



Undergraduate assignment feedback form
(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name:</i> Siyao Zeng	
<i>Module Code:</i> SICH5005	<i>Student number:</i> 1804385
<i>Module title:</i>	
<i>For completion by marker:</i>	
<i>Comments:</i>	
<i>Marker's signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Provisional mark:</i>	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

An Introduction of the Poem Mugua and Its Rhyme Feature

Word Count: 1610

Respected Provost, Miss Deng and my classmates, good afternoon. My name is Siyao Zeng. The topic I would like to share with you today is ‘An Introduction of the Poem Mugua and Its Rhyme Feature’. My presentation is separated into three parts: first I would give you a brief introduction of the background of the poem. Second, I would talk about different explanations of this poem. Third, I would talk about its rhyme feature.

Wei was a feudal state closely associated with the Zhou royal state, and was one of the most powerful and longest-lived feudal states throughout the Zhou and Warring States periods. This set, *Airs of Wei*, contains a number of outstanding poems, especially the early narrative of ‘A Simple Peasant’ and the naive lyric ‘A Quince’. This poem is one of the most widely read masterpieces of the *Book of Songs*. A Chinese four-word idiom also comes out of this poem, that is ‘Toumu baoqiong 投木報瓊’, which originally means a man and a woman are in love and giving gifts to each other. In later world, the extended meaning refers to returning someone for the kindness they have shown to us, not just between men and women, it can also be used between families or friends. And this return always has a deep gratefulness or a very good will behind.

A Quince

She threw a quince to me;
In requital I gave a bright girdle-gem.
No, not just as requital;
But meaning I would love her for ever.
She threw a tree-peach to me;
As requital I gave her a bright greenstone.
No, not just as requital;
But meaning I would love her for ever.
She threw a tree-plum to me;
In requital I gave her a bright jet-stone.
No, not just as requital,
But meaning I would love her for ever.¹

In English, this poem seems very simple and easy to understand, so I would like to give some information of its original meaning. Why it had been understood and translated like this? In fact, in Chinese statements, this poem hasn't made clear the gender of both the giver and recipient, this had generated different views and debates from ancient times. Well, there are mainly three schools of thought about the meanings of this poem so far.

First is the oldest viewpoint from the prologue of *Mao Poetry* 毛詩, regarding

¹ Translated by Arthur Waley, edited by Joseph R. Allen, *The Book of Songs*, (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 54.

this poem represents the officials want to repay the king with fierce loyalty. The prologue of this poem stated, ‘The song *Mugua* is to praise King Huan of Qi. In that time, the state of Wei was overwhelmed by the tribe of Di, the people of Wei ran out of the state and took refuge in a place called Cao. King Huan of Qi helped and enfeoffed them again, gave them chariot, horses and utensils to build their new home. People of Wei were grateful, they wanted to repaid King Huan heavily, this is where this song came from.’² This is an very old viewpoint that involved in politics, just like the prologues of the rest of songs of *Mao Poetry*.

The second school, based on Zhu Xi’s *Shijizhua* 詩集傳, which is his annotations of the collected poems, they reckoned that this poem is supposed to be about the love between a man and a woman. According to Zhu Xi’s *Shijizhuan*, it records that ‘It is suspected that these are words of presenting and responding between a man and a woman.’³ This view was endorsed by many scholars at that time, especially in the Qing dynasty, and thanks to the advocacy and encouragement of the Qing emperors, the influence of Zhu Xi’s *Shijizhuan* was unprecedentedly strong, it almost rivalled that of Mao Chang and Zheng Xuan of the Han dynasty. Zhu’s school is characterized by its School of Principle of Song dynasty, they emphasize expounding new ideas, questioning the ancient and discerning the false, and they have considerable refutation on

² Original text: ‘木瓜，美齊桓公也。衛有狄人之敗，出處於漕，齊桓公救而封之，遺之車馬器服焉。衛人思之，欲厚報之，而作是詩也。’ Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Mao Heng 毛亨: *Maoshi Zhuanjian* 《毛詩傳箋》, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018), p. 93. Trans. by myself.

³ Original text: ‘疑亦男女相贈答之詞。’ Zhu Xi 朱熹, Mao Heng 毛亨: *Shijizhuan* 《詩集傳》, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2019), p. 41. Trans. by myself.

the prologue of *Mao Poetry*. For this reason, many later scholars, including our Western scholar Arthur Wiley, have followed Zhu Xi's lead and considered this poem a love poem. Therefore, this is why we see genders in this poem, like 'she'.

However in Chinese, the literal meaning of this poem, had neither mentioned the relationship between monarch and subjects, nor the relationship between man and woman. This fact had generated the third school of thought, which tends to focus on the literal meaning of Chinese words and obey what the original text has shown. They believe that this poem is considered to be a description of the friendship between friends, reflecting the custom and the spirit of Chinese courtesy about friendship, expressing a good wish to be friends with each other forever. There is a Chinese phrase that says '禮輕情意重', it means a trifling present with a weighty thought behind it. This is also what 投木報瓊 means, it is about a great symbolic meaning of deep emotion.

Let's look at the phonological aspect of this poem. Chinese poetry is all about rhyming, that is, the last word of each line rhymes with each other. However, one can often find that when pronounced ancient poems in Chinese modern standard of pronunciation, that we called Mandarin or Putonghua 普通話, the common language in China right now, one finds that there are many cases without rhyme. Conversely, when one pronounces in dialect, like Cantonese 粵

語 and Southern Min 閩南語, in many cases, one would unsurprisingly find that the whole poem was written in rhyme. This is because dialects often retain the sounds of Middle Chinese phonology and Archaic Chinese phonology.

投我以木瓜，報之以瓊琚。匪報也，永以為好也！

投我以木桃，報之以瓊瑤。匪報也，永以為好也！

投我以木李，報之以瓊玖。匪報也，永以為好也！

There is a little rule in the rhyme of ancient Chinese poem, when an interjection is the last word of a line, such as 之、乎、者、也、兮, that the rhyme word would turn on to the word before the interjection. Like here we can see 也, this is an interjection, therefore the rhyme is on the character 報 and 好. The rhyme of this poem is the sound of au, like 報, 好, 桃, 瑤, and most of the lines read in Mandarin are already relatively rhyming. However, it is clear that there are a few lines didn't, for example '投我以木瓜，報之以瓊琚' and '投我以木李，報之以瓊玖', the character 瓜、琚、李、玖 are not in rhyme.

In this case, we could see this poem from another angle, the Middle Chinese phonology and Archaic Chinese phonology. When we go back to the ancient Chinese rhyme classified as 17 Groups of rhyme by Duan Yucan, which later had been added 6 Groups of rhyme and made into a rhyme table called Chengyuntu by Zhang Taiyan, which is also known as the Picture of

completeness and equality, from this rhyme picture we can see, the last characters of the first two lines of the first paragraph rhyme with the fifth group of rhyme 魚, the last characters of the first two lines of the second paragraph rhyme with the second group of rhyme 宵, the last characters of the first two lines of the third paragraph rhyme with the first group of rhyme 之. The last characters of the last two lines of each paragraph rhyme with the third group of rhyme 尤.

Here mention a rule of the rhyme table is that, two Groups of rhyme next to each other could be seen as in rhyme in ancient times, this is called *pangzhuan* 旁轉. The opposite Group of rhyme could be seen as in rhyme, this is called *duizhuan* 對轉. There are also secondary *pangzhuan* and secondary *duizhuan*, which could be seen as in rhyme, too. Under such rules, according to *Shuowenjiezi*, we know the main rhyme of this poem is of Group 3. Group 5 and Group 2 are the secondary *pangzhuan* of Group 3. Group 1 is the *pangzhuan* of Group 3. From all these we could know, all lines of this poem are all within the range of ancient rhyme rules. Though it is beyond my knowledge to find out how exactly those characters pronounced in ancient times, according to this picture, we can believe that in certain period or places in the long long history, at the moment of creating, this poem was totally in rhyme.

That's all for my presentation. Thank you for your listening.

Bibliography

Books (Chinese)

Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Mao Heng 毛亨: *Maoshi Zhuanjian* 《毛詩傳箋》, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018)

Zhu Xi 朱熹, Mao Heng 毛亨: *Shijizhuan* 《詩集傳》, (Taibei : Zhonghua Shuju, 2019)

Books (English)

Arthur Waley, edited by Joseph R.Allen, *The Book of Songs*, (New York: Grove Press, 1996)