

Confucius' Expectations of Poetry

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In his *Analects (Lun yü)*, Confucius (551-479 BC) placed equal emphasis on poetry, and rites and music in terms of personal cultivation (*xiu shen*). As is known from history, poetry was extremely popular in ancient China for its social, aesthetic and moral import. Its popularity was, so to speak, largely due to the fact that it would serve as a threefold form of social, aesthetic and moral discourse. It is therefore assumed that Confucius' curriculum for poetry education was generally grounded on the considerations of this trinity with regard to the principle of 'gentle and kind' character training (*wen rou dun hou*).

I Poetry as a Social Discourse *Sui Generis*

In ancient China, poetry (i.e. songs, lyrics, odes, epics and hymns in general) was widely employed on such important occasions as feasting and sacrifices, and in many other realms of social interaction. It was then sung and performed to a musical accompaniment. Evidence can be found in the *Zuo Zhuan* to show that poetry was used by scholars in general as a primary medium for exchanging opinions, expressing values, in daily conversations or in diplomatic relationships. This was apart from its use in essay writing and cultural entertainments.

The diplomatic usage of poetry, for example, can be well illustrated by events recorded in the *Zuo Zhuan*, which dates which dates back to 526 BC when Confucius was about 25 years old; the six ministers of the Zheng State gave a farewell banquet in the honor of Xuan Zi, an envoy from a neighboring state.^[1] Xuan Zi asked his hosts to sing some songs of their own, hoping to determine their views, in general about their way of life and in particular their political attitudes towards neighboring states. They each took turns to sing songs that were collected in the *Shi Jing* (The Classic of Poetry). After each of the three delightful love songs titled "The Creeping Grass" (*Ye you man cao*), "Officer in the Lambs Fleece" (*Gao qiu*) and "Lift up Your Robe" (*Qian shang*), Xuan Zi made comments to show his understanding and appreciation. The singing continued throughout the feast. One guest sang "Wind and Rain" (*Feng yu*) which describes the joy of a lonely wife on seeing her husband return home in dreadful weather. As soon as it was over, another went on to sing "Lady Jiang" (*You nu tong che*) which lauds the beauty of a newly-wed woman. Right afterwards, another picked up the tone and sang "Sing Together" (*Tuo xi*) which describes a songstress asking her companions to sing and dance together like drifting leaves after harvest. The atmosphere was so engaging

that Xuan Zi, as a guest of the state, recognized their good and friendly intentions as suggested by the songs performed. In addition to expressing his delight and gratitude with positive over the choice of the songs suitable to the diplomatic occasion, Xuan Zi presented them all with horses as a sign of friendship. He also sang “King Wen’s Sacrificial Hymn” (*Wo jiang*) as a subtle and grateful reply to his hosts:

I offer a sacrifice

Of ram and bull so nice

May Heaven bless my state!

I observe King Wen’s statues great;

I’ll pacify the land....

As a natural consequence of this appropriate form of singing and behavior, a harmonious ambiance was gradually built up and a mutual understanding obtained. Their mutual appreciation and friendship deepened, and a consensus was reached in relation to forging and maintaining peace. These activities recorded in the *Zuo Zhuan* justify the following observation made by Chen Jingpan (Joseph C. P. Chen): ‘It was of supreme importance that those songs should be suitable to the situations. They should be able to express the desires of those who chose them, and at the same time they should not hurt the feelings of others. Very often owing to inability to select songs, or to select the right and appropriate ones, serious national disgrace and calamity resulted.’^[2] It is worth noting here that poetry as a social discourse *sui generis* was encouraged in various ways, either diplomatic or conversational, writing or singing, public or private, friendly or formal. In spite of this, it was most often recommended as a way of inferring ideas or principles from the songs or lyrics concerned and then applying them to specific situations. Those ideas, often idiosyncratically expressed, could be a long way from the original intentions of the composers. However, if the lyrics can be suggestively applied to certain forms of social interaction, they were cited as appropriate for the occasions involved. In a number of cases Confucius himself explained poetry in such an inferential way. For example, Zi Xia once asked about the meaning of these lines from the poem “Duchess Zhuang Jiang” (*Shuo ren*):

Ah! dark on white her speaking eyes,

Her cheeks with smiles and dimples glow

Like flowers painted on a plain background.

Confucius answered, ‘It is only after the white background is prepared that any painting is possible.’ In that case’, replied Zi Xia, ‘can

we say that the rites can only base themselves on humanity?’ That is it’, joyfully replied Confucius, ‘since you have thrown some new light on this verse, now I can begin to discuss *The Classic of Poetry* with you.’ (*Lun yü*, 3:8) Confucius also made the same remark to encourage Zi Gong once he found his student able to ‘tell what may happen in the future when he is told about the past’ by virtue of reading poetry between the lines. It is undeniable that the Confucian approach to interpreting poetry seems far-fetched at first sight. Yet, if the Confucian concept of beauty is identified with its essence, consisting of inborn grace and simplicity without artificial adornment, the extended version above could be naturally understood in terms of his intrinsic logic. To be precise, the ‘plain background’ in the poem is symbolic of the lady’s inward charm that is essential to her outward beauty. Likewise, the ‘white background’ in a material sense is basic to any painting upon it, and thus analogous to the fact that one’s sense of humanity cultivated from within is fundamental to any rites performed from without. The internal aspect is accentuated rather than the external aspect, notwithstanding the fact that Confucius persistently advocates the balanced development of both aspects in an ideal personality.

Highly conscious of the values of poetry as a form of social discourse, Confucius resolutely advised his immediate disciples to study *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing*) with the ultimate aim, on the one hand, of enabling them to appropriate the songs for the right occasions or social interactions, and on the other refining their taste and art of speech. These are associated with two further aims; one lies in the recommended way of using poetry by inferring certain ideas, suggested or projected, from the verses and then applying them in certain verbal interactions on diplomatic occasions; the other is related to Confucius’ educational curriculum. Since most of his students were trained to be statesmen, their knowledge of poetry and its proper use was important and indispensable qualifications at that time. His advice was also rigidly applied to his son, Kong Li, who once recalled for a guest one of his personal encounters with his father: ‘One day my father (Confucius) was standing in the courtyard and I quickened my steps to pass through. He stopped me and asked, “Have you studied *The Classic of Poetry*?” I answered, “Not yet”. He then said, “You will not know how to speak properly unless you study it.” After that I began to study the book. (*Lun yü*, 16:13) But this was only the first step if compared to the full use of poetry in diverse and appropriate ways advocated. Just as Confucius proclaims, ‘If a man is able to recite the three hundred pieces of *The Classic of Poetry*, but fails when given governmental responsibilities; and if he fails to act according to circumstances and to deal with affairs independently when sent on diplomatic missions, what is the use of so much learning?’ (*Lun yü*, 13:5) This reveals the Confucian concept that that what is acquired should be put into practice for the good of individual development and the interests of the community.

II Poetry as an Aesthetic Discourse *Sui Generis*

The Classic of Poetry (*Shi jing*) available today is alleged to have been selectively edited by Confucius himself on the basis of a wide

range of information dating from remote antiquity. This anthology comprises of several genres as follows: *guo feng* (songs or lyrics), *xiao ya* (odes), *da ya* (epics) and *song* (hymns). Here *The Classic of Poetry* is subdivided into four major sections: the ‘Chapter of Songs’, which reflects mainly the everyday lives of people in general; ‘Chapter of Odes’, reflecting the lives of the nobility; the ‘Chapter of Epics’, recording historical deeds and reflecting the life of the rulers; and finally, the ‘Chapter of Hymns’, intended to glorify the ancestors of the rulers and inspire their descendants to worship them as gods (i.e. political models). In the time before Confucius, poems were considered and used as historical, political and religious records and not merely as works of art. In Confucius’ era, poetry straddled the two provinces of intellectual learning and aesthetic education. That is to say, it began to be looked upon not merely as a source of knowledge related to politics, ethics and history, but as a form of art directed toward the cultivation of the mind and the person as a whole.

Because of its aesthetic values, poetry plays an indispensable role in the personal cultivation required to become a gentleman or superior man (*jun zi*), one of the highest ideals of individual life. This idea is emphasized by Confucius in his remark: ‘Personal cultivation [of a gentleman] is inspired by poetry, made firm by rites and completed by music.’ (*Lun yü*, 8:8) This is because poetry is generally believed to be expressive of feelings and affections through its descriptions of both inner and outer experiences. It can be read, recited and appreciated so that one may get to the bottom of the message of moral implied in the work concerned. The reader is likely to be deeply impressed and moved by such human values as a love for the good, a hatred of the evil, and sympathy for the miserable, etc. That is to say, poetry par excellence may serve as a potent guide, stimulating and helping the reader in his or her moral development through aesthetic experience, setting his will on the right path and, above all, determining his personal cultivation.

Considering the aesthetic and artistic functions of poetry, Confucius said to his disciples, ‘Why don’t you study The Classic of Poetry? Poetry can serve to inspire (*xing*), to reflect (*guan*), to communicate (*qun*) and to admonish (*yuan*). On one hand, the teachings presented in The Classic of Poetry can help serve one’s parents well; on the other hand, the knowledge and methods provided in it can help serve one’s lord well. Moreover, one can learn a lot of names of birds, beasts, plants and trees.’ (*Lun yü*, 17:9) The Confucian view of poetry is largely derived from this comment. It was apparently intended to teach the disciples how to study poetry as a form of aesthetic discourse; but in praxis it turns out to be an overall guideline or relatively systematic theory oriented to poetic composition in particular and literary creation in general. Li Zhi (1527-1602), for example, asserts that legends can also perform the functions of *xing*, *guan*, *qun* and *yuan*.^[3] This entire argument reveals at least six functions of poetry as aspects of Confucius’ program of art education. First and foremost, poetry is inspiring in that it can evoke and exalt sentiments, thoughts and intentions through vividly suggestive and associative imagery, in addition to its faculty of enriching the imagination. Secondly, poetry allows reflection on the human condition and way of life so that insightful judgments can be made through contemplation, in addition to enhancing the powers of observation. Thirdly, the communicative dimension of poetry can be used to smooth and harmonize human relations through two-way communication, and remold ideas by virtue of the values expressed. Fourthly, the

admonitory aspect of poetry can provoke regret, complaints and critique of the social environment, in addition to helping one master the art of satire in relation to human problems. Fifthly, the moral dimension of poetry helps cultivate a sense of piety towards one's parents as a natural result of the moral teachings drawn from such poetry. Subsequently, the political dimension of poetry helps to develop a sense of mission, and the diplomatic tactics necessary to serve one's ruler, because of the cultural heritage and historical significance of *The Classic of Poetry*, and the possibility of extrapolating from poetry to other situations or occasions and vice versa. Finally, the cognitive dimension of poetry helps identify the names or species of fauna and flora.

Up to this point, it is desirable to explain what is implied by these statements in relation to such paramount functions of poetry as 'xing' (to inspire), 'guan' (to reflect), 'qun' (to communicate) and 'yuan' (to admonish), the four major elements comprising an aesthetic discourse in Confucius' poetics.

1. Poetic *xing*

The Chinese notion of *xing* (to inspire) carries at least two meanings, broadly defined as follows: the ability of an education in poetry to 'move and evoke the will and spirit'^[4] for good (virtue), and a rhetorical technique for poetic composition that is often generalized as 'a way of symbolizing through the imagery of things',^[5] or to draw an extended meaning from a relevant image (or analogy) via (poetic) association.

The former helps to purify the mind and lift the spirit, and aims at the cultivation of a gentleman through aesthetic experience. This experience usually features some form of catharsis and results in exalted activities designed to attain the highest possible form of life. During this process, such factors as understanding, imagination and contemplation all work together. This idea can be seen in the 'Chapter of Hymns' (*song*) which serves to glorify the ancestors of the sage rulers and inspire their offsprings to worship them as divine models. In "King Cheng's Inaugural Address" (*Lie wen*), written to commemorate Cheng's accession to the throne in 1109 BC, we read:

O princes bright and brave

Favored by former kings!

The boundless blessings we have

Will pass to our offsprings.

Do not sin against your state

And you will be honored as before.

Think of your service great

You may enlarge still more.

Try to employ wise men,

Your influence will spread from land to land....

The singer or reader would be inspired, if vicariously, to model himself on the former kings in terms of individual devotion to the service of the state, and the development of personal virtue. Kong Anguo's concept of 'xing' is 'the employment of analogy and the practice of association', [6] while for Zhu Xi it denotes to 'first describing something else by evoking images in order to illustrate the actual theme'. [7] As a procedure, 'xing' involves depicting a particular image of a particular object in a poetic style. When such poetry is contemplated, the imagination is stirred and there is understanding of the suggestiveness of the context concerned to purify the emotions and make the spirit sublime by arousing feelings and emotions, by influencing the inner world for good, and by teaching the reader to refine his mind and conduct. This is analogous to the use of 'xing' as a poetic device to describe a scene or thing that has sparked off ideas or sentiments in the poet. An example is provided by "The Large Rat" (*Shuo shu*), a song from the ancient State of Wei (modern Shanxi):

Large rat, large rat,

Eat no more millet we grow!

Three years you have grown fat;

No care for us you show.

We'll leave you now, I swear,

For a happier land,

A happier land where

We may have a free hand....

As often noted, this 'large rat' was a symbol for the corrupted official or wealthy landlords who exploited the laborers or ordinary farmhands. The 'happier land' was an allegory for an imaginary Utopia. Naturally this leads to criticism of the exploiter and sympathy for the exploited. This poem, as previously noted, is thus a subtle satire related to political and moral teaching.

Another widely noted case could be *The Newlywed (Tao yao)*, a song from south of the capital of the Zhou Dynasty:

The peach tree beams so red;

How brilliant are its flowers!

The maiden's getting wed,

Good for the nuptial bowers....

It was customary in the Zhou Dynasty (1121 BC-255BC.) for young people to marry in spring when the peach trees were in full bloom. There is no direct portrayal of the newlywed bride in this, and emphasis appears to be placed on the vivid image of the peach tree, indicative of both the golden time for marriage and the beauty of youth. The beauty of the bride is implicitly likened to that of the peach blossoms. The inspiration of poetry is assumed to 'originate from the experience touched off by contemplating Things',^[8] and 'the source of the inspiring aspect of poetry lies in the description of birds, plants and trees.'^[9] In addition, 'the fact that the central theme is brought into play by the descriptive context confirms the notion of the inspirational dimension (*xing*),'^[10] These concepts are validated by the foregoing examples.

2. Poetic *guan*

The Chinese term *guan* in one sense means to look at and contemplate, and in another to manifest or reflect. In a poetic context, according to Zheng Xuan, it is chiefly intended to 'reflect or represent the rise and fall of social customs' during historical periods.^[11] That is to say, in poetic creation it involves the exploration and observation of the social environment and the human condition, and is used to expose the moral climate and the mentality of the people as social beings. In the 'Chapter of Songs', for example, the first and second sections (i.e. the *Zhou nan*, *Zhao nan*) are mainly reflecting the family life of the ancient Chinese, and the seventh and twelfth sections (i.e. *Zheng feng*, *Chen feng*) are mostly love songs expressing the emotions of the people in general. The lives of the nobles and the rulers are reflected in the 'Chapter of Odes' (*Xiao ya*) and the 'Chapter of Epics' (*Da ya*).

In the ode *Revelry* (*Bin zhi chu yan*) we read:

The guests come with delight

And take places left and right...

They dance to music sweet

Of flute and the drumbeat...

When they've drunk their cups dry,

They shout out, brawl and cry.

They put plates upside down;

They dance like funny columns.

When they have drunk wine strong,

They know not right from wrong.

With their caps on one side,

They dance and slip and slide....

Characterized by a satirical touch, this ode demonstrates a lively picture of the licentiousness of the time of King You in the late Zhou Dynasty, which was then at the point of collapse. The depiction is vivid and detailed, the message hidden and suggestive, ostensibly directed against drunkenness, but in essence against corruption.

The ‘Chapter of Epics’ chiefly reflects historical deeds and the life of the rulers in connection with the rise and fall of the Zhou dynasty, from “The Three Kings of Zhou” to “King You’s Time.” The former praises the first rulers of the Zhou for their great virtues and achievements, whereas the latter censures King You of the late Zhou dynasty for his vices and wrong doings. The epics thus serve as a mirror of that historical period, from which instructive lessons can be drawn by scrutinized reading. This obviously corresponds to Zhu Xi’s definition of the poetic *guan* as ‘the investigation and demonstration of gains and losses’ in history.^[12]

Nevertheless, the Chinese concept of *guan* cannot be fully interpreted without referring to its aesthetic aspect. It surely involves a taste or aesthetic contemplation when used in poetry or any other forms of art. Conventionally, *guan* is usually applied to evaluating and appreciating art works, landscapes and personalities, etc., from an aesthetic as well as a moral perspective. The idea that ‘poetry can serve to reflect’ (*guan*) is meant that the poet himself would contemplate and judge his subject matter, both aesthetically and critically, during the process of the poetic reflection. This is also true for the reader when he examines the experience or event presented in poetry so long as he has adequate awareness and sensibility. In this sense, the idea that ‘poetry can serve to reflect’ can be also understood to mean that poetry is a form of art to be aesthetically contemplated and relished. Its function is thus closely associated with art education since it assists the reader to satisfy his aesthetic needs, improve his taste and mould his temperament all at the same time.

3. Poetic *qun*

The Chinese word *qun* means social grouping or gathering, but the poetic *qun* has broader connotations and implies, according to Kong Anguo, ‘the exercise of two-way communication during social interactions.’^[13] For Zhu Xi it meant ‘maintaining harmony and unity without dispersion.’^[14] In plain language, this aspect of poetry helps facilitate a two-way communication process on a range of social occasions (i.e.

at feasts and diplomatic meetings, etc.), to promote a friendly atmosphere, and eventually to completely harmonize human relations. This function can be seen in the examples mentioned above.

As has been often detected, poetic communication (*qun*) thus performs a similar role to music in the Confucian mind, It can create an engagingly harmonious climate, arousing human emotions in an attempt to awaken mutual understanding, and then bring concord to human relations. Like music, this kind of *qun* is inseparably linked to the concept of 'humanity' (*ren*), since it denies any tendency to form cliques in order to suppress or win the upper hand over other people. Rather, it is intended to arouse and foster a sense of humanity or benevolence on the part of individuals, which in turn leads to the coming together of people and a peaceful social environment. In addition, the notion of *qun* implies a sense of responsibility, mission, commitment, and above all cooperation with one's fellow men. These concepts have been rewarding, since in general the Chinese people take pleasure from and delight in social harmony, affinity and cooperation. This reflects the imperceptible influence of poetry or poetic experience on people's thinking, character and relationships with others.

4. Poetic *yuan*

According to Kong Anguo the Chinese concept *yuan* signifies a 'critique of bad politics and inadequate government'.^[15] This is obviously a one-sided interpretation. The truth of the matter is that the poetic *yuan* can be classified into two broad categories known as socio-political and psycho-sentimental. The former often included references to social problems that violated the fundamental principle of humanity (*ren*). These social problems could be subdivided into moral weaknesses, such as evil doings of an individual, and injustice in community, political scandals, in-fighting or corruption among the ruling class, harsh suppression of the populace, the failures of the populace, the failures of the government related to tight control, and serious exploitation of the ordinary people. The frustration involved in trying to promote a humanitarian government worthy of a gentlemanly status also comes into this category. The poetic *yuan* is seen, for example, in criticisms of the luxurious life of the nobility, the unqualified King You, the prevailing tyranny and misery in the reign of King Li, and of Jisun Shi violation of rites by getting eight rows of dancers to perform in his courtyard.

The psycho-sentimental category refers to the exposure of emotions in romantic and other types of relationships. These emotions involve a wide variety of moods, including frustration, anxiety, depression, discordance, sorrow and despair, They can be easily discerned in the sentimental interactions between men and women recorded in 'Chapter of Songs'. However, the critical aspect of poetry, according to Confucius, must be based upon the principle of humanity, and work for the good of society and the people. This demands authenticity and sincerity of expression on one hand, and purity and moral perfection on the other. Otherwise, poetry becomes a mere verbal exercise, only discouraging the exaltation of the human spirit and hence losing his value for aesthetic education. This explains why Confucius detested

pretentiousness in both word and deed. He proclaimed that those who speak with honeyed words and pretend to be kind cannot be humane or benevolent, nor can those who try to subvert the state with clever terms.

The respective functions and interrelationships between the poetic *xing*, *guan*, *qun* and *yuan*, which make up the four basic components of aesthetic discourse, are described by Wang Fuzhi in his comments on Poetry: ‘What is inspiring (*xing*) can be reflected (*guan*), thus making more profound; what is reflected (*guan*) can be inspiring (*xing*), thus making *guan* more manifest; what is communicated (*qun*) leads to admonition (*yuan*), thus making *yuan* more unforgettable; what is admonished (*yuan*) leads to communication (*qun*), thus making *qun* more sincere and authentic... There arises a natural flow of emotions and feelings. The poet expresses his thought or message with consistency whereas the reader undergoes an individual experience of diversity due to his own emotions or mood.’^[16] The four qualities of poetry must therefore be approached and exercised as an interrelated whole. However, the poetic *xing* appears to be the most essential of all because it is integral to art and artistic effect. To be sure, if poetry is not appealing enough to inspire or move the reader emotionally, it cannot evoke a reaction inspire nor an aesthetic response, and quite naturally the other functions also go off the track. Poetic *xing* and *yuan* tend more towards inspiring and expressing the emotions and thoughts of individuals, while poetic *guan* and *qun* are used to obtain social and moral effects through an aesthetic contemplation that imperceptibly influences and cultivates the thinking and character of individuals. All these functions may lead, as they were expected to do, to the development of one’s ability to serve one’s father (i.e. parents) and lord (i.e. sovereign) in both a moral and a social sense. This notion reveals the Confucian ideal of ‘efficient government and harmonious human relations’ (*zheng tong ren he*).

III Poetry as a moral Discourse *Sui Generis*

Confucius is noted for his preoccupation with the development of the ideal gentleman (*jun zi*). The personality of such a gentleman requires maintaining a balance between two qualities termed ‘*wen*’ and ‘*zhi*’. ‘One would seem uncouth with more *zhi* than *wen*, and seem superficial with more *wen* than *zhi*. Only then these two qualities are well-balanced can one become a gentleman’ (*Lun yü*, 6:18). *Wen* symbolizes outward cultivation characterized by refinement, scholarship, proper conduct and good manners, while *zhi* inward cultivation characterized by simplicity, sincerity, honesty and virtuousness. The former was primarily achieved through extensive study of classics and the frequent practice of rites, while the latter involves an ethical education and sincere actions based upon the principle of humanity. During the process of becoming a gentleman, poetry, as one of the classics, plays a cardinal role. This is precisely because poetry also serves as a special form of moral discourse in addition to its social and aesthetic role.

As has been mentioned previously, Confucius himself placed emphasis on both the social and aesthetic effects of poetry, since it works

in a diplomatic sense to bring people together, as well as imperceptibly influencing the ideas and the temperament of individuals. He also recognized the moral impact of poetry on the grader or user, and the ability of poetry to make imposed codes of conduct into internalised necessities. Eventually this leads to the harmony between members of a community and the community itself, and to order and stability of society as a whole.

In the eyes of Confucius, poetry performs multiple services towards the achievement of the end. Poetry, as a historical record, helped one identify the rites of the Zhou Dynasty and extend one's knowledge; as social discourse it helped to refine manners and improve the art of speech; as an aesthetic discourse it helped to cultivate the spirit and will through aesthetic experience; and above all, as a moral discourse it helped cleanse the mind of depraved thoughts because 'The theme of the 300 pieces in *The Classic of Poetry* can be summed up in one phrase--having no depraved thoughts' (*si wu xie*) (*Lun yü*, 2:2). This phrase was in fact cited from the hymn "Horses" (*Jiong*) in *The Hymns of Lu* (*Lu song*) in the last section of *The Classic of Poetry*. It is one of the lines of an ode praising Duke Xi of Lu (658-626 BC) for his admirable thoughtfulness, rightful judgement and great foresight. It was used by Confucius to encapsulate the significance of *The Classic of Poetry* as a whole. 'This is simply measuring the literary values by political standards' as Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) once remarked. ^[17] As far as I can determine from the text, the expression was employed to denote the pure and unadulterated tone, in a moral sense, which runs through all the poems allegedly compiled by Confucius in the anthology. This suggests that Confucius was inclined to use moral rather than political standards to measure literary or poetic value. If this were the case, Confucius would have preferred to link the poems to moral problems, even though the former originally had little to do with the latter. For the same reason poetry was made to occupy a prime position in Confucius' curriculum of art education.

As a result, poetry as a moral discourse had to remain in accord with the principle set by Confucius himself. That is, poetry should be 'expressive of enjoyment without being licentious, and expressive of sadness without grieving' (*Lun yü*, 3:20). According to Confucius, the lyric *Guanju* (*Wooing and wedding*) is a perfect example. It is a love story which carefully avoids excessive expression. In the first stanza it suggests a young man falling in love with a beautiful maiden in love with a beautiful maiden in spring when turtledoves are cooing. He woos her in summer as cress floats on the water (Stanza 2), and restlessly yearns for her day and night (Stanza 3). They become engaged in the autumn when the cress is gathered (Stanza 4) and eventually marry in winter when the cress is cooked (Stanza 5). The representation of emotion is tactfully measured, and there is no opportunity to be swept away by vulgar desires and passions. The expression of the seemingly one-sided love extends only to this degree:

His yearning grows so strong,

He cannot fall asleep,

But tosses all night long,

So deep in love, so deep!

This intensity of pathos and anxiety expresses ‘sadness’, but it is moderate rather than excessive and there is no sense of intense grief. The happiness of the wedding is likewise expressed with moderation:

Feast friends at left and right

On cress cooked so tender!

O bells and drums, delight

The bride so sweet and slender!

‘Bells and drums’ here indicate the performance of rites and music to celebrate the wedding ceremony. The poet thus creates a delightful atmosphere and eulogizes the beauty of the bride. Nevertheless, the delight in this kind of ‘enjoyment’, so inviting but well-measured, precludes any licentiousness of temptation. The poem “Guanju” (Wooing and Wedding) does not simply serve as an encapsulation of the principle of poetry as a moral discourse mentioned above, but also incorporates the philosophy of governing by the state and public education in relation to rites and music. One can perhaps understand at this point why the poem “Guanju” was placed at the very beginning of *The Classic of Poetry*.

It is noteworthy that Confucius stressed the principle of ‘expressive of enjoyment without being licentious, and sadness without harmful grief’ in the expression of emotions. He decried excessiveness while highly recommending moderation. This is because he was conscious of the necessity to temper sentimental expression in both poetry and music, otherwise it would go to extremes, encouraging licentiousness and hedonism, or provoking gross sentimentality. These should all be avoided in poetry since they are harmful to human life and dignity on the one hand, and detrimental to the normal and rational of a virtuous character. ‘It is as a result of this notion that the expression of emotions in Chinese art is reasonably controlled in most cases, and poetry rarely becomes simply an outlet of base and callous desires, or mysterious and fanatical impulses.’^[18] It is generally agreed that this concept originated from the application of ‘the doctrine of the Mean’ (*zhong yong zhi dao*) to the expression of emotions in poetic composition. This ‘mean’ requires the combination of opposites (i.e. sensuous pleasure and moral requirements, instinctive drives and rational pursuits, emotional expression and moral restraint) to be represented in art works in order to attain a balanced and harmonized development of the personality which is the ultimate objective of art education. Under such circumstances, the concept that ‘going’ too far is as bad as not going far enough’ (*guo you bu ji*) (*Lun yü*,11:17) can be conceived of the

Mean'. Likewise, Zhu Xi's interpretation of 'the doctrine of the poetic *yuan* as 'expressing complaint without being angry'^[19] appears to be inferred from the same doctrine, although its more overt intention is to maintain social stability and established order.

It is obvious that the Confucian principle of non-excessiveness gives rise to a paradox with regard to art creation. That is to say, it imposes a yoke on the poet since the excessive expression of emotions, such as pleasure and sadness, is considered as undesirable as their inadequate expression. This would appear to make it a formidable task for any artist to achieve moderation of expression. However, this paradox seems commendable and should be used as a positive frame of reference in face of the modern trend towards transforming poetry into a form of absurdly violent discourse (for example, 'To murder a man is to pick a lotus flower/ When murdered, hold it in hand which cannot be replaced'), or one that is sensual and erotic (for example, 'With two legs apart, practicing martial art').

In conclusion, Confucius intended to infuse into poetry a cluster of social, political, aesthetic, cognitive and moral functions, as he did with rites and music, in accordance with his preoccupation with the formation of a gentleman (*jun zi*) as the ideal personality. This ideal personality is characterized by well-balanced inner and outer development, achieved at least in part by poetry as a special form of social, aesthetic and moral discourse. In the final analysis, the underlying foundation of this ideal personality is determined by the Confucian philosophy of humanity or benevolence (*ren xue*). The ultimate objective being the achievement of the ideal society based on 'good and efficient government and harmonious human relations' (*zheng tong ren he*) or, in other words, 'a country at peace and its people at ease' (*guo tai min an*).

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[②] CHEN Jingpan. *Confucius as a Teacher* (Beijing: 1990), p.329.

[③] Beijing University Philosophy Department (ed.). *Selected Materials on Chinese Aesthetic History* (Beijing: 1981), vol.2, p.130.

[④] ‘Gan fa zhi yi’ (感发志意), cf. *Lun yu Ji Zhu* (The Confucian Analects Annotated by Zhu Xi), in *Si Shu Wu Jing* (The Four Books and Five Classics) (Tianjin:1990), vol.1,p.74.

[⑤] ‘Tuo shi yu wu’ (托事于物), cf. Hu Jingzhi. (ed.) *Selected Writings on Chinese Classic Aesthetics*. (Beijing: 1988), vol.1, p282.

[⑥] ‘Yin pi lian lei’ (引譬连类), cf. Beijing University Philosophy Department. (ed.) *Selected Materials on Chinese Aesthetic History* (Beijing: 1981), vol.2,, p.214.

[⑦] ‘xian yan ta wu yi yin qi suo youg zhi ci ye’ (先言他物以引起所咏之词也), *ibid.*, p.281.

[⑧] ‘Guan wu you gan yan, ze you xing’ (观物有感焉, 则有兴), *ibid.*, vol.2, p.326.

[⑨] ‘Niao shou cao mu nai fa xing zhi ben’ (鸟兽草木乃发兴之本), *ibid.*,p.327.

[⑩] ‘Qi yiyu jiu jing zhong xuanchu zhe, keyi xing ye’ (其意句就境中宣出者, 可以兴也), cf. Beijing University Philosophy Department. (ed.) *Selected Materials on Chinese Aesthetic History* (Beijing: 1981), vol.2, p.214.

[⑪] ‘Guan feng su zhi sheng shuai’ (观风俗之盛衰), *Ibid.*, p.214.

[⑫] ‘kaojian deshi’ (考见得失), cf. *Lun yu Ji Zhu* (The Confucian Analects Annotated by Zhu Xi), in *Si Shu Wu Jing* (The Four Books and Five Classics) (Tianjin:1990), vol.1,p.74.

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[⑭] ‘he er bu liu’ (和而不流), cf. *Lun yu Ji Zhu* (The Confucian Analects Annotated by Zhu Xi), in *Si Shu Wu Jing* (The Four Books and Five Classics) (Tianjin:1990), vol.1, p.74.

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[⑱] LI Zehou and Liu Gangji. (ed.s) *A History of Chinese Aesthetics* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1984), vol.1,p.150.

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