THE BOOK OF SONGS

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Translated by Arthur Waley

Edited with Additional Translations by Joseph R. Allen

Foreword by Stephen Owen

Postface by Joseph R. Allen

GROVE PRESS
New York

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Preface

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This edition of *The Book of Songs* offers Arthur Waley's translations of the Chinese classic in a new format, supplemented by additional translations, accompanied by new interpretative materials, and updated in several ways. I hope these changes allow readers to appreciate *The Book of Songs* in a new, revitalized light; toward that goal I have done the following:

For the first time these translations are presented in the format and order that they have known in the Chinese original for over two millennia; the nature and history of that format is discussed in the Postface at the end of the volume. This order replaces the seventeen topical categories that Waley devised when he originally published his translations in 1937 (see the Appendix for those categories and order). Now readers can enjoy Waley's excellent translations in the poems' original contextual frame, a frame that has its own elegant structure and offers a view into the principles of organization and canonization of early Chinese literature.

I have also included translations of the fifteen poems that Waley omitted from his edition (poems number 191–99, 253–54, 257–58, and 264–65), thus yielding a translation of the entire Chinese corpus of 305 poems. Waley claimed that these fifteen poems were uninteresting and corrupt; they are indeed very difficult poems, but they have been integral to the classic since its inception, and it behooves us to include them here. Although I have freely consulted other translations and commentaries,[1] I have sought to model my translations on those by Waley, both in specific vocabulary and phrasing as well as in tone and style. Needless to say, trying to write in another's voice when that voice is as strong as Waley's has been both exciting and daunting.

1. Principally, Bernhard Karlgren's *Glosses on the Book of Odes* (1942–46), Qu Wanli's *Shi jing shi yi* (1958), and Cheng Jun-ying and Jiang Jian-yuan's *Shi jing zhu xi* (1991).

For each of the translations I have added a title that is derived from the one by which the poem is commonly known in Chinese. The Chinese titles are generally taken from the opening lines of the poems, and thus I have drawn on Waley's translations (with a few exceptions) in producing these English titles.

The reader will find several types of material designed to articulate and explain the new format: a map of the Zhou feudal kingdom, a table of important legendary and historical figures that appear in the text, brief introductions to the sections and subsections of the collection, a Postface dealing with the literary history of the Chinese text, and a Selected Bibliography.

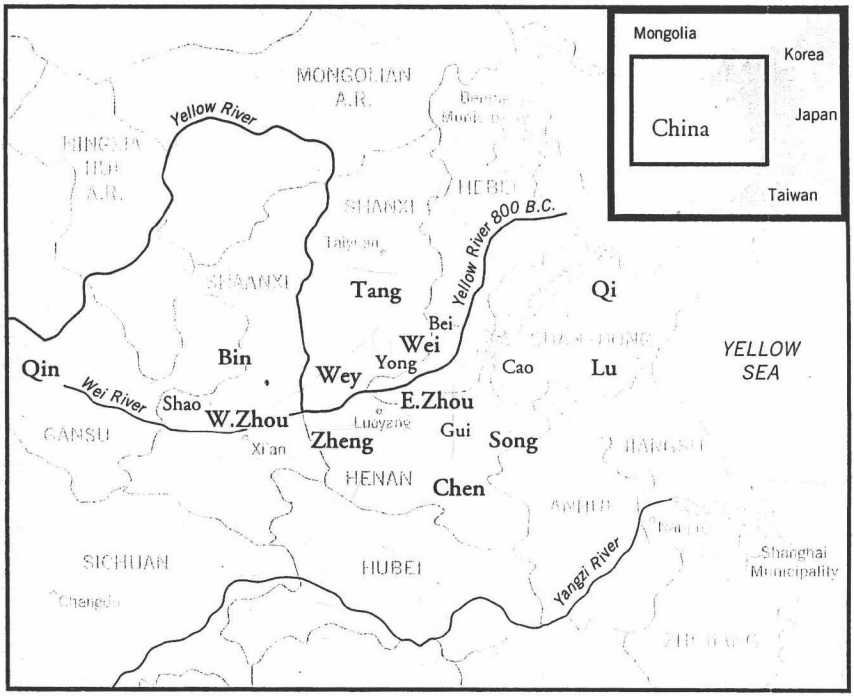
Finally, all Chinese names and terms have been cast into the pinyin romanization system that is now the international standard. In an effort to aid readers unfamiliar with Chinese, I have, however, used hyphens between syllables, except in common place-names.

In reordering Waley's translations I have retained as many of his notes and explanations as possible, recasting them to fit the new format when necessary. Occasionally I have deleted notes no longer applicable and supplemented others with additions of my own (so marked). With one exception, which I am certain is a printing error, I have retained Waley's stanza breaks. I have only on rare occasions altered his translations.

Arthur Waley's *The Book of Songs* remains a masterpiece of translation, appreciated by general readers, students of Chinese literature, and Sinologists. Like no other scholar or translator, Waley has negotiated the demands of both Sinological accuracy and the beauty of language. Stephen Owen's Foreword offers an equally eloquent appreciation of this collection. I hope this new format and additional materials will help the reader know better the power and beauty of this classic text in its original design.

JOSEPH R. ALLEN
Washington University in St. Louis

Important Sites Mentioned in *The Book of Songs*



This map shows the approximate locations of royal and feudal states mentioned in *The Book of Songs*. Relatively minor and short-lived principalities are set in a smaller font. The location of the Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou are both depicted, although they existed only prior to and after 771 B.C., respectively. Current political borders and important cities are indicated in gray, along with the present course of the lower Yellow River.

(Based on maps in *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, Vol. I [Shanghai: Ditu chubanshe, 1982].)

Important Legendary and Historical Figures

These are the most important figures mentioned in the *Songs*, along with their traditional dates (all B.C.).

PERIOD OF MYTH AND LEGEND

Yu (Great Yu), controller of the flood

Pre-dynastic Zhou

Jiang Yuan, mother of Hou Ji, impregnated when she trod on god's footprint

Hou Ji (Lord Millet), mythical male ancestor of the Zhou people, inventor of agriculture

Bu-ku, son of Hou Ji

Duke Liu (Liu Gong), grandson of Bu-ku, brought the Zhou people to the land of Bin

. . .

Dan-fu (Duke of Old, Great King), moved the Zhou people to Mount Qi, married Lady Jiang, sired sons:

Tai-bo, fled south to yield the throne to younger brother, Wang Ji

Wang Ji, married Lady Ren (Tai-ren), sired Chang, who became King Wen

Shang-Yin

Jian Di, impregnated by an egg from the dark bird, gives birth to Qi, ancestor of the Shang people

Qi, the Dark King, has grandson Xiang-tu

. . .

Tang the Victorious (1766), founder of the Shang kingdom

. . .

Wu Ding, 23rd Shang king (of 31), c. 1300

. . .

ZHOU ROYAL PERIOD

Wen Wang (King Wen, the Civil), originally Earl of West (Xi bo) under the Shang, married Tai-si, Lady Xin, designated first king of Zhou (1134)

Wu Wang (King Wu, the Martial), (r. 1122–16) son of King Wen, defeated the Shang, established the Zhou dynasty in his father's name, capital at Hao

Duke of Zhou, younger brother of King Wu, regent for young King Cheng

Duke of Shao, half brother of King Wu

King Cheng (r. 1115–1079)

King Kang (r. 1078–53)

. . .

King Li (r. 841–28)

King Xuan (r. 827–782), had adviser Zhong Shan Fu

King You (r. 781–71), took consort Bao Si, lost western capital

King Ping (r. 770–20)

Feudal States

In order of the Airs of the States

Bei
Yong
Wei
Zheng
Qi
Wey
Tang
Qin
Chen
Gui
Cao
Bin

In the Hymns

Lu

Song (under Shang designation)

Foreword

✦

Our age is one of complexities, in which the causes of events and their meanings are never entirely clear. Perhaps for this reason, in the poetry of our age we respect an answering complexity, which interprets the world and offers no clear answers. Difficulty is our common measure of depth. However, as we read more poetry, particularly early poetry, we often make a surprising discovery: that there is in some poetry a magic of simplicity, which can be even more forceful and alluring than modern complexity. We find it, for example, in some of the medieval English lyrics:

> Ich am of Irlaunde,
> And of the holy londe
> Of Irlaunde.
>
> Good sire, pray ich thee,
> For of sainte charite,
> Come and daunce with me
> In Irlaunde.

At least on one level we still feel we are included by such poems, included in the archaic invitation to go off with the singer and dance with her in that mysterious land, Irlaunde. The poem can still address us; however, we also recognize we can no longer accept such an invitation with simple delight, nor could we ourselves be able to offer such an unself-conscious invitation. A poetry as simple and open as this is somehow beyond our capacities. And at the moment we recognize this, we may have an intuition that the complexity and "depth" of our own modern poetry is not entirely a progress, but also a falling away and loss. In reading a poem like "Ich am of Irlaunde," we

may have a moment of something like shame, recognizing a basic humanity that can address us, even though we no longer speak back to it. If we are given such a moment of revelation, we can grasp something of the role of *The Book of Songs* in Chinese civilization.

There are many poems in *The Book of Songs* which are, like "Ich am of Irlaunde," invitations. They can speak desire without the wink of embarrassment or the self-conscious crudeness that reacts against embarrassment—the qualities that touch almost all statements of desire in modern popular songs.

> That the mere glimpse of a plain coat
> Could stab my heart with grief!
> Enough! Take me with you to your home. (147)

> A very handsome gentleman
> Waited for me in the lane;
> I am sorry I did not go with him. (88)

> Cold blows the northern wind,
> Thick falls the snow.
> Be kind to me, love me,
> Take my hand and go with me. (41)

Even more wondrous, it is a world in which people can speak not only desire but also the contentment of desire, a happy life between man and woman. The husband can want to sleep just a little longer, and the wife can sing him out of bed with a vision of shared joys:

> The lady says: "The cock has crowed";
> The knight says: "Day has not dawned."
> "Rise, then, and look at the night;
> The morning star is shining.
> You must be out and abroad,
> Must shoot the wild-duck and wild-geese.
>
> When you have shot them, you must bring them home
> And I will dress them for you,
> And when I have dressed them we will drink wine
> And I will be yours till we are old." (82)

As joy can be spoken, pain can be spoken as well and with an equal honesty. A woman, driven to a marriage she doesn't want, can respond with a voice that has no gender, that speaks simply as a human being:

> My heart is not a mirror,
> To reflect what others will. (26)

And as she continues her complaint, she finds her metaphors not in a literary tradition, but in the griminess of everyday life:

> O sun, ah, moon,
> Why are you changed and dim?
> Sorrow clings to me
> Like an unwashed dress. (26)

Such a direct and honest world could probably never have existed in a real human society, but somehow it did exist in poetry.

The Book of Songs is both poetry and scripture, a work of literature and one of the Confucian classics. Over the past two and a half millennia, *The Book of Songs* has been interpreted and understood in very different ways; but while the significance of the *Songs* changed from age to age and from reader to reader, the texts always retained their allure, promising access to something basic in the human spirit.

For the tradition of Chinese poetry *The Book of Songs* was a beginning that was never forgotten; echoes of the *Songs* appear throughout classical Chinese poetry, even in this century. For many the *Songs* represented the ideal for all poetry, with an archaic honesty and simplicity that seemed forever just out of reach to more sophisticated and self-conscious ages. In addition, the songs seemed to their readers to be a permanent embodiment of the inner lives of people in the remote past: in the *Songs* one could discover "what it was like then" more perfectly than in any history. Finally, for the Confucian thinker the *Songs* played a central role in the great Confucian project of educating the human heart back to its natural goodness; it was assumed that if a person heard the songs performed, especially as they had once been performed with their lost ancient music, the emotions of the listener would be shaped to decent, balanced, and, at the same time, natural responses to the events of life.

Behind all these different approaches to the *Songs* was a simple definition of what a poem was (the term "song," *shi,* in the title *The*

Book of Songs being the same generic word used later for all classical poetry). This definition first appeared in another of the Confucian classics, *The Book of Documents,* and its authority was immense (as if God had decided to offer a brief pronouncement on the nature of poetry in Genesis). The definition is: "Poetry gives words to what the mind is intent upon." This seemingly innocuous statement had immense consequences: readers found in the *Songs* not an "art" of words, produced by a special class of human beings called "poets," but rather a window into another person's heart, a person like themselves. Behind every song one might find some powerful concern—desire, anger, reverence, pain—set in its living context. Other Confucian classics treated outward things: deeds, moral precepts, the way the world worked. But *The Book of Songs* was the classic of the human heart and the human mind.

Each reader of *The Book of Songs* has sought to understand the poems as they "originally" were, and each reader has found in them his or her own vision of the remote past, a vision of basic humanity. Confucian scholars discovered their own idea of a genuinely moral society; Arthur Waley, a twentieth-century Western reader, discovered a folk poetry that confirmed modern Western notions of archaic society; contemporary Chinese Marxist interpreters find their own version of social history. However, in one sense each different interpretation of the *Songs* has discovered the same thing: that original core of humanity that we all still have within us.

The Book of Songs is an anthology of 305 poems of varying length, drawn from various levels of Zhou society. It contains folk songs, songs of the nobility, ritual hymns, and ballads on significant events in the history of the Zhou people. The oldest poems, the temple hymns of the royal house of Zhou, may date as early as 1000 B.C.; but most of the songs seem to have reached their present versions shortly before the anthology was put together, probably around 600 B.C. Although it is likely that versions of many of the individual poems continued to be sung in peasant society, the anthology itself clearly belonged to the Zhou court and the courts of the feudal states into which the Zhou kingdom had disintegrated.

Western and modern Chinese scholars have often expressed puzzlement that early China, unlike so many other cultures, has no epic, in which some central myth of the people is shaped into a narrative whole. In Chinese literature *The Book of Songs* occupies the place where Western notions of literary history assume an epic ought

to be. However, when we reflect on the nature of *The Book of Songs,* we find in it a different vision of wholeness, and one perhaps more persuasive than the narrative unity of an epic. *The Book of Songs* is a work that attempts to embrace every aspect of its world: the dead ancestors and the living, past history and present, men and women, the ruling house and the common people. And between each of these divisions in their world, the songs create relations that bind them together: the living do homage to the ancestors and the ancestors watch over the living; the present acts with past examples in mind; men and women speak to one another in love or anger; the common people praise or blame their rulers, and the best rulers act in the interest of the common people. The anthology constitutes a whole without possessing any simple unity. Moreover, its wholeness has an ideological basis which would preclude the possibility of epic. Epic unity demands a focus that speaks for one group and excludes other voices: the voices of the common people, the voices of women, voices from all aspects of life outside the heroic ethos. When Andromache begs Hektor not to go out to fight in the *Iliad,* her voice is only a foil against which Hektor can declare his fatal commitment to heroic values. Odysseus' commoners exist poetically only to serve the hero in his hour of need. But the legacy of Zhou culture prohibited deafness to those other voices: it was essential that they have their say, that attention be paid to them.

One of the most remarkable tenets of the Zhou monarchy was the notion of "Heaven's charge," that the right to rule was given to the house of Zhou by Heaven only so long as the Zhou watched over the interests of the people it ruled. The real Mycenaean warrior who fought below the walls of Troy might well have worried about the peasants at home, who were tilling the fields and keeping the sheep; but to the literary warrior in Homer these are invisible or allowed to appear to aid the hero's progress: each warrior seeks his own private glory. The rulers of Zhou were less confident: archaic Chinese writings, including many of the songs, are filled with notes of anxiety lest the ruler stray and Heaven, in its wrath, withdraw its charge from Zhou:

> Mighty is God on high,
> Ruler of His people below;
> Swift and terrible is God on high,
> His charge has many statutes.

Heaven gives birth to the multitudes of the people,
But its charge cannot be counted upon.
To begin well is common;
To end well is rare indeed. (255)

This anxiety is reminiscent of the caution that the house of Israel needed to show, always under the watchful eye of God; but the situation of the Zhou was even more precarious: they were not, like the people of Israel, chosen forever, but merely given an office which they could keep only so long as they carried out its duties and remained successful. And the clearest evidence of Heaven's support was to be found in the voices of the common people. The Zhou were constantly reminded of the fate of the dynasty they had conquered, the Yin or Shang dynasty, which had in its day enjoyed Heaven's favor and then lost it:

Bright they shone on earth below,
Majestic they blaze on high.
Heaven cannot be trusted;
Kingship is easily lost.
Heaven set up a foe to match the Yin;
Did not let them keep their frontier lands. (236)

That "foe" was the Zhou itself. Kingship is indeed easily lost. Although the power of the Zhou monarchy had disintegrated and largely passed to the Zhou's feudal lords by the time *The Book of Songs* was compiled, a concern for the attitude of the common people remained part of the Zhou legacy. The warrior class of early Greece and the later citizens of the city states, who looked back fondly on that warrior past, were content to listen to the deeds of heroes alone. And, with very few exceptions, the folk poetry of Greece is lost to us. The same is true of archaic India. But over half of *The Book of Songs* is either folk poetry, modified folk poetry, or inspired by folk poetry.

There is a noticeable lack of violence in *The Book of Songs*.[1] There is some glorification of Zhou military power—fast chariots,

1. For a longer discussion of this question and the avoidance of violence, the reader might consult C. H. Wang, "Toward Defining a Chinese Heroism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (95), January–March 1975, pp. 25–35.

blazing valor, rank upon rank of warriors—but blood is hardly ever shed. Among the songs of the dynasty are those that bear the memories of the great folk migrations that brought the Zhou people into the Chinese heartland. Here we might expect the stuff of epic, monumental struggles in which the Zhou people show their power and fitness to rule. But this is how "stalwart Duke Liu" begins the migration into the land of Bin:

> He stacked, he stored,
> He tied up dried meat and grain
> In knapsacks, in bags;
> Far and wide he gathered his stores.
> The bows and arrows he tested,
> Shield and dagger, halberd and battle-axe;
> And then began his march. (250)

The value of wholeness, which governs the compilation of the anthology, can also be seen in these individual poems: the ordinary work of provisioning the people must be celebrated along with the conquest, for in this activity Duke Liu also shows his fitness to rule. Indeed, the only point where the principle of wholeness is violated is in the presentation of violence. Having made ready "Shield and dagger, halberd and battle-axe," Duke Liu must anticipate some resistance from the people into whose lands he is leading the migration, but:

> He made his royal progress, proclaimed his rule;
> There were no complaints, no murmurings
> Either high up in the hills
> Or down in the plains. (250)

Duke Liu's fitness to rule is demonstrated by the willing acceptance of his overlordship on the part of the people whose land he has invaded. It is as sure a mark of Heaven's favor as David's strong sling-arm or Diomedes' prowess.

There is military heroism in *The Book of Songs,* but it is directed more often to public rather than private glory. The Zhou's heroes are praised for their valor, but also for their sagacious execution of state policy. The army is essentially a collective force, "the king's claws and fangs" (185):

The king's hosts swept along
As though flying, as though winged,
Like the river, like the Han,
Steady as a mountain,
Flowing onward like a stream,
Rank on rank, in serried order,
Immeasurable, unassailable;
Mightily they marched through the land of Xu. (263)

However, such exultation in Zhou military might represents a threat of violence, which must be balanced by some statement justifying the use of force, as in the stanza that immediately follows the one above:

The king's plans have been faithfully effected,
All the regions of Xu have submitted,
All the regions of Xu are at one;
It was the Son of Heaven's deed.
In the four quarters all is peace;
The peoples of Xu come in homage.
The regions of Xu no longer disobey;
The king goes back to his home. (263)

Moral power and peace here are a transparent disguise for the brute conquest of Xu. The peoples of Xu had probably thought of themselves as independent rather than "disobedient." We must never forget that here we are reading the values of Zhou rather than social fact. We must not suppose that Zhou was any less bloody than any other branch of the human family. But they felt uneasy enough about their acts of violence to try to conceal them in royal propaganda.

The principle of wholeness in the anthology does not allow such praises of Zhou military might to go unquestioned. Poems by soldiers complaining of military service are even more numerous than ballads glorifying Zhou campaigns:

Minister of War,
Truly you are not wise.
Why should you roll us from misery to misery?
We have mothers who lack food. (185)

What plant is not faded?
What day do we not march?
What man is not taken
To defend the four bounds?

What plant is not wilting?
What man is not taken from his wife?
Alas for us soldiers,
Treated as though we were not fellow-men! (234)

What Homeric warrior would have declared that he was prevented from desertion only by fear of punishment?

Oh, bright Heaven high above,
Shining down upon the earth below,
Our march to the west
Has led us to the desert wilds!
. . . . . .
Of course I long to come home,
But I fear the meshes of crime. (207)

The "meshes of crime" are what we would call "the arm of the law," which will catch him if he deserts the campaign.

The songs of courtship and marriage are generally the least marked by cultural differences and perhaps the easiest of the songs for a modern Western reader to appreciate immediately. Many of these poems might have come from any tradition of folk lyric in the world. There is an *alba,* or dawn song (96), in which the anxious girl urges her unwilling lover to get away before he is discovered, that might just as easily be a translation from the Provençal or Old French or medieval German. There is a voice for each step in the delicate dance of courtship: invitation; celebration of the dashing good looks or beauty of the beloved; exchanges of love-gifts and love-words; love-tests; the laments of women seduced and abandoned; and the man who waits for the girl who never comes.

By the willows of the Eastern Gate,
Whose leaves are so thick,
At dusk we were to meet;
And now the morning star is bright. (140)