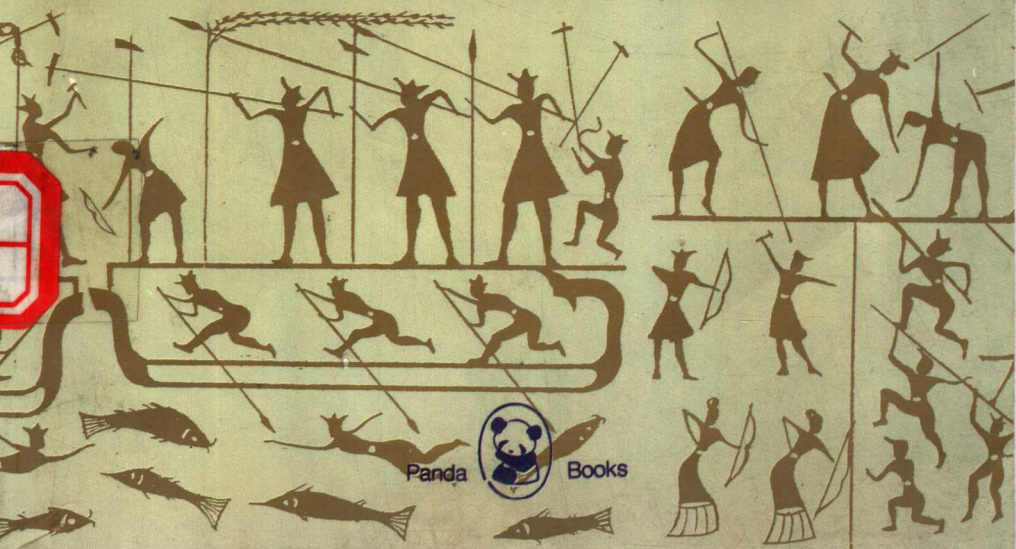




AN UNEXPURGATED TRANSLATION OF
BOOK OF SONGS



Panda



Books

AN UNEXPURGATED TRANSLATION OF
BOOK OF SONGS

TRANSLATED, VERSIFIED AND ANNOTATED

BY

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章



Panda Books

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Publisher's Note

The Chinese Literature Press, which published the *Selections from the Book of Songs* in its English Panda Books series ten years ago, is proud to present an unexpurgated English version of the book, translated by Professor Xu Yuanzhong of Peking University.

The *Book of Songs* is the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry. It 305 songs are divided into four parts: "Book of Lyrics (Guofeng)", "Book of Odes (Xiaoya)", "Book of Epics (Daya)", and "Book of Hymns (Song)".

The 160 songs in the "Book of Lyrics" were collected from 15 city states, or fiefs of the Zhou Dynasty. Most of them were created by the working people; the others composed by members of the nobility. All are the cream of China's classical poetry. A number of creative writing techniques had their origin in these songs. These include *fu*, a descriptive rhetorical device with emotional associations, *bi* or simile, a figure of speech in which two unlike things are composed, and *xing* or metaphor, another figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. It is with these rhetorical devices and versatile artistic styles that this section of songs gives graphic expression to the ideas, feelings and aspirations of the Chinese who lived more than two thousand years ago.

Most of the odes, epics and hymns in the *Book of Songs* extol the rulers, but there is no lack of poems or lines which poke fun at the evil-doers among these rulers. Some of the compositions throw precious light on life behind the walls of the nobility.

The poems in the *Book of Songs* were composed in what are today's Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hebei, Henan, Shandong and Hubei

provinces some 2,500 years ago, and they span a period of five centuries from 1713 BC during the early Zhou Dynasty to 505 BC in the mid-Spring and Autumn Period.

Some historical books, such as *The Historical Records* written by Sima Qian, claim that the *Book of Songs* was compiled by Confucius.

The *Book of Songs* disappeared when the founding emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BC) launched a campaign in which books were burned and Confucian scholars buried alive. It was not until the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) that four different compilations of the book were rediscovered. They were *Poetry of Qi* compiled by Yuan Gu of the State of Qi, *Poetry of Lu* compiled by Shen Pei of the State of Lu, *Poetry of Han* by Han Ying of the State of Yan, and *Poetry of Mao* by Mao Heng of the State of Lu. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, the *Poetry of Mao* became so popular that the other three versions gradually lost their following until they completely disappeared. The *Book of Songs* which we see today is based on the *Poetry of Mao*.

The *Book of Songs*, whose themes cover a wide cross section of Chinese society, describes the complex social life, the ideas and sentiments of the populace, and the sharpening social conditions in China's remote past. The book is remarkable for its vivid and refined use of a rich vocabulary, life-like characterization and imagery, and soul-touching narration and descriptions. It is, indeed, a glittering gem in the Chinese treasurehouse of literature and history.

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