

Chapter 8: The Function of Poetic Language and Rhymes in Pre-Modern Chinese Literature

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Abstract

This chapter will provide an overview of the research on the omnipresence and linguistic and extralinguistic relevance of poetic speech in early Chinese literature. In Chinese literature, the linguistic means of rhyme, rhythmic speech and grammatical parallelism play a significant role in the conveyance of meaning, persuasion and the distinction of linguistic register.

Rhyming in particular is also of relevance in the reconstruction of the historical phonology of Chinese. Thus, the analysis of the linguistic structures employed in poetic speech is pivotal for a comprehensive acknowledgement of Chinese literary writing.

Keywords: Ancient Chinese, Literature, Poetry, Poetic Speech, *Shijing*, Rhyming in Ancient Chinese Literature, Linguistic Register, Elevated Speech, Persuasion

Introduction

In this chapter, the particular role poetic speech has in Chinese literature will be discussed.

Poetic speech, parallelisms and rhyming were integral parts of Chinese writing in Pre-Modern times, and the analyses of their structures and functions not only help to define the stylistic register but also the purpose of the respective text employing poetic speech.

Following a survey of the history of poetry and rhyming in Pre-Modern China, the focus of this chapter will be on two aspects of Chinese poetic writing (i.e., two different instantiations of poetic speech). The first aspect is the linguistic and cultural functions of quotations of poems from the 詩經 *Shījīng*, the *Book of Odes* or *Book of Songs* (hereafter, *Odes*) in literary discourse, while the second aspect is the function of poetic speech in political discourse. The discussion of these two aspects will demonstrate that rhymes and poetry performed a relevant function in the linguistic shaping of early Chinese literature. The acknowledgment of these linguistic structures is an important prerequisite for the full comprehension of the particularities of the Chinese literary tradition.

Poetry and rhyming in Ancient China

Poetry, rhyming and poetic speech have been among the most eminent characteristics of traditional Chinese literature from the earliest times (Kern 2010: 5). As Kern (2010: 17) puts it “to speak in poetry was to speak with truth and authority.” In both prose and poetry, strictly rhythmic passages consisting of a regular number of syllables (e.g., the alternation of four and six syllables in parallel prose, the four-syllable lines in the *Shījīng*, the five-syllable meter in Classical poems) appeared with end rhymes and in non-poetic texts. Whereas early archaic rhyming seemed to be less confined to artificial rhyming distinctions, the rhyming in the Tang period (618–907 CE) and in later poetry was subjected to strict rules (see Baxter 1992: 96; among many others). According to Kern (2005: 64), in Early China there was no strict distinction “between bound (‘poetry’) and unbound (‘prose’) speech” and “‘poetic language’ transcended the narrow definition of ‘poetry’ as language organized by rhyme and meter.” The linguistic rules of poetic speech and the social contexts of poetry in Early China differed considerably from the poetry in the Tang and later periods, in which the ability to produce rhymed poetry according to strict norms was part of the imperial examinations that were required to qualify for official employment. The situation was evidently different in Early (tenth to sixth century BCE) and Late Archaic (fifth to second century BCE) Chinese. According to Baxter (1992: 96), the phonological diversity of the earliest collection of poetry, the *Shījīng*, “suggests that the forces of standardization were not very strong” at that time and in that text. Some of the obviously less perfect rhymes in the *Shījīng* may have reflected older phonological features. These imperfect rhymes may have originated from the employment of stock rhyming phrases that facilitated the spontaneous oral production of rhymes. Because they appeared in fixed phrases, these rhymes were employed continuously in the literature despite their lack of perfectly fitting the rhyme schemes.

In the Late Archaic and Early Medieval (first century BCE to sixth century CE) periods, new forms of poetry developed. Those which figured most prominently in the literature of that time could be found in the 楚辭 *Chǔcí* (*Songs of the South*) and in the 賦 *fù* ‘poems’ in Han (206 BCE to 220 CE) literature. Unlike the *Shījīng*, the *Songs of the South* “never received imperial recognition” (Kern 2010: 76), but they were nevertheless highly influential in Chinese literary history (see also Hawkes 1985). *Fù* poems, on the other hand, received imperial recognition and were regularly produced at court, where they served to commemorate events at court and imperial activities “such as sacrifices, hunts, and imperial

progresses” (Knechtges 2010: 118). Court poets were also in charge of composing 詠物賦 *yǒngwù fù* ‘*fù* on things’ in order “to celebrate the presentation of tribute items from foreign states or gifts from prominent individuals” (Knechtges 2010: 118). Besides *fù* poems, other poetic forms, such as the 頌 *sòng* ‘eulogy’, 銘 *míng* ‘inscription’, 箴 *zhēn* ‘admonition’ and 誄 *lěi* ‘dirge’, were typical court compositions (Knechtges 2010: 118). The Stele Inscriptions of Qin Shi Huangdi, for instance, not only commemorated China’s unification, “but also the act of their inscription and recitation, historicizing both the emperor’s accomplishments and their immediate recognition.” (Kern 2010: 86) Stylistically, the inscriptions were modelled after the hymns in the *Shījīng* and bronze inscriptions, “celebrating the unification not as an act accomplished by military success but as the establishment of good moral order” (Kern 2010: 86).

The tradition of composing *fù* at court continued throughout the Tang period with the composition of ceremonial 樂府 *yuèfù* ‘song poems’ by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643 CE) under Taizong (Kroll 2001: 284).¹ Moreover, a tendency to employ ancient-style poetry modelled on the simpler language of classical poetry and prose emerged again (Bodman 1978: 22) in the Tang period. This seemed to better suit the literary tasks of political remonstrance and moral instruction than the complicated rules of Early Medieval poetry. Also during the Tang Dynasty, poems confined by strict rules became popular and constituted the most famous literary genre of that time. Two forms are particularly notable: (1) 絕句 *juéjū* ‘the quatrain’ and (2) 律詩 *lǜshī* ‘regulated verse’. The Tang poems collected in the 全唐詩 *Quán Tángshī* (*Complete Tang Poems*), which consist of 900 捲 *juǎn* ‘scrolls’, include more than 48,900 poems by more than 2,200 authors. The most representative and popular Tang poems were assembled in the 唐詩三百首 *Tángshī Sānbǎi Shǒu* (*Three Hundred Tang Poems*) by Sun Zhu 孫洙 in the eighth century.

The development of poetry adhering to strict rhyming schemes is connected to the discovery of the four tones ascribed to Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513 CE) and his contemporaries, who were influential in the development of a poetic style emphasizing tonal euphony (Tian, 2010: 245). During their era in the fifth and sixth centuries, tonal distinctions became part of the rhyme schemes, which resulted in strict rules for regulated verse. Baxter (1992: 303) suggested that it was the literary interest of Shen Yue and his contemporaries and their contact with

Buddhist chanting methods which triggered the interest in the distinction of different tones (see also Bodman 1978; Tian 2010). Shen Yue first referred to the tones by the names of musical notes, probably because of the lack of terminology for this new concept. Perhaps he also wanted to provide a classical sanction for a radically new concept doubted by many Confucian scholars, who objected that the tones were not mentioned in the *Five Classics* (Bodman 1978: 132).

The poems of the *Shījīng* in Classical Chinese literature

The most important source of poetic language in the Archaic period was the *Shījīng*. The composition of its 305 poems presumably dates between 1000 and 600 BCE. According to one tradition represented by the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (fl. 100 BCE), these 305 poems were selected from more than 3,000 and collated into four different categories by Confucius 孔子 (Kongzi, 551–479 BCE). According to another account, they were collected by officials “commissioned to do so in order to discover the extent and depth of popular feeling” (Loewe 1993: 415). At the beginning of the Han period, three official versions—the 魯 *Lu*, the 齊 *Qi* and the 韓 *Han*—and one private version—the 毛公 *Mao Gong*—of the *Shījīng* existed. Of these only the version which became known as the Mao version of the *Shījīng* still exists, while merely a few fragments of the other versions have survived at different places (see Loewe 1993; Kern 2010). As one of the texts included in the *Five Classics* 經 *Wǔ Jīng*, the *Shījīng* became part of Confucian teaching in imperial times (Loewe 1993).

Myriads of quotations of the poems in the *Shījīng* appeared in Chinese literature, and countless commentaries and studies were devoted to its exegesis and linguistic analysis for more than two millennia.² Linguistically speaking, three aspects in the study of the *Shījīng* are of particular interest: (1) the study of its rhymes as a means for the reconstruction of the phonological system of the time (see Baxter 1992); (2) the analysis of the grammar of the *Shījīng* as an Early Archaic text; and (3) the linguistic analysis of the different categories of poems in the *Shījīng* as representatives of different stylistic registers in Archaic Chinese (see Feng and Vihan 2016). The present discussion will focus on the latter aspect.

The *Odes* is divided into four different categories of poems and songs: the 風 *Fēng* (“Airs”) or 國風 *Guófēng* (“Airs of the States”) (160 works); the 雅 *Yǎ* (“Elegantiae”) (105 works), which include the 大雅 *Dà yǎ* (“Major Court Hymns”) (31 works) and the 小雅 *Xiǎo yǎ*

(“Minor Court Hymns”) (74 works); and the 頌 *Sòng* (“Eulogia”) (40 works). Feng and Vihan (2016) render the terms referring to the different categories of the *Fēng*, the *Yǎ* and the *Sòng*. One of the functions of the *Shījīng*, according to Confucian thinking, is deduced from the following passage from the 論語 *Lúnyǔ* (*Analects of Confucius*) quoted by Feng and Vihan (2016: 52):

My darling young ones, why aren't you learning the Odes? The Odes can stimulate you, teach you a way of seeing things, how to associate with one another, as well as how to keep your distance. In private they instruct you on how to serve your parents, in public on how to assist the ruler, they teach you the names of birds and beasts, the terms for plants and trees.

子曰：「小子！何莫學夫詩？詩，可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨。邇之事父，遠之事君。多識於鳥獸草木之名。」. (*Lúnyǔ* 17, 陽貨 *yáng huò*)

According to Feng and Vihan (2016: 52), what the *Odes* taught were all the functions of style: “[P]eople use the Odes as a linguistic tool that regulates person to person relations and the degree of their distance and proximity.” Feng and Vihan (2016) propose that the analysis of the respective odes in the *Shījīng* is of particular relevance for the distinction of different stylistic registers in Archaic Chinese; the “Airs”, the “Elegantiae” and the “Eulogia” provide evidence of the “three stylistic registers” hypothesis. The division of the odes

either intentionally or unintentionally complied with the intrinsic property of style, that is to say, according to informal, formal, and elevated stylistic registers and their functions (i.e. the social role of language), weighed and divided the more than three hundred odes into informal Airs, formal Elegentiae, and elevated Eulogia. (Feng and Vihan 2016: 54)

Additionally, the *Lúnyǔ* as well as the 孟子 *Mèngzǐ* (*Mencius*) stress the obvious political function the odes had. In the *Mèngzǐ*, different odes were explicitly presented as serving different social functions and as reflecting “intimacy and estrangement, distance and proximity” (Feng and Vihan 2016: 53).

Quotations and phrases from the *Shījīng* and other texts have appeared in Chinese literature from the earliest times on to fulfil social and political functions. The respective stylistic characteristics of these quotations and co-occurrences reflect their extralinguistic roles. The *Fēng* can be expected to appear in less formal contexts, whereas the *Yǎ* and particularly the *Sòng* are expected to appear in formal and solemn contexts respectively (Feng and Vihan 2016) (Feng and Vihan, 2016). In the bronze inscriptions, for instance, set phrases which also appeared in the *Shījīng* occurred together with rhymed passages unrelated to the *Shījīng*. However, this did not imply that phrases identical to passages in the *Shījīng* were actually quotations from that text. The same polite and reverend phrases were typical in both the *Yǎ* and *Sòng* sections of the *Shījīng* and the bronze inscriptions. The technique of rhyming was attested in the bronze inscriptions of the tenth and ninth century BCE. Chen 陳致 (2010: 37; cf. Feng and Vihan 2016: 66) stated that

the reason why the bronze inscriptions from the Two Zhou period often match poems from the Elegantiae and Eulogia sections of the *Classic of Odes* is because the Zhou people were accustomed to using sacrificial phrases, it is not that the inscriptions are quoting the *Odes*.

Since the language of the “Airs” belongs to a different stylistic register, which is less ceremonial and sacred than the language of the “Elegantiae” and the “Eulogia,” the “Airs” are not attested in the bronze inscriptions (Feng and Vihan 2016: 67). In an example of rhymed bronze inscriptions, Kern (2010: 13) quoted the 牆盤 *qiáng pán* ‘Qiang basin inscription’ (around 900 BCE) containing two long genealogies presented in rhymed form: in this inscription the narrative part is rhymed, not the final prayer section, “reversing the usual aesthetic choice of most other inscriptions.”³

In the Late Archaic historical and philosophical writings, references to the *Odes* are omnipresent. This accounts especially for the poems from the *Yǎ* section, and foremost from the *Dà yǎ*: “the ‘Major Court Hymns’—hermeneutically unproblematic and unambiguous in their moral intent—were the primary texts invoked to ‘prove’ an argument with the authority of antiquity” (Kern 2010: 26). The *Shījīng* was particularly used by the followers of 儒家思想 *rújiā sīxiǎng* (the Ruists) ‘Confucian thought’ as part of their textual learning. In the 左傳 *Zuǒ zhuàn* (“Commentary of Zuo”) and the 國語 *Guó yǔ* (“Discourses of the States”), odes

were cited from all parts of the *Shījīng* at diplomatic meetings of several feudal states regardless of cultural differences within the realm of the Eastern Zhou (770–221 BCE) (Kern 2010). The *Odes* also played an eminent role in marking “moments of crisis and catharsis, violence and destruction” (Kern 2005: 68).

To illustrate the function of the *Odes* in Late Archaic and Early Medieval literature, two exemplary texts have been chosen: the Late Archaic *Guóyǔ* and the Early Medieval 女誡 *Nǚ Jiè* (“Admonitions for Women”) included in the 後漢書 *Hòu Hànsū* (*History of the Later Han Dynasty*). Although both texts play an eminent role in Chinese literature, examples from these texts have been less frequently included in literary and linguistic studies. The *Guóyǔ*, as a rhetorically highly-stylized text, is of particular interest in the analysis of the function of poetic speech, and it will figure in both parts of the present discussion. First, a few citations from the *Shījīng* in the *Guóyǔ* will be presented and analysed. Most of the explicit quotations in this text are from the *Dàiyǎ* and the *Xiǎoyǎ* sections, but there are also some from the *Sòng* and the *Fēng* sections. As the examples will demonstrate, the category of the *Odes* chosen corresponds closely to the kind of situation in which they appeared. In (1) from the 周語 *Zhōuyǔ* part of the *Guóyǔ*, the first two stanzas of a song from the *Xiǎoyǎ* section of the *Shījīng* are quoted in a diplomatic discourse. In this discourse King Xiang of Zhou is advised not to attack the state of Zheng. The advice is enhanced by a poem referring to the proper behaviour of brothers and friends as an instantiation of the behaviour requested from the king towards the ruler of another state.

(1) 周文公之詩曰：『兄弟鬩于牆，外禦其侮。』 (*Guóyǔ*, 周語中 *Zhōuyǔ zhōng*)

zhōu wén gōng zhī shī yuē: xiōng dì xì yú qiáng, wài yù qí wǔ

‘Brothers may quarrel inside the walls,

But they will oppose insult from without,

(When friends, however good they may be,

Will not afford help.)’⁴ (*Shījīng*, *Xiǎoyǎ*) (Translation, Legge)

In the following (2), a section from the *Dàiyǎ* is quoted together with a section from the 尚書 *Shàngshū* (“Book of Documents”) in a diplomatic discourse to underline the rules for the proper behaviour of a gentleman:

(2) 詩曰：『愷悌君子，求福不回。』 (*Guóyǔ, Zhōuyǔ zhōng*)

shī yuē: kàitì jūnzǐ, qiú fú bù huí

‘Easy and self-possessed was our prince,⁵

Seeking for happiness by no crooked ways.’ (*Dàiyǎ, 文王之什 Wénwáng Zhī Shén*

[“Decade of Wenwang”]) (Translation, Legge)

In (3), the first part of the “Eulogia” from the 周頌 *Zhōu Sòng* chapter was employed in a ceremonial situation to emphasize solemnly the paramount importance of the proper behaviour of a sovereign. In the discourse this is followed by a comprehensive explanation of its meaning.

(3) 其詩曰：『昊天有成命，二后受之，成王不敢康。』 (*Guóyǔ, Zhōuyǔ zhōng xià*)

qí shī yuē: hào tiān yǒu chéng mìng, èr hòu shòu zhī, chéng wáng bù gǎn kāng

‘Heaven made its determinate appointment,

Which [our] two sovereigns received.

King Cheng did not dare to rest idly in it.

(But night and day enlarged its foundations by his deep and silent virtue.

How did he continue and glorify [his heritage],

Exerting all his heart,

And so securing its tranquillity!’ (*Shījīng, Zhōu Sòng*) (Translation, Legge).

In the next example, the last three stanzas of a song from the odes of the state of Zheng 鄭 from the *Guófēng* are quoted, urging the future 晉文公 Wengong of Jin, Prince Chong’er, to leave Qi with his followers because the duke of Qi, who gave refuge to Chong’er, died and the diplomatic situation became unfavourable and precarious for the prince. The dialogue takes place in a more personal and informal setting, after a plan to get Chong’er’ out of the country quickly was overheard by a maid. Consequently, the maid was killed and the situation became even more perilous.

(4) 鄭詩云：『仲可懷也，人之多言，亦可畏也。』 (*Guóyǔ, 晉語 Jìn Yǔ*

“Discourses of Jin”: 4)

zhèng shī yuē: zhòng kě huái yě, rén zhī duō yán, yì kě wèi yě

‘(pray you, Mr. Zhong,

Do not come leaping into my garden;
Do not break my sandal trees.
Do I care for them?
But I dread the talk of people.)
You, O Zhong, are to be loved,
But the talk of people,
Is also to be feared.’ (*Shījīng*, *Zheng Guófēng*) (Translation, Legge).

These few examples may suffice for an illumination of the highly normative sociocultural functions a citation of the poems from the *Shījīng* had in historical discourse. Particularly, the “Eulogia” and the “Elegentiae” were employed to convey rules for proper behaviour, transmitted through time by poems and songs. They served to pass on a received truth by referring to exemplary events and personalities in the past. Since the different categories of the *Odes*, employed in different sociocultural settings, obviously also reflected stylistic distinctions (see Feng and Vihan 2016), an analysis of the linguistic contexts in which the *Odes* appeared may provide supporting evidence for the identification of possible differences in the linguistic registers of the Classical Chinese language.

This employment of the *Odes* was not confined to the literature of Archaic Chinese, but was still prominent in later literary genres. Since the citation of poems from the *Shījīng* referred to Ancient times and to exemplary situations in history, it became even more authoritative in post-Classical times. Additionally, the *Shījīng* was charged with the exegetic explanations of generations of earlier commentators. The *Nǚ Jiè* “Admonitions for Women”, included in the *Hòu Hànshū*, will serve as an example. This text was written in the Ruist tradition, and it was interspersed with Classicisms and references to the *Odes* that spoke truthfully and underlined the relevance of the issues related. The author of *Nǚ Jiè*, Ban Zhao 班昭 (45/51–114/120 CE), was a daughter in the Ban 班 family, the most distinguished and famous scholarly and literary family of the Eastern Han. Her brother Ban Gu 班固 was not only the main compiler of the *Hànshū*, but he was famous for the *fù* he composed. His longest and most famous *fù* was 兩都賦 *Liǎng Dū Fù* (“The *Fù* on the Two Capitals”)—the capital of the Western Han Chang’an and the capital of the Eastern Han Luoyang. In his preface to this *fù*, Ban Gu associated it with the *Sòng* genre in the *Shījīng*. Two functions of the *fù* were mentioned by Ban Gu:

Sometimes it was for the purpose of expressing feelings of the emperor's subjects and conveying subtle criticism and advice, and other times it was for the purpose of proclaiming the ruler's virtue and demonstrating the utmost loyalty and filial obedience. (cf. Knechtges 2010: 123)

The literary works of his sister Ban Zhao include *Narrative Poems, Commemorative Writings, Inscriptions, Eulogies, Argumentations, Commentaries, Elegies, Essays, Treatises, Expositions, Memorials, and Final Instructions*, sixteen books in all. She was “one of the most distinguished female scholars in Chinese history” (Knechtges 2010: 121). After her brother's death she was employed to finish the compilation of the *Hànshū*. She also served as a tutor for the women at court. One of her functions was to write *fù* on unusual objects. Her daughter-in-law, of the Ting family, collected and edited her works, and appended thereto an appreciation of Ban Zhao (Knechtges 2010: 121). In her “Admonitions for Women”, Ban Zhao referred directly or indirectly to the *Shījīng* on several occasions. In the first chapter, “On Humility,” for instance, she referred indirectly to a passage from the *Xiǎoyǎ* section, in which the proper way of bringing up girls is described (see [5a-b]).

(5) a. 古者生女三日，臥之床下，弄之瓦墼，而齋告焉。（後漢書 *Hòu Hànnshū*, 74: 2785)

gǔ zhě shēng nǚ sān rì, wò zhī chuáng xià, nòng zhī wǎ chuán, ér zhāi gào yán

‘In ancient times, when a girl was three days old, she was put to sleep under the bed, for play she was given tiles and potsherds, and only the offerings were explained to her.’

b. (乃生女子，載寢之地，載衣之裒，載弄之瓦。) (*Shījīng, Xiǎoyǎ Sigan*) (translation, Legge)

nǎi shēng nǚzǐ, zài qǐn zhī dì, zài yī zhī xi, zài nòng zhī wǎ

‘Daughters shall be born to him: They will be put to sleep on the ground;
They will be clothed with wrappers; They will have tiles to play with.
It will be theirs neither to do wrong nor to do good.

Only about the spirits and the food will they have to think,
And to cause no sorry to their parents.’

In the second chapter, on the proper behaviour of husbands and wives, Ban Zhao referred to the opening passage in the *Guófēng* section (see [6a-b]); this is the first poem in the *Shījīng*. This stanza praises the behaviour of a woman towards her husband; the symbolic meaning of this passage has been frequently pointed to in commentary literature. In this example, the *Shījīng* is explicitly cited.

(6) a. 以禮貴男女之際，詩著關雎之義。(Hòu Hànsū, 74: 2785)

yǐ lǐ guì nán nǚ zhī jì, shī zhù guānjū zhī yì

‘The relations between man and woman are honoured according to propriety; the *Odes* manifest the meaning of *guānjū*.’

b. (關關雎鳩，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。) (*Shījīng*, *Guófēng*, 周南

Zhōunán [“South of Zhou”]) (Translation, Legge)

guānguān jū zhī jū, zài hé zhī zhōu. yǎotiǎo shù nǚ, jūnzǐ hǎo qiú

‘Guan-guan go the ospreys,

On the islet in the river.

The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:

For our prince a good mate she [is].’

The “Admonitions for Women” ends with two stanzas from the *Zhou Sòng* chapter in the solemn “Eulogia.” This poem was chosen to emphasize the paramount relevance of the proper behaviour of women within a society moulded by Confucian ethics. In this function the “Admonitions for Women” became the canonical rules for female behaviour in Confucian China.

(7) 詩云：「在彼無惡，在此無射。」(Hòu Hànsū, 74: 2791)

shī yún: zài bǐ wú wù, zài cǐ wú shè

‘The *Odes* say: (There, there is no dislike, here, there is no satiation.

A flock of egrets is flying,

About the marsh there in the west.

My visitors came,

With an [elegant] carriage like those birds.)

There, [in their States], not disliked;
Here, [in Zhou], never tired of⁶;
(They are sure, day and night,
To perpetuate their fame.)’ (*Shījīng*, 周頌·振鷺 *Zhōu Sòng, Zhènǜ*) (Translation,
Legge).

These few examples from the Late Archaic and Early Medieval texts demonstrate that all sections of the *Shījīng* were employed to accentuate and support an argument by referring to an authoritative source from Ancient China. The selection of an ode from any of the respective sections depended on the purpose of the author, the relevance of the issue and the social contexts of the situation the citation referred to. In all the examples presented, their function as a representative of Confucian (Ruist) thinking is highly normative. As Kern (2015: 196) puts it, “early Chinese poetic discourse...begins and ends with the unquestioned assumption that poetry serves moral purposes, and indeed only these.” Nevertheless, the choice of an ode from the “Airs,” the “Elegantiae” or the “Eulogia,” which represent different stylistic registers of speech, reflect the different grades of formality in the respective social setting.

Rhymes in Classical Chinese texts

In addition to using citations of passages from the *Shījīng* to enhance arguments in a discourse, rhythmic and rhymed paragraphs appeared regularly in Chinese literature. Poetic speech, including rhyme, rhythm and grammatical parallelism, was characteristic for Late Archaic literature in general. According to Kern (2016: 4), poetic diction is not “external embellishment of reasoned discourse...it is an intellectual style...and as such it fulfills—as style in any rhetorical tradition—functions of persuasion and even of what philosophers are wont to call illocutionary force.”⁷ Not only texts of Confucian content, but also Late Archaic texts in general and Daoist texts in particular employed rhythmic and rhymed diction to generate chains of argumentation: the 道德經 *Dào Dé Jīng* (“Canon of the Way and Power/Integrity”) consists of rhythmic and frequently rhymed paragraphs (see Baxter 1998)⁸; the 莊子 *Zhuāngzǐ* text contains numerous poetic tales and parables; and rhymes or other euphonic structures were frequently employed (Kern 2010: 75).

McCraw (1995) also pointed out the “importance of didactic verse to Zhou Chinese.” He distinguished between prescriptive, normative poetics “heavy words” and “lodged words” in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Many of the “heavy words” were, according to McCraw (1995: 14), negative admonitions. The “lodged words” could be serious but also functioned close to parody (McCraw 1995: 8); they often involved an arousal of the verses in the *Shījīng*. In a text like the *Zhuāngzǐ*, verse served multiple functions, including mockery of Confucian (Ruist) points of view (according to McCraw, particularly in the “Outer Chapters”) and what McCraw (1995) called “funny verse,” humorous verse and punning riddles to elucidate the philosophical concepts of the *Zhuāngzǐ* text. According to McCraw (1995), the comic, funny verses often referred to more serious philosophical or human issues. With regard to the rhyming techniques, McCraw (1995: 36) noted that the *Zhuāngzǐ* “rhymes across neighbouring groups with surprising freedom.” This supports the claim that rhyming was much freer in Archaic times than it was during the Tang period.

In the remainder of this overview, a short passage, again from the *Guóyǔ*, will be presented as an example of the employment of poetic speech in political argumentation. As Kern (2016), in his analysis of poetic speech in the 荀子 *Xúnzǐ*, points out, literary style in argumentation was “central to the quality not merely of its form of expression, but of its argument itself.” This does not only account for the argumentation in the *Xúnzǐ*, but also for the highly rhetorically stylized second part of the 越語 *Yuèyǔ* section in the *Guóyǔ* (see Meisterernst 2002).

The *Yuèyǔ* section is the last of the discourses on the eight feudal states of Zhou, Lu, Qi, Jin, Zheng, Chu, Wu and Yue during the Eastern Zhou period. Traditionally, it was assumed that the same author wrote the *Guóyǔ* and the *Zuǒzhuàn*. However, despite the close connection between the two texts, the hypotheses that they both originated from one author must be refuted (Chang et al., 1993). Additionally, different periods of composition ranging from the middle of the fifth to the beginning of the fourth century BCE (Wei 衛聚賢 1928; cf. Chang et al. 1993) have been proposed for the respective sections in the *Guóyǔ*. The differences in the dates of composition pertain even within the *Yuèyǔ* section: for the first part, *Yuèyǔ Shàng*, a date after 384 BCE was proposed by Wei, and for *Yuèyǔ Xià*, the date was assumed to be after 314 BCE. The hypothesis that both parts of the *Yuèyǔ* were composed by different authors can be supported by their respective stylistic characteristics (Meisterernst 2002). Both

parts cover the relations between the two Southern states Yue and Wu. In the first part, the peace negotiations between Yue and Wu and subsequently the preparations for the final attack on Wu are at issue in either narrative text or in the dialogue. The second part, from which the example below is taken, almost entirely consists of debates between the ruler of Yue, Goujian, and his counsellor Fan Li on the political and martial conflicts with Wu. In contrast to the first part of the *Yuèyǔ*, which only occasionally contains rhymed sequences, the second part is characterized by the frequent employment of rhymes, rhythmic speech and parallelism. These occur throughout the text, almost exclusively confined to the speech passages by counsellor Fan Li, who advises or admonishes his king, Goujian, against an attack on Wu. He argues that Goujian has only to wait for the right time to prevail against Wu without harming his own people. Thus, these prescriptive passages belong to the category of “heavy words” suggested by McCraw (1995). In the narrative parts and in the speeches of the king, rhymes are the exception. The following example represents only a small fraction of the poetic speech in the *Yuèyǔ Xià*:

(8) The king said, “My country and my families are [also] your country and your families, please consider this!” He (Fan Li) answered,

- | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------------|
| 1) “Within the four borders, | <u>四封之內</u> | *nûts |
| 2) In the affairs of the people, | 百姓之事 | *dzrəʔ |
| 3) The seasons determine the three duties: | 時節三樂 | *râuk |
| 4) {Do not bring chaos to the peoples’ efforts, | {不亂民功 | *kôŋ ⁹ |
| 5) Do not oppose the heavenly seasons, | 不逆天時 | *də |
| 6) If the five kinds of cereals ripen in harmony, | 五穀睦熟 | *duk |
| 7) The people will thus prosper and proliferate, | 民乃蕃滋 | *tsə |
| 8) Ruler and subject, high and low | 君臣上下 | *grâʔ |
| 9) Will together obtain their goals.} | 交得其志 | *tə-s} |
| 10) [In this] Li cannot compare with Zhong.” | 蠡不如種也。 | |
| | | |
| 1) “Outside the four borders, | <u>四封之外</u> | *ŋwâts |
| 2) In making decisions on enemy territory, | 敵國之制 | *təh |
| 3) And in the affairs that have to be decided | 立斷之事 | *dzrəʔ |
| 4) {Depend on the regularity of Yin and Yang, | {因陰陽之恆 | *g ^ˆ əŋ |

- | | | |
|---|------------|--------|
| 5) Follow the regulations of Heaven and Earth | 順天地之常 | *daŋ |
| 6) In softness do not bend, | 柔而不屈 | *kʰut |
| 7) In strength do not be hard, | 彊而不剛 | *kâŋ, |
| 8) In virtuous and cruel actions | 德虐之行 | *grâŋ |
| 9) Thus make it your rule. | 因以為常 | *daŋ |
| 10) Death and life depend on the model ¹⁰ of heaven, | 死生因天地之刑 | *gêŋ |
| 11) Heaven depends on men, | 天因人 | *nin, |
| 12) The sage depends on heaven, | 聖人因天 | *thîn |
| 13) Men beget something themselves, | 人自生之, | *srêŋ |
| 14) But Heaven and Earth shape it, | 天地形之, | *gêŋ |
| 15) The sage depends on it and perfects it. | 聖人因而成之. | *geŋ } |
| 16) Thus, fighting and prevailing without regretting, | 是故 戰勝而不報, | |
| 17) Taking land without returning, | 取地而不反, | |
| 18) Armies prevailing outside, | 兵勝於外, | |
| 19) Happiness emerging inside, | 福生於內, | |
| 20) Employing very little strength and having fame rising bright, | 用力甚少而名聲章明, | |
| 21) [in this] Zhong does on the other hand not compare to Li.” | 種亦不如蠡也。 」 | |
- The king said, “Agreed!”

A substantial part of this passage is composed of four-syllable lines, which additionally frequently rhyme.¹¹ The sequence from the *Yuèyǔ* discussed here can be divided into two parts according to their perfectly parallel opening lines: “Within the four borders,” < “Outside the four borders.” These define the topic or range of the following advice for the king. The two parts are connected by rhymes: line 2 in the first part and lines 2 and 3 in the second part all belong to the rime group 之 *zhī*. In the first part, the grammatical structures of lines 1 and 2 and lines 4 and 5, respectively, are identical.¹² The part which conveys the advice for the king starts on line 4, with rhyming end words in lines 5, 7 and 9. All three rhyme words belong to the rime group *zhī*. The rhyme words in lines 5 and 7 have a 平声 *píngshēng* reading in Middle Chinese, but 志 *zhì* has a 去声 *qùshēng* reading in Middle Chinese. The suffix underlying this reading obviously does not destroy the rhyme.

The second part of this sequence is longer and less consistent in the number of syllables per line because the issue is more complex than that in the first part. It contains four-syllable lines, five-syllable lines, one three-syllable line, one seven-syllable line, etc. The grammar of many of the lines is exactly parallel: lines 1, 2 and 3 have an almost identical grammatical structure; the respective grammar of lines 4 and 5 and lines 6 and 7 is identical; and the respective grammar of lines 16 and 17 and lines 18 and 19 is also identical. Apart from the first three lines, which display an identical structure, generally two consecutive lines are composed in a grammatically parallel fashion. In the second part the rhymed sequence that conveys the advice starts again on line 4; the end words of lines 5, 7, 8 and 9 belong to the rime group 陽 *yáng*; the end words of lines 11 and 12 belong to the rime group 真 *zhēn*; and the rhyme words in lines 10, 13, 14 and 15 all belong to the rime group 耕 *gēng*. In lines 13, 14 and 15 the rhyme words are the penultimate word in the line, followed by the object pronoun *zhī*. The number of rhymes evidently underlined the relevance and urgency of the advice presented. No citations from the *Shījīng* are involved in this section, but some of the phrases have been found in other Late Archaic texts. Line 6 in the second sequence also appears in the *Xúnzǐ*; the argumentation in lines 11 and 12 overlaps with a passage in the 管子 *Guǎnzǐ*; lines 16 and 17 also appear in the 淮南子 *Huáinán Zǐ* (*The Masters of Huáinán*); and line 18 is also attested in the 戰國策 *Zhànguó Cè* (“Strategies of the Warring States”). According to Wei (1928) (cf. Chang et al. 1993: 264), the *Guóyǔ* was connected to the state of Chu. The same holds true for at least parts of the *Guǎnzǐ* text and for the *Huáinán Zǐ*; Xun Qing 荀況, the author of substantial parts of the *Xúnzǐ* text, was born in Zhao but served in the state of Chu according to the 史記 *Shǐjì* (*Records of the Grand Historian*) (74: 2348).

The *Guǎnzǐ* and the *Huáinán Zǐ* not only share similar passages but also rhyme schemes typical of Chu (Rickett 1993: 248). Additionally, the *Guǎnzǐ* text shows a close connection to another part of the *Guóyǔ*, the 齊語 *Qiyǔ*, the discourse on the state of Qi, which has been dated about one century earlier than the *Yuèyǔ* section.¹³ Accordingly, it seems more likely that the *Yuèyǔ* borrowed from or shared materials with parts of the *Guǎnzǐ* instead of the reverse. The *Huáinán Zǐ* may have borrowed its phrasing either from the *Guǎnzǐ* or from the *Guóyǔ*. In any case, conscious borrowings do not necessarily have to be assumed in any of the parallels between other earlier, contemporary or later texts. However, a close cultural

connection manifests itself in the employment of poetic speech to enhance the relevance of the presented line of argumentation.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a few examples of the omnipresence and relevance of poetic speech in early Chinese literature. The linguistic means of rhyme, rhythmic speech and grammatical parallelism played a significant role in the conveyance of meaning, while poetic speech imparted truth. Thus, the analysis of the linguistic structures employed in poetic speech is pivotal for a comprehensive acknowledgement of Chinese literary writing. Recent research has demonstrated that the investigation of the stylistic characteristics of poetic speech may provide evidence for the distinction of different registers in the Chinese written language. This chapter presented a small range of poetic forms, and it demonstrated that from the earliest times on, the use of poetic speech was highly conventionalized. This allowed poetry to be deconstructed and rearranged into a great number of miscellaneous poetic forms according to the intended purpose of the respective authors; some of these forms have been briefly alluded to in Chapter 16 of this volume (see also Li 2005).

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¹ An overview of the literary history of poetic writing is not at issue in this chapter. The reader is referred to the titles listed in the References regarding this issue.

² For a concise overview, see Loewe (1993).

³ A more detailed discussion of this inscription and of the relation of inscriptions (both oracle bone and bronze) in general to historical fact and religious value is provided in Kern (2005). Kern noted that “[r]itual bronze inscriptions as the Shi *Qiáng Pán* can be seen as a controlled distillate of history, encapsulated in a highly intensified, formalized and linguistically restricted code that not merely preserves the past but, first and foremost, defines it. Such texts do not contain an expansive, amorphous, and ambiguous mass of historical knowledge; they tightly limit what is to be remembered, and how it is to be remembered.... Reducing historical knowledge to a normative and ideal account, they create a memory sanctified by its performances in ancestral sacrifices and other rituals, a linguistically constructed parallel reality that with its own authority overrules the ‘factual’ one” (Kern 2005: 61f).

⁴ The respective parts of the *Odes* that are not included in the citation are presented in parentheses.

⁵ The first stanza of this song appears in different contexts in the *Shījīng*; this demonstrates that the stanzas have been chosen freely from the *Shījīng* according to the meaning intended.

⁶ The last word in the *Nü Jie* version in the *Odes* differs from the one in the *textus receptus*, which has 斃 *yì* ‘be tired of, detest’. According to Karlgren, GRS 807a, 射 *shè* appears as a loan for 斃 *yì*.

⁷ Kern (2016) discussed in particular the poetic diction and its function in the *Xúnzǐ*. He explicitly did not refer to those passages of the *Xúnzǐ* which are generally considered to represent Late Archaic poetic forms, but to the employment of rhymed and highly stylized passages in general. Kern also provided a valuable list of references to the relevant work on rhyme in early expository prose.

⁸ Baxter (1998) demonstrated conclusively how the phonological features of the rhymes of the *Laozi* text can help to provide a more accurate date for the composition of the text.

⁹ Reconstructions follow Schuessler’s (2007) OCM (Minimal Old Chinese) if available. Otherwise they follow Baxter (1992).

¹⁰ This translation tries to account for both words, 刑 *xíng* ‘law’ and 形 *xíng* ‘shape’. The latter has been suggested as a preferred reading by Wang Niansun in a commentary of the *Guoyu*.

¹¹ In Han period literature, four-syllable phrases and rhymes were typical for admonitions, the first of which was composed by Yang Xiong 揚雄 (see Knechtges, 2010: 139).

¹² Grammatical parallelism is marked by italics; rhyme is marked by bold characters.

¹³ Content-wise, there is a close connection between the *Guānzǐ* and the *Guóyǔ*. Although the latter is listed together with the *Zuōzhuàn* in early bibliographies, it contains materials from different political and philosophical schools.