

This paper was first contributed to the Journal of Aesthetics and Literature issued in Australia and is included in *Before Pangae: New Essays on Transcultural Aesthetics* edited by E. Benitez.

## Zhu Xi's Moralistic View of Poetry

Keping Wang

As a leading figure of the Neo-Confucianists in the Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) appears to be chiefly preoccupied with heavenly principles that he identifies with *tianli*. As he argues, “Whatever the sagely predecessors teach is not but to help people obtain a clear vision of *tianli* and meanwhile get rid of *renyu* as human desires. Any form of teaching and education is found needless so long as *tianli* are clarified in full sense.”<sup>[1]</sup> This shows that *tianli* are conceived of as both the key content and ultimate objective of teaching and education. *Tianli* as heavenly principles are opposite to *renyu* as human desires, thus forming a binary pair as such in Neo-Confucianism. The former are taken as constant virtues to be nourished and cherished whereas the latter as base vices to be reduced and shed away. In Zhu Xi's mind, *tianli* are distinguished between the one and the many. The one refers to the universal principle, abstract and metaphysical. The many refer to the particular principles embodied in all things, concrete and physical. Analogically, the one is like the moon in the sky while the many are like its multiplied imagery reflected in all the rivers and lakes (*yue yin wan chuan*). Hence the one is essential and original while the many are extensional and derivative. This line of thought remains dominant and decisive not merely in Zhu's philosophizing, but also in his literary criticism as well.

### Conformity to the Moral Principle *a priori*

Approaching *The Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*), for instance, Zhu sticks to a moral principle *a priori*. This principle is largely originated from the Confucian conception of poetry education (*shijiao*). According to Confucius, poetry education is intended to help people develop “a gentle and kind personality” (*wenliang gongjian*). In this regard poetry is vital in a sense that it “stimulates” [people's good conscience and moral awareness] (*xing yu shi*). Under such circumstances people will be motivated to observe and nurture their virtues in order to accomplish their humanity-based personality. Zhu Xi agrees with Confucius and maintains that poetry is the expression of feelings and emotions that can be categorized into the *xie* (unconventional and vicious) and the *zheng* (serious and virtuous). The verbal descriptions in poetry are easy to understand. But reading and reciting them enable people to experience the musical rhythms and melodic effects, which then move them to their heart's content and remold their personalities. At the very beginning poetry stirs up people's awareness of the good and the evil. It gets them engrossed in the poetic experience as if they have lost themselves in it. It is on this point that they have enriched their spiritual nourishment.”<sup>[2]</sup> Elsewhere he continues to advocate the idea that “the Dao of human morality is completely available in *The Book of Poetry* (*renlun zhi dao, shi wu bubei*).”<sup>[3]</sup>

When it comes to the *Guofeng* as lyrical songs in *The Book of Poetry*, Zhu Xi persistently sticks to a moral principle *a priori* as is derived from Confucius' two conclusive remarks on music as part of poetry: One denies the educational merits of the *Zheng* anthology, announcing that “The *Zheng* tunes are excessively wanton (*zhengsheng yin*)” and thus Confucius “detests them for corrupting the *ya* music (*wu zhengsheng zhi luan yayue ye*).”<sup>[4]</sup> In this context the *ya* music denotes an ancient and classical type like the music of peace (*Shao*) and of war (*Wu*), characterized with simplicity in style and solemnity in tone. In contrast, the *Zheng* tunes demonstrate a folk and popular type seeming rather sophisticated and sensuously pleasing or tentatizing. Seeing people become more pleasure-seeking than ever before, Confucius condemns the *Zheng* tunes and even attempts to banish them (*fang zhengsheng*) as their growing popularity poses a threat to the position of the *ya* music.<sup>[5]</sup>

The other remark Confucius makes is to affirm the pedagogical value of the *Zhounan* and the *Zhaonan* anthologies, claiming that “To be a man who does not study these two anthologies is like standing with one's face directly towards the wall.”<sup>[6]</sup> This means such study is

necessary to help one widen his scope of perspective and become well qualified with others. For in antiquity poetry was utilized as a special genre of political discourse to hint at their foreign or interstate policies on many social occasions. Scholars and officials must be well equipped to cite and sing the songs from the *Shijing* as freely and properly as they could when talking with or entertaining their guests as diplomats or envoys from other states. It was a highly delicate and demanding enterprise such that one could not afford to make any errors by using a wrong song in response to another. Otherwise the guests would feel offended and the two states involved might go into conflict and even warfare sometimes. Such practical use of poetry is subtle and frequent as is recorded in the historical documents like the *Zuozhuan*.<sup>[7]</sup>

Confucius's condemnation of the Zheng tunes for their being excessively wanton and harmful to the *ya* music ends up in a negative guideline, while his praise of the *Zhounan* and *Zhaonan* anthologies in a positive counterpart. Both of them provide a direct impact on Zhu Xi's conceptual conformity to Confucius' viewpoint, and consequently conduce to the binary dimension of the moral principle *a priori* Zhu accepts and applies to his poetics. That is why his commentary is found not fair and convincing enough in certain cases. His treatment of the *Yeyou sijun* (A Deer Hunter and a Jade-like Maiden), for example, discloses not merely his preset misconception, but also his hypocritical attitude. Depicted in this poem is a more daring and even erotic clandestine love affair:

*An antelope is killed  
And wrapped in white afield,  
A maid for love does long,  
Tempted by a hunter so strong.*

*He cuts down trees amain  
And kills a deer again.  
He sees the white-drest maid  
As beautiful as jade.*

*"O soft and slow, sweetheart,  
Don't tear my sash apart!"  
The jade-like maid said, "Hark!  
Do not let the dog bark!"<sup>[8]</sup>*

Believe or not, what is depicted above is most explicit in the expression of the secret love affair among all the lyrical songs. The strong hunter, killed deer and jade-like maiden are bound together to form a symbolic interaction. The hunter is not simply a hunter of animals, but also a hunter of women. He has killed a deer, wrapped it in white rushes and then presented it as a gift to his beloved. The killed deer as the hunter's prey easily reminds the reader of the hidden destiny of the young girl. The phrase of "jade-like maid" signifies the female beauty, charming innocence and naked body altogether that make a sexual prey of tremendous temptation. The two lovers are now trysting alone in a tranquil grove outside the village. The hunter tries every means to please the maid with an intention to satisfy his lust. The last stanza literally represents their lovemaking during which whispers are uttered, requesting the hunter to be gentle and quiet instead of being too harsh and noisy. The ambiance here implies the man's eagerness and sexual thirst and the girl's willingness but cautiousness. The whole scene appears so natural, real and human.

Yet, since this poem is collected in the *Zhaonan* anthology instead of the *Zheng* anthology, Zhu Xi pretends not to see the reality but offers a ridiculous defense via his commentary. As is noticed in his statement, "The Southern State was civilized through the rites under the leadership of the King Wen of Zhou. The beautiful maiden was purely chaste and morally dignified, defending herself against a sexual seduction and attack as is seen in the hunter's way to treat her. The poet admired her self-defensive deed and wrote to eulogize it. The sexual seduction continues through the poem until the maiden holds her back with dignity and pushes away the hunter who is touching her all about."<sup>[9]</sup> Few people could accept this far-fetched interpretation as it is obviously branched off the sheer logic of a secret love affair the song as such sets forth.

Comparatively, when it comes to the *Qiangzhongzi* (Cadet My Dear) from the *Zheng* anthology, Zhu again goes so far as to label it a love poem full of lustful and flirting expressions (*yinben zhici*). But reading the first stanza of the poem--

*Cadet my dear,*

*Don't leap into my hamlet, please,*

*Nor break my willow trees!*

*Not that I care for these;*

*It is my parents that I fear.*

*Much as I love you, dear,*

*How can I not be afraid*

*Of what my parents might have said!....*<sup>[10]</sup>

we can easily discern the secret romance involved in a dilemma, and find nothing licentious and morally problematic on the part of the maiden. Instead we have the feeling that she is timid, fragile and self-defensive because she confines herself to her parents' advise or patriarchic power. Such an interaction between the girl and her parents actually unfolds a bilateral awareness of moral conduct as a result of adhering to the rites. Noticeably, the two lovers have met each other before as the man is indicated to steal his way into her dwelling. But now she advises him not to come along this way any more. This implies her face-consciousness and moral rationality mixed up with psychological ambivalence.

Through comparative illustrations Zhu's bi-polarized treatment of the lyrics is found restricted to a designated sphere contained in the moral principle *a priori*. This principle is composed of two dimensions: positive and negative in accord with the two categories of poems in his perception. The positive is applied to the so-called serious and virtuous category (*zheng*) mainly from the *Zhounan* and *Zhaonan* anthologies, whilst the negative is applied to the so-called vicious and wanton category (*xie*) mainly from the *Zheng* and *Wei* anthologies. What he does in this regard is like what the old saying suggests: he draws a circle on the ground to serve as a prison to detain himself within (*huadi weilao*). That is why some amount of his commentary turns out to be far-fetched, lopsided and even misconceived. No one knows whether Zhu Xi speaks out what he really feels and experiences in the love poems. But in order to secure his position as a moralist educator, he seems obliged to do whatever possible to defend the *tianli* or the rites as a foundation stone for moral education.

Yet, in spite of his preoccupation with the moral principle *a priori*, Zhu Xi's treatment of the *Cadet My Dear*, and among many others, reveals his distinct and sharp observation if compared with the orthodox interpretation provided by Mao Heng in the Han Dynasty. As is read in the *Maoshi zhengyi* (Mao Heng's Commentary on *The Book of Poetry*), the thematic line of all the *feng* lyrics is overshadowed by sheer political allegory that is used "to educate the ruled by the ruling" (*shang yi feng hua xia*) and "to satirize the ruling by the ruled" (*xia yi feng ci shang*), aiming to rectify their morals and manners altogether.<sup>[11]</sup> Regarding the case of the *Cadet My Dear*, Mao Heng repeats a sort of

intentional fallacy by linking it with a historical story in the *Zuozhuan*, and asserts that the lyric itself signals a moral lesson and political teaching concerning the dramatic interrelationship in a power game between the two brothers, Zhuangong and Duanshu.<sup>[12]</sup> In a word, Mao

Heng paraphrases it as a satire against Zhuangong for his failure to prevent his younger brother Duanshu from being spoiled and corrupted to his doomed end. Quite some readers, both Chinese and Western, are induced into this far-fetched interpretation and tend to parrot back what

Mao Heng says.<sup>[13]</sup> Instead, it is Zhu Xi who first breaks away from this beaten track and bases his explanation on the subject matter

represented. He concludes that it is merely a love poem intensified by the daring expression of private experiences. All this seems to me justifiable in terms of textual and contextual anatomy. As is noticed in the three stanzas of the poem, the maiden exhorts her lover not to break the willows, mulberries and sandal trees when he sneaks through the surroundings and "leaps into her garden". This is not because she cares about the trees themselves. Rather, the only thing she cares or fears about is what her parents, brothers and neighbors might say about their trysting adventures. In fact she herself enjoys such adventures even though she appears highly alert against the noises and traces that might be made and left behind during the process. She therefore announces repeatedly "Much as I love you, dear" (*zhong ke huai ye*) with passionate affection and heartfelt delight. The poetic ambiance as a whole impresses me as if the female persona unwillingly suppresses her passion due to the social pressure while implicitly complaining about the family supervision and moral discourse not in her favor.

Zhu Xi is renown to have spent over 40 years on the study of *The Book of Poetry*. He scrutinizes each text and grounds most of his interpretations on textual investigation by reading all the poems numerous times for an aesthetic contemplation and insightful understanding. Hence he has come out to define poetry as "the artistic expression of feelings inspired by things or events" (*ganwu daoqing*) rather than the documentary representation of political overtones. Thus confidently he knocks down the conventional approach to promoting overstrained explications and farfetched analogies, and criticizes Mao Heng's doctrine of literary satirization (*meici shuo*) as being in many cases a

“fantasized conjecture” (*wangyi tuixiang*) and “originally absent of truth” (*chuwu qishi*).<sup>[14]</sup> Specifically with respect of the *Cadet My Dear*, he says it is “simply about a male-and-female romance, and therefore has nothing to do with [any political overtones or moral teachings relating to such historical figures as] Zhai Zhong and Gong Duanshu at all.”<sup>[15]</sup>

## Second Reflection on ‘Having no Depraved Thoughts’

The school of canonic studies (*jingxue*)<sup>[16]</sup> witnesses a substantial development in the Zhu Xi’s era. The methodology he exercises and promotes manifests certain hermeneutic features. It can be broadly classified into two interrelated modes: one is textual as is based on the sentence patterns (*ju fa*), and the other is empirical as is based on personal apprehension (*xin fa*). In Western terminology the textual mode is essentially objective while the empirical mode is subjective. These two modes are interactive and even interwoven instead of being clear-cut and monadically self-closed. That means personal apprehension or empirical explanation can penetrate into the textual interpretation in the praxis of literary criticism.

With respect to the textual mode, Zhu upholds that any textual interpretation should be preconditioned by the fundamental theme of the text concerned. The theme as such serves as an indispensable premise or master key to clarifying the meaning of the phrases and sentences used in the text. From his viewpoint, “*The Book of Changes (Yijing)* is thematically about the Yin and the Yang; *The Book of Poetry (Shijing)* is thematically about the *xie* (depraved) and the *zheng* (non-depraved); and *The Book of History (Shujing)* is thematically about the *zhi* (social order) and the *luan* (social chaos).”<sup>[17]</sup> A good command of their respective themes can secure a relevant orientation to understand and explicate the text. This being the case, the use of philological devices can help pinpoint what the phrases and sentences really mean, which then goes further to locate and clarify the meaning of the text as a whole. As there arise doubted points with ambiguous implications in the text, it is therefore necessary to interpret and reinterpret them in order to clear away the possible ambiguities and misunderstandings.

Then what on earth the interpretation aims at? According to Zhu Xi, it aims to find out three things: the first is the original meaning of the canonic text; the second is the intention of the author; the third is the message of the enlightened reader.<sup>[18]</sup> It seems to me that the first objective depends on the intended meaning of the text that can be largely specified by virtue of textual analysis; the second objective is subject to variables and mostly based on extended significance of the text, and so is the third objective. The extended significance often deviates from the textual meaning because of its implicitness and suggestiveness. To fulfill these three objectives, the textual mode is not adequate enough. It therefore requires the assistance from its counterpart of the empirical mode as a complementary dimension. The latter is closely associated with fore understandings, personal observations, cultural literacy, moral cultivation, intelligible capacity, and cognitive familiarity with the past undertakings in canonic studies and interpretations, etc. It encourages the reader to feel into the text along with all his schematic resources available. By so doing can the hidden meaning be exposed and the significance be extended.

As an outcome of this methodological drive, Zhu Xi has brought many ambiguous arguments into light even though he has also distorted the pictures of some lyrical poems in terms of the moral principle *a priori*. A typical example lies in his second reflection on Confucius’ conclusive remark: “In *The Book of Poetry* are three hundred pieces in number. They can be summed up in one sentence—‘Have no depraved thoughts (*si wu xie*).’”<sup>[19]</sup> This overgeneralization is conducive to misconception. It is often taken for a moralized summary of the general theme or subject matter of the three hundred poems or so. People tend to get confused when reading the love songs that represent, implicitly or explicitly, the romantic sentiments and erotic deeds between young lovers. They find quite a number of the love songs falling short of the expectation of “having no depraved thoughts” if viewed from a moralized perspective. So they cannot help but wonder what Confucius really means by this line (‘Having no depraved thoughts’) cited from a hymn of Lu entitled the *Jiong* (Horses).

Zhu Xi firstly points out that “The Confucius’ remark bears a profound implication. For what is expressed in the poetry can be either good-natured or evil-natured in content. The former stimulate the good conscience of people, whereas the latter warn them of their sensuous pursuits and unhealthy fantasies. Eventually both of them are intended to help people develop a decent and moral personality. Since the poetic discourse is indirect and suggestive, it is not easy to exhaust its meaning in clarity.”<sup>[20]</sup> This given comment does not work to justify what Confucius means by the phrase-based summary even though Zhu Xi quotes Cheng Yi’s vague interpretation in terms of “sincerity” (*cheng*).

Later on Zhu offers a more elaborate and individual explanation of this ambiguous point when he rereads the love poem of the *Sangzhong* (Trysts) from the *Yong* anthology:

“By claiming that all the poems [in *The Book of Poetry*] ‘have no depraved thoughts’ (*si wu xie*), Confucius means to use the three hundred pieces to promote the good while punishing the evil. Although its basic intention is good-natured and directed to the right path, it is not completely and justly understood yet. As a matter of fact, it does not suggest that all the poets be freed from depraved thoughts. Now there arise two interpretations: One argues that the poets do describe the love romances but they themselves have no depraved thoughts. They do so to denote a moral message with both a sense of sympathy and that of punishment relating to the victims. The other argues that the poets write about these poems when they have depraved thoughts, but readers are expected to rid themselves of any depraved thoughts when reading the pieces. They can learn moral lessons from the ugly in the poetic representations and keep alert against such wrong doings. These sayings are varied from one another. In my mind, it would be better to look into oneself rather than into others from the light of non-depravedness. Likewise, it would be even better to banish the vice of depravedness on one’s own rather than attributing the virtue of non-depravedness to others.”<sup>[21]</sup>

This interpretation is highly instructive due to its moralized intention and requirement. It is a consequence not merely of empirical analysis pointed to the merits of cultural literacy and personal sensibility, but also of second reflection in pursuit of the general objective of Confucius himself regarding the use of the poems in all. With the objective identified and the attitude rectified, whether or not to have depraved or non-depraved thoughts is found far less decisive when it comes to reading the love poems in particular. For what really counts in this experience is the reader’s aesthetic attention, normal attitude, and moral conscience. Just as the old saying runs, you should not bother so much about your slanting shadow on the ground so long as you yourself are walking straight ahead. That is, whatever form of depraving and seducing depictions in poetry matters too little provided you can manage to keep yourself in a decent and innocent state of mind. Such a state of mind is sustained by at least two essential characteristics: one is the inward transcendence and the other is aesthetic detachment, so to speak. All this is not adequately heeded and reconsidered, however. It is Xiong Shili, a modern Chinese philosopher, who perceives the message and pushes it further in plain language as follows:

“Reading through each piece in *The Book of Poetry*, we find it groundless to conclude that they all have no depraved thoughts (*si wu xie*). Subsequent Confucian scholars insist that Confucius says this to let people draw moral lessons from both the good and bad contents. This is not against the possible intention but narrows down what Confucius means. In fact, Confucius applies this idea to *The Book of Poetry* as a whole, calling for a complete and thorough understanding of literature. Originally literature expresses the human life or condition. Though saturated with the exposure of the bright and dark or the good and bad aspects, it enlightens people to think of moving from the dark toward the bright, and to explore the nature of human freedom. It is for this reason that Confucius talks about having no depraved thoughts in the case of the poems...From antiquity up till now, *The Wooing and Wedding* (*Guanju*) has been widely read. But how many people have ever experienced the spiritual state of ‘being joyful without causing licentiousness and being sorrowful without excessive grief.’ .As human beings are enslaved by the instrumental values and corrupted by material wants, they are so wanton and licentious that they have lost their original nature of innocence. They tend to delight in the licentious life and suffer from excessive grief to the extent that they have confined themselves to the small and selfish ‘I’, transformed themselves along with things and desires, and consequently lost their real essence to be integrated with the great universe. This is so tragic of human existence.”<sup>[22]</sup>

Apparently what Xiong Shili tries to say is reconfirm what Zhu Xi and many others have done before by approving the moral purpose of “having no depraved thoughts” in connection with the poems. Like Zhu Xi, he encourages people to look inward, instead of looking outward in view of personal cultivation and spiritual sublimation. But he ventures further with a critique of the narrower preoccupation with merely moralized intention and attitude concerning the subject matter of the poems proper. He in fact announces the hidden function of literature as an expression of the human condition, and advocates the nature of human freedom for value judgment. This largely broadens the scope and perspective of literary criticism. According to Xiong Shili’s observation, the human condition is rendered so harsh by instrumental confinement, material corruption, pleasure-seeking greed and small-minded selfishness, etc. Worse still, many people appear self-obsessed in this plight and even self-deprived of their sense of justice, not to speak of their real knowledge and courage to face the tragic aspect of their being. This being the circumstance, Xiong Shili assumes and possibly expects literature to play an important role to enlighten the victims at loss. As is seen in the genre of poetry, literature exposes and typifies both the positive and negative respects of the reality. Once “a complete and thorough understanding of literature” is attained, people are supposed to be enlightened to the extent that they will act to go beyond the negative toward the positive. In other words, they will be enabled to get back the nature of human freedom, confront with the harsh reality and become conscious of changing their existing condition. All this requires such traits as moral awareness, personal responsibility, psychical equanimity, and courageous spirit in addition to poetic sensibility in particular. Such poetic sensibility is, in Xiong’s mind, rather crucial and

even determinate in a way as it stirs up people's aspirations and facilitate the possibility of all the other virtuous traits above mentioned. Further more, the product of literature like *The Book of Poetry* "is difficult to read. Without great wisdom, that it is read makes no difference from that it is unread"<sup>[23]</sup> because any literal reading cannot easily secure an insightful apprehension or relevant understanding. Xiong seems to make so big a story of literature in general and *The Book of Poetry* in particular at a time when he grows much worried about the human condition and corruption. He therefore attempts to advise people to mirror themselves through the poetic imagery in order to wake up from their illusions, realize their downfalls, and hopefully mend their ways in the end.

Now let us turn back again to the notion of "having no depraved thoughts" with reference to Zhu Xi and Xiong Shili who open up a new horizon in contrast with the traditional and narrower interpretations concerned. Quietly noticeably the second reflection as they have operated sheds considerable light on what Confucius says about the predominant theme of the three hundred poems or so. It seems to me, for instance, that "having no depraved thoughts" can be taken as a threefold principle to guide the reading and treatment of the *feng* lyrics in particular.

First and foremost, it is often applied as a moralized guideline to poetic criticism. By so doing overstressed are the moral values and practical usages. Accordingly the critique of poetry tends to be mechanical and conformistic regardless of specific contexts, say, the ancients used to live and love according to the "old" rites as moral codes of their times. Judging from the "new" rites as the Neo-Confucianists granted, the ancients appeared as if they were so laissez-faire and dissipated. As is shown in his commentary on the love poems, Zhu Xi is inclined to impose the current moral codes onto the departed ancients, and make his judgment according to the value systems of his time. This is similar to the case of "cutting the feet to fit the shoes", so to speak.

Secondly, the notion of "having no depraved thoughts" can be seen as a realistic principle for literary creation. Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi's master, once identifies this notion with the Chinese conception of *cheng*. In this context *cheng* signifies sincere instead of pretentious, genuine instead of fake, true instead of false, natural instead of artificial, etc. It is hereby assumed that the poems "have no depraved thoughts" because they are authentic expressions of the natural flow of human emotions and feelings along with their experiences of life style. Both Cheng Yi and his brother Cheng Hao champion "the sincerity and authenticity of verbal expression (*xiu ci li qi cheng*)" as a guiding rope for all literary writings. When reading the *feng* lyrics and especially the love songs, we feel strongly and value highly the sincerity, authenticity and simplicity in the descriptions of romantic adventures and clandestine love affairs. This does not mean we don't care about morals. Rather, we hardly bother about their morals because love would be so natural among the ancients who were not subject to the moral codes or taboos as were the later descendants, say, centuries later in the Song Dynasty. In other words, the interaction between man and women enjoyed an unconceivable latitude in accordance with their free will and less restricted norms in antiquity. Even nowadays among certain minority ethnic groups in China, the similar trysts as we read about in the love songs are still common according to their folklores, for instance, the Li people in Hainan, the Suoluo people in Lijiang, and the Yi people in Guizhou.

Thirdly, the notion of "having no depraved thoughts" can be identified with an aesthetic attitude of detachment. This attitude features a "serene contemplation" (*jing guan*) as Cheng Zi recommends. It is free or detached from any practical needs. Idealistically speaking, it is intended to nurture a transcendental outlook to make life both artistic and moralistic, integrating emotionality (aesthetic sensation) with rationality (moral reason) in harmony. To clarify it in Kantian terms, this aesthetic attitude is supposed to be characterized with kind of disinterestedness and purposelessness in a pragmatic sense. With the help of this attitude, even the love songs can be appreciated without being morally upset or corrupted. In this case, personal cultivation and moral conscious are all the more important and determinant just as Zhu Xi perceives and claims.

All in all, Zhu Xi's critique of poetry is somewhat moralized against a preset or *a priori* imperative subject to his preoccupation with *tianli* (heavenly principles) in terms of the cardinal virtues and feudal rites as codes of conduct par excellence. Moreover, it is somewhat preconditioned by his conceptual conformity to Confucius' over-generalized observations, and practically pushed forward by his methodology of interpretation. His justification of "having no depraved thoughts" is noteworthy as it opens a new horizon for poetic criticism despite of its moral finality. His poetics places more emphasis on the Dao of morality rather than the literary value as is noticed in his commentary on the poetry. This can be well justified by his renowned statement that "The Dao is the root of literature while literature is the bough and leaf of the Dao (*dao zhe wen zhi genben, wen zhe dao zhi zhiye*)".<sup>[24]</sup> Nevertheless, Zhu Xi treats the *feng* lyrics as love poems expressing the male-and-female romances instead of far-fetched political overtones in many cases. This shows that Zhu gets much closer to the nature of poetry as a literary genre and hence his moralistic view implies a tendency to break away from the earlier conventionalized mode of literary criticism shaped in the Han Dynasty. It is just in such a historical and comparative sense that it is acknowledged as a step forward anyway.

[1] Cf. Zhu Xi. *Zhu Zi yulei* (Recorded Sayings of Master Zhu), vol. 12. In Chinese *tianli* can be seen as a collective term, including “the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” (*sangang wuchang*) among others. The three cardinal guides are known as “Ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife”, and the five constant virtues are known as “reciprocal humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness”. They are all specified in the feudal system of ethical code. In Zhu Xi’s mind, they are definitely right and proper, as perfectly justified as heavenly that are ultimately directed towards the One as the highest good (*zhishan*). The highest good is based on the “four beginnings” (*siguan*) in Mencius’ terminology (*ceyin zhixin* as the feeling of commiseration, *xiuwu zhixin* as the feeling of shame and dislike, *cirang zhixin* as the feeling of modesty and complaisance, and *shifei zhixin* as the feeling of approving and disapproving) (Cf. *The Works of Mencius*. 3.6). These four beginnings are the premises of developing the four virtues of reciprocal humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. Anyone who follows these heavenly principles is bound to have a just and righteous mind, and able to retain his good nature in all cases. In contrast, *renyu* as human desires are negative and misleading. They reflect the selfish, morbid and even evil aspects of human mind which is confused and covered up with “material desires” (*wuyu*) or “insatiable greed” (*shiyu*). Such a confused mind is usually indifferent to “the four beginnings” and “the four virtues” as well. One who has this kind of mind is inclined to act against the constant virtues and accordingly against the heavenly principles. Hence Zhu Xi encourages people to get “the heavenly principles purified” (*tianli chun*) in order to have “the human desires completely abandoned” (*renyu jin*).

[2] Cf. Zhu Xi. *Lunyu jizhu* (The Coomentary on The Confucian Analects). In *Sishu zhangju jizhu* (The Commentary on The Four Books) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983), pp. 104-105

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[4] Cf. Confucius. *The Analects*. (tr. D. C. Lau, London: Penguin Books, 1979), XV.11, p.134; XVII. 18, p. 146.

[5] *Ibid.*, XV.11, p. 133.

[6] *Ibid.*, XVII. 10, p. 145.

[7] Cf. Wang Keping. “Confucius’ Expectations of Poetry,” in *The Social Sciences in China* (English). 1996, vol. 4, p.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41. A minor modification is made in the English version.

[9] Cf. Zhu Xi. *Shijizhuan* (The Commentary on the Book of Poetry), p. 9.

[10] Cf. Xu Yuanchong (tr.). *The Book of Poetry*. pp. 142-145.

[11] Cf. Mao Heng. *Maoshi zhengyi* (Mao Heng’s Commentary on The Book of Poetry, Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), vol. 1, p. 13. The original remark runs: “*shang yi feng hua xia, xia yi feng ci shang, zhuwen er juejian, yanzhizhe wu zui, wenzhizhe zuyijie, gu yue feng* (The ruling use the *feng* lyrics to educate the ruled; the ruled use the *feng* lyrics to satirize the ruling. This recommends literary and diplomatic satire or analogy. Those who make such satirical utterances is freed from any blame; and those who hear about them ought to mind their conduct. So named are the *feng* lyrics).”

[12] This historical story is read in the *Zhuozhuang* and used by Mao Heng to interpret the political overtones as are assumingly attached to the poem of *Qiangzhongzi* (Cadet My Dear). It is documented in what happens in the first year of the Lord Yin of Lu state as briefly follows: Lord Wu of Zheng state married Lady Wu Jiang who gave birth to Zhuanggong first and to Duanshu second. As she had a hard time when having her first delivery, the Lady loved Duanshu so much more than Zhuanggong that she persuaded her husband, Lord Wu, to allow Duanshu to take the throne but did not succeed. When Zhuanggong became the Lord of the Zheng state, he accepted his mother’s request and offered his young brother Duanshu an important position in the capital. Zhai Zhong, a minister, advises Zhuanggong to restrain the power and stop the misbehavior of Duanshu for the safety of the state power, but Zhuanggong rejected due to his mother’s preference. In turn he told Zhai Zhong that Duanshu would be doomed if he continued his wrong doings. As a result, Duanshu was so spoiled and corrupted that he ventured to usurp the state power from Zhuanggong. Eventually Duanshu failed and got killed after a chaotic and warring period of time (Cf. *Zuozhuang* or *Chunqiu zuozhuang zhengyi* (Zuo Qiuming’s Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals, Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 50-54.

[13] Some Western scholars have noticed the political overtones in these poems as a result of making a particular reference to Mao Heng’s interpretation in the *Maoshi zhengyi* (Mao Heng’s Commentary on The Book of Poetry, vol. 1, pp. 279-280). Cf. Francois Julien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 2000). Mao Heng’s statement follows: “*Qiangzhongzi, ci Zhuanggong ye. Busheng qi mu, yihai qidi. Di Shu shidao er Gong fuzhi, Zhai Zhong jian er Gong futing, xiao buren yizhi daluan yan* (The poem of the *Cadet My Dear* is satirical against Lord Zhuanggong of Zheng state. The Lord takes no measures as his mother spoils his younger brother Duanshu. Then Duangshu misbehaves more brutally, but the Lord Zhuanggong lets him become what he wants to. Zhai Zhong, a minister, advises the Lord to stop Duanshu, but the Lord refuses to do anything. Consequently Duanshu goes so far as to launch a political coup and causes great disorder in the state).”

[14] Cf. *Zhuzi yulei* (Recorded Sayings of Master Zhu Xi, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), vol. 80, p.2077.

[15] *Ibid.*, vol. 81, p. 2108. His Chinese statement follows: “*ru Qiangzhongzi, zi shi nannü xiangyu zhici, que yu Zhai Zhong Gong Duanshu shenshi? (Take the Cadet My Dear for example. It is just about a romance between a male and a female. And it has nothing to do with Zhai Zhong and Gong Duanshu at all, doesn’t it?)*”

[16] The school of canonic studies (*jingxue*) in China is basically devoted to the interpretation of Chinese canons or classics. It can be traced back to Confucius’ compiling and treatment of the five classics, including *The Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*), *The Book of History* (*Shujing*), *The Book of Rites* (*Lijing*), *The Book of Music* (*Yuejing*), *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*). Ever since the Han Dynasty or from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC onward, the school of canonic studies is developed into an orthodox in favor of Confucianism. In the Song Dynasty it reached its acme to which Zhu Xi is acknowledged as the most outstanding and comprehensive contributor.

[17] Cf. Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi yulei* (Recorded Sayings of Master Zhu), vol. 11.

[18] Cf. Pan Derong. “Jingdian yu quanshi: lun Zhu Xi de quanshi sixiang” (Classic Cannons and Interpretations: On Zhu Xi’s Hermeneutic Ideas), in *Social Sciences in China*. 2002, No. 1, pp. 60-63.

[19] Cf. Confucius. *The Analects*. II. 2. The translation is modified with reference to the Chinese original. One may well go to check James Legge's version.

[20] Cf. Zhu Xi. *Lunyu jizhu* (Commentary on The Confucian Analects), vol. 1, in *Sishu zhangju jizhu* (Commentary on The four Books). pp. 53-54.

[21] Cf. Kang Xiaocheng. *Xianqin rujia shijiao sixiang yanjiu* (A Study of the Pre-Qin Confucian Ideas of Education through Poetry). (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1988), pp. 159-160.

[22] Cf. Xiong Shili. "Shijing Lüeshuo" (A Rambling Talk on *The Book of Poetry*), in *Dujing shiyao* (A Basic Approach to Reading the Chinese Classics), quoted from *Xiong Shili ji* (Selected Writings by Xiong Shili). (ed. Huang Kejian, Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 1993), p.269.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 268.

[24] Cf. Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi yulei* (Recorded Sayings of Master Zhu Xi), sect. 139. Also see Beida Meixueshi. *Zhongguo meixueshi ziliao xuanbian* (Selected Sources of the History of Chinese Aesthetics). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p.59.