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The Origin and Development of Western Sinologists' Theories of the Oral-Formulaic Nature of the *Classic of Poetry*

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Beginning early in the twentieth century, Western scholars have emphasized the oral origins of early world literature, including Chinese literature. With respect to the *Shijing* or *Classic of Poetry*, China's earliest collection of poetry, two proponents of this theory of oral literature have been particularly influential: Marcel Granet (1884–1940) and C. H. Wang. It is little known among Sinologists that Granet's *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine*, published in 1919 and perhaps the most important single Western contribution to the study of the *Classic of Poetry*, was heavily influenced by the early studies of Jean Paulhan (1884–1968). It is better known that C. H. Wang's *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (1974), the second great contribution to this theory, was deeply indebted to the theories of Milman Parry (1902–1935) and Albert B. Lord (1912–1991). As a prelude to a broader study of recently excavated textual materials and their significance for the early history of the *Classic of Poetry*, in this article I examine the background of these two scholars' studies of the *Classic of Poetry*, and explore as well some of the influence that they have had in the scholarship of the last century.

Keywords: *Classic of Poetry*, oral literature, Marcel Granet, C. H. Wang, excavated manuscripts

In a recent article entitled "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral Versus Written Nature of the *Classic of Poetry*,"[1] I have tried to show the considerable role that writing played in the creation of the *Shijing* 詩經 or *Classic of Poetry* (or simply *Poetry*) in all of the different periods of its creation: from the Western Zhou dynasty (1045–771 B.C.), when the first poems were composed, through the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 220), when the collection that we have today took definitive shape. I first examined several recently discovered manuscripts—from the Shanghai Museum and Tsinghua (Qinghua 清華) University collections—with both systematic references to the *Poetry* and also early versions of individual poems to show that poems could be and were written no later than the Warring States period (480–222 B.C.). I then examined other evidence—less direct, to be sure—that strongly suggests that writing was involved in every step of the creation and transmission of the *Poetry.* Inscriptions on bronze vessels show that at least some of the social elites of the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods were fully capable of writing texts very similar to the poetry we see in the received *Poetry.* Variants and errors seen in the received text of the *Poetry*, plausibly caused by changes in the script or in the idiom of usage over the course of the centuries before the common era, suggest that at least some of the transmission of the text was accomplished by copying from one manuscript to another over the course of the Eastern Zhou period (770–249 B.C.). And at least one case in which two separate poems were conflated in the Han dynasty suggests that editors were then working with a text written on bamboo strips. All of this evidence should suffice to remind readers that the *Poetry* was created within a fully literate context. Already by the end of the Western Zhou period, the period to which many of the poems are traditionally dated, scribes had been writing at the Shang and Zhou courts for some four hundred years.

This argument for the role of writing in the creation of the *Poetry* flies in the face of many recent pronouncements concerning the nature of the *Poetry.* Especially among Western Sinologists, there is a prevalent view that the poems in the collection were originally produced orally and to a considerable extent were also transmitted orally, at least through much of the Zhou dynasty. This is a view that has been stated, in one way or another, by many of the most

1 Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral Versus Written Nature of the *Classic of Poetry*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75.2: in press.

influential contemporary Sinologists and *Shijing* specialists, including Joseph Allen, Christoph Harbsmeier, David Knechtges, Michael Nylan, and Stephen Owen, as the following brief quotations will show:

> Joseph Allen: "Although there is little direct discussion of the issue in early commentaries, it is assumed that the songs emerge from different performance contexts, and pre-Han references to the songs should always be seen in the bounds of that type of environment. At the earliest stage this context would be entirely fluid and ephemeral; songs would not have existed beyond their momentary instantiations; they may have been repeated, but these repetitions would not be seen as versions of some fixed model."[2]
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> Christoph Harbsmeier: "The *Iliad* was still recited, and for the first time written down in 'Homeric Greek,' long after anything like 'Homeric Greek,' if indeed it ever was a current spoken language, had become a matter of the past. Similarly one must assume that the *Book of Songs* of the Chinese was written down at a time when its language already sounded archaic or was at least obsolescent. The crucial point that the Homeric poems and the *Book of Songs* have in common is that both, though written in sometimes formulaic, somewhat artificial language, were evidently based on oral poetry which was only incidentally—almost literally *post festum*—written down and almost certainly first performed by illiterate people. Bards could be blind even after the invention of writing because they did not need to read.
>
> "Indeed, at least as late as the 3rd century it appears that the texts of the *Book of Songs* were known and understood by less learned scribes by their sounds, not their characters, as the phonetic way of writing quotations in the famous *Lao Tzu* manuscripts recently discovered would suggest. In general, the profusion of phonetic loan characters throughout the epigraphic evidence accumulated through archaeological discoveries must indicate that texts were remembered primarily not as graphic form but as spoken sound. The proliferation (and irregularity) of phonetic loans throughout even printed texts is the strongest proof we have of the

2 Joseph Allen, "Postface: A Literary History of the *Shijing*," in *The Book of Songs*, translated by Arthur Waley, edited with additional translations by Joseph R. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 336–37.

primacy of the spoken over the written forms of texts. In a predominantly illiterate society this is not in the slightest surprising: indeed anything else would be anthropologically and historically extraordinary." [3]

David Knechtges: "What this means is that the *Shi* text to which we have access is far removed from the time of the original composition of the songs themselves, some of which may date from the early Western Zhou. Furthermore, Zheng Xuan prepared his version of the *Shi* after the regularization of the script, which is clearly in evidence at the time of the compilation of the *Shuowen jiezi* in 100 C.E. The script and text of the received version of the *Shi* have been influenced by the ways in which the Han scholars wrote and pronounced the words of the songs. William R. Baxter, for example, has shown that the phonology of the *Shijing* has been significantly influenced by Han dynasty pronunciation and script. As Baxter aptly puts it, the *Shi* 'as we now have it is a Zhou text in Han clothing; both its script, and, to some extent, its text have been influenced by post-*Shijing* phonology, and are not always reliable guides to the phonology of old Chinese.'

"Baxter's caution about the unreliability of the received text of the *Shi* as a guide to Old Chinese phonology is important, for it tells us that the versions of the *Shi* poems that we read today are not the ancient Zhou versions, but late Han recensions of them. The Zhou versions were circulated primarily by means of oral transmission." [4]

Michael Nylan: "The *Odes* (*Shi* 詩), a collection of what appear to be polished folk songs, sophisticated occasional pieces, and solemn dynastic hymns, is the most uniformly old compilation of texts included in the Five Classics—and the first to be recognized as canon. Some of the odes now included in this collection of 305 verse pieces may have been in existence as oral performance texts by the fifth century BC—in time for Confucius himself to have used them in his teaching—though a fixed anthology of these particular lyrics may not have existed in written form before unification in 221 BC. No evidence, of course, supports the pious legend that Confucius himself compiled the received version, culling 'the

3 Christoph Harbsmeier, *Science and Civilisation in China, Volume 7, Part 1: Language and Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 41–42.

4 David R. Knechtges, "Questions about the Language of *Sheng Min*," in *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, eds. Pauline Yu, Peter Bol, Stephen Owen and Willard Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 15–16.

three hundred odes' from more than three thousand; and yet the received anthology in all likelihood crystallized out of a much broader repertoire of performance songs, just as in myth." [5]

Stephen Owen: "The *Shi* probably existed as orally transmitted texts long before they were ever committed to writing, and even after their commitment to writing (when we cannot be sure, but I would guess late Chunqiu at the earliest), their primary mode of transmission was probably oral until (another guess) the late Warring States." [6]

Although Stephen Owen qualifies his published comments on the nature of the *Poetry* as "guesses," the other authorities quoted here are more definite in their statements, with David Knechtges' "the versions of the *Shi* poems that we read today are not the ancient Zhou versions, but late Han recensions of them. The Zhou versions were circulated primarily by means of oral transmission" and Michael Nylan's "Some of the odes now included in this collection of 305 verse pieces may have been in existence as oral performance texts by the fifth century BC—in time for Confucius himself to have used them in his teaching—though a fixed anthology of these particular lyrics may not have existed in written form before unification in 221 BC" being just the most extreme. In light of these statements, one might assume that there exists firm evidence demonstrating that the *Poetry* was composed and transmitted orally. One would be quite wrong in this assumption. In fact, most of the arguments in favor of the oral nature of the *Poetry* derive—whether explicitly or implicitly—from studies of the Homeric epics, the New Testament, Malagasy *hain-teny*, Yugoslavian ballads, Old English poetry, etc. There is a general agreement that these were first produced orally and only later transcribed into writing, but the agreement pretty much ends there. In the United States, discussions of oral literature, and especially poetry, almost invariably—one almost wants to say formulaically—refer to the Parry-Lord Theory.[7] However, there were

5 Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 72–73.

6 Stephen Owen, "Interpreting *Sheng Min*," in *Ways with Words*, 25. For a still more developed statement of Owen's views concerning the oral nature of the *Classic of Poetry*, see "Yuwen Suo'an tan wenxueshi de xiefa" 宇文所安談文學史的寫法 , *Shanghai shuping* 上海書評 , 8 March 2009, 2.

7 The Parry-Lord Theory of oral-formulaic poetry refers to the work of Milman Parry (1902–1935) and his student Albert B. Lord (1912–1991), and has its fullest exposition in Lord's book *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

important developments in this regard, even concerning the *Poetry*, even before Milman Parry arrived in Paris in 1923, and other important developments, again even concerning the *Poetry*, well after Parry's student Albert B. Lord brought the theory to a wider readership with his 1960 book *The Singer of Tales.*

Because of the important place the *Classic of Poetry* holds in the Chinese literary tradition, it seems important to examine how this theory, or these theories, have been applied to it. Throughout the twentieth century, the two most prominent arguments in favor of the oral nature of the *Poetry* were by Marcel Granet (1884–1940) and by C. H. Wang (Wang Jingxian 王靖獻). I will consider in turn the works of these two scholars.

Marcel Granet

Published in 1919, Marcel Granet's *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine* set out to demonstrate that the poetry found in the *Shijing* was produced in the course of seasonal agricultural rituals.

> They make it possible to study the operations of popular invention; it will appear that they are the product of a kind of traditional and collective creation; they were improvised, on certain set themes, in the course of ritual dances. It is evident from their content that the occasion of their composition was the important oral ceremony of the ancient agricultural festivals, and they are thus a direct testimony of the emotions which gave rise to these periodical gatherings.[8]

It is well known among most sinologists that Granet began at the University of Paris as a student of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and that *Fêtes et chansons*'s concern with communal agricultural rituals is indebted to Durkheim's *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (indeed, the book is dedicated to Durkheim, as well as to Granet's

8 Marcel Granet, *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine* (1919; 2nd ed., Paris: Leroux, 1929); tr. E. D. Edwards, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1932), 7.

teacher of things Chinese Édouard Chavannes [1865–1918]).[9] Interested solely in an analysis of society and religion, Granet denied to the poetry he was studying any individuality.

> No regard is directed to the particular. This accounts at once for the fact that the songs borrow lines or whole stanzas from each other. It further explains how it was so easy to invest the poems with meanings at will. But, above all, it proves that it is vain to try to discover the personality of the author in individual poems. These impersonal lovers, all experiencing precisely the same impersonal emotions of love in a purely formal background, are not the creation of poets. The lack of individuality in the poems necessitates the assumption that they are of impersonal origin.[10]

While Durkheim was doubtless the primary influence on Granet, Granet's analysis of the poetry itself was just as strongly influenced by another of his contemporaries: Jean Paulhan (1884–1968), the twentieth century's first great proponent of oral literature.[11] In the period from 1908 to 1910, while teaching in Antananarivo, Madagascar, Paulhan observed illiterate local workers engage in oral duels that consisted of the exchange of clichés, proverbs, and stereotyped phrases. In 1913, Paulhan published *Les Hain-teny merinas, poésies populaires malgaches* (Paris: Geuthner, 1913) in which he introduced these poetic "jousts" (*joutes*), referred to as *hain-teny*:[12]

> One might imagine a language consisting of two or three hundred rhythmic phrases and four or five hundred verse-types, fixed once and for all and passed on without modification by oral tradition. Poetic invention

9 For a valuable scholarly biography of Granet, focusing especially on his contributions to sociology, see Maurice Freedman, "Introductory Essay: Marcel Granet, 1884–1940, Sociologist," in Marcel Granet, *The Religion of the Chinese People*, tr. Maurice Freedman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 1–29. Regarding *Fêtes et chansons*, Freedman remarks astutely: "The world of Durkheim's Australia and that of *Fêtes et chansons* are one," 19.

10 Granet, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, 86.

11 My discussion here of Paulhan, as well as the following comments on Marcel Jousse, draws largely on Haun Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm: Orality and Its Technologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016). I am extremely grateful to Professor Saussy for having made a draft version of this monograph available to me before its publication, and for granting me permission to quote from it.

12 Paulhan, *Les Hain-teny merinas, poésies populaires malgaches* (Paris: Geuthner, 1913).

> would then consist of taking these verses as models and fashioning new verses in their image, verses having the same form, rhythm, structure, and, so far as possible, the same meaning. Such a language would quite closely resemble the language of Malagasy poetry: its type-verses are proverbs, and its poems, imagined in imitation of these proverbs, reproducing them in hundreds of new copies, stretching them out or shortening them, setting them for the sake of contrast amid other differently rhythmed phrases, are the hain-teny.[13]

According to Haun Saussy, who devotes the first chapter of a remarkable new study of the genesis of the theory of oral-formulaic literature to Paulhan, "the participants in hain-teny are submerged in collectivity, both by the argumentative situation that gives rise to the poetry and the finite materials from which the poems are drawn.[14] Saussy also calls attention to Paulhan's influence on Granet. In *Fêtes et chansons*, Granet refers explicitly to *Les Hain-teny merinas* in several different places, and Appendix I of his book is almost wholly dependent on it. Tellingly, Saussy notes that in Granet's description of the poems in the *Poetry* as formulaic exchanges, he uses the word "joust" no fewer than sixty-six times.[15] Granet's Appendix I analyzes the poem "Xing lu" 行露 (Mao 17) as one such exchange, and says of it:

> So the lovers' debate is not basically a trial: the result being certain, the contestants struggle only for honour and by courtesy: their conflict is merely formal; it is a game, a joust.
>
> The proverb is the means of drawing the desired conclusion from the premises contained in the emblematic formula. It reinforces this conclusion by conferring upon it a natural correspondence which commands respect. The emblematic formulae of the calendar are real commandments: they are insufficient because one legal phrase does not make a speech. An image impressed upon the mind by personal observation, a metaphor imagined by one's own ingenuity, add nothing to the force of an idea for their novelty deprives them of all weight. On the other hand, a wealth of proverbial sayings furnishes those venerable

13 Paulhan, *Les Hain-teny merinas*, 53; quoted and translated at Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 22.

14 Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 26.

15 Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 180n30.

> images which assure victory in a poetical contest: they command respect because they are felt to be related to the emblematic formulae, and, because they are adaptable, they may serve as emblems and support the particular propositions that one wishes to prove. And he who talks in proverbs will be victor in this lovers' debate.[16]

As Saussy says, "The echo of Paulhan's Madagascar is obvious."[17] Unfortunately, it is hard not to conclude that Granet's insistently sociological reading was a blunt-edged tool, with none of the literary nuance that Paulhan brought to the *hain-teny*. Granet not only denied to the makers of the *Poetry* any individuality, he also denied them any poetic creativity. The *Poetry* becomes no more than a repository of repetitions, always the same and yet always different. Nevertheless, Granet's approach to the *Poetry* has been enormously important among Western scholars. It won the Prix Stanislas Julien for 1920, the year after its initial publication; it was early on translated into English (and also into Japanese[18]); and perhaps most importantly for the wider reception of the *Classic of Poetry*, it very obviously influenced Arthur Waley's (1889–1966) translation *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry*, which was first published in 1937. Waley had this to say of Granet's work:

> The true nature of the poems was realized by M. Granet, whose *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine*, published in 1911 [*sic*], deals with about half the courtship and marriage songs. I differ from M. Granet as regards some general questions and many details. But his book was epoch-making, and I can only hope that the next translator of the *Songs* will feel as much respect for my present versions as I do for those of M. Granet.[19]

16 Granet, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, 247–48.

17 Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 29.

18 Uchida Tomoo 内田智雄 , tr., *Chūgoku kodai no sairei to kayō* 中國古代の祭禮と歌謠 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1938; rpt. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1989). A proposed Chinese translation was never completed; for some notice of the work, see Yang Kun 楊　, "Ge Lanyan yanjiu daolun (xia pian)" 葛蘭言研究導論 (下篇), *Shehui kexue jikan* 社會科學季刊 2.1 (1943): 2–3, 33–34.

19 Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (1937; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1987), Appendix 1, 337.

Paulhan's Madagascar inspired many more people than just Marcel Granet. One of the most important of these was Marcel Jousse, S. J. (1886–1961), of whom it was said that he gave us "the very words of Jesus."[20] Of Fr. Jousse's battle with Modernist philology and his development of the "Rhythmic and Mnemotechnic Oral Style of Verbo-Motor Individuals," which is the topic of Chapter 4 of Haun Saussy's *The Ethnography of Rhythm*,[21] perhaps the less said here the better (though Professor Saussy's account of his work is fascinating for all sorts of reasons, best told by Saussy himself). It is worth noting, however, that his lectures in Paris captured even the attention of *Time* magazine, which reported that "when Père Jousse lectures, 200 people watch goggle-eyed: doctors, spiritualists, philologists, ballet students, poets (among them Paul Valéry)—and two Jesuit theologians, hawklike for heresies."[22] Among those who heard him describe the sayings of Jesus—or the Rabbi Yeshua of Nazareth, as he liked to call him—as *hain-teny* style repetition, rhythmic variation, and reorganization of the Old Testament, was none other than Milman Parry.[23]

C. H. Wang

There is no need here to say much about Parry. His work, first with the Homeric epics and then with Yugoslav bards, is well known, and he is often credited—especially in the United States—with being the founder of the idea of oral-formulaic poetry. It goes without saying that it has been enormously influential, decanted "into a thousand dissertations," as Haun Saussy puts it very memorably.[24] At least one of those dissertations concerned the *Classic of*

20 Andr Gorsini, "Psychologie expérimentale et exégèse," *La Croix*, February 3, 1927, 4, quoted and translated at Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 127.

21 See Marcel Jousse, *Etudes de psychologie linguistique: Le Style oral rythmique et mnémotechnique chez les Verbo-moteurs, Archives de Philosophie* 2.4 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1925).

22 "Rhythmocatechist," *Time*, November 6, 1939, 54; cited at Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 138–39.

23 For a published account of the work of Jousse, noting the debt that Milman Parry owed him, see Edgard Richard Sienart, "Marcel Jousse: The Oral Style and the Anthropology of Gesture," *Oral Tradition* 5.1 (1990): 91–106. Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 43, notes that it was through Jousse that Parry first learned of the Yugoslav bards that would later become the focus of his work.

24 Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, 170.

Poetry: "*Shih Ching*: Formulaic Language and Mode of Creation" by Wang Ching-hsien.[25] When his study was published in 1974 as *The Bell and the Drum:* Shih Ching *as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition,* it created a stir in the world of Sinology.[26] In the study, Wang applied the theories of Parry (and especially as elaborated by Albert Lord—the so-called Parry-Lord theory of oral-formulaic poetry) in a rather mechanical fashion,[27] defining formulas as "a group of not less than three words forming an articulate semantic unit which repeats, either in a particular poem or several, under similar metrical conditions, to express a given essential idea.[28] His analysis shows the following percentages of formulas for the various discrete sections of the *Poetry*:

Feng	26.6%
Xiao Ya	22.8%
Da Ya	12.9%
Zhou Song	15.1%
Lu Song	16.8%
Shang Song	2.6%

Noting that a rate of 20% repetition is held to be the threshold for oral-formulaic composition, he concluded that the *Shijing* "is conceivably oral, and demonstrably formulaic." [29]

Recognizing that the China of the period when the poems of the *Poetry* were composed (for which he accepts the traditional dating of 1000–600 B.C.) was not like Homer's Greece, in that it could boast an already centuries' long history of writing, Wang proposed to modify the Parry-Lord theory along the lines proposed by Francis P. Magoun, Jr. (1895–1979) for Old English poetry. Magoun had viewed this poetry as essentially oral-formulaic, but noting that it also shows obvious literary borrowings, he called it "transitional in nature:

25 Ching-hsien Wang, "*Shih Ching*: Formulaic Language and Mode of Creation" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1971).

26 C. H. Wang, *The Bell and the Drum:* Shih Ching *as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

27 Wang claims to have used a computer to produce his analysis ("I have gone a tortuous way, through tabulation, charting, and computerization, to establish the basic statistics concerning the word, the phrase, the line, the stanza, and ultimately the poem"; *The Bell and the Drum,* 126), which must have been quite rare indeed in humanistic research at the time.

28 Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*, 43.

29 Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*, x.

a hybrid oral-written composition." [30] Wang noted that the *Poetry* contains several poems signed by named authors, similar to *Beowulf*'s inclusion of poems signed by Cynewulf, and concluded that "these poems are lettered compositions, though they also have formulaic influences." [31] This marked a decided break with the orthodox Parry-Lord theory, for which Wang would subsequently be severely criticized by David E. Bynum, at the time Executive Officer of the Center for the Study of Oral Traditions and curator of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University.[32] However, in his own book, Wang offered a conclusion that would seem to bring him back into the fold of orthodoxy, emphasizing especially the repetition and variation of the *Poetry*:

> I have made the foregoing arguments in order to suggest that it is not necessary for a *Shih Ching* student rigidly to assign a particular group of works to a particular period. An extant poem about a specific historical occasion is possibly composed at the time just following that occasion, but it is not necessarily perfected to survive (in the form in which it stands today) exactly at that time. Every poem was over a period of time constantly modified and even drastically altered in language and structure. This period of time, "the formative age of the *Shih Ching*," was an age when all the poems were undergoing the process of transmission. The period may extend from the dawn of the Chou empire through the age of Confucius. Until then, there was no poem in the anthology that could claim completeness.[33]

These notions of a "formative age" and a "process of transmission" did not impress David Bynum:

> One more major misconception of oral tradition that comes to Wang from a source ultimately in the thinking of Francis Magoun concerns the so-called "transitional period between the Age of Orality and the Age

30 See, e.g., Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," *Speculum* 28 (1953): 446–67.

31 Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*, 30.

32 David E. Bynum, "The Bell, the Drum, Milman Parry, and the Time Machine," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 1.2 (1979): 241–53.

33 Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*, 95.

> of Literature". Wang understands very well that he cannot by the Oral Theory as devised by Parry and Lord prove anything decisively about the orality of poems in the *Shih-ching*; there is within that corpus alone altogether too little attestation either of formularity or of traditional thematics to reconstruct from them the characteristic poetic *process* of an oral tradition. Magoun found, and Wang follows him in finding, the notion of "transition" a convenient hedge against the absolute necessity which Parry recognized of going to some real oral tradition for the scientific control of theoretical suppositions.
>
> ...
>
> Lord said plainly, and no evidence has come from any *de facto* oral tradition to the contrary, that there is no such thing as Magoun's transition. It is not enough to equate as Magoun did any *element* of tradition with the *whole* tradition; one must rather admit that the birth of written literatures entails for those who are instrumental in it a renunciation of the oral tradition.[34]

It is not my purpose here to adjudicate between these two different understandings of oral-formulaic literature; whether the birth of written literatures entails for those who are instrumental in it a renunciation of the oral tradition, as Bynum states, or if the onset of writing may have marked a hybrid oral-written "transitional stage," as Magoun argued. C. H. Wang's view of a "formative age of the *Shih Ching*, when all the poems were undergoing the process of transmission," is almost certainly correct insofar as it goes. However, despite the apparent statistical rigor of his presentation, I would like to suggest that it does not go nearly far enough. In my study "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral Versus Written Nature of the *Classic of Poetry*," I have presented considerable evidence, including newly discovered epigraphic evidence, showing that the relative weight of the oral versus the written nature of the text is still very much in question.

34 Bynum, "The Bell, the Drum, Milman Parry, and the Time Machine," 250–51 (emphases in the original).

Conclusion

When C. H. Wang was writing, at the beginning of the 1970s, it was still possible to be skeptical of the antiquity of China's "written literatures". The oracle-bone inscriptions of the Shang dynasty (c. 1200–1050 B.C.) and the bronze inscriptions of the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 B.C.) were known, of course, but did not attract much attention from students of literature. And the received literature of antiquity had been subjected to a withering attack from the iconoclastic *Gu shi bian* 古史辨 movement of the 1920s and 30s. However, the very year that his book *The Bell and the Drum* was published (1974) brought reports of the excavation of the tomb library at Mawangdui 馬王堆 . This discovery would change forever the way scholars would study ancient Chinese civilization and especially its literary heritage. In the forty years since Mawangdui, Chinese archaeologists (and, unfortunately, also tomb-robbers) have discovered hundreds more ancient manuscripts, including—over the last twenty years—many that date to the Warring States period (453–222 B.C.), well before the infamous Qin "burning of the books". These manuscripts are so important, both qualitatively and quantitatively, that it is now incumbent on anyone who proposes to contribute to the discussion concerning China's ancient literature to have more than a passing familiarity with them.[35]

When we do examine the length and breadth of early China's paleographic record, I think we find that the premises of the scholarship of Marcel Granet and C. H. Wang concerning the creation and transmission of the *Classic of Poetry* become ever less persuasive, and the statements concerning the oral nature of the *Poetry* quoted at the beginning of this essay—all by excellent scholars of traditional Chinese literature, to be sure—to the extent that they are not informed by this paleographic record, should be subject to

35 It is the case that Christoph Harbsmeier made reference to "the famous *Lao Tzu* manuscripts recently discovered" (i.e., the Mawangdui *Laozi* 老子 manuscripts), to argue that "the profusion of phonetic loan characters throughout the epigraphic evidence accumulated through archaeological discoveries must indicate that texts were remembered primarily not as graphic form but as spoken sound." However, in the light of the last forty years of scholarship on these and other manuscripts, it is clear that the profusion of phonetic, as well as non-phonetic, loan characters reflects primarily that the Chinese script had not yet been standardized, and not that writing was scarce.

re-evaluation.[36] I would urge that, in the future, studies of the nature of the *Classic of Poetry* be based primarily on ancient China's own written traditions, and only secondarily — if at all — on comparisons with oral literature found elsewhere in the world.

36 I should mention here that one of the most active proponents of the oral nature of the *Classic of Poetry*, Martin Kern, has written a series of studies that address the paleographic record and its implications for the *Poetry*: see especially his "Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1–4 (2002): 143–81; "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts," in *Recarving the Dragon: Understanding Chinese Poetics*, ed. Olga Lomová, (Prague: Charles University, The Karolinum Press, 2003), 27–72; "The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 149–93; "Excavated Manuscripts and Their Socratic Pleasures: Newly Discovered Challenges in Reading the 'Airs of the States,'" *Études Asiatiques/Asiatische Studien* 61.3 (2007): 775–93; "Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shangshu*, and the *Shijing*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC to 220 AD)*, eds. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 143–200;"Lost in Tradition: The *Classic of Poetry* We Did Not Know," *Xiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry* 5 (Centre for East Asian Research, McGill University), 29–56. In the article mentioned at the beginning of the present essay, "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral Versus Written Nature of the *Classic of Poetry*," I have devoted an entire section to evaluating Kern's arguments and evidence, and will not repeat myself here. While his scholarship is presented with great methodological rigor throughout and demands great attention, it suffices to say here that I do not find his conclusions persuasive.

《詩經》與口頭文學學說的發展：兼論出土文獻對研究《詩經》著作年代和傳授過程的意義

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二十世紀初期以來，口頭文學學說一直是西方文學學術界的重要學說之一。早在 1919 年，西方漢學家就採取這一學說討論中國文學，特別是《詩經》。本文對一百年以來西方漢學的《詩經》與口頭文學學說研究作一總覽，特別針對葛蘭言（Marcel Granet, 1884–1940）和王靖獻（C. H. Wang）兩位漢學家的觀點作深入討論。最後，本文介紹最近幾十年發現的與《詩經》有關的出土文獻，以便對口頭文學學說作出評價。

關鍵詞：《詩經》　口頭文學　葛蘭言　王靖獻　出土文獻