



Trinity Saint David

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Good morning, everyone. What I'm going to talk about today is The connection between Confucius and *The Book of Poetry*.

Confucius, a native of the state of Lu during the Spring and Autumn Period, was a great educator, thinker and philosopher. His father died when he was young, and his mother died when he was 17. He also said that he had learned many skills from an early age because he had lived in poverty. At the age of 27, Confucius founded a private school, breaking with the tradition of official schooling and promoting the spread of scholarship and culture among the people. At the age of 55, Confucius found it difficult to fulfil his political ambitions, so he left the state of Lu with his students and travelled around the world for 13 years, returning to his own country at the age of 68. In his old age, Confucius continued to teach in Lu, redacting poetry and revising rites and music.

Confucius made great contributions to poetry throughout his life. Firstly, Confucius valued the education of poetry, saying, "If you do not learn the Poetry, you will not be fit to converse with." 不學詩無以言. Confucius also quoted poetry on various occasions and in conversations with his students as a way of inspiring and educating them. For Confucius, the educational purpose of poetry was to change one's character and temperament and to make one gentle and generous. 溫柔敦厚詩教也. Because poetry was mostly composed by the common people, its content included a large number of names of animals and plants. The surviving versions of *The Book of Poetry* contain the names of nearly 200 species of animals and plants. In addition, the poems contain a large number of records of customs, rituals and daily life in different countries and regions. By studying *The Book of Poetry*, students can enhance their knowledge, improve their thinking and observation skills, and gain a better understanding of different societies.

In fact, as poetry was originally composed and communicated orally by the people and collected by the officials, the number of poems was quite

large. After Confucius refused to become an official at the age of 46, he began the task of redacting *The Book of Poetry*. According to Sima Qian, there were over 3,000 poems in the old poetry collection, but Confucius removed some of them and left only those with ritualistic and edifying significance, leaving a total of 305 poems and composing music for them. This history, recorded by Sima Qian, illustrates two important things. One is that Confucius composed the poems, making a great contribution to music while at the same time collating *The Book of Poetry*. Confucius himself said, at the age of 68, at the end of his travels around the world: "I returned from Wei to Lu, and then the music was reformed, and the pieces in the Royal songs and Praise songs all found their proper place." “吾自衛反魯，雅頌各得其所” In doing so, Confucius corrected the music on the one hand, and strengthened the academic status of *The Book of Poetry* on the other. On the other hand, *the Records of the Historian* 《史記》 clearly records the process by which Confucius redacted *The Book of Poetry*, from around 3,000 pieces to only around 300. This is a meaningful way in which Confucius sought to further refine the educational significance of poetry.

Historically, many scholars have expressed doubts as to whether Confucius had redacted *The Book of Poetry*. Kong Yingda, for example, argues that most of the poems quoted in traditional Chinese classics still exist in *The Book of Poetry*, and that very few of them are lost. In proportion to this, Confucius must have preserved most of the poems and did not delete a large number of them, so Sima Qian's claim that there were more than three thousand ancient poems is not credible. However, the fact that so few poems were lost does not directly prove that Confucius did not delete poems. According to the most basic historical rules, there were already tens of thousands of poems written during the Tang dynasty, but only a few thousand of them have been preserved, and only a few hundred of them are known to the public. On the other hand, if we look at the poetry collected in *The Book of Poetry* by country, only a few dozen poems were preserved in large countries,

and in some small countries only one or two poems were preserved. It is obviously unreasonable to say that in a time when poetry was prevalent, only a few poems were created over a period of several hundred years, and it is therefore inevitable and reasonable that Confucius should have collated and deleted some 3,000 poems.

The completion of Confucius work on *The Book of Poetry* gave it a more important place in the educational, academic, political and cultural spheres. On the other hand, even though the music of *The Book of Poetry* has been lost, it had a significant impact on the whole musical trend of the time. In addition, as it was passed down through later generations, its historical value and significance became more evident. For example, the literary approach to writing in the poems had a profound influence on the direction and style of later literary production. The historical events recorded in these texts have also been verified and are important evidence for future generations to study the culture and customs of the period. In addition, the unique style of writing in *The Book of Poetry* provided important research material for later generations in the field of phonology and helped scholars to reconstruct the ancient sounds.

That is all my presentation today! Thank you for your listening!