

The Wáng 王 Decade

E Bruce Brooks 白牧之

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

19 July 2011

Abstract. The Royal Domain section of the Canon of Poetry (Shī 65-74), like the Yūng 鄘 (Shī 45-54) and Wèi 衛 (Shī 55-64) sections, consists of exactly ten poems. In the Yǎ or courtly division of the Shī, a ten-poem unit is called a shí 什 “decade.” That term is not used in the Fvng or popular division, but a tendency to decade structure is clear: the Chín 秦 (Shī 126-135) and Chv́n 陳 (Shī 136-145) sections also contain ten poems. Sections with more than ten poems (like Jōu-nán 周南, Shī 1-11, and Chí 齊, Shī 96-106) may imply expansion beyond an original decade. I here take up the Wáng poems to see if this unexpanded decade itself shows signs of evolution. I find that it does: it is not the beginning, but the end, of a text formation process.

Data for the Wáng poems include poem number, stanza form (3x6 means a poem of 3 stanzas, each with 6 lines), gender of speaker (*asterisked if that person is not a speaker, but rather described; S is a summary of the poem story by the poem author), and content. Common-line contacts, where they exist, are given below each poem:

65	3x10	M	courtier complaint
	ABC9		= 121ABC6 (Táng)
66	2x8	F	soldier's wife
67	2x4	F	sharing pleasure with a gentleman
68	3x6	M	soldier complaint
	ABC1		= 92AB1 (Jvng), 116ABC1 (Táng)
	A2		= 92B2 (Jvng)
	ABC3		= 80ABC3 (Jvng), 108ABC3 (Ngwèi), 117AB3 (Táng), 151ABC3 (Tsáu)
	B2		= 92A2 (Jvng)
69	3x6	*F	sad fate of rejected wife
70	3x7	M	courtier complaint
71	3x6	F	hard lot of new wife
72	3x3	F	girl misses lover
	ABC2		= 91C3 (Jvng)
	A3		= 91C4 (Jvng)
73	3x4	MS	tale of unlucky lovers
	AB3		= 59A3 (Wèi), 89B3 (Jvng), 146ABC3 (Gwèi)
74	3x4	F	enticement by girl

A few things emerge at the outset: (1) the simplest forms (the 2-stanza poems) always have F speakers; (2) poems with common-line contacts mostly have M speakers; and (3) Jvng or Táng (and Ngwèi, a state associated with Táng) or both figure in all the common line contacts, though other states (Wèi, Tsáu, Gwèi) are represented as well.

These details invite investigation. I will begin with the common line aspect.

Common Lines

First, the common-line contacts need to have their directionality determined. Waley's translations are signaled by W. Order is that of the Wáng poems.

SHR 65

Shī 65ABC9 悠悠蒼天. Shī 121ABC6 (which is also a penultimate line refrain) cries to heaven for an end to the soldiers' suffering, one aspect of which is that they cannot be back home to plant millet, thus providing their parents with food. This filialized version of the basic soldier's hardship poem is probably not very early in the larger literary scheme of things. In 65ABC9, the common line is part of a personal plaint of unspecified career cares and troubles. It begins with millet plants heavy with grain (65ABC1-2), but it is not clear what relevance these have to the main theme, unless the bent millet plants symbolize the man bowed down with troubles. The common line might fit either situation, but the secondary similarity of the millet plants suggests a not very felicitous borrowing from Shī 121. Then Shī 121 > Shī 65.

SHR 68

Shī 68ABC1 揚之水. The "fretted waters" in 92AB1 do not dislodge bundled sticks, symbolizing friends who remain true despite calumny. In 116ABC1, less felicitously, the waters contrast with steadfast rocks, symbolizing the speakers who will follow and obey their leader. Our 68ABC1 is less literarily cogent; not only is it critical, but it is not clear how the image supports the criticism. Then 92 is primary; 116ABC seems to diverge from it, but in a different direction. Shī 92 > Shī 68.

Shī 68A2 不流束薪. The waters cannot move bundled kindling. The other case is 92B2 (a line in the second stanza of that poem matching a first-stanza line of this one).

Shī 68B2 不流束楚. 92A2 (first stanza, matching a line in the second stanza of Shī 68) is the only other case. Given the conclusion about 68ABC1 (above), based on the appropriateness of this image, it follows that the three-stanza 68 has exchanged the two lines of its two-stanza prototype, and Shī 92 > Shī 68.

Shī 68ABC3 彼其之子. Always said of a man, mostly by an admiring female; so 80ABC3 (W "that great gentleman"), 108ABC3 (W "there came a gentleman"), and 117AB3 (W "that man of mine"). In 151ABC3 it is ironic (W "that fine gentleman") in a poem denouncing a seducer. Our 68ABC3, as noted above, is also critical, but of military slackers rather than of a lover. The male speaker in 68 is thus an exception in an established usage. The most likely precedent for the military Shī 68 is 80ABC3, where the male is praised in a military way. Shī 80 > Shī 68.

SHR 72

Shī 72ABC2 and A3 一日不見，如三月兮. In 91C3-4 (Shī 91 has 3 stanzas of 4 lines each), this is said by a girl who cannot meet her lover, but asks that he send her word or come to her. In the prosodically simpler 72 (3 stanzas of 3 lines each), the motif runs through all stanzas (72A3 如三月兮; 72B3 如三秋兮; 72C3 如三歲兮). Even though this reverses a previous pattern of Wáng indebtedness to other Fvng sections, on literary grounds we should conclude that Shī 72 > Shī 91. The probability is then that the third stanza of Shī 91 is a later addition to an original two-stanza poem, and that Shī 72 is itself primary rather than derivative, and presumptively early.

SHR 73

Shī 73AB3 豈不爾思 “how do I but think of you?” is always a protestation of love, but with significant differences in the four poems in which it appears. In 59A3, early in the poem, a girl affirms her love; later in the poem she goes to him. In 89B3, at the end of the poem, the girl ends by noting her lover’s failure to come, and by inference, her willingness to move on to another; this is a frequent if much deplored theme in the Jǜng section. Shī 146ABC3 juxtaposes the elegance of a courtly lover with the girl’s grief at the lack of contact between them. Of the three, the flippant 89 is likely the oldest (that is, the closest to folk origins; see Brooks **Template**), the unresolved 146 is a gentrified version of it; 59 ends with the girl going to be married, a happy ending with a subtheme of filial regret. Hopeless love is developed into a story in 73, the first two stanzas affirming the male’s affection, but also his inability to come; in the third stanza, the narrator tells how they died without marrying, but were buried together. This sentimental conclusion had later literary continuations.¹ It seems that the situation in Shī 89 was sentimentalized in three different directions, none of which has greatly influenced the others. In terms of literary origins, Shī 89 > Shī 73.

Three of the four Wáng poems with outside contacts (Shī 65, 68, and 73) thus turn out to be secondary to those contacts, all of which are in the Jǜng and Táng sections. In two cases, an F speaker in a prototype is replaced by an M speaker. Shī 72 moves in the opposite direction: a Wáng poem has been literarily developed in a Jǜng poem. The horizon of Wáng, so to speak, centers on Táng and especially Jǜng, but over time, that influence seems to have been bidirectional. In terms of time strata, Shī 72 is early, and 65, 68, and 73 are later. It follows, among other things, that the Wáng decade was not composed as a unit, but grew over time.

Theme

We may now review the Wáng poems by omitting the three seemingly late ones, to see what the decade looked like before they were added:

66	2x8	F	soldier’s wife
67	2x4	F	sharing pleasure with a gentleman
69	3x6	*F	sad fate of rejected wife
70	3x7	M	courtier complaint
71	3x6	F	hard lot of new wife
72	3x3	F	girl misses lover
74	3x4	F	enticement by girl

Thematically speaking, Shī 74 is near to the female enticements of the Jǜng section, and thus likely early; we have suspected that it in turn influenced a *late* Jǜng poem. Closely resembling the late Shī 65 (not present here) is Shī 70, which also has an M speaker and is a courtly complaint; its stanza length is at the high end for this group. Despite lack of common lines, this poem appears to be typologically late, and on the parallel of the excluded Shī 65, it probably belongs to a later phase in the growth of the Wáng section. Classifying it as late would leave six presumptively early poems.

¹See the later story of Hán Píng, Sōu-shǔn Jì #294 (DeWoskin 137).

The Six Presumptively Early Poems of the Wáng Decade

Shī 66 君子于役 (Wifely concern; patriotic)

My gentleman 君子 is on service,
 I know not what his term is –
 Where has he got to?
 The chickens roost in their niches,
 The sun sinks to evening,
 The cattle and the sheep come down.
 My gentleman is on service,
 How can I but think of him?

My gentleman is on service,
 Not for a day, nor for a month –
 When will he come back?
 The chickens roost on their perches,
 The sun sinks down to evening,
 The cattle and the sheep are home.
 My gentleman is on service,
 If only he is not hungry or thirsty!

Shī 67 君子陽陽 (Amorous: a woman with her lover)

My gentleman 君子 is pleased.
 In his left he holds his pipes,
 With his right he summons me to the chamber,
 How great my joy!

My gentleman is happy,
 In his left he holds his plume,
 With his right he beckons me to the platform,
 How great my joy!

The virtuous apartness of Shī 67 (portraying the loyal wife of a soldier on campaign) might be read as a moralizing reproof of the amorous togetherness of Shī 66. However that may be, the two are literarily linked by the use of 君子 as the woman's reference to the man, and Shī 66 was probably composed with Shī 67 in mind.

Shī 69 中谷有蕓 (Sympathy with a divorced woman)

In the vale is motherwort,
 Scorched where it was dry;
 There was a girl who had to leave,
 Sadly does she cry,
 Sadly does she cry,
 To meet such hardships

In the vale is motherwort,
 Scorched where it had grown;
 There was a girl who had to leave,
 Sadly does she moan,
 Sadly does she moan,
 To meet such unkindness

In the vale is motherwort,
Scorched where it was moist;
There was a girl who had to leave,
Sadly fall her tears,
Sadly fall her tears,
But what will weeping do?

This is a poem of familiar type, portraying the sorrows of a wife who has been sent home by her husband. There is no sense that the woman in the poem deserved her fate; rather, the poem is an implied criticism of the unfaithful husband.

Shī 71 葛藟 (Sympathy with a mismarried woman)

Thickly spreads the creeper 葛,
On the River's edge;
I am far from my brothers forever,
I call another "father"
I call another "father" –
He will not look round at me.

Thickly spreads the creeper,
On the River's marge;
I am far from my brothers forever,
I call another "mother"
I call another "mother" –
She will not acknowledge me

Thickly spreads the creeper,
On the River's verge;
I am far from my brothers forever,
I call another "brother"
I call another "brother" –
He will not give heed to me

Shī 72 采葛 (Amorous: missing a lover)

He is gathering creeper 葛,
One day without seeing him
Is like three months

He is gathering southernwood,
One day without seeing him
Is like three autumns

He is gathering mugwort,
One day without seeing him
Is like three years

Shī 71 is not readily construed as a reproof to the speaker of Shī 72 (as is probably also the case with Shī 66 and 67), but here too, a verbal link (the creeper image) exists between these adjacent pieces. It would seem that Shī 71 was composed with Shī 72 in mind, and probably with the intention of preceding it. That is to say, Shī 71 at the time it was written had an editorial function – a function as part of the poem series – as well as the general ethical function of expressing social sympathy.

Shī 74 丘中有麻 (Amorous: a woman inviting a lover, any lover)

On the mound is hemp.
 That Lyóu Dž-jyē,
 That Lyóu Dž-jyē –
 Would that he would come and play!
 On the mound is wheat.
 That Lyóu Dž-gwó
 That Lyóu Dž-gwó –
 Would that he would come and eat!

Of the three amorous poems, this openly promiscuous one was undoubtedly the most problematic. One stratagem was to insert before it this sentimental piece:

Shī 73 大車 (Young lovers thwarted but reunited in death)

His great carriage rumbles along,
 His jacket glistens like rush-wool.
 “How do I but think of you?
 I was afraid you would not dare”
 His great carriage groans along,
 His jacket glitters like gems.
 “How do I but think of you?
 I feared that you would not elope”
 Alive, they dwelt in different rooms,
 In death, they lay in the same grave.
 “You thought that I had broken faith,
 I was as constant as the sun.”

This was acceptable to the moralists as a tale of fidelity, rather than of improper union. The other stratagem was to add this final stanza to the improper Shī 74 itself:

On the mound are plums.
 That scion of the Lyóu
 That scion of the Lyóu
 Has given me a pendant jyǒu 玖

which legitimizes everything, since gifts mean proper betrothal. This device takes us beyond the Wáng decade to the preceding Wèi decade, whose last poem is:

Shī 64 木瓜 (Exchange of gifts between an elite man and a humble maid)

She gives to me a quince from off the twig,
 I requite a lifestone fair and big.
 Not that I requite,
 But that forever more my love I plight.
 She gives to me a peach from off the bough,
 I requite a truthstone fair enow.
 Not that I requite,
 But that forever more my love I plight.
 She gives to me a plum from off the tree,
 I requite a longstone 玖 fair to see.
 Not that I requite,
 But that forever more my love I plight.

Fidelity, marital or otherwise, puts us safely in the realm of socially approved values.

The link between the ends of the Wèi and Wáng decades, not only in theme but in specific words, is sufficiently obvious. So is the *intent* of those similar gestures: to adapt the always popular theme of young love to situations of ceremonial propriety. But if these two poems represent the same editorial strategy, that editorial strategy cannot be internal to either of the individual decades, or their respective court poets. We have instead a device of the Shī proprietors. So also, presumably, was the addition of ameliorating poems, in this and other sections, to the original amorous poems.

Then the original content of the Wáng decade was three amorous poems.

Jōu in Spring and Autumn

Returning to the Jōu Kings, I ask: Do these poems have anything specifically to do with them? The Máu commentary applies the lament of Shī 65 to “the desolation of the old capital of Jōu,” and makes Shī 66 critical of King Píng, the first Spring and Autumn Jōu King (taking Shī 67 as its sequel); Shī 68 (the soldiers on campaign) is said to be critical of King Píng; Shī 69 describes the sufferings of the Jōu people generally; Shī 70 describes hardships under King Hwán (Píng’s son). Shī 71 is said to be critical of King Píng, 72 to be critical of King Hwán, and so on. But as Legge notes in some cases, the explanations are contrived, and the poems themselves generic. On the testimony *of the poems*, the Royal Domain is no different from any other state.

May this not be the final message of the section? For the virtue of Jōu, we need to look in the places the Shī headings *tell* us to look: the Jōu-nán at the beginning of the Fvng, representing the tradition of Jōu as preserved by the descendants of Jōu-gūng in Lǚ, and the celebratory Jōu-nán at the end. Bu contrast, the later Jóu kings in their eastern enclave are utterly undistinguished, and their back yard is littered with the same old cans and bottles as everybody else’s. The recorded history of Jōu after its fall shows nothing but military ineffectiveness.² The best that the visitor from Wú (in the story in DJ Syāng 29, late 04c) can say of this Wáng section is the very tactful remark “Excellent! Thoughtful but not timorous; is not this Jōu in its eastern phase?”³

Jōu in its eastern phase was a complete nonentity, and the political and military possibilities of the age, as the Shī here subtly lets us know, lay in other directions.

Works Cited

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²For the span 0722-0481, the Lǚ chronicle records precisely three military ventures of Jōu, all of them humiliatingly unsuccessful.

³美哉，思而不懼，其周之東乎。It is safe to assume that at the time this story was written, the Wáng section possessed all ten of its present poems.

Appendix 1: The Large Picture

It may facilitate later Shī study to diagram the growth situation at which we have arrived for the Wáng section. Here are the strata (with the earliest one at the bottom, as in archaeological reports), plus echoes, (including common lines, in other sections:

Wèi	Wáng		Jùng	Táng/Ngwèi
		<i>4. Sentimental Touches</i>		
64C2	> 74C	moral addendum to enticement poem		
59B3	> 73	sentimental new poem	< 89B3	
		<i>3. Social Complaints</i>		
	65	courtier complaint		< 121ABC9
	68	soldier's complaint	< 92ABC1	= 116, 117
	70	courtier complaint		
		<i>2. Ameliorative Additions: Sympathy with Women</i>		
	66	soldier's wife		< 121ABC6
	69	rejected wife		
	71	hard lot of new wife		
		<i>1. Amorous Females</i>		
	67	sharing pleasure with gentleman		
	72	misses lover	> 91C3-4	
	74	enticement		

Appendix 2: Dž-syà 子夏

In the usual Shī transmission genealogy, Dž-syà is next after Confucius. There is no evidence that Confucius compiled the Shī, or used them in teaching. Dž-syà is more plausible. In LY 6:13, “Confucius” says to him, “You should work on the *rú* 儒 of the gentleman, not that of the little people.” *Rú* here is not “Confucian,” as in later centuries, but “learning” or “cultural tradition.” The courtier poems in the Wáng section are elite complaints, and this censure will not apply to them. But if Dž-syà was instead responsible for gathering popular songs of the several states, the sort of thing we see in the earliest Wáng layer, the remark has point. I suggest that LY 6:13 (c0460) registers the first attempts to compile material like that in the earliest Wáng layer, and that the disapproval expressed in LY 6:13 was the stimulus for the addition of poems like those in the second Wáng layer, by which the impropriety of the original material was diluted, bringing the whole, or its average, within the limits of elite acceptance.

Why collect popular songs in the first place? Probably for the reason which is still implied in the DJ Syāng 29 story (late 04c): they were thought to reflect popular morality, which in turn was an index of the moral, and thus ultimately the military, strength of the state. It was a measure of survivability in the coming years of warfare. In that sense the Shī, whatever their literary interest, are ultimately political.

Dž-syà is approved in LY 3:8 (c0342), a century later, where he figures as subtly able to draw ritual wisdom out of the description of a beautiful and virtuous woman. Clearly, the commentary tradition which had performed these miracles of reorientation was by then established, and had retained Dž-syà as one of its spokesman.