

*Shī+

#87 (Jvng 13)

2(44446)

(c0460)

The Shī, the court poetry repertoire, grew throughout the classical period. Its roots are in the 05th century. Confucius' disciple Dž-syà and Dzṽngdž's son Dzṽng Shṽn were important in its formation; they are listed in the standard transmission genealogy. The Shī were later thought to go back to Confucius, who however was not involved: in the early chapters of the Analects, he is never shown as quoting or teaching them. The early poems were not always congenial to the Confucians; some reflect popular customs in which youths and maidens sang to each other across a stream, and then paired up as they wished. The ones that most bothered Confucian interpreters were those that featured female sexual initiative.

Here, a girl invites a boy to come over to her side of the river – and if he won't, she will find somebody who will. The poem has two stanzas in mixed meter, with 44446 syllables per line. Mixed meter implies popular, not elite procedure, a contrast that will continue through future centuries.

If you fondly care for me,
Lift your robe and cross the Dzvn;
If for me you do not care,
Are you then the only one?
 The craziest of crazy boys, is all you are!

If you fondly care for me,
Lift your robe and cross the Wai;
If for me you do not care,
Are you then the only guy?
 The craziest of crazy boys, is all you are!

#86 (Jvng 12)
2(4546)

This, like Shī 87, which stands next to it in the Shī, is a “crazy boy” poem. Unlike Shī 87, the girl here registers distress when her chosen swain fails to come; this is a one-guy girl. The image of the abandoned but faithful woman was congenial to the Shī editors, and this poem was probably placed next to that one to dilute its effect. We do not have a folk tradition here; rather, a constructed one – constructed to be more congenial to elite needs and sensibilities.

The poem is in two stanzas, with lines of different length, the last line being the longest. The Shī 86 remake is thus in the style of the Shī 87 original.

Yonder madcap boy, ah,
Won't consent with me to meet, ah,
 It is all because of you
 That my food I cannot even eat, ah

Yonder madcap boy, ah,
Won't consent with me to share a bite, ah,
 It is all because of you
 That my rest I cannot get at night, ah

*Shī+

#95 (Jǜng 21)
2(3434444/34445)

This very sophisticated later piece also features a meeting, preceded by the mutual exchanges required by ritual between a lady and a lad – or more exactly, a burlesque of that convention. It copies the folk two-stanza form, refers to the two rivers of the poem on p18, and alludes to the floodwaters that had made the earlier swain hesitate to cross. There is thus no doubt, where this poem is coming from. What it is getting to is an elite acceptance of the pleasures of dalliance.

The moralists had done what they could to rewrite, or recontext, the naughty original songs of Jǜng. Their efforts led to a 20-poem Jǜng section, with ten more or less naughty poems balanced by something similar but safer to teach the young. Then along came this piece, and undid all their good work.

The Dzvn and eke the Wai
Are now at floodtime height, ah
The gallants and the girls
With sweet grass are bedight, ah
A girl says “Have you seen the sight?”
A gallant says “I have indeed,
But shall we see again the sight?”
 Out beyond the Wai
 One may roam delightfully;
 And so the gallant and the girl
 Exchange a bit of pleasantry,
 And she presents him with a peony

The Dzvn and eke the Wai
Are flowing very clear, ah
The gallants and the girls
In multitudes appear, ah
A girl says “Have you seen the sight?”
A gallant says “I have indeed,
But shall we see again the sight?”
 Out beyond the Wai
 One may roam delightfully;
 And so the gallant and the girl
 Exchange a bit of pleasantry,
 And she presents him with a peony

#96 (Chí 1)

4444 4454 4545

Here is another couple. Custom permitted, but did not officially approve, the visit of a youth to a maiden, as long as he was discreetly gone before the morning. If this poem were in French, it would be called an aubade.

The girl's concern is for them not to be discovered. Dawn is here, and the danger is great. This is comically portrayed in each successive stanza: her urgings become steadily more urgent, and his responses become ever more unconcerned. He burrows down deeper into the bedclothes, symbolized acoustically by the rhymes: first -ing (a high open vowel), then -ang (lower and muted), finally -vng (central and muffled; those phonetic nuances are not reflected in this translation). Whoever wrote this thing had a lot of fun doing it.

There is formal closure in the third stanza, which does not duplicate the plot of the other two, but instead reverses the order of speakers: his invitation to further intimacies, and her angry refusal. Two-stanza pieces are open: more might be added, if the singer could find more rhymes. In this poem, the series has a final scene: a third stanza. It is typical of elite poems to be formally closed in this way, the third stanza rounding off what precedes.

'Tis cockcrow, end of night, now;
 The dawn is full in sight, now.
 'Tis not the cockcrow, end of night,
 Just buzzing insects, faint and slight.
 The east is growing light, now;
 The dawn is brilliant quite, now.
 'Tis not the east that now is growing light,
 But rising moon that glows so bright.
 The flies are humming in their flight;
 I'd share a dream beside you if I might . . .
 You had best be going, now,
 Do not make me come to hate your sight.