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Student Name: QIXUAN ZHOU 周琦璇	
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General Introduction to Zhengyue from *the Book of Poetry*

Student name: Qixuan Zhou

SID: 1804447

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Respected Professor Wang and Miss Deng, good morning. My name is Qixuan Zhou and I would like to share with you the topic on a poem name *Zhengyue*. My presentation is divided into three parts. Part 1 introduces the historical background and description of *Zhengyue*. Part 2 verifies some disputed extracts. The last part is a conclusion.

First and foremost, let us start part 1 about the historical background and description of *Zhengyue*. At that time, the Zhou Dynasty was weak in the national power so that some dukes were ready to take some actions. Particularly, the feudal princes represented by Duke Shen challenged the royal authority, in hope of manifesting his strong power. For example, two pieces of materials associated with Duke Shen were recorded in *Zhushu Jinian*. One was recorded in *Zhushu Jinian of Ancient Version* 'In the thirty-ninth year during the reign of King Xuan of Zhou, the King waged a war against Shen Rong tribe and won the victory.'¹ while another one could be found out in *Zhushu Jinian of Current Version* 'In the forty-first year during the reign of King Xuan, the King's troops was defeated by Shen Rong.'² Both of them are enough to prove that during the reign of King Xuan, the national power of the Western Zhou Dynasty has already been far worse than before but it has been further deficient because King You was extremely extravagant, as well as wasted manpower and money during the period of rule by King You, resulting in social instability and torment of common people. Beyond that, King You was fond of beauties and was on intimate terms with villains so that officials were flattering. Just at that moment, Shen Rong (a clan name), on the one hand, eyed covetously. On the other hand, no wise sovereign dominated affairs of the state. Therefore, the Zhou Dynasty remained between the beetle and the block. Unfortunately, in such a situation of internal and external difficulties, King You insisted on abolished Queen Shen and the Prince Yi Jiu but turned to make Bao Si as the queen and her son as the prince, leading to further intensification of social contradictions or even the extinction of the Western Zhou Dynasty. After that, with eastward migration during the period of King Ping, the Zhou Dynasty has been never flourishing in later years, thus *Zhengyue*, as the full-length political satirical poem in *the Book of Potery*, was just created in such a chaotic era. Just mentioned in the *Poetic preface*, 'A scholar-official of Zhou wrote *Zhenyue* to satirize King You of Zhou'³, it satirized incompetence and licentiousness of King You as a ruler. The poem included a total of thirteen chapters. Each chapter included five sentences in top eight and there were six sentences in the rest of the chapters. With resentment of the poet, the poem focused on questioning the 'God', expressing his concern for the fate of his nation and depression that he desired to serve the country but had no way because of villains holding sway. Besides, he also expressed infinite anxiety for the national outlook and strong dissatisfaction of King You's despotic rule.

Next, the second part verifies some disputes extracts. The time of creating this poem always

¹ Wang guowei 王国维 *guben zhushu jinian jijiao* 古本竹书纪年辑校 [Zhushu Jinian of Ancient Version] (Shanghai, Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House), p592.

² Wang guowei 王国维 *jinben zhushu jinian jijiao* 今本竹书纪年辑校 [Zhushu Jinian of Current Version] (Shanghai, Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House), p85.

³ Kong Yinda 孔颖达 *maoshi zhengyi* 毛诗正义 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, Peking University Press), p827.

has been controversial. Some scholars argued that it was finished in early years of the Zhou Dynasty. For example, Mr. Qu Wanli thought, it could be verified by ‘But the majestic honoured capital of Zhou is being destroyed by Bao Si.’ in the poem as early years of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty⁴. Besides, some scholars deemed it as a prediction. For instance, Kong Yingda said ‘As the Zhou Royal was still in power, literati have been conscious of the authorities’ pros, cons and foreseen through close observation that Bao Si, consort of King You, was bound to cause the downfall of Zhou Dynasty due to her immoralities and jealousies.’⁵, showing that to figure out the era of creating this poem, the actual meaning of the poetic prose ‘The flames, when they are blazing, may still perhaps be extinguished; But the majestic honoured capital of Zhou, is being destroyed by Bao Si.’ should be clarified.

In fact, different scholars have developed different explanations for this poetic prose. In *Zheng Jian*’s opinion, “‘Blazing fire (燎)’ is used to describe the scene when the whole plain bursts into flames. How could the most exuberant flames be extinguished? ‘Not being’ is here used to compare with ‘being’ and highlight the great extent of ‘being’”⁶, starting with nothing to express everything, it set off Bao Si who resulted in perishing the state and it was extremely ferrous. Mr. Pei Puxian said ‘How could the blazing fire on the plains be extinguished when it is raging? The majestic honored capital of Zhou is ultimately being destroyed by Bao Si. How horrible it is!’⁷, which adopted the statement of *Zheng Jian*. Kong Yingda wrote in *Maoshi Zhengyi*, ‘If the blazing flames could be extinguished by water, water is apparently stronger. This is used to indicate the great evil of Bao Si in destroying the powerful Zhou Dynasty.’⁸. Ma Ruichen criticized *Zheng Jian* in *Maoshi Zhuanjian Tongshi* with it and directly explained the character 宁 as the character 乃, showing ‘The poem implies, it seems that nothing could extinguish the blazing flames on the plains, but finally water did it’⁹. Mr. Yu Guanying thought ‘such a strong fire could be perished so it was not difficult to subjugate such a great power.’¹⁰

Though these comments were different, they were based on the so-called fact that ‘Bao Si resulted in perishing the state’. Scholars who considered the creation of the poem before perishing the Zhou Dynasty took a broad and long-term view while scholars who deemed the creation of the poem after perishing the Zhou Dynasty summed up experience. All of them could make sense but couldn’t directly determine the era of creating the poem. However, was it a fact that ‘Bao Si resulted in perishing the state’? If we cast aside the so-called fact and read the poetic prose ‘The flames, when they are blazing, may still perhaps be extinguished; But the majestic honoured capital of Zhou, is being destroyed by Bao Si.’ the internal logic should be similar to the explanation in the front part of *Maoshi Zhengyi*, ‘As the saying goes, nothing could extinguish the most exuberant flames, which

⁴ Qu Wanli 屈萬里 *shijing quanshi* 詩經詮釋 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Taipei, Linking Publishing Company), p353.

⁵ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, Peking University Press), p836.

⁶ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, Peking University Press), p836.

⁷ Pei Puxian 裴普賢 *shijing pingzhu dubenxia* 詩經評注讀本(下) [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Taipei, San Min Book), p162.

⁸ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, Peking University Press), p836.

⁹ Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰 *maoshi zhuanjian tongshi* 毛詩傳箋通釋 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p607.

¹⁰ Yu Guanying 余冠英 *shijingxuan* 詩經選 [The selection of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, People's Literature Publishing House), p220.

is used to reveal that nothing could overturn the ruling of the deep-seated Zhou Royal in its flourishing period. That said, neither of them could be destroyed in their heyday.’¹¹ Beacon fires were used to compare prosperity of the Zhou Dynasty, implying that how could Bao Si perish such a national power. According to such an explanation, it could be clearly observed that the time of creating this poem must be before perishing the state, instead of destruction, so whether there is a basis for such an explanation?

The first issue to be solved is that whether Bao Si committed a heinous crime to result in destruction of the Zhou Dynasty. Looking through historical records, in only several references of the Western Zhou Dynasty available, *Guoyu·Zhengyu* described the so-called crime of Bao Si in the paragraph that ‘Shi Bo discussed rise and fall for Duke Heng of Zheng’¹², which was most detailed. In addition to ‘being a concubine in her childhood’ and ‘born without a father’ or other mythical rumors for Bao Si’s family background, there was no material sin. The biggest factual basis for ‘Bao Si resulted in perishing the state’ was shown in the matter that King ingratiated Bao Si with beacon fires by making fun of dukes in Shih Chi. However, according to the textual criticism of Mr. Li Feng for the Destruction of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the beacon fire system had no substantive evidence in the pre-Qin period to prove its existence¹³. I also think Bao Si’s story should be fabled by later generations according to the ancient belief that ‘a siren brings calamity to the country and people’. Particularly, when a woman is involved in the dispute of a state, even if it is insignificant, her role still will be exaggerated.¹⁴ Moreover, Bao Si was captured by King You and kept away from her family because of her gorgeous and beautiful looks, which made King addicted. Even if she was beloved by King You, she never served the hour and tried all means to cater to his pleasure, but became indifferent to him. She didn’t want to exchange her glory in such a way. Just because King You was greedy and concupiscent, he imposed his power on her. Such a pitiful weak woman has been rumored by the public and turned into an evil in Shi Bo’s description. She was even disdained by later generations. Is it so ridiculous to impose the destruction of the Zhou Dynasty on such a weak woman?

What’s more, there is also an evidence in the poetic prose. The clue of the poem is not ‘But the majestic honoured capital of Zhou, Is being destroyed by Bao Si.’ noticed by later generations, but ‘the rumor of the public’. The first sentence in the poem described ‘In the first month [of summer] the hoar-frost abounds, And my heart is wounded with sorrow. The false calumnies of the people, Also wax greater and greater.’ Zhengyue actually referred to April. It was abnormal in the season that wasn’t supposed to frost, making the poet feel distressed. The rumor of the public was spreading furiously. The rumor was the statement in *Guoyu Zhengyu* which considered her as the source of bringing calamity to the country and people. Such a rumor was spreading more severely. Then, the poet mentioned ‘I think how I stand alone, And the sorrow of my heart grows intense.’ According to “Their good words are ‘only’ from the mouth; Their bad words are ‘only’ from the mouth. The sorrow of my heart becomes greater, And because of this I incur contempt.” in the second chapter,

¹¹ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 [The annotation of *the Book of Potery*] (Beijing, Peking University Press), p836.

¹² Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 *guoyu zhengyu* 國語·鄭語 [Guoyu-Zhengyu] (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House), p519.

¹³ Li Feng 李峰 *xizhou de miwang* 西周的滅亡 [The demise of the Western Zhou Dynasty] (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House), p217-218.

¹⁴ Li Feng 李峰 *xizhou de miwang* 西周的滅亡 [The demise of the Western Zhou Dynasty] (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House), p519.

it showed that the source for the poet's worry was just attributed to the rumor. Even in the chapter five, the poet directly criticized 'The false calumnies of the people, How is it that you do not repress them?' to express disdain to such a rumor. By combining with the rumor and it was not a fact that 'Bao Si resulted in perishing the state', we can conclude that the poet just made an analogy in 'The flames, when they are blazing, May still perhaps be extinguished; But the majestic honoured capital of Zhou, Is being destroyed by Bao Si.' between them to satirize ridiculousness and absurdity of the rumor.

The last part is conclusion. *Zhengyue* emerged under the unique historical background. It was a sad tune of loyal officials when the nation was going to be perished. The poet mixed his family-country feelings, sympathy for people, regret for the King's licentiousness, and hate for officials' political corruption in this poem, which turned into a complaint for the era. The sentence "Ye parents who gave me birth! Was it to make me suffer this pain? 'Why was this time' not before me? Or 'why was it' not after me?" seemed to blame everyone and everything but not himself. Actually, it was desolated that his true heart was restrained by the era. In the era that had superstition of spirits, the poet didn't believe the rumor but focused on the essence of the issue to satirize nonfeasance of King You. He also clearly realized that 'prosperity of the Zhou Dynasty' like beacon fires has already become utterly decadent, so he wrote this poem.

This is all for my presentation today, any suggestion and feedback would be appreciated. Thank you for listening.

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