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EXCAVATED MANUSCRIPTS AND THEIR SOCRATIC PLEASURES: NEWLY DISCOVERED CHALLENGES IN READING THE “AIRS OF THE STATES”

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Abstract

The present essay examines the discussion of “Guan ju” 關雎 (Fishhawks; Mao 1) in the Shanghai Museum’s *Kongzi shilun* 孔子詩論 (Confucius’ Discussion of the *Odes*) bamboo text, the Mawangdui *Wuxing* 五行 (Five Modes of Conduct) silk manuscript, and a range of other early sources to show how in late Warring States and early imperial times, “Guan ju” was understood rather differently from both the Mao commentary and the Western Han “three lineages” of *Odes* interpretation. This early interpretation connects the song to texts that the tradition has come to refer to as “licentious *Odes*,” specifically “Qiang zhongzi” 將仲子 (Zhongzi, Please!; Mao 76) from the “Zheng feng” 鄭風, and “Yue chu” 月出 (The Moon Comes Forth; Mao 143) from the “Chen feng” 陳風 section. Moreover, the essay suggests that for the “Airs of the States” in general, the Mao tradition is not merely an interpretation of a pre-existing and commonly shared original *Odes* text, but that its choices of characters, its individual word glosses, and its “minor prefaces” together constitute the text in both form and meaning. In other words, we cannot reject the “minor prefaces” while at the same time still accepting the individual word glosses of the *Mao Odes*; we also cannot rely on the *Mao Odes* to determine the words and meaning of the “Airs of the States” as they are discussed in a text like the *Kongzi shilun*.

I. Introductory remarks¹

Beginning with the finds at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Changsha, Hunan) in 1973, a total of five recently excavated manuscripts from Warring States and early

- 1 The present essay has evolved over the past year in parallel Chinese and English versions, with presentations at the Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, the University of Münster, and at conferences in Wuhan and Beijing—all occasions where I received numerous helpful comments. With its focus on early Chinese commentary, hermeneutics, and philology, may the result be considered a footnote to Robert Gassmann’s massive and inspiring œuvre in these (and so many other) fields.

imperial times have yielded substantial citations from the ancient *Classic of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經): the two *Wu xing* 五行 (Five Modes of Conduct) versions from Guodian 郭店 (Jingmen, Hubei) and Mawangdui, the two *Ziyi* 緇衣 (Black Robes) texts from Guodian and in the Shanghai Museum corpus, and the *Kongzi shilun* 孔子詩論 (Confucius's Discussion of the *Odes*) also in the latter. In addition, a badly fragmented version of the *Odes* anthology has been found at Shuanggudui 雙古堆 (Fuyang, Anhui). Together, these manuscripts span some 150 years from around 300 BC (Guodian, Shanghai) to the mid-second century BC (Shuanggudui, Mawangdui). Reviewing these manuscripts, I have previously concluded that there was no fixed written version of the *Odes* even in Western Han times, that the manuscript fragments indicate layers of oral transmission of the text, probably intersecting with layers of copying from written texts,² that the *Odes* quotations in received Warring States and Han texts must have undergone pervasive graphic standardization during post-Han times, and that the received Mao 毛 and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 reading reflects late Western and then Eastern Han imperial needs to agree on a unified text and its more or less normative interpretation.³ I also noted that while the written form of the *Odes* was instable, the text itself was perhaps not: there is overwhelming phonological coherence between the *Odes* quotations in excavated manuscripts, the received text of the

- 2 The idea is that any single manuscript should be seen as a diachronic artifact that stands at the end of a series of acts of textual transmission, some of them acts of copying from an earlier manuscript, others acts of writing from memory or recitation. A manuscript can therefore show traces of both modes of transmission that entered the development of the text at different times. In specific terms, a manuscript may simultaneously exhibit textual variants that indicate a copyist's mistakes as well as graphic variants indicative of oral transmission or writing from memory.
- 3 See Kern, "The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005) 149–193; "Quotation and the Confucian Canon in Early Chinese Manuscripts: The Case of 'Zi Yi' (Black Robes)," *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 59.1 (2005): 293–332; "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts," in *Recarving the Dragon: Understanding Chinese Poetics*, ed. Olga Lomová (Prague: Charles University—The Karolinum Press, 2003), 27–72; "Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1–4 (2002): 143–181; 柯馬丁, "Zuowei zhuixiang de shi: Shi ji qi zaoqi quanshi" 作為追想的詩:《詩》及其早期詮釋, *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究 16 (2005): 329–341; "Yinju yu Zhongguo gudai xieben wenxian zhong de rujia jingdian: 'Ziyi' yanjiu" 引據與中國古代寫本文獻中的儒家經典:《緇衣》研究, *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 2005, forthcoming; "Chutu wenxian yu wenhua jiyi: Shijing zaoqi lishi yanjiu" 出土文獻與文化記憶:詩經早期歷史研究, *Zhongguo zhixue* 中國哲學 25 (2004): 111–158.

Mao Odes, and the little that is left of the Western Han *sanjia* 三家 versions. On the basis of these findings, the present essay extends the analysis to the early interpretation of the *Odes*, juxtaposing the traditional interpretation by Mao and later readers with the quite different understanding that we gain from some of the manuscripts. Furthermore, I will offer some tentative thoughts on the most fundamental set of questions we are facing today, after the manuscripts have, in effect, discredited much of the traditional—and also modern—reading of the *Odes*: what are the methodological problems and contradictions involved in attempting to decide on the original meaning of the *Odes*? To which extent can we even decide on the individual words of their texts without subscribing to a particular interpretation, for example, the one of the *Mao Odes*?

With these considerations, I am less concerned with the “Minor” and “Major Court Hymns” (*xiaoya* 小雅 and *daya* 大雅) or the “Eulogies” (*song* 頌) sections of the text. Problematic as some words and lines in these certainly are,⁴ the real trouble is in the “Airs of the States” (*guofeng* 國風, or *bangfeng* 邦風 in the *Kongzi shilun*). For example, Ma Yinqin 馬銀琴 and others have compared how the statements on individual songs from the *Odes* in the *Kongzi shilun* manuscript text match the Mao “minor prefaces” (*xiaoxu* 小序), presumably dating from the second century BC, to these songs.⁵ The *Kongzi shilun* includes statements on twenty-two *guofeng*, twenty-two *xiaoya*, five *daya*, and three *song*. According to Ma, there are eleven cases where a song is characterized completely differently in the two sources—and all of them come from the *guofeng*. In fact, Ma is quite generous in acknowledging correspondences between the *Kongzi shilun* and the Mao reading as evinced in the prefaces. He posits, for example, that the *Kongzi shilun* statement on “Guan ju” 關雎 (Fish-hawks; Mao 1) resonates well with the Mao preface—something I will argue against below.

During pre-Qin and Qin-Han times, the section of the *Odes* that was consistently favored in quotations across early texts was that of the *daya* (and to much lesser extent the *xiaoya* and *song*). The *daya* are the grandiose ceremonial monument of early history and cultural memory, as a whole the master narrative

4 See, e.g., David R. Knechtges, “Questions about the Language of *Sheng min*,” in *Ways With Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, ed. Pauline Yu et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 14–24.

5 Ma Yinqin, “Shangbo jian ‘Shilun’ yu ‘Shi xu’ shishuo yitong bijiao” 上博簡《詩論》與《詩序》詩說異同比較, *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 2002, 98–105.

that answers the questions “Who are we” and “Where do we come from.”⁶ The *guofeng*, at least at face value, are not. The *daya* are clear in their eulogistic narrative of ancient history. The *guofeng* require a hermeneutical reading; their meaning needs to be discovered. It is thus perhaps understandable that the *daya* (together with the other ritual hymns of the *xiaoya* and *song*) were quoted intensely across a range of early texts, but not the *guofeng*.⁷ Yet, surprisingly, the *Kongzi shilun* does not observe this preference: while the manuscript is fragmentary and thus does not lend itself to statistical analysis, it does not at all seem to slight or neglect the *guofeng*. Indeed, using the same formulaic pattern to discuss each of the four sections of the anthology in its specific nature and purpose, it treats them all as equally important.

By contrast, very few texts of early China give equal weight to the *guofeng* as compared to the other parts of the *Odes*, notably the *daya*. The *guofeng* figure prominently in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓氏外傳, though even there not surpassing references to the *ya* and *song* sections. The only major text of early China that in its—albeit altogether relatively few—references to the *Odes* focuses mostly on the *guofeng* is the *Analects*, that is, apart from *Kongzi shilun*, the one other text claiming to directly reflect Confucius’s own thoughts about the *Odes*. At the same time, all early texts that refer substantially to the *guofeng* do so in ways distinctly different from the Mao tradition and, as far as we can tell from the surviving fragments, from the Western Han Qi 齊 and Lu 魯 readings. While the Mao, Qi, and Lu interpretations can sometimes dramatically differ among themselves—“Guan ju,” for example, is taken as a eulogy in the Mao reading but as moral criticism in the Qi and Lu traditions—they share a tendency toward associating the *guofeng* songs with specific historical circumstances and moral claims.

By declaring, for example, that the twenty-five songs of the “Zhou nan” 周南 and “Shao nan” 召南 sections expressed the virtue of the members of the early Zhou royal house, the Mao “minor prefaces” read them along the lines of the *daya*. Indeed, as first made explicit in Zheng Xuan’s “Shi pu xu” 詩譜序,

6 This is true for all but the final two of the thirty-one *daya* in the *Mao Odes*; according to the Mao reading, the final two songs from that section, “Zhan yang” 瞻仰 (Mao 264) and “Shao min” 召旻 (Mao 265), are texts of moral criticism, composed to apprehend the last ruler of the Western Zhou, King You 幽王 (r. 781–771 BC).

7 For a survey of *Odes* quotations in early literature, see He Zhihua 何志華 and Chen Xionggen 陳雄根, *Xian Qin liang Han dianji yin “Shijing” ziliao huibian* 先秦兩漢典籍引《詩經》資料匯編 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese University Press, 2004). Note that the *guofeng* comprise no less than 160 of the 305 *Odes*.

the “Zhou nan” and “Shao nan” became regarded as “airs [in praise] of moral orthodoxy” (*zhengfeng* 正風) from the early Western Zhou rules as opposed to most of the remaining *guofeng* as “airs [in criticism] of moral deviation” (*bianfeng* 變風) from later periods, which parallels the way how twenty-nine of the thirty-one *daya* came to be seen as “hymns [in praise] of moral orthodoxy” (*zhengya* 正雅) versus the remaining two *daya* and most of the *xiaoya* as “hymns [in criticism] of moral deviation” (*bianya* 變雅). In other words, the Mao-Zheng tradition of the *Odes* placed the “Zhou nan” and “Shao nan” in the glorious reigns of the early Western Zhou kings and, by definition, established them as songs of historical praise. In this interpretation, they became ancient voices speaking directly out of history and thus could be read as authentic historical judgments that are not retrospective but concurrent with the events they are singing about. This historical view of poetry matches how early songs appear in both late Warring States (*Zuo zhuan* and *Guoyu* 國語) and early imperial (*Shiji* 史記 and *Hanshu* 漢書) historiography.⁸ Thus, the *guofeng* were important as moral witnesses and judgments about ancient history, and they could be organized in groups that were both chronological and ideological: the Mao-Zheng interpretation takes *all* eleven “Zhou nan” songs as eulogizing the royal wife’s virtue, and likewise all but the first of the twenty-one “Zheng feng” 鄭風—to which we shall return below—as criticizing the various lords of Zheng.

By contrast, as has often been noted,⁹ the *Kongzi shilun* discussions of the *guofeng* do not support any dimension of these historical or political readings, and neither do the *Analects* or the *Wu xing* commentary from Mawangdui.¹⁰ Likewise, the comments on the *guofeng* in the *Xunzi* 荀子 and by Liu An 劉安 that are closely related to the line in *Analects* 3.20 (“Ba yi” 八佾)—“‘Guan ju’ [expresses] pleasure but does not lead to licentiousness, [expresses] sorrow but

8 For the pre-imperial texts, see David Schaberg, “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59.2 (1999): 305–61, and *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001). For song in early imperial historiography, see Kern, “The Poetry of Han Historiography,” *Early Medieval China* 10–11.1 (2004): 23–65.

9 The late professor Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 was the first to make this point in the original publication of the manuscript; see Ma Chengyuan, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (yi)* 上海博物管藏戰國楚竹書(一) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), 146–147.

10 See Jeffrey Riegel, “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57 (1997): 143–177.

does not cause harm” (*Guan ju le er bu yin, ai er bu shang* 關雎樂而不淫，哀而不傷)¹¹—do not engage in the “praise and blame” pattern of historical reading that aligns the ancient songs with the political and moral course of Zhou history. Indeed, according to all our sources including the newly excavated manuscripts, the *guofeng* prior to the Mao interpretation did not display a fixed set of historical meanings.

With the present essay, I will briefly use the example of “Guan ju” to discuss the fundamentally different approach to the *guofeng* that we find in the *Kongzi shilun* and Mawangdui *Wu xing* as compared to the received Mao tradition. Following this analysis, I will then raise certain methodological questions that affect both our trust in the received Mao interpretation of the *guofeng* and the possibilities—and limitations—in reading the “Kongzi shilun.”

II. “Guan ju” in the *Mao Odes*, in the *Kongzi shilun*, and in Mawangdui *Wu xing*

The fragmentary *Kongzi shilun* comments upon “Guan ju” on four bamboo slips as follows (in Ma Chengyuan’s arrangement):¹²

- 11 For *Xunzi*, see Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986) 19.336 (“Da lue” 大略): “As for the *guofeng* expressing being fond of sex, a tradition says: they satisfy the desires but do not lead to the transgression of the correct stopping point” (*guofeng zhi hao se ye, zhuan yue: ying qi yu er bu qian qi zhi* 國風之好色也傳曰盈其欲不愆其止). Liu An’s comment on the *guofeng* is included in *Shiji* 史記 84.2482 (“Qu Yuan Jia sheng liezhuan” 屈原賈生列傳): “The *guofeng* express fondness for sex but do not lead to licentiousness” (*guofeng hao se er bu yin* 好色而不淫). Here, the comment is not attributed to Liu, but it is also quoted—and properly identified—in Ban Gu’s 班固 “Li sao xu” 離騷序, which is preserved in Wang Yi’s 王逸 commentary to the “Li sao” 離騷; see Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chu ci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986) 1.49.
- 12 Ma Chengyuan, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (yi)*, 119–168. A number of other arrangements of the slips have been proposed since; see Liu Xinfang 劉信芳, *Kongzi shilun shuxue* 孔子詩論述學 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2003), 281–284; 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 chubanshe, 2004), 1–22; Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 32–33.

- Slip 10: ... the transformative force of “Guan ju” (*Guan ju zhi gai* 關雎之改)¹³ ... “Guan ju” uses [the expression of] sex to lead through analogy to ritual propriety (*Guan ju yi se yu yu li* 關雎以色諭於禮).¹⁴
- Slip 11: ... the transformative force of “Guan ju” is in the progression of [one’s] thinking. (*Guan ju zhi gai, ze qi si yi yi* 關雎之改, 則其思益矣)¹⁵
- Slip 12: ... reversing oneself toward the acceptance of ritual propriety, is this not just being able to transform [oneself]? (*fan na yu li, bu yi neng gai hu* 反納於禮, 不亦能改乎)
- Slip 14: Its fourth stanza is an expression of analogy. It uses the joy [derived from] the *qin* and *se* zithers to compare to how one appreciates being fond of sex; it uses the delight [derived from] bells and drums ... (*qi si zhang ze yu yi. yi qin se zhi yue ni hao se zhi wan; yi zhong gu zhi le* 其四章則諭矣. 以琴瑟之悅擬好色之玩; 以鐘鼓之樂)¹⁶

These comments on “Guan ju” do not bear the slightest relation to the Mao reading of “Guan ju,” namely, that the song praises the virtue of the queen. However, they resonate closely with the discussion of the song in the Mawangdui *Wu xing* silk manuscript as well as with *Analects* 3.20 and the related statements on the *guofeng* in the *Xunzi* and by Liu An. Yet unlike the latter three texts, and even more clearly than the *Wu xing* silk manuscript, the *Kongzi shilun* discussion of “Guan ju” amounts to a statement on literary hermeneutics. Explicitly invoking the rhetorical concept of “analogy” (*yu* 諭), it instructs the reader how to approach and understand the ancient *guofeng*. To a certain extent, the hermeneutical process revealed here is similar to that of the *Mao Odes*, yet the resulting interpretation of “Guan ju,” and of the *guofeng* altogether, is entirely different. The similarity is in the hermeneutical operation itself, that is, in revealing a purportedly true meaning that lies below the literary surface of the text itself and thus requires a special procedure of interpretation in order to be retrieved. In the

13 For *gai* 改 (“transformation/transformative force”), see Liu Xinfang, *Kongzi shilun shuxue*, 25–28, and Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu “Shilun” jieyi*, 23–26, both summarizing an extensive discussion by several scholars.

14 “Sex” (*se* 色) is used for both sexual allure and sexual desire.

15 For a discussion of *yi* 益 (“progression”), see Liu Xinfang, *Kongzi shilun shuxue*, 27–28, again summarizing an extensive discussion by several scholars.

16 I follow the interpretation of the graphs as given by Liu Xinfang, *Kongzi shilun shuxue*, 25, 42–47; cf. the slightly different reading in Huang Huaixin, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu “Shilun” jieyi*, 23–31.

Mao and Western Han *sanjia* readings of “Guan ju,” this hidden meaning is historical and political; in the *Kongzi shilun*, it lies in moral edification. By contrast, in an attempt to find the meaning of “Guan ju” in the literary surface of its text, modern interpreters—following discussions that emerged only in Song times—have largely agreed to read “Guan ju” as a song of courtship and marriage, declaring that the mentioning of musical instruments in the final stanza simply points to the actual wedding ceremony. These readers take “Guan ju,” and by extension the *guofeng* in general, as straightforward poetic expressions of possibly folk origin, and have scorned the Mao interpretation for perverting their purportedly simple messages into political and historical statements.¹⁷

From the evidence of the *Kongzi shilun*, I wish to suggest that one is indeed justified to doubt the specific historical and political meaning of the *guofeng* as original. However, I also think that the *Kongzi shilun* exposes the modern reading of the textual surface as simplistic and profoundly inappropriate. Nothing in the *Kongzi shilun* suggests that the presumed original meaning of the *guofeng* was to be found just in their literary surface. To insist on the modern reading would imply that the *Kongzi shilun* already distorts the original meaning. This, of course, is exceedingly problematic and would question most of our assumptions about the *Kongzi shilun*. Current scholarship unanimously assumes that this text represents the thoughts of Confucius—who at least since Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BC) *Shiji* has been credited with the compilation of the ancient *Odes*. Thus, if Confucius is the compiler of the *Odes*, and if the *Kongzi shilun* represents his own approach to them, then the *Odes* were collected and compiled according to the principles of interpretation advocated in the *Kongzi shilun*.

Yet there is an even deeper methodological problem arising from the *Odes* interpretations in our newly excavated manuscripts—a problem that affects *any* interpretation of the *guofeng* on the level of their individual graphs and words. First of all, the overwhelming majority of textual variants in *Odes* quotations found in recently excavated manuscripts can be explained as merely graphic, not lexical differences, that is, as “loan characters” (*jiajiezi* 假解字). In other words,

17 This line of reasoning goes back to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) *Shi ji zhuan* 詩集傳; see the discussions in Wong Siu-kit and Lee Kar-shui, “Poems of Depravity: A Twelfth Century Dispute on the Moral Character of the *Book of Songs*,” *T’oung Pao* 75 (1989): 209–25; Li Jiashu (Lee Kar-shui) 李家樹, *Guofeng Mao xu Zhu zhuan yitong kaoxi* 國風毛序朱傳異同考析 (Hong Kong: Xuejin chubanshe, 1979) and the same author’s *Shijing de lishi gong’an* 詩經的歷史公案 (Taipei: Da’an chubanshe, 1990), 39–82.

if we compare the *Mao Odes* to the *Odes* fragments in excavated manuscripts, we see great differences in the choice of graphs but almost no difference in the sounds of the words they are writing. This suggests that the actual text of the *Odes* in these manuscripts corresponded overwhelmingly with the received *Mao Odes*; there is no reason to assume that large numbers of different graphs would indicate different homophonous words. But here is also the problem: considering that in Warring States and Western Han times the writing system was far from fixed, and that the highly archaic and poetic language of the *Odes* was (and still is) open to numerous possibilities of understanding, scholars by necessity rely on the overall phonological coherence with the received *Mao Odes* to transcribe the *Odes* quotations in early manuscripts, that is, to determine their actual text. This is particularly true for the *guofeng*.

The very large number of textual variants in *Odes* quotations by which each of the excavated manuscript texts differ from the received *Mao Odes*, from one another, and from the identified fragments of the Han dynasty *sanjia* versions lets us appreciate the enormous difficulties that the Han dynasty scholars—men to whom we owe all our pre-imperial texts—had to overcome in order to transcribe ancient manuscripts into Han clerical script, or to compile texts from memory or oral transmission. This was difficult enough with writings of philosophical and historical prose, which were composed in relatively recent prose and which advanced logical arguments and meaningful narratives. It must have been extraordinarily taxing with songs like the *guofeng* that were written in an archaic idiom and filled with poetic expressions rarely found in expository prose while at the same time lacking any clear argumentative or narrative structure. It is only with these difficulties in mind that we can understand what the Mao version of the *Odes* really is: one particular attempt not simply to interpret a commonly shared pre-existing ancient text, but, in fact, to first of all constitute the wording of the very text to be interpreted. It is this particular text—the *Mao Odes* in the recension of Zheng Xuan’s commentary—that later served as the template to retrospectively standardize the *Odes* quotations across all Warring States, Qin, and Han texts.

The authority of the Mao and Zheng Xuan transmission of the *Odes* rests not just in its character/word choices and the “minor prefaces” that give a distinctly historical and political interpretation to nearly every song. It is further based on a commentarial structure that has no precedent in any text of early China: the continuous glossing of individual words. To return to “Guan ju” and begin with its most important word, *yaotiao* 窈窕, an assonating binome that describes some quality of the young lady in “Guan ju,” Mao glosses *yaotiao* as

youxian 幽閒, “pure and secluded”—the virtue that makes the lady a good fit for her lord. This gloss sets up the entire song’s interpretation as provided in the “minor preface” that begins with the statement “‘Guan ju’ is about the virtue of the queen” (*Guan ju houfei zhi de ye* 關雎后妃之德也) and from there continues to elaborate on the proper relation between husband and wife as exemplified in the song.

In the Mawangdui *Wu xing* manuscript, the binome *yaotiao* is written *jiaoshao* 菱芍, which—unlike the one in the *Mao Odes*—rhymes perfectly. Rhyming (or assonating), alliterative, or reduplicative binomes are not only frequent in the *Odes* lines quoted in excavated manuscripts, they also tend to be written differently from manuscript to manuscript as well as versus the *Mao Odes* and the *sanjia* fragments.¹⁸ According to the evidence from excavated manuscripts, these poetic expressions are important for their sounds and extremely volatile in their graphic appearance—in fact, more volatile than any other kind of word in early texts. They also, as can be shown abundantly from later commentaries on all early poetry—the *Odes*, the *Chu ci* 楚辭 (*Verses from Chu*), the *Han fu* 漢賦, etc.—, are extremely flexible in their meaning and in each context become defined only through the specific context in which they appear.¹⁹ This leads us to question whether or not *youxian* actually is the proper meaning of *yaotiao* or *jiaoshao*. We do not know of any other explanation prior to the *Mao Odes* that would give us a definite alternative, but the interpretations of “Guan ju” in the *Kongzi shilun* and Mawangdui *Wu xing* manuscripts immediately suggest that the meaning *youxian* for *yaotiao* is inadequate, because it would directly contradict the overall meaning of the song in these interpretations; furthermore, the moral reading of *yaotiao* is at variance with a number of appearances of the same word in other early texts.²⁰ As far as we can tell today, the interpretation of *yaotiao* as *youxian* does not precede the Mao interpretation

18 Kern, “The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts,” 175–176.

19 See David R. Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3–12; Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1997), 194; Kamatani Takeshi 釜谷武志, “Fu ni nankai na ji ga ōi no wa naze ka: Zen-Kan ni okeru fu no yomarekata,” 賦に難解な字が多いのはなぜか: 前漢における賦の讀まれかた, *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本中國學會報 48 (1996), 16–30.

20 For a concise list, see Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559), *Sheng'an jingshuo* 升庵經說, chapter 4, as cited in Liu Yuqing 劉毓慶, Jia Peijun 賈培俊, and Zhang Ru 張儒, *Shijing baijia biejie kao* 詩經百家別解考 (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 2002), 49.

of “Guan ju.” Thus, the first task in trying to understand “Guan ju” as it was known to the *Kongzi shilun* is to abandon not just the Mao “minor preface” to the song, but also the Mao reading of *yaotiao*—that is, the Mao definition of the song’s most important word.

The excavated manuscripts indeed suggest an alternative understanding of *yaotiao*, namely as a word descriptive of sensual allure. This understanding matches the use of *yaotiao* in the “Shan gui” 山鬼 (Mountain God) piece among the “Jiu ge” 九歌 (Nine Songs) of the *Chu ci* and can even be applied to *Analects* 3.20. We also find a different interpretation of the word within the *Mao Odes*, namely in “Yue chu” 月出 (The Moon Comes Forth; Mao 143) from the “Chen feng” 陳風 section, where the second of three very brief stanzas reads as follows:

The moon comes forth, how bright,
The beautiful girl, how charming.
Leisurely she is in her sensual allure,
My toiled heart, how anxious.

月出皎兮
佼人僚兮
舒窈糾兮
勞心悄兮

Here, the binome is written *yaojiao* 窈糾, but there can be no question—as noted already by the Qing scholar Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰 (1782–1835) in his *Odes* commentary *Mao shi zhuan jian tongshi* 毛詩傳箋通釋—that the binome is the same as in “Guan ju,” with which it is nearly homophonous. *Yaojiao*, just like *jiaoshao* in the Mawangdui *Wu xing* quotation of “Guan ju,” is merely another variant of the word that can also be written as *yaotiao* and perhaps in several other ways we have yet to see. However, the Mao “minor preface” to “Yue chu” is diametrically opposed to that to “Guan ju” in stating that the song “criticizes being fond of sex” (*ci hao se* 刺好色) and is about those in office who “are not fond of virtue but delight in glorifying sex” (*bu hao de er yue mei se* 不好德而說美色). This reading of “Yue chu” as a satirical poem is not the same as the *sanjia* reading of “Guan ju.” The latter can still accept the moral reading of *yaotiao* by stating that the praise of female virtue is a satire directed at the Western Zhou king Kang 康 (r. 1005/3–978 BC) who was notorious for his indulgence in sexual passion and corresponding neglect of government.²¹ By con-

21 This reading is made explicit, for example, in the Eastern Han poet Zhang Chao’s “Fu on a Grisette” (Qiao qingyi fu 諫青衣賦); see Mark Laurent Asselin, “The Lu-School Reading of ‘Guanju’ as Preserved in an Eastern Han Fu,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117.3 (1997): 427–43; for further examples, see Zhang Shubo 張樹波, *Guofeng jishuo* 國風集說 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1993), 9–12.

trast, the Mao preface takes “Yue chu” as a description of genuinely dissolute behavior. In Song times, precisely songs like “Yue chu” were at the center of the famous controversy between Zhu Xi and Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1181) over the nature of the so-called “lascivious *Odes*” (*yinshi* 淫詩) among the *guofeng*;²² in Zhu Xi’s words, “Yue chu” is about “the mutual delight of a man and a woman and their longing for each other” (*nan nü xiang yue er xiang nian* 男女相悅而相念).

It is clear that the Mao reading of “Yue chu” understands *yaojiao* as descriptive not of female morality but of female allure. This understanding of *yaojiao* matches precisely the implied meaning of *yaojiao* or *jiaoshao* in the *Kongzi shilun* and Mawangdui *Wu xing* manuscripts. To read “Guan ju” in similar terms as “Yue chu” is suggested by the expression in *Kongzi shilun* that “Guan ju uses [the expression of] sex to lead through analogy to ritual propriety.” This reading is then further elaborated upon in the Mawangdui *Wu xing* discussion of “Guan ju” where the second couplet from stanza two of “Guan ju,” “Alluring is the fair lady / Awake and asleep I desire her” is explained as expressing “sexual desire” (*si se* 思色)—making the couplet exactly parallel in meaning to the one in stanza two of “Yue chu,” “Leisurely she is in her sensual allure / My toiled heart, how anxious.”

“Yue chu” is one of the altogether ten songs from the “Chen feng” section that the Mao prefaces without exception read as satires and moral criticism. Yet prior to the Mao reading, neither in “Yue chu” nor in “Guan ju” may the expression of sexual desire have been considered conducive to dissolute behavior. In fact, the *Analects* (“‘Guan ju’ [expresses] pleasure but does not lead to licentiousness, [expresses] sorrow but does not cause harm”), the *Xunzi* (“[The *guofeng*] satisfy the desires but do not lead to the transgression of the correct stopping point”), and Liu An (“The *guofeng* express fondness for sex but do not lead to licentiousness”) all suggest rather the opposite, namely, that the songs’ expression of sexual desire ultimately leads to the recognition of moral propriety. This is the reading of “Guan ju” in both the *Kongzi shilun* and the Mawangdui *Wu xing* manuscripts, suggesting that it was widely recognized from the fourth through the second centuries BC. Most importantly, through the *Kongzi shilun*, this reading is now associated with Confucius himself, that is, the purported compiler—and foremost interpreter—of the *Odes*. To the Confucius

22 See Wong Siu-kit and Lee Kar-shui, “Poems of Depravity”; Li Jiashu, *Shijing de lishi gong’an*, 39–82.

of the *Kongzi shilun*, the expression of sexual desire was not a problem but, on the contrary, a powerful poetic device in the service of moral education.

This is nothing short of a scholarly sensation. It puts to rest the (at least since Song times) ferocious debate over why the *Odes* include apparently frivolous songs, how these songs could be harmonized with Confucius's dictum in *Analects* 2.2 (“Wei zheng” 為政) “To cover the three hundred *Odes* in one phrase, one can say: no wayward thoughts” (*zi yue: shi san bai, yi yan yi bi zhi, yue: si wu xie* 子曰：詩三百，一言蔽之，曰：思無邪), and whether or not the *guofeng* attributed to the states of Zheng 鄭 and Wei 衛 should be understood as associated with the infamous and lascivious “melodies from Zheng and Wei” (*Zheng Wei zhi sheng* 鄭衛之聲) that in Warring States and early imperial times became a prominent topos of cultural and political decline.²³ The *Kongzi shilun* and Mawangdui *Wu xing* texts reverse the discussion: it is not that certain songs (especially from the “Zheng feng,” “Wei feng,” 衛風, and “Chen feng” sections) are frivolous and have to be domesticated through complicated hermeneutic procedures. According to the excavated manuscripts, they actually are of one category with the songs that the Mao-Zheng tradition has read as expressions of pure virtue—most importantly, “Guan ju.” Their didactic force rests precisely in their depiction of desire—a desire that can only be overcome after it has been fully recognized.

Further evidence for this reading comes from another passage in the Mawangdui *Wu xing* commentary on “Guan ju” that seems to take the song in a completely unexpected direction:

如此其甚也，交諸父母之廟(側)，為諸？則有死弗為之矣。交諸兄弟之廟(側)，亦弗為也。交[諸]邦人之廟(側)，亦弗為也。[畏]父兄，其殺畏人，禮也。繇(由)色榆(諭)於禮，進耳。

If [his desire] is as deep as this, would he copulate next to his father and mother? Even if threatened with death, he would not do it. Would he copulate next to his older and younger brothers? He would not do it either. Would he copulate next to the countrymen? He would not do it either. [Being fearful] of father and older brother, and only then being fearful of others, is ritual propriety. Using sex to lead through analogy to ritual propriety is to advance [in moral conduct].²⁴

23 For a succinct discussion, see Jean-Pierre Diény, *Aux origines de la poésie classique en Chine* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 17–40. For a discussion of the presumably lascivious songs in the *Odes* as entertained by Zhu Xi and others, see Wong Siu-kit and Lee Kar-shui, “Poems of Depravity.”

24 See Liu Xinfang 劉信芳, *Jianbo Wu xing jiegou* 簡帛五行解詁 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 2000), 158–160; Wei Qipeng 魏啟鵬, *Jianbo “Wu xing” jianshi* 簡帛《五行》箋釋

This passage is a commentary on a single line of the *Wu xing* base text “to know something through the use of analogy is called to advance in it (i.e., moral conduct)” (*yu er zhi zhi, wei zhi jin zhi* 榆(諭)而知之, 胃(謂)之進[之]). This line is already found in the Guodian bamboo manuscript of the *Wu xing* base text, and the Mawangdui commentary uses “Guan ju” to illustrate the principle of “analogy” (*yu*). In doing so, it also offers a specific hermeneutical approach to the song. However, this approach did not originate with the Mawangdui manuscript; as we see from the *Kongzi shilun* discussion of “Guan ju,” it existed already at the time of the Guodian *Wu xing* text. In other words, the Mawangdui commentary uses a well-established reading of “Guan ju” to illustrate the hermeneutic principle expressed in the *Wu xing* base text. But why did the Mawangdui commentary then continue to elaborate at such length on “Guan ju” itself, even raising rhetorical questions about whether the impetuous lover might engage in copulation in front of his parents, brothers, or the countrymen? Where did this line of reasoning originate? The answer may well be found in “Qiang Zhongzi” 將仲子 (Zhongzi, Please!; Mao 76), one of the most notorious songs from the “Zheng feng” section:

Please, Zhongzi,	將仲子兮
do not leap into our hamlet,	無踰我里
do not break the willow trees we have planted.	無折我樹杞
How would I dare to care for them,	豈敢愛之
yet I am fearful of my father and mother.	畏我父母
Zhongzi is truly to be loved,	仲可懷也
Yet the words of father and mother	父母之言
are also truly to be feared.	亦可畏也

Please, Zhongzi,	將仲子兮
do not leap across our wall,	無踰我牆
do not break the mulberry trees we have planted.	無折我樹桑
How would I dare to care for them,	豈敢愛之
yet I am fearful of my older brothers.	畏我諸兄

(Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2000), 126–128; Pang Pu 龐樸, *Zhubo “Wu xing” pian jiaozhu ji yanjiu* 竹帛《五行》篇校注及研究 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2000), 82–83; Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, *Maōtai Kanbo hakusho gogyōhen kenkyū* 馬王堆漢墓帛書五行篇研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1993), 533–45; Jeffrey Riegel, “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary”; Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), 366–367.

Zhongzi is truly to be loved,
yet the words of my older brothers
are also truly to be feared.

仲可懷也
諸兄之言
亦可畏也

Please, Zhongzi,
do not leap into our garden,
do not break the sandalwood trees we have planted.
How would I dare to care for them,
yet I am fearful of the many words by the people.
Zhongzi is truly to be loved,
yet the many words by the people
are also truly to be feared.

將仲子兮
無踰我園
無折我樹檀
豈敢愛之
畏人之多言
仲可懷也
人之多言
亦可畏也

There can be little question that it is this song, and not “Guan ju,” that has provided the template for the Mawangdui discussion on “Guan ju.” First, there is the sequence of father and mother, the brothers, and other people that at times of urgent sexual sexual desire are to be considered in order to guard oneself against licentious behavior. Second, both “Qiang Zhongzi” and the *Wu xing* commentary speak of “being fearful” (*wei* 畏) of these three groups, with the Mawangdui text explicitly ranking them in a hierarchy of importance that matches the progression in “Qiang Zhongzi.” And finally, slip 17 of the *Kongzi shilun* itself contains a brief commentary on “Qiang Zhongzi”:

What “Qiang Zhong” speaks about cannot but be feared.
將[將]中[仲]之言不可不韋[畏]也。

In the Mao exegesis, “Qiang Zhongzi” is interpreted as criticizing Lord Zhuang of Zheng 鄭莊公 (743–701 BC); but Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1036–1162) has famously called it the “words of a licentious eloper” (*yin ben zhe zhi ci* 淫奔者之辭), a verdict that Zhu Xi cites with appreciation.²⁵ While the *Kongzi shilun* gives no support at all to the Mao reading, it also differs from Zhu Xi’s understanding according to which certain *Odes*, especially a number of “Zheng feng” and “Wei feng” songs, were meant as warnings against licentious behavior.²⁶ Zhu Xi tried to resolve the problem that the *Odes* apparently contained songs of dubious moral stature, but this is not the ultimate concern of *Kongzi shilun* and

25 Zhu Xi, *Shi ji zhuan* 詩集傳 (Sibu congkan ed.) 4.13a–b.

26 See Wong Siu-kit and Lee Kar-shui, “Poems of Depravity,” 214–15.

Mawangdui *Wu xing* when they speak of “being fearful.” Instead, “fearful” (*wei*) as used in the *Wu xing* commentary, is to be taken as “respectful” or “submissive” and clearly defined through the hierarchical order of ritual propriety (*li* 禮): first toward ones parents and older brothers, and then toward others, as elaborated in “Qiang Zhongzi.” In the end, neither “Guan ju” nor “Qiang Zhongzi” offer accounts of licentious behavior that has to be shunned. Instead, they provide examples of appropriate behavior, guided by the capacity of ritual propriety, in situations of strong sexual desire. “Guan ju” gives us the example from the perspective of the man longing for an alluring lady; “Qiang Zhongzi” shows us the same from the perspective of the woman admonishing her lover. The male and female speakers in these two songs experience powerful sexual desire, but both turn this desire into a challenge to aspire to ritual propriety.

In sum, for the first time after full two millennia of thinking about the *guofeng*, the discussions in *Kongzi shilun* and Mawangdui *Wu xing* allow us to appreciate such apparently disparate songs like “Guan ju” and “Qiang Zhongzi” (or “Yue chu”) from a common perspective—a perspective, moreover, that avoids both the historical and political interpretation of the *Mao Odes* and the modern, rather simplistic surface reading of the *guofeng* as charming folk songs. What the manuscripts call “analogy,” or “to guide through analogy” (*yu*) is what Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–AD 18) called *tui lei er yan* 推類而言 when arguing that the extravagant descriptions of the Han *fu* were intended to “suade” (*feng* 諷) toward moral behavior.²⁷ As Yang Xiong lamented, “The expositions of the (ancient) *Odes* authors were gorgeous in order to provide standards, [but] the expositions of the (recent) rhapsodists are gorgeous in order to lead to licentiousness” (*shiren zhi fu li yi ze, ciren zhi fu li yi yin* 詩人之賦麗以則, 辭人之賦麗以淫).²⁸

27 *Hanshu* 87B.3575; Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶, *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 3.45 (“Wu zi” 吾子).

28 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu* 3.49; see also *Hanshu* 30.1756. I believe Yang Xiong was wrong; the early Western Han *fu* that his criticism is directed at exhibit precisely the rhetoric of moral transformation that the manuscripts advance for the reading of the *guofeng*. See Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63.2 (2003): 383–437.

III. Methodological problems in reading the *guofeng* and their early interpretations

Originally, the Mao tradition of *Odes* interpretation must have emerged from a the common practice of applying the ancient songs to historical situations, that is, a procedure similar to the use of the songs in the historical narratives of *Zuo zhuan* and *Guoyu* or as proof texts in philosophical texts like *Ziyi*, among many others. In such contexts, the meaning of a song could flexibly change according to the specific circumstances. Yet in the world of Han scholasticism, this application of the songs was then turned back onto the *guofeng* themselves: it was no longer the song that made a case about history, but it was now history to provide the purported original context and meaning of the song. It is crucial to understand this circular application—first of a song to history, and then of that history to the song—in order to appreciate the rhetorical force of the Mao prefaces. Furthermore, as has now become clear from the textual variants and radically different readings in the manuscripts, the circular process of the Mao exegesis ruled deeply into the text itself. In addition to the “minor prefaces” that provided an overall meaning for each song, the Mao orthographic choices and its individual word glosses oftentimes provided the basis for this meaning, creating the impression of an original text from which the “minor prefaces” then seemed to merely extract the “original meaning.”

As Ma Chengyuan and others have pointed out, the discussion of “Guan ju” in the *Kongzi shilun* shows that the Mao preface to the song is “by no means the true transmission of Confucius’s discussion.”²⁹ But if this is true for “Guan ju,” it must also be true for the overall Mao approach to the *guofeng*. There is not a single *guofeng* that the *Kongzi shilun* discusses in historical terms. But we must go a step further and accept that the “Guan ju” *text itself* of the *Mao Odes* is not the one of the *Kongzi shilun*. The Mao commentary on *yaotiao* defines this word in a meaning radically at odds with the *Kongzi shilun* discussion and a wealth of other evidence such as the Mawangdui *Wu xing* discussion, or the comments in the *Analects*, in the *Xunzi*, and by Liu An. This amount of material to challenge the Mao reading of a particular song is unique and most likely due to the eminent stature of “Guan ju.” Yet it is precisely this eminence, in which the song appears as paradigmatic, that asks us to also question the historical readings of the *guofeng* “minor prefaces” in general, and with them numerous Mao word glosses. As far as we can tell today, these glosses did not exist prior to Mao; the

29 Ma Chengyuan, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (yi)*, 140.

most likely dominant hermeneutic tradition from the late fourth through the mid-second century BC—from *Kongzi shilun* and Guodian *Wu xing* to Mawangdui *Wu xing* and Liu An's comment on the *guofeng*—shows no trace of individual word glosses whatsoever. Taken seriously, this situation creates a fundamental difficulty: we are now able to doubt the Mao glosses alongside the historical interpretations they are supporting, but we have very little to replace them. While we know that the *Odes* as they circulated in 300 BC were composed of the same—or at least homophonous—words as those of the received Mao tradition, once we eliminate their Mao graphic choices and glosses, we no longer know what these characters and words actually are. In other words, our usual scholarly procedure to base our reading of the songs discussed in *Kongzi shilun* on our understanding of the Mao text is fundamentally self-contradictory and ultimately untenable. We cannot reject the Mao “minor prefaces” while at the same time accepting the words of the Mao text, because this text is not at all in any way “original” or prior to the Mao glosses. It is the text that in its received form and meaning exists only through the Mao reading as we have it in Zheng Xuan's recension. There are no original *Odes* available to us; all we have are the *Mao Odes*—that is, a text constructed through a particular interpretation. This problem, as it happens, has already plagued the Song critics of the Mao tradition who, lacking any alternative, had to use the Mao text to argue against the Mao interpretation. Zhu Xi tried to resolve the problem by suggesting that the “minor prefaces” were a later (in his mind, Han) addition to the earlier (to him, pre-Qin) Mao text that often distorted the original meaning. He did not, however, realize that the characters of the *Mao Odes* themselves were already interpretative choices, that the Mao glosses—which for lack of alternatives he by and large had to accept—helped to establish and rationalize these choices, and that both elements may have evolved more or less concomitantly and in mutual support with the “minor prefaces.”

Unfortunately, our manuscript finds so far are not nearly sufficient to establish for the majority of the *guofeng* a reading independently from the Mao glosses. Unlike the philosophical and historical texts we now see in excavated manuscripts, most of the *guofeng* do not present discursive arguments or sequential narratives, written in straightforward Warring States language, that we could decipher on the basis of their continuous philosophical or narrative logic. The language of the *guofeng* is frequently discontinuous, and their capacity to become applied to a wide range of historical situations or philosophical arguments is based on their very nature of being indeterminate, ambiguous, and therefore fundamentally contingent texts that embodied a wide range of latent meanings.

By definition, such texts can never be explained out of their own words but only through external reference; in fact, from the mere textual surface, they cannot even be confidently established on the level of the individual word. In the case of the Mao tradition, the external reference is moral and historical; but what is it in the *Kongzi shilun*? Perhaps we can tell for “Guan ju,” but we cannot for most of the other songs. Consider the case of “Juan er” 卷耳 (Cocklebur; Mao 3), the third of the “Zhou nan.” According to the Mao “minor preface,” it displays the “intent” (*zhi* 志) of the queen who assists her lord by selecting men of talent and virtue, not favoring her own relatives (卷而, 后妃之志也。又當輔佐君子, 求賢審官, 知臣下之勤勞, 內有進賢之志, 而無險詖私謁之心, 朝夕思念, 至於憂勤也). The *Kongzi shilun*, by contrast, states laconically: “*bu zhi ren*” 不知人, that is, “does not know / appreciate others.” This is simply too little to help us grasp what the *Kongzi shilun* author made of this song. Moreover, as I have tried to show, we cannot use our present understanding of the song itself—which at its basis depends on the Mao text—to make sense of the laconic remark in the *Kongzi shilun*. As far as we can tell, the note *bu zhi ren* goes against the Mao interpretation that has helped to determine the Mao text in the first place.

In short, the *Kongzi shilun* has brought us closer in time to the origins of the *Odes* and their compilation. In the process, we now also have lost whatever certainty we might have felt about reading and understanding the *Odes* before (and beyond) Mao. Such are the Socratic pleasures of reading archaic poetry in ancient manuscripts.

