative data, I of course assume that ancient Chinese civilization did not operate entirely on its own terms, incomparable to any other ancient civilization, and that therefore, basic competence in comparative anthropology is a *sine qua non* in the study of early China.

but a phenomenon to be acknowledged. What if there never was a single, immutable, way of organizing “Martiality”? And what if the *Mao shi* arrangement of multiple short poems under individual titles was but a late textualization of a body of poetic material—the repertoire of “Martiality”—after its flexible, adaptive use in actual performances had already ceased? Once again, as in the case of “Jing zhi” and “Xi shuai,” a belief in individual authorship, in the moment of first composition, and in “the original poem” whence a line of written copies emerged, is the least plausible answer.

A wealth of other evidence shows that the combinatory and composite use of poetic repertoires in early China, and their use in ritual performance contexts, was the rule, not the exception. To stay with the “Eulogies of Zhou”: as I have noted elsewhere,⁵³ most of the thirty-one “Eulogies” are very short: twenty-seven of them have just between eighteen and sixty characters each, and they are not discrete, self-contained textual units. Instead, some are closely interrelated, sharing entire lines or even couplets with one another but not with other poems, which marks them as expressions of particular repertoires.⁵⁴ For example, of the mere thirty characters of “Year of Abundance” (“Feng nian” 豐年; *Mao shi* 279), sixteen are verbatim identical to verses in “Clear Away the Grass” (“Zai shan” 載芟; *Mao shi* 290), while “Clear Away the Grass” also shares three more lines with “Good Ploughs” (“Liang si” 良耜; *Mao shi* 291) and additional lines with four other neighboring texts.⁵⁵ In other words, we are looking not at individual (let alone individually authored) songs but at “one poetry” (Owen) that was circumscribed by the formal and semantic constraints of a particular set of ritual demands.

Recently, Scott Cook in an excellent analysis of *Zhou gong zhi qinwu* has made similar observations regarding both “Jing zhi” and other “Eulogies of Zhou,” showing how lines and phrases from different poems appear to have been combined in different configurations according to different occasions in Western Zhou court ritual.⁵⁶ In this, Cook develops further Fu

53. Martin Kern, “The Formation of the *Classic of Poetry*,” in *The Homeric Epics and the Chinese Book of Songs: Foundational Texts Compared*, ed. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018), 48–49.

54. For example, the four “Eulogies” numbered 286–289 in the *Mao shi* sequence share lines in several ways, and only with one another; see W. A. C. H. Dobson, *The Language of the Book of Songs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), Appendix II, 247–49.

55. These are *Mao shi* 277, 292, 293, and 294.

56. Gu Shikao, “Qinghua jian ‘Zhou gong zhi qinwu’ ji *Zhou song zhi xingcheng shitan*.”

Sinian's 傅斯年 (1896–1950) earlier discussion⁵⁷ that the short “Eulogies of Zhou,” including “Jing zhi,” may once have been part of the repertoire of dance and music at the Zhou royal court. Writing in 1928, many decades before any of our recently discovered manuscripts had come to light, Fu perspicaciously noted the multiple connections between different poems within the “Eulogies of Zhou” and surmised that the “Eulogies” may have originally been multi-stanza compositions (or at least groups of poems that bore an inseparably close connection with one another) instead of the isolated short poems as which they appear in their *Mao shi* arrangement. He then assumed a history of loss and dissolution of the original forms of the “Eulogies of Zhou” due to their exclusive existence in the hands of Western Zhou court ritualists: once the Western Zhou court was gone, its music, dance, and poetry fell into disorder as well.

Cook, writing with the advantage of the manuscript evidence, advances a further hypothesis, namely, that the *Mao shi* preserves but selections of these earlier, more extensive suites that the Zhou court ritualists had employed in different configurations. This is entirely possible, but I am inclined to go just one step further. Instead of a history of loss and disintegration of the original poetic suites after the fall of the Western Zhou, or of a canonical selection of earlier texts in the *Mao shi*, I read the manuscript evidence as suggestive of a living poetic tradition, with the interaction of writing and performance in multiple, mutually independent strands continuing over many centuries beyond the Western Zhou, and possibly all the way through the Warring States. Moreover, this tradition included not just the “Eulogies of Zhou” but all sections and genres within the *Poetry*.

As suggested above for “Airs of the States” such as “Xi shuai” and “Shi jiu,” the notion of poetic repertoires is not limited to the “Eulogies of Zhou.” Furthermore, decades ago C. H. Wang proposed a “Weniad,” that is, an epic of King Wen that he reconstructed from a series of “Major Court Hymns” (“*Daya*” 大雅) in the *Poetry*.⁵⁸ I do not agree with Wang’s attempt to show that China, too, has some sort of an epic tradition,⁵⁹ but

57. See Fu Sinian, *Shijing jiangyi gao* (han *Zhongguo gudai wenxueshi jiangyi*) 詩經講義稿 (含《中國古代文學史講義》) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue, 2004), 15–34.

58. Wang, *From Ritual to Allegory*, 73–114; for the “Weniad,” Wang includes *Mao shi* 245, 250, 237, 241, and 236 in what he claims to be the “correct sequence ... for the delineation of the epic fable.”

59. Wang’s earlier attempt to interpret the “Airs of the States” (“*Guofeng*” 國風) section in the *Poetry* along the Parry-Lord theory of oral-formulaic composition was more seriously problematic; see his *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). During the 1970s, the study of classical Chinese literature saw a surge in comparative work that tried to show how certain Western concepts could be applied more or less directly to the

footnote continued on next page

his readings still reveal an important fact: the five poems he regrouped as the “Weniad” do in fact belong to a single narrative of the Zhou heroic past. Similar groupings on other topics can be found across both the “Major” and the “Minor Court Hymns” (“Xiaoya” 小雅).⁶⁰ What these repertoires share are, once again, sets of topics and phrases that could be compiled in modular ways, yielding ever new poems that were always similar but never the same. This modular way of poetic composition extends further: large parts of the *Lyrics from Chu* (*Chu ci* 楚辭) anthology should be read as modular compositions from circumscribed repertoires—just consider the various cycles named as “Nine ...” (*jiu* 九)⁶¹—as should be Western Zhou bronze inscriptions⁶² and the stele inscriptions of the Qin First Emperor.⁶³ The principle of modular composition evident in all such “one poetry” can also be observed in later Chinese poetry, most conspicuously in medieval *gushi* 古詩 and *yuefu* 樂府,⁶⁴ and well beyond poetry even in traditional Chinese visual and material culture.⁶⁵

Hypotheses or Conclusions?

Considering the phonological stability between *Poetry* quotations in manuscripts and their counterparts in the *Mao shi*,⁶⁶ together with the fact that the manuscripts since c. 300 B.C.E. (Guodian, Shanghai

Chinese tradition. Unfortunately, many of these early comparative efforts were little more than a mechanical and uncritical transposition of Western concepts. Something similar had happened in China already in the early twentieth century, in the wake of the collapse of the empire and subsequent rise of the nation state. It was at this time when Chinese scholars redefined the “Airs of the States” as simple, straightforward folk songs that could be understood at the level of their literary surface. However, it appears that no ancient reader had taken the “Airs” this way; all early sources show them as being in need of complex hermeneutic explication. See Martin Kern, “Lost in Tradition: The *Classic of Poetry* We did not Know,” *Hsiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry* (Montreal: Centre for East Asian Research, McGill University) 5 (2010), 29–56.

60. See, for example, *Mao shi* 192–197, 209–212, 253–258, or 259–262.

61. Remarkably, *Zhou gong zhi qinwu* is also divided into nine sections, and the “*Lisao*” 離騷 (“Encountering Sorrow”) itself contains a reference to “Nine Songs” (“*Jiu ge*” 九歌, not to be confused with the cycle of the same title within the *Chu ci* anthology). Other early texts likewise mention nine musical movements.

62. See Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Issues in Western Zhou Studies.”

63. See Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2000).

64. In addition to Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, see also Joseph R. Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1992).

65. See Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

66. Kern, “The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts.”

Museum, Tsinghua University) include very few lines not found in the *Mao shi*, something close to the core of the *Mao shi* was known no later than in the fourth century B.C.E. While this corpus existed not yet in a fixed written form, it constituted the very center of elite education, as shown in texts like *Zuo zhuan* or in the various pronouncements by Confucius in the *Analects*: the *Poetry* was internalized through memorization and could be recited or written down whenever the situation called for it. And most importantly, as now in evidence from examples like “Xi shuai” and “Jing zhi,” even at a time when at least the signature lines of the *Poetry* had already solidified into quasi-canonical formulas, such textual performances in speech and writing still continued in mutually independent realizations of circumscribed repertoires.

What does all this mean for the formation, integrity, and transmission of our texts? How can the same material reappear in different configurations, without any ancient scholar ever being disturbed by this, or even just wondering about the original version of these materials? What even *is* an early Chinese text? In a culture where the same historical story, poem, or philosophical thought existed in multiple versions and could be attributed to multiple speakers, nobody before the founding of the empire in 221 B.C.E. ever claimed his version to be superior, older, or more authentic than any other one. In early China, there were arguments over ideas, but there was never an argument over texts.⁶⁷

There are various ways of dealing with this situation, some better than others. One that the prevailing evidence will not support is the idea that we somehow have access to the original versions of ancient texts together with access to the minds of their authors, and that texts were stable in the way that we have come to think about texts today. These are mere fantasies.

Across all ancient cultures I am aware of, there is but one that privileged individual authorship from a very early moment:⁶⁸ Greece, subsequently canonized and emulated in Rome and since the Renaissance hailed as the origin of, and model for, all “Western” civilization. In sixth- to fifth-century B.C.E. Greece, the following phenomena all happened within three generations, according to their reflection in the available sources: the Homeric epics became widely known, widely performed texts across a range of Greek cities; written texts began to circulate

67. *Mengzi* 孟子 7B.3 is the one exception in doubting the trustworthiness of the “Wu cheng” 武成 text, a lost account of the Zhou conquest (not to be confused with the chapter of the same name in the “ancient-text” *Shang shu* 古文尚書). However, the argument in *Mengzi* is not one of textual criticism but one of moral indignation.

68. In early China, *Mengzi* 3B.9 is exceptional in attributing the *Springs and Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu* 春秋) to Confucius, and *Mengzi* 5A.4 and 5B.8 are equally exceptional in emphasizing the persona of the author as well as authorial intent in the *Poetry*.

beyond their immediate contexts, and new texts were composed and read explicitly as writings; the words “poet” and “rhapsode” began to appear in written sources, denoting the “maker” and “performer” of epic poetry, respectively; and the name Homer appeared in the writings of Xenophanes (c. 570–c. 475 B.C.E.) and Heraclitus (c. 535–c. 475 B.C.E.) and was then quickly identified as the “maker” of poetry. Altogether, the paradigmatic cultural texts, the paradigmatic author, the widespread use of writing, the practice of reading, as well as the conceptual distinction between author and performer all emerged together and in relation to one another. Thus, when the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* became Pan-Hellenic texts, they simultaneously acquired their named author who, as a poet, “made” the texts in the way pottery was made (one of the earlier activities for which the verb *poiéō* was used—just as it was by Greek vase painters and sculptors since the sixth century as they signed their works).

As early as there were texts widely celebrated as literature, there were authors: not only Hesiod and Homer, but very soon also those who identified themselves at the outset of their works, such as Hecataeus (c. 550–c. 476 B.C.E.), Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 B.C.E.), and Thucydides (c. 460–c. 395 B.C.E.). All three historians used the very first words of their books to introduce themselves and their goals. Far from introducing an element of questionable subjectivity, the historians named themselves at the outset to inspire trust: as history does not write nor explain itself, it becomes credible only through the credentials and explicitly presented methods of its author who takes personal responsibility for his text. Each author named his own local origin that placed him in a particular geographical, political, and cultural context, and from which he derived his authority and trustworthiness. Remarkably, the historians introduced themselves in the third person, not merely asserting but also historicizing themselves and their texts before turning to their first-person narrative histories. This practice must have developed in response to how the earlier poets—most notably Homer and Hesiod—had invoked not themselves but the muses (or the goddess, in the case of the *Iliad*) at the beginning of their texts: while for Homer and Hesiod, such invocation endowed the poetic text with authority because it was derived from divine inspiration, for Hecataeus, Herodotus, and Thucydides, the authority of their historical writing was rooted in a claim for truthfulness that was grounded in the historian’s personal accomplishment and judicious use of existing sources. Moreover, these historians defined themselves as self-aware authors, situated themselves against the history they were writing, and insisted on the reliability of their information, as opposed to the myths and legends told by the earlier poets. Altogether, no later than in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E., the Greeks found it difficult to do without specific ideas about authors and the origins of their texts, be it in epic, dramatic, or historical writing.

Nothing like this existed in China before the Qin-Han imperial state, by which time Chinese written texts had been in existence for more than a millennium. Different civilizations develop different institutions and different impulses toward the stabilization of their textual traditions. In China, this process was overwhelmingly dominated by the imperial state since the late third century B.C.E., when a canon of classical texts was first monopolized at the Qin imperial court and competing versions that circulated beyond imperial control were censored and suppressed.⁶⁹ Institutions such as the imperial academy, the imperial library, and the channels of written communication between the imperially appointed (and salaried) scholars, officials, and ultimately the emperor himself all contributed to a new textual culture in need of a stable historical past complete with genealogies of discrete texts, intellectual lineages, and individual authors. Discussions over specific versions and interpretations of the classics were officially sponsored at the imperial court, and texts had to be collated, defined, and created in newly standardized editions for the purposes of the imperial library as the repository of officially sanctioned knowledge.⁷⁰ Repeatedly, the process of textual stabilization was one of reducing larger bodies of textual materials to smaller, more manageable ones, whether in poetry, historiography, or philosophy.⁷¹

When thinking about ancient texts, we must not project either the paradigms of fifth-century Greece or the practices of the Chinese imperial state onto the textual culture of pre-imperial China. Instead, we are best advised—especially in light of the evidence from manuscripts—to let go of what earlier generations have taken as certainties, including assumptions of stable, discrete texts, their authors, and their linear transmission as writings. We know that Chinese texts before the empire could be written down repeatedly, and locally, but without any central control over their integrity and without concern over their origin or authorship. No philosophical, literary, historical, or technical manuscript from early China contains the name of its author. No pre-imperial manuscript exca-

69. As I have argued elsewhere, the Qin measures of “burning of the books” and “burying the scholars alive” of 213 and 212 B.C.E. were—if anything—attempts to control the inherited textual tradition, not to destroy it (as then falsely claimed for the purposes of Han Confucian mythology); see Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang*, 155–96.

70. Under the leadership of Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–78 B.C.E.) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 C.E.) in response to Emperor Cheng's edict of 26 B.C.E.; see Piet van der Loon, “On the Transmission of Kuan-tzu,” *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952), 353–93.

71. For philosophical texts, see, e.g., van der Loon, “On the Transmission of Kuan-tzu,” 361, and John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988–94), vol. 1, 106–7. For the typical process of editing down materials from larger corpora, including both philosophical and historical texts, see Martin Kern, “The ‘Masters’ in the *Shiji*,” *T'oung Pao* 101 (2015), 335–62.

vated or looted that has a counterpart in the received tradition is in its internal structure identical to the transmitted version. Texts continued to change, and not always for the better.⁷² For China before the empire, we are lacking any central institution—like the Temple in Jerusalem for the Hebrew Bible⁷³ or the Ptolemaic Library at Alexandria⁷⁴—where a text was written, edited, and guarded, and from where it was then faithfully transmitted by mechanical visual copying.

It is fruitless to consider any newly discovered manuscript text as “better” or “more original” or “more reliable” than its received counterpart. Just because we now have one or two such manuscripts does not privilege any of them in any way: there could be a hundred more that are waiting to be discovered, not counting all those that no longer exist. Even worse are attempts to assimilate the rich textual and conceptual differences of newly discovered manuscripts to the traditional framework, instead of allowing these differences to challenge whatever we thought we already knew. The vast majority of manuscript texts are unknown from the received tradition; they are there not merely “to complement” (*buchong* 補充) the tradition, but to allow us to rethink the early development of Chinese textuality, including our all-too-familiar concepts and classifications that are entirely the result of early imperial attempts to retrospectively create a textual order in the service of the imperial state, its officials, and its scholars.

Texts before the empire were not just written differently; they were different texts. Every early text we know went through multiple stages of transmission, often both oral and written, and was reconstituted repeatedly in different forms along the way. In performance, textual repertoires were mobilized in response to situational needs, leading to a multiplicity of individual textual realizations none of which should be reified as a discrete, autonomous work. In writing, we know of different local and regional scribal traditions, of regional calligraphic systems, and of the fact that many ancient characters were eliminated when the Chinese script was standardized beginning with the Qin and Han empires. Each case of rewriting a text into a new script form involved acts of interpretation. Every transcription required a new decision on which graph to choose, opening some possibilities of meaning and interpretation while excluding others. From

72. A case in point is the “Black Robes” bamboo manuscript from Guodian (and its looted counterpart in the Shanghai Museum corpus) which shows far greater formal coherence and internal textual logic than the disjointed version of the same text in the received *Liji*; see Kern, “Quotation and the Confucian Canon in Early Chinese Manuscripts.”

73. See Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

74. Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

the macro-level of the integrity of an entire text to the intermediate level of its internal structure and further to the micro-level of individual character choices, early Chinese texts were reconstituted in new and different ways over and over again. Thus, early imperial commentaries were also not just attached to fixed, preexisting canonical texts; they created these texts, prominently among them the *Poetry*, anew by way of particular hermeneutic decisions.

Instead of regarding pre-imperial texts as stable objects, we are better advised to look for the processes of change and fluidity that may inform us about textual practices and the communities where such rich and varied practices were pursued. In this, we have to learn how to embrace and cherish uncertainty, and how to offer hypotheses, not conclusions. Given the extremely fragmentary nature of the evidence, the best we can do is formulate hypotheses that (a) can accommodate all the available evidence and, *equally important*, (b) are well informed by comparative perspectives. And while the next new manuscript is certain to appear, much remains to be gained from radically rethinking the received corpus and our traditional assumptions about it.

早期中國詩歌與文本研究諸問題：從《蟋蟀》談起

柯馬丁

提要

通過檢視部分傳世《毛詩》內容及其在近年所見出土文獻中的對應篇章，本文探究了關於早期中國詩歌成篇、表演、流通以及傳的問題。以對《蟋蟀》詩的細緻考察為起點，本文簡要討論了我們在處理盜掘寫本文獻時所面對的諸種問題，進而重新思考早期中國詩歌的成篇和傳播模式。學界通常將各首詩歌視為彼此分離且具象化的個體、以《毛詩》中所見的那種形式存在，與此立場不同，本文建議將它們視作有限素材庫的諸種特定實現。在這些素材庫中，作為個體的詩歌文本僅僅是某個包含多種理念和表達之共享整體的諸多具體實現之一。這一分析源自於對寫本文獻和傳世文獻的雙向考察，也得益於在中國中古文學與其它早期及中古文學傳統之間建立起的比較性視野。通過將詩歌形成強調為一種持續性過程，本文摒棄了諸如“原本”、“作者”以及“原作”時刻的概念，這些概念在前帝國時代的早期中國文學傳統中並不重要。

Keywords: *Mao shi*, *Classic of Poetry*, Manuscripts, Looted Artifacts, Repertoires, Performance, Poetic Composition, Authorship

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