



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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English Oral Presentation

Good morning, professor. The main figures to be compared today are Xu Shen, Zheng Xuan, Duan Yu Cai, and Zhu Xi. In order to make it easier to understand the different approaches and achievements of the philology and the interpretive, I will compare the four of them in the same field. This time I will focus on their research and views on the different perspectives of *The Book of Poetry* 詩經.

Next I will present Xu Shen's analysis of *The Book of Poetry*. Before I do so, I would like to introduce Xu Shen as a great philologist who was also well versed in the Confucian classics. His greatest contribution was in the area of philology, with the publication of the *Shuowen Jiezi*. Of these, the *Shuowen Jiezi* cites *The Book of Poetry* 441 times, of which it is broadly divided into three ways, such as the annotation and explanation of meaning; this reflects Xu Shen's in-depth study and understanding of *The Book of Poetry*. This is because the meaning of the poems was made easier to understand through the interpretation of word meanings, which laid the foundation for later poetic hermeneutics. In addition Xu Shen studied mainly *The Book of Poetry* written by Mao Heng and Mao Chang, but his field of study would not be limited to just this one area. For example, when he annotated individual characters in the *Shuowen Jiezi* he would also cite the contents of different versions of *The Book of Poetry*. He took note of the peculiar scholarly value of the other three versions, which was incredible at the time. As the other versions of *The Book of Poetry* have been lost, only a few of them have been preserved in his work, which has been helpful to later scholars coming to study other versions of *The Book of Poetry*.

On the other hand, Zheng Xuan, a famous scholar during the Han dynasty, because of his extensive knowledge and his understanding of the different meanings of *The Book of Poetry* of his time, usually focused more on the interpretation of the meaning of *The Book of Poetry* than on the study of the meaning of individual words. In addition, he would comment on the poems through his understanding of the three areas of history, politics and ritual, and because he had not had a good life and the country was in decline, his commentary on the poems was often related to political edification. As his annotation of *The Mao Book of Poetry* solidified its place in the history of Chinese scholarship, and because he consolidated all the research on *The Book of Poetry* during the Han dynasty, the influence of this scholarship was far-reaching.

By the Qing dynasty, the famous philologist Duan Yucai went even further by building on Xu Shen's original foundation and using phonology to interpret *The Book of Poetry*, correcting erroneous meanings and making their meaning clearer. In addition, by studying the rhythms of *The Book of Poetry*, he counted seventeen groups of ancient sounds, a major discovery in the history of phonetics. Because of his emphasis on the examination of primary sources and his search for sources, Xu Shen was able to make a great contribution to the analysis of the meaning of *The Book of Poetry*, which also contributed to the development of exegesis.

Finally, I would like to introduce Zhu Xi, a famous scholar of the Song dynasty, for his unique insights into the classics and his long-lasting influence on future generations. Zhu Xi did much research on *The Book of Poetry* and continued to work on them until his later years. He did not use too much vocabulary in his commentaries on the content, and his use of words was often simple and easy to understand, allowing the reader to better understand and read the original works, while leaving the reader more room for reflection. In addition to his basic phonetic

meaning and hermeneutics of words, Zhu Xi usually followed each chapter of the poem with his own understanding of the content of the piece, sometimes of the poem as a whole, sometimes of the creative context of the time, in addition to expressing his own reflections on the relevance of the poem. Unlike the usual philologist who confine themselves to quoting and examining material to interpret *The Book of Poetry*, Zhu Xi's commentaries not only quote from others but also include his own thoughts and meanings, which are often personal and emotional. In his personal evaluation of the poems, Zhu Xi also usually focused on ethics, in addition to implying Neo-Confucianism 理學 in the content. This excessive pursuit of truth can to some extent compromise the beauty of the poem itself, but Zhu Xi's ability to understand and interpret the poem in its original sense, rather than forcing the poetic meaning to be linked to history and the politics of the time, as Han scholars did, was certainly progressive and innovative. It is because of his transcendent understanding and unique and profound interpretation of content that his ideas have remained influential for thousands of years.

For me personally, both the philological and the interpretive approaches are very important, one for the basic interpretation of meaning and the other for further research and discovery beyond the original basic understanding. Personally, I prefer the interpretive, but I should stress that this does not mean that I do not consider philology to be important. I like the interpretive approach because understanding the classics often requires subjective thought and a little imagination. I can understand and expand on the parsing of the meaning of original sentences, which allows me to understand different philosophical ideas; these are the motivations that help me to study further under these deep theoretical systems of thought.

That is all for my presentation today. Any feedback and suggestions will be appreciated. Thank you for your listening.