



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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An Introduction and phonological analysis of the Poem *Look at the Rat* 相鼠

Word Count: 1500

Respected Provost and Ms Deng, good afternoon! My name is Wang Xinyu, The topic I would like to share today is An Introduction and phonological analysis of the Poem Look at the Rat 相鼠.

My presentation will be divided into four parts. The first part is introduction. The second part is the introduction of the poem *Look at the Rat* 相鼠. The third part is the phonological analysis of this Poem and the final part is the conclusion.

I. Introduction

The poem I am going to talk about today is from one of the earliest collections of Chinese poetry, the Shijing. In terms of content, the Book of Poetry is divided into three categories: Airs(風), Odes(雅), and Hymns(頌). The Airs, which comes from the folk songs of various regions, contains chants about beautiful things such as love and hard working, and nostalgia for the homeland, Lament and anger against oppression and bullying. The Odes is divided into Major Odes and Minor Odes, which are mostly ritual poems for the nobility, praying for a good year or praising their ancestors. Hymns are ritual poems of sacrifice in the ancestral temple. *Look at the Rat* 相鼠 is a poem in the Airs of Yong 邶風.

Airs of Yong 邶風 collect 10 poems from Yong. Yong was the second of two small principalities later absorbed into the large state of Wei. Yong is in the northeast of present-day Henan province. The ‘Airs of Yong’ can be seen as a companion set to the ‘Airs of Bei,’ with a parallel opening poem named ‘Cypress Boat’ 柏舟.

II. Introduction of two poems

We can understand the poem from an idiom first. In China, there is a idiom, which is 相鼠之刺 and its English translation is the satire of 相鼠. This idiom comes from the title of the poem 相鼠 and its meaning is that people should pay attention to decency and integrity and be polite and righteous. From this, we have probably know what talking about in this poem.

Now let us look at something professional. First, the preface of the poem *Look at the Rat* 相鼠 said that ‘*Look at the Rat* is a poem satirizing discourtesy. The duke Wen of Wei was able to guide his ministers in a positive way. Some incumbents do not follow the example of previous kings, so this poem satirize their discourtesy.’¹ In *Shijing Pingshi* 《詩經評釋》, Zhu Shouliang 朱守亮 also regarded that this poem is for satirizing discourtesy. Now let us look at the original text and its English translation:

相鼠

相鼠有皮，人而無儀。人而無儀，不死何為。
相鼠有齒，人而無止。人而無止，不死何俟。
相鼠有體，人而無禮。人而無禮，胡不遄死。

Look at the Rat

Look at the rat; he has a skin.

A man without dignity,

A man without dignity,

What is he doing, that he does not die?

Look at the rat; he has teeth.

A man without poise,

A man without poise,

What is he waiting for, that he does not die?

Look at the rat; he has limbs

A man without manners,

A man without manners,

Had best quickly die.²

This poem is divided into three chapters, each with four sentences. The three chapters overlap in sentence pattern, starting with the rat, followed by repeated analogies and parallel meanings, but each chapter has its emphasis. Now let's look at the interpretation of this poem. Next, I will explain the meaning of Chinese characters in this poem sentence by sentence. Firstly, let us look at the chapter 1.

¹ Original text: ‘相鼠，刺無禮也。衛文公能正其群臣，而刺在位承先君之化，無禮儀也。’ Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Mao Heng 毛亨: *Maoshi Zhuanjian* 《毛詩傳箋》, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018), p. 74. Trans. by myself.

² Translated by Arthur Waley, edited by Joseph R. Allen, *The Book of Songs*, (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 43.

相鼠有皮: it is stated in *Shuowenjiezhizhu* 《說文解字注》 that the character ‘相’ means ‘inspecting 省視’ *Shigu* 釋詁 and *Maozhuan* 毛傳 all said that ‘相’ means ‘look’. Here referring to ‘inspecting 省視’ for the different meaning. It emphasizes check, not just look. Belong to the character Mu 目 and Mu 木. It is a associative character and its sinigraphic spelling is Xi 息 and liang 良.³ The character Shu 鼠 means rat. The character Pi 皮 means skin.

人而無儀: In *Shuowenjiezhizhu* 《說文解字注》, the character Yi 儀 means Du 度 and Du 度 means legal system. This character belong to Ren 人 and its sound is Yi 義. Its sinigraphic spelling is Yu 魚 and Ji 羈.⁴ In *Shijingpingshi* 《詩經評釋》, the character Yi 儀 is explained as etiquette and dignity. It is stated that this mention the attitude and behaviour in line with etiquette of the present day.⁵

不死何為 means what else is he going to do if he doesn't die? *Maoshizhuanjian* 《毛詩傳箋》 stated that ‘man is honorable because he has dignity. Now it is no more, and it is better to die than to do something harmful to the people. The commentary of chapter 1 from *Shijingpingshi* 《詩經評釋》 stated that from rats also have skin, to leads to that as a human being cannot be without courtesy and dignity.⁶

Now let us look at the chapter 2.

人而無止: It is stated in *Maoshizhuanjian* 《毛詩傳箋》 that the character Zhi 止 means manners.⁷ *Shijingpingshi* 《詩經評釋》 stated that Zhi 止 means manners, just like Yi 儀’s

³ Original text: ‘省視也。釋詁、毛傳皆云相視也。此別之云省視。謂察視也。从目木。會意。息良切。’ Xu Shen 許慎, Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezhizhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hongyewenhua youxiangongsi, 2018), p.134. Trans. by myself.

⁴ Original text: ‘度也。度、法制也。从人。義聲。魚羈切。’ Xu Shen 許慎, Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezhizhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hongyewenhua youxiangongsi, 2018), p.379. Trans. by myself.

⁵ Zhu Shouliang 朱守亮, *Commentary and Annotations of Shijing* 《詩經評釋》, (Taiwan: Xuesheng Shuju, 2017), p. 166.

⁶ Zhu Shouliang 朱守亮, *Commentary and Annotations of Shijing* 《詩經評釋》, (Taiwan: Xuesheng Shuju, 2017), p. 166.

⁷ Original text: ‘止，容止。’ Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Mao Heng 毛亨: *Maoshi Zhuanjian* 《毛詩傳箋》, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018), p. 74. Trans. by myself.

meaning etiquette and dignity mentioned in previous chapter.⁸

不死何俟: The character Si 俟 means wait. *Shijingpingshi* 《詩經評釋》 summarized that the second chapter is the same as the first, but with a new rhyme and a heavier tone.

Now let us look at the chapter 3.

相鼠有體: The character Ti 體 means body.

人而無禮: The character Li 禮 means etiquette and the norms of human behavior.

胡不遄死: The character Hu 胡 means why. *Shuowenjiezhizhu* 《說文解字註》 annotated that the character Chuan 遄 means number of coming and going. *Shigu* 釋詁 said that Chuan 遄 means fast.⁹ *Shijingpingshi* 《詩經評釋》 summarized that the third chapter, which is the same as the first two chapters, just changes the rhyme and repeats the words with heavier tone.

The above is the literal interpretation of the whole poem. This poem can be regarded as the most intense poem in *the book of songs*. The strong feelings and sharp language throughout the whole poem, which is both coherent and evocative and enhances the power of the satire.

III. Phonological Analysis of this Poem

Now let's look at this poem from phonological view. The Chinese characters in *Shuowen jiezi* were categorized into 17 rhyming divisions by a Qing scholar Duan Yucai, who was famous for his outstanding annotation of *Shuowen jiezi*. His rhyming divisions have been regarded as the fundamental and primary of Chinese phonology by later scholars.

There are a few known phonological systems in China. One of them is renowned Professor Chen Xinxiong of phonology in Taiwan. One of his contribution is that, based on the 17 rhyming divisions of Duan Yucai, he added 12 Groups of rhyme of entering tone, and three other Groups of rhyme, that is Wei 微, Dong 東, Tian 添. For this module had followed the

⁸ Zhu Shouliang 朱守亮, *Commentary and Annotations of Shijing* 《詩經評釋》, (Taiwan: Xuesheng Shuju, 2017), p. 166.

⁹ Original text: '往來數也。釋詁曰。遄、疾也。速也。' Xu Shen 許慎, Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezhizhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hongyewenhua youxiangongsi, 2018), p.72. Trans. by myself.

system of Chen as our materials, therefore, in the meantime, I listed Chen's corresponding Groups of rhyme for your reference.

Let's look at the first chapter. According to Duan Yucai's annotation of *Shuowen jiezi*, it shows that the last word of each line of the first chapter rhymes with Group 17 *ge* 歌 of Duan, Group 1 *ge* 歌 of Chen; the last word of each line of the second chapter rhymes with Group 1 *zhi* 之 of Duan, Group 1 *zhi* 之 of Chen; the last word of each line of the third chapter rhymes with Group 15 *zhi* 脂 of Duan, Group 4 *zhi* 脂 of Chen.

To put it simply, the first chapter is all for Group 17, the second chapter is all for Group 1, the last chapter is all for Group 15. We can see this poem is neatly organized. Further more, it is a common phenomenon in ancient Chinese poetry that every chapter could have its own rhyme in one poem, therefore, this poem, as a whole, is in rhyme.

IV. conclusion

This poem is a reminder of the importance of dignity and manners. The greatest difference between man and beast is that man knows manners and righteousness, and understands the rules of family. That is why man is honoured, but the rats are hated by all. If man has lost his sense of propriety and shame, then he is no different from the rats, and it would be better for him to die sooner rather than let he harm others.

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