



## Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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| <i>Student Name: Feng Yingran 馮穎冉</i>                                                                                                                           |                                |
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# **A Brief Analysis of the Poem *Cricket of Guofeng·Tangfeng***

## **國風·唐風 and Explore the Cultural Differences Between**

### **China and the West on Enjoyment**

Student name: Feng Yingran

SID: 1903354

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Professor Wong, Miss Deng, good morning. My name is Feng Yingran and I would like to share with you the topic on the analysis of the poem cricket of *Guofeng·Tangfeng* 〈國風·唐風〉 and explore the cultural differences between china and the west on enjoyment

The presentation will be divided into four parts. Tang Feng originated in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, which is my hometown. Therefore, I wanted to study the poems in Tang Feng to explore the customs and inner world of the people living on the land in the pre-Qin Period. The study of the first poem cricket also aroused my interest. People there enjoy themselves in a moderate way and dare not forget their duties even in leisure time, which is quite different from the pursuit of material desire and enjoyment of stimulation in modern society. Therefore, I wanted to discuss relevant contents with this theme.

#### **1. Introduction**

In *the book of Songs*, there are three types of poetry: *Feng* 風, *Ya* 雅, *Song* 頌. The poem studied in this article comes from *the Guofeng* 國風. Zhu Xi 朱熹

explained the word *Guofeng* 國風 in this way. ‘*Guo* 國 refers to the territory of vassal states, and *feng* 風 is poems recording folk songs. The princes collected poems from the fiefs and sent them to the emperor. When the emperor saw this, he would ask the musicians to compose music and perform them’.<sup>1</sup> In this way, from the folk beauty and evil contained in the poem, the political gains and losses can be known by the praise or ridicule of the public, which is a good way to test the political achievements.

## 2. The origin of the *Tangfeng* 唐風

Tang is the name of a country. The last name is Ji. ‘The territory of the state was located to the west of Mountain Taihang 太行 and Hengshan 恆山, on the outskirts of Taiyuan and Taiyue 太岳, the area of present-day Taiyuan in Shanxi Province. The original capital was Jinyang 晉陽, which is now Taiyuan’.<sup>2</sup> ‘Tang was originally the old capital of Emperor Yao 堯, but King Cheng of Zhou granted it to his younger brother Shuyu 叔虞 and made him the vassal of Tang’.<sup>3</sup> River Jin was in the south of this place. Therefore, when It came to the vassal xie, he changed the state name to Jin 晉. Three generations after Shuyu 叔虞 to the Period of the vassal Cheng, he moved the capital from Jinyang to Quwo 曲沃 (present-day wenxi 聞喜 County in Shanxi Province). Eight generations later, during the Mu Hou period, he moved his capital to Jiang 絳 (present-day Jiang county in Shanxi Province). In the Zhaohou

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by myself, Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shijizhuan* 詩集傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 2011), p.1

<sup>2</sup> Translated by myself, Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shijizhuan* 詩集傳, p.87

<sup>3</sup> Translated by myself, Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shijizhuan* 詩集傳, p.87

Period, it moved to Yi 翼 (southeast of yicheng County, Shanxi Province present-day). After several generations, the territory of the State of Jin also became larger and larger. There are three views to call it Tang instead of Jin. First, 'It probably still retains its original title'.<sup>4</sup> Second, 'Now, these poems focus on the original customs, so it is called tang'.<sup>5</sup> Third, 'Probably because the twelve poems were collected from the fief of Tang, and their voices were also from there'.<sup>6</sup> Whether because of respecting its old name, valuing its origin and pronunciation, or respecting local customs, later generations called it *Tangfeng*. According to historical materials, 'the twelve poems of *Tangfeng* were recorded from King Xuan in the West Zhou dynasty to King Hui in the East Zhou Dynasty'.<sup>7</sup> *Feng* 風 reflects the local conditions of different countries, so *Tangfeng* records the life of the local people, give expression to different local customs, reflects the people's psychological activities and thinking.

### 3. Brief analysis and the cultural differences

#### 3.1 Cricket

*Tang Feng's* first poem is *Cricket*. The preface of poetry says, 'Cricket is a sarcastic comment on Jin Xigong 晉僖公. Being too thrifty also does not accord with the requirements of etiquette, so the poet wrote this poem to express the concern of

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by myself, Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shijizhuan* 詩集傳, p.87

<sup>5</sup> Translated by myself, Mao Heng 毛亨, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Maoshi Zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2000), p.439

<sup>6</sup> Translated by myself, Pei Puxian 裴普賢, *Shijing Pingzhu Duben* 詩經評註讀本 (Taipei: Sanmin Bookstore, 2016), p.259

<sup>7</sup> Translated by myself, Pei Puxian 裴普賢, *Shijing Pingzhu Duben* 詩經評註讀本, p.259

him, to let him timely according to the requirements of etiquette to enjoy'.<sup>8</sup>

However, without historical research, such a statement is a little far-fetched, so later generations do not use this statement. Fang Yurun 方玉潤 of the Qing Dynasty, for example, retorted that 'the meaning of the poem was not ironic, nor did it mention that "too thrifty does not meet the requirements of etiquette". How can the preface be written for Xigong 僖公? Prologue likes to say irrelevant things are relevant, but there is no evidence to prove it. The prologue is often similar with the case and we cannot follow such a statement'.<sup>9</sup> If the interpretation of this poem is not limited by its preface, it may be interpreted as 'a poem express that the people live in Tang are industrious and thrifty, and never forget to work even when they are entertaining'.<sup>10</sup>

The first sentence of this poem is associated with the end of the year by *xishuaizaitang* 蟋蟀在堂. ('The cricket is in the fields in July, and under the eaves in August. The September cricket comes in the door, and October comes under my bed'.<sup>11</sup>) The year is coming to an end, which makes people feel that time flies. *Suiyuqimo* 歲聿其莫 is what this means. *Jinwobule, riyueqichu* 今我不樂，日月其除。 If we do not have fun now, time will soon be gone. Isn't it just a waste of time? This sentence seems to express the poet's desire to enjoy himself in time, and makes one exult in the enjoyment of having a good time at the end of the year. And then he says, *Wuyitaikang? Zhisiqiju*. 無已大康？職思其居。 We should think about whether we are doing our duty. The first sentence seems to urge everyone to have

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<sup>8</sup> Translated by myself, Mao Heng 毛亨, *Maoshi Zhengyi* 毛詩正義, p.442

<sup>9</sup> Translated by myself, Fang Yurun 方玉潤, *Shijing Yuanshi* 詩經原始, 6 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1986), p.252

<sup>10</sup> Translated by myself, Pei Puxian 裴普賢, *Shijing Pingzhu Duben* 詩經評註讀本, p.260

<sup>11</sup> Translated by myself, Zhu Shouliang 朱守亮, *Shijing Pingshi* 詩經評釋 (Taipei: Student Bookstore, 2017), p.421

fun, then the poet immediately tells everyone not to indulge in too much joy, but to think about whether you are doing your duty? This can ease a year's hard work, but at the same time, it will not make people overindulge and still remember their responsibilities. Zhu Xi commented that 'the folk customs here are probably honest and upright, and the influence of the good morals handed down from the previous sages can be seen from here'.<sup>12</sup> Then there is *zhisiqiwai* 職思其外 and *zhisiqiyou* 職思其憂. In addition to our duty, there are other things we need to take care of.

Thinking carefully about both inside and outside of your job. At the same time, we should also have a sense of crisis. 'If one does not plan for the long term, trouble will soon appear'.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the first poem is a warning from the poet. We should not indulge our desires even when we are having fun. If we take anything seriously, we will not put ourselves in danger. The poet is fond of pleasure, but he knows that he should moderate his desires and not indulge in them. *Haolewuhuang* 好樂無荒 is the aim of this poem.

### 3.2 Different views on enjoyment

This poem reflects the attitude of the people in the pre-Qin period towards enjoyment, that is, they should not indulge their desires at will, but always keep their duties in mind. That is also a traditional value in Chinese society that has influenced generations of Chinese people. However, western societies have different values and hedonism is more prevalent. Perhaps fundamentally, this is because Chinese and Western societies pursue different goals. Chinese society places more emphasis on

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<sup>12</sup> Translated by myself, Mao Heng 毛亨, *Maoshi Zhengyi* 毛詩正義, p.442

<sup>13</sup> Translated by myself, Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 *The Analects of Confucius* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1980), p173

the concept of wholeness, which is more valuable than the individual. People regard their own moral cultivation as more important than momentary pleasure. While western society emphasizes more on the concept of the individual and the inviolability of individual rights. They believe that the enjoyment and stimulation of the senses are natural and primitive, so they should not be restricted.

The concept of *guayu* 寡慾 comes from Laozi. ‘There is no greater calamity than not being satisfied, and there is no greater fault than satisfying one's desire’.<sup>14</sup> Laozi believed that desire is the root of misfortune, so a person should think less and have less desire for self-cultivation. Mencius also said that ‘there is nothing better for the cultivation of one's self than lack of desire’.<sup>15</sup> That is the attitude of ancient Chinese sages towards desire, though they acknowledge its existence and that everyone has. But they all warned the public to be aware of its dangers, to be cautious and not to indulge their desires. Therefore, this idea has been passed down from generation to generation, influencing generations of Chinese people's thinking patterns and behaviours. The Chinese prefer to have some leeway in doing things, rather than ignore the real situation for the sake of temporary pleasure. For example, most people will not spend all their monthly salary and always save some money for a rainy day.

‘In the West, hedonism can be traced back to the Cyrene and Epicurean schools of ancient Greek philosophy’.<sup>16</sup> At that time, the philosophers were still discussing the true meaning of happiness, not the pursuit of physical and sensory pleasure. In the

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<sup>14</sup> Translated by myself, Shi Deqing 釋德清 *The interpretation of the Daodejing* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.101

<sup>15</sup> Translated by myself, Zhu Xi 朱熹 *Mencius Variorum* (Beijing: China Social Publishing House, 2013), P.179

<sup>16</sup> . Liu Haoxiang 劉好香, ‘A Tentative Discussion of Gastronomy Philosophy and the Modern Crisis of Mankind’, *Journal of Yan'an University (Social Science edition)*, 06(2003), pp.22-25+84

Middle Ages, asceticism prevailed, and people's desires were greatly limited, and they sought truth through ascetic practices. In this way, after the Renaissance, such as the formation of utilitarianism set up the concept of people-oriented idea. The famous representative of utilitarianism Mill says that 'Ultimate goal of man is to avoid as much pain as possible and to enjoy as much pleasure as possible'.<sup>17</sup> Such ideas greatly influenced the values of Western society in the days that followed. This kind of theory fits well with people's innate desire to pursue desire, so although there have been many attempts to modify the content of hedonism since then, it has mostly failed. As a result, the public constantly pursue desire and material enjoyment, which they consider to be their inviolable rights. Moreover, for pursuing such enjoyment, many people often advance future salary to satisfy current desires.

I remember once reading a story, in which there are two grandmothers, one is a Chinese, the other is an American. The Chinese grandmother said she had worked hard all her life and finally saved enough money to buy a big house. The American grandmother said that she finally paid off the house loan a few days ago and has been out of debt ever since.<sup>18</sup> The cartoon vividly shows the different values of China and the West, it really impressed me.

#### **4. conclusion**

The content and the words of this poem are simple and easy to understand, which enables us to appreciate the honesty and integrity of the people in the pre-Qin period

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Katz, Philip Nozick and Robert Stover, *Writers on Ethics: Classical and Contemporary* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1962), p114

<sup>18</sup> Translated by myself, Wang Xiaofeng 王小峰 *Who Can Start China's Economy* (Sichuan : Sichuan People's Publishing House , 1999 ) , p,191

without any false atmosphere. The people toil all the year round, but they still remember their duties even in the pleasure. That is a true portrayal of the life and thoughts of the people at that time.

This led to my discussion on the attitudes of Chinese and Western people towards desire. Since ancient times, Chinese society has taught that people should be content with few desires, should give priority to individual moral cultivation, and emphasize that the interests of the whole outweigh individual gains and losses. Although the western society also discussed the relationship between material enjoyment and the inner mind in the early stage, with the prevalence of humanism in the later stage, the opinions of relevant thinkers also let the public try their best to pursue material enjoyment without psychological burden. This difference is due to the different goals pursued by Chinese and Western societies. In China, personal moral cultivation is more important. While in the West, natural attributes are more important.

However, as American culture continues to spread around the world, modern society seems to be moving in one direction. That is, profit comes first. People make continuous efforts to pursue personal interests and satisfy their desires. It seems that the enjoyment of material and sensory stimulation can make them happy, but many people also gradually fall into the confusion and hesitation of the situation. The great abundance of material life corresponds to the great emptiness of spiritual world, so more and more people suffer from mental illness. The divorce rate and crime rate of the society are also increasing year by year. It seems that simple physical enjoyment cannot meet people's spiritual needs, and life that ignores moral cultivation is not happy either.

Therefore, a few people cannot help but reflect on the past pursuit of the direction of error, whether we should readjust their goals. Although hedonism is still popular nowadays, so long as someone makes unremitting efforts, the public will gradually wake up, so that the future of human society will be better than before.

This is all for my presentation, any feedback and suggestions would be appreciated.

Thank you for listening.

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