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## Women in Classic of Poetry Mujeres en Classic of Poetry

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### Abstract

The *Classic of Poetry* of the Confucius era occupied an important position in China's literary history of thousands of years. Of the 300 poems it contains, it not only shows considerable literary value, but also reflects social changes in ancient China. The ritual system promoted by Confucianism was formed at the beginning of the Zhōu Dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC), and gradually influenced all aspects of Chinese life in all social classes, including the social status of women. From these poems, we can see the process of this important social change. Some poems show us a free, egalitarian and open relationship between men and women, while others describe the impotence of women in a patriarchal society.

### Keywords

Classic of Poetry, women, China, Confucianism, ritual

### Resumen

El *Clásico de Poesía* de la era de Confucio ocupó una posición importante en la historia milenaria de la literaria de China. De los 300 poemas que contiene, no solo muestra un valor literario considerable, sino que también refleja los cambios sociales en la China antigua. El sistema ritual, promovido por el confucianismo, se formó al comienzo de la dinastía Zhōu (1046 a.C.-256 a.C.) e influyó gradualmente en todos los aspectos de la vida en todas las clases sociales, incluyendo la posición en la sociedad de las mujeres. A partir de estos poemas podemos ver el proceso de este importante cambio social. De esta manera, algunos poemas muestran una relación libre, igualitaria y abierta entre hombres y mujeres, mientras que otros describen la impotencia de las mujeres en una sociedad patriarcal.

### Palabras clave

Clásico de Poesía, mujeres, China, confucianismo, ritual

## 1. Introduction

In the millennial history of the Chinese Literature, the *Classic of Poetry* (詩經 *Shī Jīng*) is considered as the first poems collection of 300 poems, it occupies a very important place, a part of which still have considerable literary value<sup>2</sup>. Collected poems were continuously written during the first period of the Zhōu dynasty (1046 B.C. - 256 B.C.), and they were divided in three parts, which were: *fēng* (風), *yǎ* (雅) and *sòng* (頌). The *fēng* part are popular streams (some of them from noble writers) with regional characteristics; the *yǎ* part is composed by works which were used for invitations and visits of the nobles; and the *sòng* part are lauds used by nobles in religious ceremonies or events commemorating their ancestors.

Ideologies and ethic rituals from the Confucianism times controlled the ancient and modern Chinese History almost completely and its influence remains nowadays.

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment: This work is benefited by the Junta de Castilla y León (Orden EDU/1083/2013).

<sup>2</sup> CHARLES HOLCOMBE, *Una historia de Asia oriental. De los orígenes de la civilización al siglo XXI*. FCE, México 2016, p. 54.

However, that was neither from Confucius' time nor from the Confucian philosophy, but from the Hàn dynasty (202 a.C. - 220 d.C.). From the Liú Chè Emperor's reign, the warrior, (漢武帝劉徹, 141 a.C. - 87 a.C.) the authoritarianism political system was applied (霸道 *bàdào*) and also combined Confucianism, especially, during the Yuán, Liú Shì Emperor's reign (漢元帝劉奭, 49 a.C. - 33 a.C.). From then, the domain of Confucian ideology there was a notable increase, and since then, began the domain of two thousand years of Confucianism in China.

During these two thousand years, Confucianism converted the marriage relationship into a relationship of owner and servant, convert women into slaves or, rather, into subordinates who do not have their own freedom, nor their own will. Women lived clearly in inferiority and obedience, they even want to express that women are humble from birth. For example, in the 18th century, an unprecedented emphasis was placed on the chastity of widows<sup>3</sup>. These foundations of the patriarchal society did not differ much from those that extended through the western world at the end of the Middle Ages.

But before the time mentioned, what was the life of women in pre-Confucian China? That is what the collection shows us through the verses of a variety of poems in the *Classic of Poetry*.

Although the translated possessions will lose their harmony and literary feeling, but to facilitate the understanding of the verses of the readers, in this article, most of the translations of the verses in English, we will take James Legge<sup>4</sup>, and the others will mark them with notes.

## 2. The life of women in verses

Women are a very important part of the creation of the human history, there are many works in the *Classic of Poetry* which described the women's daily life throughout scenes of their laboring lives, which show their love for life. Among them, we can find: *Koh t'an* (How the dolichos spread itself out 葛覃), *Fow-e* (Plantains 采芣) and *Ts'ae pin* (Pick up dwarf waterclover 采蘋). The second stanza of *Koh t'an* describes:

(...)	
<i>How the dolichos spread itself out,</i>	葛之覃兮
<i>Extending to the middle of the valley!</i>	施于中谷
<i>Its leaves were luxuriant and dense.</i>	維葉莫莫
<i>I cut it and I boiled it,</i>	是刈是漚
<i>And made both fine cloth and coarse,</i>	為絺為綌
<i>Which I will wear without getting tired of it.</i>	服之無斁
(...)	

(*Koh t'an* fragment)

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> JAMES LEGGE, *The first part of the She-king, or the lessons form the states; and the prolegomena*. Lane, Crawford & Co., Hongkong 1871a; JAMES LEGGE, *The second, third, and fourth parts of the She-king, or the minor odes of the kingdom, the greater odes of the kingdom, the sacrificial odes and praise-songs; and the indexes*. Lane, Crawford & Co., Hongkong 1871b.

Gě is a species belonging to the *Fabaceae* family. In the Western world, it is also known by its Japanese name “kudzu” or “kuzu” as described in the verses, and it was used as a base to make clothing with its grains.

As much the verses in *Koh t’an* as in *Fow-e* and in *Ts’ae pin*:

(...)	
<i>We gather and gather the plantains;</i>	采采芣苢
<i>Now we place the seeds in our skirts.</i>	薄言袺之
<i>We gather and gather the plantains;</i>	采采芣苢
<i>Now we tuck our skirts under our girdles.</i>	薄言褊之
	( <i>Fow-e</i> fragment)

(...)	
<i>She deposits what she gathers,</i>	于以盛之
<i>In her square baskets and round ones;</i>	维筐及筥
<i>She boils it,</i>	于以湘之
<i>In her tripods and pans.</i>	维錡及釜
(...)	
	( <i>Ts’ae pin</i> fragment)

These scenes, gathered in *Koh t’an*, *Fow-e* and *Ts’ae pin*, have shown the joy of these women by the results of their labor.

### 3. Relations between women and men

#### 3.1 In festivity encounters

Through some poetry, we can discover that, in the pre-Confucian China, relations between men and women were yet open. Young men and women dated, met, celebrated feasts together, and even flirted and chased each other.

Verses in *Tsin Wei* (The Tsin and the Wei 溱洧) showed us a scene of men and women in *Shàng Sì* fest (上巳):

(...)	
<i>Ladies and gentlemen</i>	士与女
<i>Are carrying flowers of valerian.</i>	方秉蘭兮
<i>A lady says, “Have you been to see?”</i>	女曰觀乎
<i>A gentleman replies, “I have been.”</i>	士曰既且
<i>“But let us go again to see.</i>	且往觀乎
<i>Beyond the Wei,</i>	洧之外
<i>The ground is large and fit for pleasure.”</i>	洵訏且樂
<i>So the gentlemen and ladies.</i>	維士與女
<i>Make sport together,</i>	伊其相謔
<i>Presenting one another with small peonies.</i>	贈之以勺藥
(...)	
	( <i>Tsin Wei</i> fragment)

Shàng Sì fest is celebrated on the first day of sì in the third month of the Chinese calendar. It was also known as the day of the spring bath. That day, men and women had baths in rivers with no distinction between them, they thought they could remove illnesses and avoid calamities. According to *Zhōu Rituals*<sup>5</sup> even sexual relations were permitted<sup>6</sup>. That kind of scenario is impossible to happen in the two thousand years after, as reflected in many legends, even daughters of the Emperor of Heaven were also forced to marry a mortal because he has seen him bathe. Through the verses in *Tsin Wei* a fervent conversation between young men and women, who transmit us their love desires, is shown.

In *Muh kwa* (*Papaya*, 木瓜) verses we have more details about the way young people pursued love:

<i>There was presented to me a papaya,</i>	投我以木瓜
<i>And I returned for it a beautiful keu-gem.</i>	報之以瓊琚
<i>Not as a return for it,</i>	匪報也
<i>But that our friendship might be lasting.</i>	永以為好也
(...)	

(*Muh kwa* fragment)

*Muh kwa* is one of the poems which describes those sorts of encounters. In the following stanzas, the first structure is maintained, and just the name of the fruit is changed for peach (木桃 *mùtáo*) and plum (木李 *mùlǐ*). It is a poem about presents young people exchange<sup>7</sup>. In the same way, as it is described in these verses, in the encounters or festivities, when a girl finds her suitor, she used to throw him fruit, and the boy, if he felt the same, responded with one of his jades.

### 3.2 Compliments to women

Speaking about love poetry, it is necessary to mention the first poem of the collection, *Kwan ts'eu* (The ospreys 關雎). «The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady; - / For our prince a good mate she»<sup>8</sup>. Possibly that is the oldest love hope in China, and one of the best known, even today. It was written from the point of view of a young noble. Apart from this popular poem, in this collection, we could find many poems to praise women, with both direct and indirect descriptions. Direct ones such as «A woman goes with him in the carriage. Hibiscus flower is her face»<sup>9</sup> (*Yew neu t'ung keu*; There is the lady in the carriage 有女同車). The author described the beauty of the oldest daughter of the Jiāng family with a hibiscus flower. Such as in *Shih jin* (Large was she 碩人):

<sup>5</sup> *Zhōulǐ* (周禮). ca. 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, <<http://ctext.org/rites-of-zhou/zh>> (September 2017).

<sup>6</sup> «In that moment, it is not forbidden to have sexual relations» (於是時也，奔者不禁。)

<sup>7</sup> JIANG LIANGFU 姜亮夫, *Xiānqín shī jiànshǎng cídiǎn* (先秦詩鑒賞辭典). Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House (上海辭書出版社), Shanghai 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Original text: “窈窕淑女，君子好逑。”

<sup>9</sup> Original text: “有女同車，顏如舜華。”



(...)  
*Her fingers were like the blades of the young white-grass;* 手如柔荑  
*Her skin was like congealed ointment;* 膚如凝脂  
*Her neck was like the tree-grub;* 領如蝤蠧  
*Her teeth were like melon seeds;* 齒如瓠犀  
*Her forehead cicada-like; her eyebrow like [the antennae of] the silkworm moth;* 螭首蛾眉  
*What dimples, as she artfully smiled!* 巧笑倩兮  
*How lovely her eyes, either the black and white so well defined!* 美目盼兮  
 (...)

(Shih jin fragment)

In these brief verses, the wife of the Lord Zhuāng of Wèi is presented by the author throughout a foreground description of her hands, skin and neck, even though the trifles about her teeth and eyebrows with all type of detail and the use of metaphors.

On the contrary, «The reeds and rushes are deeply green. / And the white dew is turned into hoarfrost»<sup>10</sup>. «The reeds and rushes are luxuriant. / And the white dew is not yet dry»<sup>11</sup>. *Kēen kēa* (Reeds and rushes蒹葭) the author gives us a blurred image of a beautiful girl by the river side under the twilight fog, throughout a countryside description.

### 3.3 In the love

During the last period of free-love in the ancient China, young girls and boys enjoyed themselves and they showed their emotions by writing and singing poems, and they kept their loves among their verses until nowadays. There are also many love poems in the collection written by girls which are kept today.

(...)  
*Of whom are my thoughts?* 云誰之思  
*Of the fine men of the west.* 西方美人  
*O those fine men!* 彼美人兮，西方之人兮  
*Those men of the west!*  
 (...)

(*Kēen he* fragment)

A young noble girl kept her praise and love for a principal dancer in her words<sup>12</sup>, such as in the following descriptions: «Our elegant and accomplished prince, - / Never can he be forgotten!»<sup>13</sup> (*K'e yuh*; River's Qí curve 淇奧).

<sup>10</sup> Original text: “蒹葭蒼蒼，白露為霜。”

<sup>11</sup> Original text: “蒹葭萋萋，白露未晞。”

<sup>12</sup> YÚ GUÀNYÍNG 余冠英, *Shī Jīng xuǎn* (詩經選). People's Literature Publishing House (人民文學出版社) 1979; GĀO HÉNG 高亨, *Shī Jīng jīn zhù* (詩經今注). Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House (上海古籍出版社), Shanghai 1980. ; YÁO Xiǎo'ōu 姚小鷗, *Shī Jīng yì zhù* (詩經譯注). Contemporary World Press (當代世界出版社) 2009.

In the moment when the young boy arrived at the corner of the city wall where he had arranged to meet his girlfriend, however he could not find her, she was hidden. This is the scene described in *Tsing neu* (The Gather Woman 靜女):

<i>How lovely is the retiring girl!</i>	靜女其姝
<i>She was to await me at a corner of the wall.</i>	俟我於城隅
<i>Loving and not seeing her,</i>	愛而不見
<i>I scratch my head, and am in perplexity.</i>	搔首踟躕
(...)	

(Tsing neu fragment)

The first verses show a lively and pleasant girl. The main character in *K'ëen chang* (I will roll up my dress 褰裳) show that the young girl is also an extrovert girl, and in order to verify if her boyfriend's love was real or not she was singing to him on the riversides:

<i>If you, Sir, think kindly of me,</i>	子惠思我
<i>I will hold up my lower garments, and cross the Tsin.</i>	褰裳涉溱
<i>If you do not think of me,</i>	子不我思
<i>Is there no other person [to do so]?</i>	豈無他人
(...)	

(K'ëen chang fragment)

The author of *P'eaou yew mei* (Dropping Plums 標有梅) is without a doubt a young and cheeky girl with a great initiative. With a metaphor of the plums falling and the remaining number of fruits she was describing the fugacity of the time, the youth brevity and she is claiming for her impatience for love desire:

<i>Dropping are the fruits from the plum-tree.</i>	標有梅
<i>There are [but] seven [tenths] of them left!</i>	其實七兮
<i>For the gentlemen who seek me,</i>	求我庶士
<i>This is the fortunate time!</i>	迨其吉兮
<i>Dropping are the fruits from the plum-tree;</i>	標有梅
<i>There are [but] three [tenths] of them left!</i>	其實三兮
<i>For the gentlemen who seek me</i>	求我庶士
<i>Now is the time.</i>	迨其今兮
(...)	

(P'eaou yew mei fragment)

The next young girl has no initiative and is not a cheeky girl, instead, she is a heroine for love, she wanted to convince her boyfriend to elope together:

---

<sup>13</sup> Original text: “有匪君子，終不可諼兮。”

(...)		
<i>His great carriage moves heavily and slowly,</i>		大車啾啾
<i>And his robes of rank glitter like a carnation-gem.</i>		毳衣如璫
<i>Do I not think of you?</i>		豈不爾思
<i>But I am afraid of this officer, and do not rush to you.</i>		畏子不奔
(...)		
		(Ta keu fragment)

In order to convince her boyfriend, she even told him: «but when dead, we shall share same grave»<sup>14</sup>.

Contrary to these direct and cheeky poetess, the writer of *Yay yew sze keun* (Dead antelope野有死麋) shows a dead gazelle wrapped in white hay as a present from a hunter. She is much shier and she insisted to the boy not to touch it nor to let people and dog know about it:

(...)		
<i>[She says,] Slowly; gently, gently.</i>		舒而脫脫兮
<i>Do not move my hadkerchief;</i>		無感我帨兮
<i>Do not make my dog bark.</i>		無使龍也吠
		(Yay yew sze keun fragment)

«But I have seen my husband / And how should I not rejoice?»<sup>15</sup> (*Fung yu*; Wind and rain 風雨) Apart from those mentioned, another similar poems like *Neu yueh ke ming* (Says the wife, it is cock-crow 女曰鷄鳴), *Ke ming* (The cock has crowed 鷄鳴) and *Shuh-yu-t'ëen* (Shuh has gone hunting 叔于田) showed romantic scenes from the happy encounters of the couple are also shown.

There are also in this collection several works which describe the wedding as a very important step in the relationship, as for instance: *Këw muh* (The trees with curved drooping branches 樛木), *T'aou yaou* (The peach tree is young and elegant 桃夭), *Ts'ëoh ch'aou* (Magpie nest 鵲巢), *Ho pe nung* (How great it that luxuriance 何彼禮矣), *Choo* (Entre la puerta y la pantalla 著), etc. In *Yen-yen* (The swallows 燕燕) it is described the farewell of a young boy when his sister is going to her wedding. Carmelo<sup>16</sup> translated *Yen-yen* as the return of a married woman to her paternal house, that is wrong, in the poem the verb "歸" (*guī*) appears, "guī" in old Chinese meant "marry" when the subject was a woman. Like 歸, one of the 64 hexagrams, its name is "歸妹" (*Guī mèi*) meaning «the wedding of the girl» not «the return of the girl».

We could say that in this last utopian era of ancient China, young people were enjoying the ultimate freedoms of love and relationship that belonged to them. Apart from these poems, we can also see in the ancient inscriptions, until the end of the Shāng dynasty (1600 BC - 1046 BC), women could be named as feudal with their own territory, for example, *Fù Jìng* (婦媯), They could also be a leader of an army, such as *Fù Zǐ* (婦好), which shows us an opposite case from later times, which shows

<sup>14</sup> Original text: “死則同穴。”

<sup>15</sup> Original text: “既見君子，云胡不喜？”

<sup>16</sup> CARMELO ELORDUY (tr.), *Romancero chino*. Editora Nacional, España 1984, pp. 58-59.

us in the legend of Mùlán, to enter an army in later times, wear costumes. But a new era of rituals was already closed.

#### 4. Contrast with the ritual code

##### 4.1 Beginning of inequality

(...)

*Sons shall be born to him: -*

*They will be put to sleep on couches;*

*They will be clothed in robes;*

*They will have scepters to play with;*

*Their cry will be loud.*

*They will be [hereafter] resplendent with red knee-covers,*

*The [future] king, the princess of the land.*

乃生男子

載寢之牀

載衣之裳

載弄之璋

其泣嗶嗶

朱芾斯皇

室家君王

*Daughters shall be born to him:-*

*They will be put to sleep on the ground;*

*They will be clothed with wrappers;*

*They will have tiles to play with.*

*It will be theirs neither to do wrong nor to do good.*

*Only about the spirits and the food will they have to think,*

*And to cause no sorrow to their parents.*

乃生女子

載寢之地

載衣之裼

載弄之瓦

無非無儀

唯酒食是議

無父母詒懼

(Sze kan fragment)

The Zhōu Dynasty was also known as “Zhōu Ritual” due to its ritual construction policy, where it gave a fruitful land to the future Confucianism. Although we could say that compared to later times from the ancient China, during Zhōu Dynasty, the relation between both genres was yet free, but once the conditions were matured, inequality hidden factors exuded<sup>17</sup>. Ritual rules started to affect the life of young people. The same as it is mentioned in the last two verses in the named poem, *Sze kan* (Este torrentet斯干), girls and boys were labeled from birth, in their social position as well as in their future tasks; therefore, they received different treatment: boys slept in cradles and girls on the floor; boys played with jades and girls with spinning wheels; in addition, girls had to obey their parents and behave properly. From then, women started to be sacrificed by a patriarchal society. The concept of «The intermediary’s word and parent’s command»<sup>18</sup> was already made as described in the verses in *Nan shan* (South hill 南山): “(…) *How do we proceed in taking a wife? / Announcement must first be made to our parents. (…)* *How do we proceed in taking a wife? / Without a go-between it cannot be done (…)*”<sup>19</sup> all this made women to vent throughout their songs and poems. «*The breath of the Han /*

<sup>17</sup> Gě Zhìyì 葛志毅, *Nán nǚ xìngbié fēngōng yǔ Zhōu Lǐ fùquán zōngfǎ tèzhì sùyuán* (男女性別分工與周禮父權宗法特質溯源). «Study & Exploration (學習與探索)», No.05 2005, pp. 25-31

<sup>18</sup> “媒妁之言，父母之命。”

<sup>19</sup> Original text: “取妻如之何？必告父母。” “取妻如之何？匪媒不得。”

*Cannot be dived across*».<sup>20</sup> The author of *Han kwang* (The breadth of the Han漢廣) used the width of the river Hàn, a tributary of Yangtzé river, as a metaphor of the unreachable distance being between him and his lover. Similar to this, the author of *Yueh ch'uh* (The moon comes forth 月出) expressed the same sadness for the distance with the moon beauty: «*The moon comes forth in her brightness. (...) How miserable is my toiled heart!*»<sup>21</sup>. Or as expressed in the verse «*The house is near there. / But the man is very far away*»<sup>22</sup>. from *Tung mun che shen* (Near the level ground at the east gate 東門之墀).

The author of *Tsëang Chung-tsze* (I pray you, Mr. Chung 將仲子) told us in more direct way: «*You, O Chung, are to be loved, / But the words of my parents / Are also to be feared*»<sup>23</sup> The writer is fighting with love and ritual rules, she loved her boy but she was afraid of the rite, especially as it is said in the work «*But the talk of people / Is also to be feared*»<sup>24</sup>. It can be seen that in that time free love with no intermediary was socially frowned upon

For women of that time, that imposed ritual rule was just like «*There is a rainbow in the east, / And no one dares to point to it*»<sup>25</sup> (*Te tung*; Rainbow 蜺蜺) where the poetess described it metaphorically. In the same poem, she described a young girl who escaped with her lover «*She separates from her parents and brothers*»<sup>26</sup>. showing her point of view, and confronting the ritual codes. Although in her poems she also described recrimination and satire of the readers saying that «*Greatly is she untrue to herself, / And does not recognize [the law of] her lot*»<sup>27</sup>.

For sure she was not the only woman of the time who started to choose her own destiny. The writer of *Peh chow* (Boat of cypress wood 柏舟) also had the courage to express her decision to her mother directly.

At the beginning, she compares her destiny to a cypress wood boat on the water, being that, she claims «*O mother, O Heaven*»<sup>28</sup>, but with her mother's denial, she claimed that her chosen man «*He was my mate*»<sup>29</sup>; and «*He was my only one*»<sup>30</sup>; «*And I swear that till death I will have no other*»<sup>31</sup>; and «*And I swear that till death I will not do the evil thing*»<sup>32</sup>. She does not occult her cordial desire and decision for love, her statement is not to prudish at all.

#### 4.2 Attitude facing with a patriarchal society

It is impossible to deny that during the Zhōu dynasty, in the same moment to the ritual code formation, words referred to family members in Chinese language increased considerably. Chinese relationships system was changed from the Hawaiian system, which was already working during the previous dynasty, Shāng, to the

<sup>20</sup> Original text: “漢之廣矣，不可泳思。”

<sup>21</sup> Original text: “月出皎兮（……）勞心悄兮。”

<sup>22</sup> Original text: “其室則邇，其人甚遠。”

<sup>23</sup> Original text: “仲可懷也，父母之言，亦可畏也。”

<sup>24</sup> Original text: “人之多言，亦可畏也。”

<sup>25</sup> Original text: “蜺蜺在東，莫之敢指。”

<sup>26</sup> Original text: “遠父母兄弟。”

<sup>27</sup> Original text: “大無信也，不知命也。”

<sup>28</sup> Original text: “母也天只”

<sup>29</sup> Original text: “實維我儀”

<sup>30</sup> Original text: “實維我特”

<sup>31</sup> Original text: “之死矢靡它”

<sup>32</sup> Original text: “之死矢靡慝”

Sudanese system<sup>33</sup>, which became the most complex system of all languages and cultures in the world. All that reflects the change in the intensification and consolidation in a patriarchal society. The book *Classic of Poetry* does not have a description of the type of case.

Some women such as the main character in *Hing loo* (The dew on the path 行露), did not surrender for the man's threat, but she replied: «*How else could you have urged on this trial? / But though you have forced me to trial*»<sup>34</sup>. That strong personality of a woman is not the only one in the collection, in *Peh chow* (Boat of cypress wood 柏舟), the protagonist shows the same position facing the maltreatment of her husband and the lack of help by her family:

(...)		
<i>My mind is not a mirror; -</i>		我心匪鑿
<i>It cannot [equally] received [all impressions].</i>		不可以茹
(...)		
<i>My mind is not a stone; -</i>		我心匪石
<i>It cannot be rolled about.</i>		不可轉也
<i>My mind is not a mat; -</i>		我心匪席
<i>It cannot be rolled up.</i>		不可卷也
<i>My deportment has been dignified and good,</i>		威儀棣棣
<i>With nothing wrong which can be pointed out.</i>		不可選也
(...)		
		(Peh chow fragment)

After the failure of the marriage, when there was no option of reconciliation, some women had to take their own decisions. In *Mǎng* (A Lad 氓), the writer was reminding, step by step in the sixty verses, her love story, stating her sorrow for the better old times. However, after three years of marriage she, determinedly, claimed: «*That it would be broken I did not think, / And now it must be all over!*»<sup>35</sup> Suggesting the end of the matrimony.

Some women were abandoned by their husbands, who loved the new things and hated the old ones. One of them, the poetess of *Keang yew sze* (The Kēang has its branches 江有汜) shows her strong personality and she could face reality and predicted that her husband would pay for it: «*You will not accompany me anymore, / But you will regret later*»<sup>36</sup>. «*You will not live with me anymore, / But I wish you will live in tranquillity*»<sup>37</sup>. «*You will not find me anymore, / But I wish you will live in songs*»<sup>38</sup>.

On the contrary, the author of *Kuh fung* (East wind 谷風) in the same situation as the previous writer, was reminding the past, the hard days she spent with her family and husband and the verses she wrote knowing about her husband's new wedding: «*When*

<sup>33</sup> According to the six system division of relationship by LEWIS HENRY MORGAN, *Systems of consanguinity and affinity of the human family*. Smithsonian Institution, Washington 1871.

<sup>34</sup> Original text: “何以速我訟，雖速我訟，亦不女從”

<sup>35</sup> Original text: “反是不思、亦已焉哉”

<sup>36</sup> Original text: “不我以，其後也悔”

<sup>37</sup> Original text: “不我與，其後也處”

<sup>38</sup> Original text: “不我過，其嘯也歌”

we gather the mustard plant and earth melons, / We do not reject them because of their roots»<sup>39</sup>. She expresses that she has been abandoned by her husband euphemistically, but she lacks the courage of the previous writer to face the situation. Being a vulnerable group at that time, apart from the mentioned brave ones, there were more women who chose to suppress with submission the insults, and they only expressed indirectly lament throughout their verses. «Ever flow her tears! / But of what avail is her lament?»<sup>40</sup> (*Chung kuh*; In the Valleys grows the mother-wort 中谷有蕓)

«How is a man like this possible?»<sup>41</sup> In the poem *Jeh yueh* (Sun and moon 日月), the protagonist is able to tell her misery just to the sun and moon, and she continued to claim for the end of that difficult situation by asking «How can he get his mind settled?»<sup>42</sup>

Some women even continue imploring for a change of their husband's mind after they are abandoned, as it is seen in the words of *Tsun-ta loo* (Along the highway 遵大路), where a woman who was rejected by her husband continued interacting with him and continued imploring him humbling not to leave her: «Do not hate me»<sup>43</sup>. «Do not think me vile»<sup>44</sup>.

We could say that, under the ideology of women being inferior to men, facing the maltreatment, slavery and abandonment, the majority of women, being unfairly treated, vent themselves throughout poetry. Apart from the mentioned verses, poems like *Këaou t'ung* (Artful boy 狡童), *Yang che shwuy* (The fretted waters 揚之水), *Ho jin sze* (What man was 何人斯) y *Kuh fung* (East wind 谷風) treat about the same topic.

In this collection of more than 300 poems, we can also find descriptions of maternal love, which is the biggest love of humanity, such as in *Ch'e-hëaou* (Owl 鴟鴞) and *K'ae fung* (South wind 凱風). A verse in *K'ae fung* says: «Our mother is wise and good; / But among us there is none good»<sup>45</sup>. Expressing a feeling of shame for the maternal fatigue of the continuous years, we can also find descriptions of the solitude of widows as for example in *Yëw hoo* (There is a fox 有狐) and *Koh sang* (Dolichos grows 葛生). There also existed ironies to lasciviousness of noble ladies, as it happens in the description of the Xuān del Wèi marquess' wife in *Keun-tsz' këae laou* (The husband's to their old age 君子偕老).

Thanks to these poems, it is easier for us to know a totally real image of women two thousand years ago, their lives, loves, suffering and their struggle for equality, however, this struggle continues for more than two thousand years.

In the old Chinese archives, they said that at the beginning of the second King of the Zhōu Dynasty, in the sixth year of the Zhōu Duke regency (1037 B.C.), the Duke established the music and ritual, from then, the theory of “three obediences” and the definition that «men and women must be treated in a different way». The two sentences are written in two of the principal Works from Confucianism times. The first one in *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* (儀禮 *Yili*), and the second one in *Book*

<sup>39</sup> Original text: “采葑采菲，無以下體？”

<sup>40</sup> Original text: “嘸其泣矣、何嗟及矣。”

<sup>41</sup> Original text: “乃如之人兮”

<sup>42</sup> Original text: “胡能有定”

<sup>43</sup> Original text: “無我惡兮”

<sup>44</sup> Original text: “無我醜兮”

<sup>45</sup> Original text: “母氏聖善，我無令人”

of Rites (禮記 *Lǐjì*), as if they were wives who imposed to the rest of women on this land. This two thousand years old collection shows us a contrast between two different types of relationships between men and women during this period of change. Among them we can find happy moments, but also suffering under the inequality imposed from a moral and judicial level. This inequality lasted more than two thousand years, and we can even find law articles at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century such as *Imperial Statute of the kindergarten and home teaching* (奏定蒙養院章程及家庭教育法章程 / *Zòudìng méngyǎngyuàn zhāngchéng jí jiāting jiàoyù fǎ zhāngchéng*) from 26 from the eleventh month of 29 by Guāngxù (13 January 1904) which claims:

*Young women are absolutely prohibited to be admitted in group researches, nor to demonstrate in the streets or markets. In the same way, they are prohibited to read many occidental books and to learn foreign rules or traditions in a wrong way, which made a free marriage, and provoke a tendency for disregarding parents and husband<sup>46</sup>.*

### 4.3 Separation and longing

Apart from the ritual code, war was the other reason which caused the separation of couples. Due to the age which made the poems of the collection as well as the rest of the Chinese and human ages, it could not escape from the sorrow of war, especially, the period of the last poems, which was known as «*The period of Springs and Autumns*» (770 B.C. - 476 B.C.). During the mentioned time, the Son of Heaven, King, lost his influence over his kingdom, therefore, more than a hundred states started to fight searching for richness, land and power. According to Sīmǎ Qiān<sup>47</sup>, there were 36 murdered Lords and 52 States which were eliminated in the first 242 years of the unceasing wars. Philosopher Mò described how war affects everyday life in the village in the work «*the farmers will have no time to sow or reap, the women will have no time to weave or spin*»<sup>48</sup>. This pray is registered in the chapter *Rejection of aggression* from the book *Mò zǐ*. Apart from wars, other compulsory services had the same impact on couples. If we say that men were direct victims of war, their wives and families were indirect victims as well. Longings and loneliness was what these affected women expressed without exception. «*While I do not see my lord, / My sorrowful heart is agitated*»<sup>49</sup>. This is what verses in *Ts'au-ch'ung* (Grass-insects 草蟲) expressed. In the same way, the husband of the writer of *Joo fun* (Raised banks of the Joo 汝墳) received a new royal command when he just returned home.

In *Yin k'e luy* (Grandly rolls the thunder 殷其雷) the poetess described metaphorically the itinerant life that her husband is taking with fluctuating lightnings, «*My noble Lord!*»<sup>50</sup> this way she valued her husband, repeating it three times, and her longing

<sup>46</sup> Original text: “少年女子，斷不宜令契結隊入學，遊行街市；且不宜多讀西書，誤學外國習俗，致開自行擇配之漸，長蔑視父母、夫婿之風。” QÚ XINGU 璩鑫圭, TÁNG LIANGYÁN 唐亮炎, *Zhōngguó jìndài jiàoyù shǐ zīliào huìbiān · xuézhì yǎnbàn* (中國近代教育史資料彙編·學制演變). Shanghai Education Publishing House (上海教育出版社), Shanghai 1991. p. 393.

<sup>47</sup> SĪMǎ QIĀN 司馬遷, *Shǐ jì* (史記). 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, <<http://ctext.org/shiji/zhs>> (September 2017)

<sup>48</sup> Original text: “農夫不暇稼穡，婦人不暇紡績織紵”

<sup>49</sup> Original text: “未見君子，憂心忡忡”

<sup>50</sup> Original text: “振振君子”



became the words “*May he return*” (歸哉 *guī zāi*) which is repeated six times in the poem.

Facing the separation, some women removed their sorrow with alcohol, as it does the writer of *Keuen-urh* (Mouse-ear 卷耳): «*I will now pour a cup form that gilded vase, / Hoping I may not have to think of him long*»<sup>51</sup>. «*I will now take a cup form that rhinoceros' horn, Hoping I may not have long to sorrow*»<sup>52</sup>. In these homes, women took charge of all the tasks in order to maintain the family, whether these tasks were inside or outside home. The poems showed not just her longing, but also her impotence with tasks, and with the fact that her horse and servants are sick. Other women did not even want to comb their hair, wash themselves or make themselves up, as it happens to the main character in *Pih he* (My noble husband 伯兮):

(...)

*Since my husband went to the east,  
My head has been like the flying [pappus of the] artemisia.  
It is not that I could not anoint and wash it;  
But for whom should I adorn myself?*

自伯之東  
首如飛蓬  
豈無膏沐  
誰適爲容

(...)

(*Pih he* fragment)

She even asked herself if it would exist an herb which made her forget her sorrow. Apart from the mentioned poems, verses in *Keun-tsze yu yih* (My husband is away on service 君子于役), *Te too* (Russet pear tree 杖杜) y *Ts'ae luh* (I gather the king-grass 采綠) also expressed the same situation. In all its verses, the most direct and simplest sentences to express sorrow was: «*One day without the sight of you / Is like three months!*»<sup>53</sup> Such sentence was used in *Ts'ae koh* (Gathering the dolichos 采葛), as well as in *Tsz' K'en* (Your collar 子衿)

Being different, in the poem *Sëaou jung* (Short war carriage, 小戎) the writer expressed longing as well as she used more verses to described her husband's prepared carriage. This poem is collected in *Air of Qín* (or *Odes of Qín*, 秦風 *Qín fēng*). *Qín* was the domain which conquered the whole Chinese territory at the end of the long civil war, which longed five years, under the mandate of Yíng Zhèng (嬴政), who was later known as the Prime Emperor. *Qín* family, due to their situation on the occidental border with Zhōu Reign, worked as a shield to protect them from the nomad attacks, these nomads were the ancestors of the future Huns. The unceasing plunderings conceived a military role of the *Qín* family, and this role is clearly shown throughout her verses by a *Qín* woman:

(...)

*His mail-covered team move in great harmony  
There are the trident spears with their gilt ends;  
And the beautiful feather-figured shield;  
With the tiger-skin bow-case, and the carved metal ornaments  
on its front.*

儻駟孔羣  
公矛鏦鏘  
蒙伐有苑  
虎韞鏤膺

<sup>51</sup> Original text: “我姑酌彼金罍，維以不永懷。”

<sup>52</sup> Original text: “我姑酌彼兕觥，維以不永傷。”

<sup>53</sup> Original text: “一日不見，如三月兮”

*The two bows are placed in the case,  
Bound with string to their bamboo frames.  
(...)*

交韞二弓  
竹閉緹滕

(*Sèaou jung* fragment)

We can see that militarism in the *Qin* members, was not just in men's mentality but it was also rooted in women's, who facing their husbands' departure to war, lauded more men's arms rather than their sorrow.

## 5. Epilogue

Through these verses, we can get to know a little-known Ancient China, we can also see the beginning of the struggle of women for their equality and their right. More than two thousand years after the Zhōu dynasty, in the Qīng Dynasty fell down, since the foundation of the Chinese Republic in 1912, and lately the Chinese Popular Republic in 1949 in the last century, the role of women has becoming more and more important. The development of gender equality has been progressing as well. Nowadays, in Chinese Popular Republic's Constitution it is clearly said: «In the Chinese Popular Republic women have the same rights as men in all aspects whether they are political, economic, cultural, social and familiar». (Art. XLVIII 1)