

## 1.4 VERSES FROM THE *BOOK OF POETRY*

The *Book of Poetry* appears to have been the first text to be identified as a source of wisdom so great that it needed to be learned by all the elite. It is the founding text of the standard “Canon” of the later Confucian eras. The *Zuo Commentary* to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (the *Zuo zhuan*), as we have seen, portrays its pivotal role in the discourse of patricians, and the *Analects of Confucius* presents it as a core of the syllabus that Confucius taught his followers – “If you do not study the *Poetry*,” said Confucius, “how will you have words to speak?”

The importance of the text to later generations produced elaborate interpretations of the meanings of the poems. Many of the poems were read as the works of noble men of the early Zhou, and they were taken to be oblique commentary on the events of that period. In fact, the poems seem to represent a wide variety of authorial origins and motives. They range from royal temple incantations, perhaps dating from the late Shang and early Zhou, to rural chants that appear to have been early Zhou forms of very ancient peasant ritual songs. Some of the latest of the poems, dating from the early Spring and Autumn period, are frankly political in nature – complaints about the immorality of rulers and the indifference of Heaven – but a great many of the poems in the book are simply love poems or literary accounts of the trials of everyday life. These poems form important sources for our understanding of the nature of early Chinese society.

Originally, all the poems were set to music, and the music was considered as central to the aesthetic meaning of each poem as the words. By the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D. 220), however, the music had been lost. In other texts that we will encounter, we will see references to the singing of these odes by courtiers employing them in diplomatic discourse and we will encounter instances of the poems “performed” by an orchestra of musicians. The importance of the music to the cultural role of the songs cannot be underestimated. Depending on your musical taste, imagine, if the music were lost, how incomprehensible might seem the cultural influence of “La Traviata,” “Jingle Bells,” “My Way,” or “She Loves You (Yeah, Yeah, Yeah).”

There are altogether 305 poems in the text. Those below comprise a brief but somewhat representative collection, illustrating the variety of topics and voices that appear. (The number of each poem in the traditional collection is indicated to the right of the title.)

## Songs of Love and Marriage

A very substantial number of the verses in the *Book of Poetry* concern the relationship between men and women. These are often very poignant. While it would not be prudent to assume that these poems provide direct insight into the minds of peasant poets – they are probably the products of court editors who revised songs collected from the villages of China or created their own “folk songs” – they surely reflect a type of public understanding of the psychology of young people, and are in this way important cultural artifacts.

### **Oh Zhongzi, Please!**

[#76]

Oh Zhongzi, please!  
 Don't climb our village wall,  
 Don't injure the willows we've planted.  
 Not that I mind about willow trees,  
 But I am afraid of my parents.  
 You're dear to me Zhongzi,  
 But what parents will say –  
 Of that I'm afraid indeed!

Oh Zhongzi, please!  
 Don't climb our household wall,  
 Don't injure the mulberries we've planted.  
 Not that I mind about mulberry trees,  
 But I am afraid of my brothers.  
 You're dear to me Zhongzi,  
 But what brothers will say –  
 Of that I'm afraid indeed!

Oh Zhongzi, please!  
 Don't climb into our garden,  
 Don't injure the sandalwood we've planted.  
 Not that I mind about sandalwood trees,  
 I'm afraid of what people will say.  
 You're dear to me Zhongzi,  
 But what people will say –  
 Of that I'm afraid indeed!

Many of the folk songs of the *Poetry* employ repetitive schemes, in the manner of “Oh Zhongzi, Please!” What does this simple poem tell us about ancient China? Apart from the picture of the family compound, and the testimony of adventurous youth, the poem illustrates an intriguing tension between the values of chastity and a freer relationship between young lovers. While the girl who narrates is clearly constrained by the strict moral code explicit in her family, the very fact that this poem was a public expression of these ideas indicates a more playful or ambivalent attitude towards sexual relations. Consider how these same issues bear in the following two poems.

**Cock Crow**

[#96]

“The cock has crowed,  
     it’s daylight!”  
 “That’s not the cock’s crow,  
     it’s the green flies’ buzz.”  
 “The east sky glows,  
     dawn’s broken!”  
 “That’s not dawn’s glow,  
     it’s the rising moon’s light.  
         In this buzz of the flies,  
             let’s share a sweet dream!”  
 “Quick, quick! Go home!  
     Lest I’ve good cause to hate you!”

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**The Dead Doe in the Wilds**

[#23]

In the wilds there lies a dead doe  
     All wrapped in white rushes,  
 A young woman longs for spring  
     And fine young men entice her.

In the woods there grows a stand of oaks,  
     In the wilds there lies a dead deer,  
 White rushes tightly tied –  
     And a young woman, smooth as jade.

Slowly! Oh, be patient,  
     Don't pull the kerchief at my waist,  
     Don't stir the dogs to barking!

The great French sinologist Marcel Granet believed that many of the poems in the *Book of Poetry* originated as antiphonal chants sung by choruses of young women and choruses of young men as part of spring rituals of group courtship in villages across China. The form of this poem conforms well to this theory, as does its risqué theme. The original text does not indicate the speakers, and it would be as logical simply to substitute “The women” and “The men,” in the spirit of Granet’s ideas, and to allow the portrait of secret lovers to emerge from the text itself.

Granet was particularly anxious to demonstrate that the elaborate ethical and political interpretations that had come to be bestowed on the poems obscured their origins in simple popular rituals. In his brilliant and witty book, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China* [on Library Reserve], he gives a striking illustration of the divergence of late scholarly interpretations from what he himself identifies as the original meanings of the texts.

The following poem, which celebrates the isolation of a tree, was traditionally understood to be a satire directed against a particular evil patrician ruler. So hard was his rule on the common people that they wished to be free of friends or family, isolated from the pain of a society that only trampled on loved ones. For example, one line of the poem reads, “What joy, to have no awareness!”

Granet noted that the word “awareness” also carried the meaning of “acquaintance,” and making only this one change in the interpretation of the words of the poem, he suggested a far more satisfying non-political background for the poem. This is how he read the poem (at least, as rendered by Granet’s English translator, E.D. Edwards):

### **The Carambola Tree**

[#148]

In the valley is a carambola tree.  
Charming, the grace of its branches;  
How vigorous in tender beauty.  
What joy! You have no acquaintance.

In the valley is a carambola tree.  
Charming, the grace of its flowers;  
How vigorous in tender beauty.  
What joy! You have no husband.

In the valley is a carambola tree.  
Charming, the grace of its fruit;  
How vigorous in tender beauty.  
What joy! You have no wife.

For Granet, the sense was simple. This was a song sung between young men and women courting. The first stanza, sung together, expressed mutual admiration and pleasure to learn that each was unmarried. The following two stanzas were sung by the woman and man in turn. What could be simpler? Ever since Granet wrote his book in the 1920s, it has become customary to read many of the verses of the *Poetry* on two levels, both in terms of their original folk origins, and also in terms of the political and moral interpretations which were, after all, what motivated the elite to preserve them and enshrine them as canonical.

The longer poem that follows is a retrospective account of marriage. While the voice is a woman's, and there it may have had its origins in folk performance involving women, its form is very literary, and it was undoubtedly committed to writing by a man.

### The Simple Man

[#58]

You seemed a simple man,  
     bearing cloth to trade for silk,  
 But you'd not come to trade for silk,  
     you'd set your mind on me.  
 We said farewell at the River Qi ford,  
     we walked you to Dun Hill.  
 It was not I who'd put it off,  
     but you with no matchmaker.  
 "Please don't be upset,  
     we'll fix an autumn date."

I climbed a high wall  
     to gaze toward Fu Pass where you lived,  
 And when I could not see Fu Pass,  
     my tears fell flowing down.  
 And when I did see Fu Pass,  
     how gay I laughed and talked!  
 Then when you threw the yarrow-stalks,  
     they showed no baleful omens,  
 And so you came back with your cart,  
     carrying off my dowry and me.

Before the mulberry sheds its leaves,  
     how soft and glossy they are!  
 Oh dove, oh turtle-dove,  
     don't eat the mulberry fruit!  
 And oh, young girls,  
     don't take your pleasure with men!  
 A man may take his pleasure  
     and still he may be free.  
 A girl who takes her pleasure,  
     there's no escape for her.

The mulberry leaves have fallen,  
     all yellow and all sere.  
 And since I came to you,  
     I've swallowed poverty three years.  
 The River Qi was in flood then,  
     the bride cart curtains wet through.

It is not I at fault,  
    you have changed your path,  
It is you who have broken faith,  
    your favors cast this way and that.

Three years as your wife,  
    and never slack in work.  
Rising early, late to bed,  
    never a moment, never at rest.  
You found fault at first,  
    and at last you grew rough.  
My brothers disown me  
    with chortles and laughs.  
All calm I think back,  
    I alone console myself.

“I shall grow old with you,” I once vowed,  
    but age makes me only resentful.  
The Qi has its banks,  
    the lakes have their shores,  
With hair looped and ribboned,  
    how gaily you laughed,  
    how solemnly swore to be true.  
Never dreaming of change –  
    of no change did I dream –  
All’s finished, alas, all is done!

## Agricultural Life

The following poem was composed about 700 B.C. and is perhaps the most vivid description we possess of mid-Zhou village life. The voice shifts from male to female, cataloguing the rhythms of the year, perhaps stitching together lines and themes from many songs. The patchwork origins of the song may be reflected in the fact that the poet weaves together two different calendars in this description of the peasant's year. I have noted at right some corresponding periods of the Western calendar year.

### **The Seventh Month**

[#154]

In the seventh month the Fire star ebbs,	[August]
pass out the jackets in the ninth.	[October]
The first month past the solstice the wind blows sharp,	[Christmastime]
by the second it chills you through and through:	[Jan.-Feb.]
without our jackets, our rough clothes,	
how could we live out the year?	
But in the third month we repair the ploughs,	[Feb.-Mar.]
and in the fourth we stir our feet –	[Mar.-Apr.]
with wife and children all together,	
bearing hampers of meals to the southern fields,	
where the hands greet us, glad as can be.	

In the seventh month the Fire star ebbs,  
    pass out the jackets in the ninth.  
When the spring days grow bright  
    and the oriole calls,  
    the girls bear deep baskets  
    and thread narrow pathways  
    to gather young mulberry leaves;  
    and as spring days grow long,  
    they pluck clusters of aster –  
    but deep in their hearts they ache for young men  
    to return to a home with together.

In the seventh month the Fire star ebbs,	
gather up rushes in the eighth.	[September]
In the month of the silkworm, plucking the mulberry,	[April]
grip your axe by the handle	
and crop the long branches	
and pull in the tender young leaves.	
In the seventh month hear the shrike cry.	
In the eighth twine the thread –	
with thread black and yellow	
and rich red so bright,	
we'll weave skirts for our fine young men.	

In the fourth month the milkwort plant blooms. [May]

In the fifth, the cicada starts calling.

In the eighth month the harvest is gathered,

In the tenth, the leaves start to fall.

[Oct.-Nov.]

In the first month past the solstice we follow the raccoon,

capture the fox and catch the wildcat,

and sew the fur jackets for our fine young men.

In the second month's days comes the great gathering –

we drill there in arts of war:

the small pigs we hunt down we keep as our own,

and the great boars we give to our lord.

In the fifth month the locust leg twitches,

[May-June]

In the sixth, the grasshopper wing shakes.

[June-July]

In the seventh month they are out in the wilds,

in the eighth they come under the eaves,

and then in the ninth, they come in at the door.

In the tenth month the cricket creeps under my bed.

Plug up the holes and smoke out the mice,

cover the windows and plaster the door.

I sigh to my wife and my children,

“Now the turn of the year is at hand;

we must go in to dwell in our rooms.”

In the sixth month we eat plums and wild grapes,

boil mallows and beans in the seventh.

In the eighth skin the dates,

In the tenth harvest rice,

and use it to make the spring wine

that will bring us to long-eyebrowed age.

In the seventh month we eat melons.

In the eighth month we cut down the gourds,

In the ninth month we pluck up the seeds of the hemp,

bitter thistle to eat and ailanthus to burn,

so our farmers will always fed.

In the ninth month make ready the threshing ground,

we harvest the grain in the tenth:

millet, wine-barley – early ripened and late –

wheat and hemp and beans and oats.

“Ah, my farming man,

now that our grain is all gathered and stored,

come in to start work on our home.

All morning we gather the reeds for the thatch,



late into night twisting the cables.  
 Now quick, get on up to the rooftop –  
 for how soon once again you'll be sowing the grains!"

In the second month after the solstice we chop river ice with cold blows,  
 In the third, store the slabs in the dark of the icehouse.

Early at dawn in the fourth, [Jan.-Feb.]  
     we sacrifice lambs, garlic grass round the offering.

The ninth month so heavy with frost,  
 In the tenth sweep the threshing grounds clean,  
     with twin pitchers of wine hold the great village feast,  
     and slaughtering young yearling lambs,  
     we shall climb up the path to the hall of our lord;  
 "Oh, raise high the wild ox-horn goblet –  
 To long life and age without end!"

### Poems About War

The following poem is a lament concerning the hardship of military service to the lord. It is followed by a more boisterous military poem, evidently composed on the occasion of a victory banquet after a battle against a major nomad enemy of the Western Zhou dynasty, the Xianyun people. Unusual among the songs of the *Book of Poetry*, it names individuals: Yin Jifu, a minister of war whose name is familiar from the history of the reign of King Xuan (r. 827-782 B.C.), and Zhang You, apparently the leading army commander at the victory feast.

#### **Climbing the Wooded Hill**

[#110]

I climb the wooded hill  
 And gaze at my father's land.  
 "Alas!" sighs my father,  
 "My son is off serving;  
     day and night, never ceasing.  
 Oh, please take good care –  
 Come home, don't be left behind!"

I climb the bare hill  
 And gaze at my mother's land.  
 "Alas," sighs my mother,  
 "My youngest off serving;  
     day and night, never sleeping.  
 Oh, please take good care –  
 Come home, don't be cast away."

I climb the ridge  
 And gaze at my brother's land.  
 "Alas," sighs my brother,  
 "Little brother off serving;  
     day and night, always toiling.  
 Oh, please take good care –  
 Come home and don't die."

### The Sixth Month

[#177]

It was in the sixth month and all was in ferment,  
 We'd decked out our war chariots,  
 Horse teams all fit,  
 And put on our warrior gear.  
 The Xianyun nomads were all ablaze!  
 We'd no time to lose –  
 The king led us out,  
 To set right the royal domain.

Black steeds well matched,  
 All trained to high pitch –  
 It was in the sixth month,  
 When the field tasks were finished,  
 All finished, the field tasks  
 For miles all around,  
 And the king led us out –  
 The aides of the Son of Heaven.

Horse teams tall and broad,  
 How high their heads soar!  
 We set on the Xianyun,  
 We did mighty deeds.  
 Majestic and solemn,  
 We joined the work of war –  
 We joined the work of war!  
 To set right the royal domain.

The Xianyun mismeasured  
 As they massed at Jiaohu,  
 They invaded the precincts of Hao and Fang,  
 To the northern river bank at Jingyang.  
 Then our bird emblems blazoned  
 On white pennants flying

And our ten massive war wagons  
Opened the way.

We'd fit out our wagons,  
Advancing, retreating,  
Their horse teams tenacious,  
Tenacious and trained,  
We set on the Xianyun  
Upon the broad plain.  
And there fought Jifu, our great civil warrior,  
Model to all in the myriad states.

Now Jifu is host at this joyful feast –  
May he be granted countless blessings!  
We have returned from the precinct of Hao,  
Our long, long journey is done.  
Food and wine, good friends!  
Turtle, carp, and crisp meats.  
And what friend do I see here –  
The filial Zhang You!

### **Music, Banqueting, and Hunting**

The next poem describes the preparations for a ritual dance, apparently a dance of war in which past triumphs were acted out. Musicians in ancient China were often blind men, and that is the explanation for the title and opening line, and the reference to the sightless in the poem “The Magic Tower” poem below.

#### **Blind Men**

[#280]

Blind men, blind men,  
In the courtyard of the Zhou.  
Raise the face-board, stand the frame,  
Line the hooks and set the plumes.  
Hang the small drums by the big,  
Tom-toms, stone-chimes, wood block clackers –  
All is ready, now they play,  
Pan-pipes, flutes all call as one.  
Grand, grand the sound!  
A solemn song profound.  
Our forbears, oh, indeed they hear!  
Now our guests are come,  
And gaze till grand finale's done.

Not all poets saw musical celebrations as joyous occasions. The following satire on patrician banqueting provides an unusually vivid picture of the conduct of the elite. Note in particular how it portrays a variety of attitudes towards conduct, picturing both restrained and raucous elements among the nobility.

### When the Guests Are First Seated

[#220]

When the guests are first seated  
 they sit left and right,  
 Baskets and bowls are set in their rows,  
 each filled with meats and bones.  
 Wine blended and smooth,  
 they all drink in harmony.  
 The bells and the drums have been set,  
 and toasts have been raised in turn.  
 The great target is hung,  
 bows stretched, arrows set,  
 The bowmen all matched –  
 “Now show us your skill:  
 Hit the mark! Let the winners  
 console losers with drink.”

Fluting they dance to reed-organ and drum,  
 the instruments played in concert,  
 And offerings to please our host’s glorious forebears,  
 that all of the rites may be done.  
 For when all the rites are perfect in form,  
 grandly and royally done,  
 The ancestors bestow the grandest of gifts  
 and sons and grandsons rejoice.  
 So rejoice making music –  
 “To the ablest of archers!”  
 Guests pour for their partners,  
 follow host to the hall,  
 The great goblets refilled,  
 “To your dead-center shot!”

When the guests are first seated,  
 How decorous they are,  
 And while sober still,  
 So dignified, punctilious –  
 And now they are drunk,  
 their dignity flown.

They leave their seats and roam,  
     all hunched and twisted they dance.  
 Yes, while sober still,  
     oh dignified, oh grave,  
 But once they are drunk,  
     their bearing indecent;  
 For the drunk  
     know nothing of seemly behavior.

Once the guests become drunk  
     they howl and shout,  
 The baskets and bowls and knocked to the floor,  
     they dance hunched with faces like masks.  
 When people are drunk  
     they grow blind to their blunders.  
 Unsteady, caps crooked,  
     hunched dance never ceasing –  
 Take your leave once you're drunk,  
     and you'll keep fortune's blessing,  
 But when the drunk stay  
     their bad traits are exposed.  
 Wine is great pleasure  
     with decorum alone.

But with wine it is always the same;  
     some get drunk and some do not.  
 So we have to appoint a director,  
     and perhaps a clerk to assist:  
 "That drunk one is rowdy,  
     he's shaming the sober!  
 Stop him from babbling  
     like a great fool.  
 Stop saying what should not be said!  
     stop urging what should not be done!  
 Your speech makes no sense -  
     'a ram without horns.'  
 Three cups and you're witless,  
     yet shouting for more!

A very different voice animates the next poem, which depicts preparations for a patrician hunt. Hunts were not just sporting events, they were important rituals which symbolized the elite's control over territory, and provided the delicacies served at great banquets and at religious ceremonies of sacrifice.

**Lucky Day**

[#180]

Lucky day! Fifth of the week of ten –  
 prayer for the hunt, horse victim slain –  
 Chariots fine for the hunt,  
     teams of stallions strong,  
 So we mount up to the high hills  
     and chase the herds of game.

Lucky day! Seventh of the cycle of sixty –  
     steeds for the hunt, each one picked –  
 Where the beasts are plenty,  
     doe and stag abound,  
 We race by Rivers Qi and Ju,  
     toward the Son of Heaven's abode.

See them there upon the plain,  
     so broad and wide, see them all!  
 Now racing, now watching,  
     here in herds, there in pairs.  
 We take them at the left and right  
     for the Son of Heaven's feast.

We draw our bows,  
     our arrows set,  
 Now shooting small shoat,  
     now felling wild bull,  
 To feast honored guests  
     with the toasts of thick wine.

## Poems With Political Themes

The two poems below are images of the glorious early days of the Zhou. The Numinous Tower was the name given a ritual building constructed by King Wen, the greatest culture-hero of the Zhou people; its name reflects the mysterious spirit-power associated with the virtue of the Zhou founder. The Circular Moat, referred to in the poem, was another sacred precinct of the Zhou. It is often said to have been the place where the royal sons were educated, and to have been viewed as the location of the symbolic axis of the Zhou polity and the world.

### **The Numinous Tower**

[#242]

When the Numinous Tower was first begun,  
 They measured it out and marked the walls.  
 The common people all labored there,  
 And in no time at all it was done.  
 No urging was needed when it was begun,  
 Like good children the people all came.

The king was in the Numinous Park,  
 The doe and the stag couched within,  
 Doe and stag wandering at will,  
 And sleek birds gleaming bright.  
 The king was by the Numinous Pool,  
 So full with leaping fish.

On face-board and frame, fasten the hooks,  
 And hang the big drums and the gongs.  
 Once the drums and the bells are aligned,  
 Let musical joy fill the Circular Moat.  
 The lines of the drums and the bells,  
 The musical joy at the Circular Moat!  
 Banging the lizard-skin drums with a boom,  
 The blind men play for all.

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### **The Audience**

[#283]

They first appeared before their king  
 To seek the emblems of their rank  
 Dragon-banners bright blazing,  
 Chariot-bells clear jingling,  
 Bridle-straps sharp snapping,  
 Glorious gifts all glimmering.  
 They show their shining ancestors,  
 And filial make them offerings,

Seeking long-eyebrowed age  
 And everlong protection.  
 “Oh, give much glimmering grace,  
 Bright-patterned lords of yore!  
 Comfort us with blessings full,  
 Great glories gleaming ever on.”

The next poem was composed after 658 B.C., the year in which the people of Wey, harassed by nomad tribes, transferred the site of their capital and their territorial lands eastward, under the protection of Duke Huan of Qi, the great hegemonic lord of that age, settling near the abandoned site of an old state named Cao. It is said that the Duke presented the people of Wey many horses to replace those that had been stolen or killed in their struggles with the nomads.

**When the Ding Star Was Just At Mid-Sky**

[#50]

When the Ding star was just at mid-sky  
 We set to work on the palace at Chu,  
 And the rays of the sun as our guidelines,  
 We set to work on the chambers at Chu,  
 Planting hazelwoods there and chestnuts,  
 Catalpas, pawlownias, and the lacquer-tree,  
 Good timber for lutes great and small.

We climb to the site of the ruins  
 And gaze toward the hills at Chu,  
 The hills at Chu and the village of Tang,  
 Toward Mount Jing and toward our new city,  
 And descending we look at our mulberry trees.  
 The first omens we cast for are lucky,  
 And so too the others, all good.

A numinous rain has been falling!  
 Now order the grooms to prepare –  
 By last starlight we'll mount them at morning,  
 And rest them in mulberry fields.  
 It is not merely men he provides for,  
 His heart holding boundless and deep,  
 But these stallions and mares, three thousand.

The next two poems are protests against injustice. In the first, the poet adopts the persona of a loyal and hardworking officer of the king. Having sacrificed the pleasures of life in dedication to the king and the state, he laments how unfair it is that other without his sense of responsibility enjoy an easy life without suffering adverse consequences. The final poem is a scalding protest against events that followed the death of Duke Mu of Qin in 621. The Duke, who was brutal, successful, and much admired, revived an ancient custom by ordering that upon his death, the



greatest of his fighting men be buried along with him to provide him comfort and protection in the next life. The poet's view of the subsequent slaughter is expressed in acid verses.

### **The Northern Hills**

[#205]

Climb high on the northern hill,  
     pluck the bitter willows there.  
 How hardened, those young warriors!  
     Early and late at their tasks –  
 Work for the king is never done.  
     But it's my parents for whom I'm distressed.

All land beneath the broad sky –  
     there is none that is not the king's.  
 To the shores most distant,  
     there are none who are not his subjects.  
 But his ministers, they are not just;  
     I alone devote will to this work.

Like a team of four steeds ever pulling,  
     my work for the king never ends.  
 Good fortune that I'm not yet old,  
     good luck that I'm still strong,  
 My sinews still tough and taut,  
     I shore up the realm on all sides.

Some dwell at home in luxury,  
 Some serve till their bodies wither;  
 Some recumbent on their beds,  
 Some toil ever for the state.

Some yell senselessly and shout,  
 Some consumed with labors long;  
 Some recline in languid ease,  
 Some at tasks staunch for the king.

Some all blissful swill their wine,  
 Some consumed by fear of blame;  
 Some bustle out to criticize,  
 Some turn no hard task away.

### The Oriole

[#131]

“Jiaojiao,” cries the oriole  
 Perched on the thorn bush.  
 Who went with Duke Mu to the grave?  
     It was Yanxi of the clan of Ziju.  
     Now this Yanxi’s fine virtue  
     Was one of a hundred,  
 But as he drew near to the pit of the tomb,  
 Oh, how he trembled!  
 Heaven so blue  
 Cut down our fine man.  
 Could he be redeemed,  
 He’d be worth a hundred.

“Jiaojiao,” cries the oriole  
 Perched on the mulberry.  
 Who went with Duke Mu to the grave?  
     It was Zhonghang of the clan of Ziju.  
     Now this Zhonghang’s great strength  
     Could fend off a hundred,  
 But as he drew near to the pit of the tomb,  
 Oh, how he trembled!  
 Heaven so blue  
 Cut down our fine man.  
 Could he be redeemed,  
 He’d be worth a hundred.

“Jiaojiao,” cries the oriole  
 Perched on the bramble.  
 Who went with Duke Mu to the grave?  
     It was Zhenhu of the clan of Ziju.  
     Now this Zhenhu’s great valor  
     Could ward off a hundred,  
 But as he drew near to the pit of the tomb,  
 Oh, how he trembled!  
 Heaven so blue  
 Cut down our fine man.  
 Could he be redeemed,  
 He’d be worth a hundred.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *What attitudes do these poets have towards love? What seem to be the prevailing social mores?*
2. *Taken together, do these poems seem to view the patrician state positively or negatively – or is there no prevailing view?*
3. *Go through the poems and identify the social classes that you think each poetic voice represents? Where do you find ambiguities that make it hard to say?*
4. *Which poems give us the most intimate pictures of Classical life? From which do you learn the most?*
5. *Based on these poems, construct a brief almanac listing a dozen or more seasonal activities in the life of a peasant, including farming tasks, household duties, and ritual events.*

## Sources and Further Reading

The language of the *Book of Poetry* is archaic, and the songs have been studied through glosses and commentaries since at least the second century B.C. Translations such as the ones here all reflect to some degree writers' choices of which commentaries to rely on, and among various options of interpretation offered by them. For example, in preparing these translations I consulted an edition of the text called *Shijing tonggu* [Comprehensive glosses on *The Book of Poetry*], by Luo Jiangsheng [1998], which includes the text of the two earliest commentaries and selected later ones that reflect the editor's own views, as well as more summary literary approaches that present only the interpretations of the editor, such as *Shijing tongshi* [Comprehensive explications of *The Book of Poetry*], a less scholarly edition by Wang Jingzhi [1968]. There are thousands of such studies of the text, many of the most valuable edited by Japanese scholars.

Translations vary according to the sophistication of the technical scholarship of the writer and according to the writer's literary skill as well. The complete translation generally acknowledged to be the most thorough in a scholarly sense is Bernhard Karlgren's, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: 1950). Karlgren was very erudite, and translated with such precision and literary insensitivity that readers may find the text as poetic as the US tax code. At the other extreme is the poet Ezra Pound's, *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1954), animated by Pound's feverish brilliance and free of the burdens of accuracy. A middle ground and the most appropriate choice for most readers is Joseph Allen's reediting and supplement to Arthur Waley's 1937 translations: *The Book of Songs: Translated by Arthur Waley, Edited with Additional Translations by Joseph R. Allen* (New York: 1996).