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Characteristics and Value of The Collection of Ancient Chinese Poetry, Shi Jing

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Abstract

Shijing, the earliest collection of poetry in ancient China, collects 305 poems from the beginning of the Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Chunqiu Period (11th century B.C.E.-6th century B.C.E.), and is divided into the three parts of the Feng, the Ya, and the Song. The main research purpose of this paper is, firstly, to synthesize the literature related to the study of *Shijing* from various perspectives, such as literature, history, and culture, by combing and summarizing the relevant literature of *Shijing*. This paper utilizes the literature research method and interdisciplinary research method to study the concept and compilation process of *Shijing*. The second is to analyze the content characteristics, linguistic features, and the expression of *Shijing*. We will clarify the status and influence of *Shijing* in China, and deeply explore the historical, cultural, artistic and social values of *Shijing*.

Keywords: Ancient Chinese poetry collection *Shijing*, characteristics of the text of *Shijing*, its role and value

Introduction

China is the only surviving country among the four ancient countries in the world with a history of more than 5,000 years. During the pre-Qin period, China went through the historical stages of Xia, Shang and Zhou. The Zhou Dynasty was divided into two historical stages: the Western Zhou (1046 BC - 771 BC) and the Eastern Zhou (770 BC - 221 BC). The Eastern Zhou is further divided into two periods: the Chunqiu period (770 BC-453 BC) and the Zhanguo Period (453 BC-221 BC). The poems in the *Shijing* are detached from the mystical nature of the distant past and reflect not only the orthodox system of ritual and music, but also secular orientations and lifestyles. Most of the authors of the *Shijing* cannot be traced, and it is now



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believed in academic circles that it was collected by Yin Jifu and compiled with the participation of Confucius, and that it was included according to the three categories of Feng, Ya, and Song. As a representative text of China's ancient civilization, the great influence of *Shijing* has long transcended national boundaries and become a treasure of world literature. Nowadays, *Shijing* is spreading around the world in dozens of languages, and has become a hot spot of Sinology in the world. Through the study of *Shijing*, we can gain a deeper understanding of the development and characteristics of ancient Chinese literature and art, which is also of great significance to the study of ancient Chinese culture and history.

Objectives

1. To organize and summarize the relevant studies of *Shijing*.
2. To analyze the characteristics and values of *Shijing*.

Research Scope

The object of this research is the text of *Shijing*, and the scope of the research focuses on selecting 10 works from each of the three parts of *Shijing*, namely, the Feng, the Ya, and the Song, to be analyzed.

Research Methodology

Literature research method, historical research method, survey method

Research results

1. Concept of *Shijing*

Shijing is the first collection of Chinese poetry, written in the middle of the Chunqiu period, originally called Shi, was an important part of the Zhou Dynasty rituals and music, and has been referred to by researchers as one of the "cultural canons". "The first basic concept to be clarified is that *Shijing* is not a scripture, but an anthology of the most ancient poetry. It is a collection of 305 poems written about 500 years before the year 2,500, the whole number of which is referred to as the 300 poems. They were produced from the early Western Zhou to the middle of the Chunqiu Period, so they are all Zhou poems (Xia Chuancai, 2007)." *Shijing*, also known as the Three Hundred Poems and the Three Hundred Pieces, was recognized as a classic by Confucianism from the Han Dynasty onwards, and then it was called the *Shijing*, and the official use of the name *Shijing* should have begun in the early years of the Southern Song Dynasty.



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2. The Compilation of *Shijing*

The works of *Shijing* span a period of more than five hundred years, and were produced in a geographical area centered on the Yellow River basin and distributed in present-day Henan, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Shandong, Anhui, and Hubei. The authors of *Shijing* basically covered all levels of society, and the vast majority of them are now unattested. There are three ancient accounts of how *Shijing* was compiled into a book:

The first theory is that the poems in the *Shijing* were collected by officials of the Zhou Dynasty. In the spring of every year, they went to the folk with wooden dowels in their hands to collect poems that responded to the hardships of the people, processed and organized them, and then handed them over to the officials in charge of music to compose and sing them to the King of Zhou as a reference for governance.

The second theory holds that the poems in *Shijing* were presented to the ruler of the state by the aristocratic literati of the Zhou Dynasty. Through the poems, they sang praises and expressed their loyalty, or through the poems, they made sarcastic comments and expressed their appraisal of politics. There were also some folk songs in the poems they presented.

The third theory is that the poems in *Shijing* were compiled by Confucius. According to legend, Confucius selected and cut out 305 of the original 3000 poems and compiled them into *Shijing*. After scholars' documentary evidence, this claim is not valid. Mr. Xia Chuancai, an expert in classical literature, believes that the 305 poems in the Book of Songs were gradually collected and accumulated by the royal officials and musicians of different generations, and that the compilation and arrangement of these poems was not done by Confucius alone. Confucius only made an important collation and publication on the basis of the compilation already made by his predecessors, and the later generations continued to make some processing. The text of *Shijing* that we see now is the finalized version that has been handed down since the Han Dynasty.

To summarize, the compilation of *Shijing* was a long and complicated process, which can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn Period. At that time, the officials in charge of music at the court compiled and organized the poems collected from the folk and presented by the nobles and literati, and composed the music. Confucius again organized and surveyed on the basis of the previous editors. Currently, the bamboo slips of *Shijing*, collected by Anhui University, belong to the early and middle stage of the Warring States period, and are the earliest original version of the existing excavated documents of *Shijing*.



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Shuhui's Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Studies on *Shijing*. There are 5,729 research works and dissertations on the Poetry Scriptures at home and abroad, but the actual number is much higher than that, and the publications cited in this book are not exhaustive, so they will not be repeated here.

3. The classification of *Shijing*

"Feng", as the opening chapter of the *Shijing*, contains a total of 160 poems originating from fifteen countries and regions, including Zheng Feng, Wang Feng, Bei Feng, Yong Feng, Wei Feng, and Zhou Nan, which take up more than half of the entire text. These 160 poems are called "Fifteen State Feng" after being embellished and modified, which vividly record the social features of the Zhou Dynasty, such as people's labor life, war and resistance, homesickness and remembrance of people, and the pursuit and praise of love. Stylistically speaking, "Feng" has a strong local color; in terms of content, most of the "State Feng" are folk poems, which can truly reflect the social life of the grassroots people and express their spiritual outlook against oppression and exploitation, and their yearning for a better life.

"Ya" is the elegant music used by the ruling class in the Zhou Dynasty during court feasts or court meetings, which is divided into "Daya" and "Xiaoya", totaling 105 pieces. Among them, "Daya" 31, mainly created in the early Western Zhou Dynasty, the author of most of the aristocrats, advocating elegance, in order to glorify the royal family of the Zhou Dynasty and the achievements of their ancestors. Most of the 74 Xiao Ya pieces were written in the late Western Zhou Dynasty, most notably reflecting war and labor, but also individual folk songs similar to the Feng. The ideology presented in the Xiao Ya is generally inferior to that of the Feng, but it truly reflects certain aspects of social life in the Zhou Dynasty from another perspective, and also has certain social significance and cognitive value.

"Song" are musical songs for the rituals of the temples, some of which are dances, and are divided into the Zhou songs, Lu song, and the Shang song. Among them, there are 31 Zhou songs, 4 Lu song, and 5 Shang song, totaling 40 pieces, collectively known as the "Three Songs". Ode" is used to inform the gods of the merits of the ruling class, with singing and dancing characteristics of the temple music, the feelings expressed are mainly for the ancestors of the gods, reflecting the religious feelings of the people of the Zhou Dynasty. The content of Ode is mostly empty and abstract sermons, lacking image and rhythmic beauty, and the overall ideology and artistry are not as good as that of Feng

4. Characteristics of *Shijing*

Shijing is divided into three parts, namely, the Feng, the Ya and the Song, and the poems collected have distinctive characteristics of the times. The *Shijing* epitomizes the



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history of social life in the Zhou Dynasty and has had a profound influence on ancient Chinese literary thought, culture and art, and aesthetic concepts.

1) Rich in content

Shijing includes epic poems about ancestor worship, agricultural affairs, banquets and feasts, grievances, and marriages, etc. It contains many aspects such as labor, wars, class conflicts, morality and ethics, customs and habits, etc., and has a strong spirit of realism.

2) Language Characteristics

The Language Characteristics of *Shijing* include: first, the four-line stanza is the main form, with four independent lines, which created the four-line stanza in the history of Chinese poetry, with repetitions of overlapping lines and repetitions, and the rhymes are neat and tidy, but not lacking in variations. Secondly, the use of superimposed words and double rhymes has a strong sense of rhythm and musicality. All 305 poems of *Shijing* can be put into music, and each poem has a specific tune and rhythm. Third, the style of writing is simple and concise, using simple language and refined words to express far-reaching moods and emotions.

关关雉鸣，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。
参差荇菜，左右流之。窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。
求之不得，寤寐思服。悠哉悠哉，辗转反侧。
参差荇菜，左右采之。窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之。
参差荇菜，左右芼之。窈窕淑女，钟鼓乐之。

Legend: *Shijing*- *GuanJu*, a four-word sentence pattern (Draughtsman: Xiang Li)

3) Fu, Bi, Xing's expressive techniques

Zhu Xi, a scholar of the Ming Dynasty, emphasized the characteristics of fugue, bi and Xing as a creative method. The exquisite use of the three expressive techniques of fugue, bi and xing can enhance the expression of emotions and emphasize the beauty and vividness of the sound and rhythm of poetry. The creative experience of *Shijing* laid the foundation for the metaphorical, comparative and analogical rhetorical techniques and the lyrical approach of blending situations in later narrative literature, which gradually became one of the important features of ancient Chinese poetry.



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4. The Role and Value of *Shijing*

As one of the earliest general collections of poetry in China, "*Shijing*" is not only a literary classic, but also a model text for the education of later generations. "*Shijing* records and reflects the production life, social activities, spiritual culture and other aspects of the ancestors in the Central Plains about three thousand years ago in a true and objective, multi-angle and multi-directional way through language and art forms, and it is an encyclopedia that includes politics and economy, history and culture, canonical rules and regulations, customs and culture". (Liu chun & Liu feng, 2018). Therefore, *Shijing* is an important carrier of Chinese cultural inheritance and the promotion of the culture of the Chinese nation, with far-reaching historical significance and cultural value.

1) *Shijing* is an important historical document. According to Hu Shi, "*Shijing* is not a Bible, but is indeed a collection of ancient songs, which can be used as material for social history, for political history, and for cultural history" (Gu Jiegang, 1982). Many of the poems in the *Shijing* recorded the vassal states, the names of the vassals, and major social events at that time, which provided an important basis for future generations to understand the historical evolution of the Zhou Dynasty and the relationship between the vassal states, and provided important documentary references for the study of ancient Chinese politics, society, and culture.

2) *Shijing* plays an important role in the history of Chinese literature. It is China's first monograph of pure literature, which opens up the connotation of narrative and lyricism in Chinese poetry, and is the "ancestor of pure literature" in China. It defined the rhetorical and rhyming principles of Chinese poetry, and was called "the ancestor of the general collection" and "the ancestor of poetry (rhyming)". *Shijing* pioneered the realist literature of ancient China and established the important position of folk songs in the history of Chinese literature. From the content and different styles of *Shijing*, it is full of various joyful, uplifting and free emotions, as well as dissatisfaction with the social reality and ridicule, people in the Zhou Dynasty sighed and sang poems to express their sighs for the reality of life, which often had a transcendental meaning of reality. This transformation provided new ideas and paradigms for the literary creation of later generations, and played a great cornerstone and driving role in the development of Chinese poetry.

3) *Shijing*, is a classic work of political, moral and ethical significance, as well as ritual, musical and cultural synthesis and education, and has played an important role in shaping the humanistic spirit and cultural character of the Chinese nation. Kongzi believed that *Shijing*, had the effect of clarifying the mind and was the best tool for indoctrination. As



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a Confucian classic, *Shijing* embodied different educational values in different historical periods. In the pre-Qin period, it had the educational value of comprehensive cultivation; in the Han and Tang periods, it had the value of political indoctrination; and after the Song Dynasty, it had the most prominent value of ethical indoctrination.

Discussion

Shijing is an important part of ancient Chinese literature. Through the study of *Shijing*, it has been found that: the text of *Shijing* is able to reflect the life, thoughts, feelings and values of the ancient people; the rhetorical technique of fu bi xing is of great value to the study of ancient languages and cultures; and the ideological concepts embedded in the poems play an important role in the cultivation of moral qualities, humanistic qualities, and aesthetic tastes of the people.

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