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Stanza permutation in the “Guo feng” 國風 and an examination of the hermeneutical tradition of “orderly progression”

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Abstract

The Anda manuscript and Haihun slips have revealed that there were several different stanza permutations for poems in the “Guo feng” 國風 in early China. As most repetitive stanzas are essentially nonlinear, there is no intrinsic sequence for many poems. Rather than finding a “superior” stanza order, I would like to consider how the various stanza orders might challenge traditional interpretations of references to stanza numbers in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and the hermeneutical rule of “orderly progression” in the *Shijing*. Just as establishing the order of stanzas took a long time, the development of this rule was gradual. The belief in there being an unalterable stanza order not only influences how rhymes are interpreted but also shapes how lines and verses are annotated. Therefore, reconsidering the theory of orderly progression is a step towards re-evaluating the tradition of *Shijing* interpretation.

Keywords: “Guo feng”; Anhui University manuscript; Hermeneutics; Orderly progression; Stanza permutation; *Zuozhuan*; *Shijing*

1. Introduction

Recent discoveries of *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Odes*) materials, including the Anda manuscript (probably mid-fourth century BCE) received by Anhui University in 2015¹ and *Shijing* slips unearthed from the tomb of the Marquis of Haihun 海昏 (i.e. Liu He 劉賀 [92–59 BCE]) in Nanchang 南昌² have brought scholarly attention to the previously

¹ This manuscript comes from a corpus of looted Chu bamboo strips received by the university. For a brief introduction to the Anda manuscript, see the preface of *Anhui daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 安徽大學藏戰國竹簡, ed. Anhui daxue hanzhi fazhan yu yingyong yanjiu zhongxin 安徽大學漢字發展與應用研究中心 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2019), 1–7, and Huang Dekuan 黃德寬, “Anhui daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian gaishu” 安徽大學藏戰國竹簡概述, *Wenwu* 文物, 9, 2017, 54–9. For a comparison between the Anda manuscript and the *Mao shi*, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “A first reading of the Anhui University bamboo-slip *Shi Jing*”, *Bamboo and Silk*, 4/1, 2021, 1–44; and Dirk Meyer and Adam Craig Schwartz, *Songs of the Royal Zhōu and the Royal Shào: Shī 詩 of the Ānhuī University Manuscripts* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022).

² For a preliminary introduction to the *Shijing* materials excavated from this tomb, see Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, “Xi Han Haihunhou Liu He mu chutu zhujian *Shi* chutan” 西漢海昏侯劉賀墓出土竹簡《詩》初探, *Wenwu* 文物, 6, 2020, 63–72.

neglected issue of how stanzas in the *Shijing* are sequenced.³ We have learned that the sequence of stanzas within a poem was not fixed across all editions before the first century BCE, especially for poems in the “Guo feng” 國風 (Airs of the states). Scholars have compared the order of stanzas within these newly discovered texts with the order of stanzas in the *Mao shi* 毛詩 (Mao tradition of the *Shijing*) and attempted to explain the differences.⁴ Some scholars believe that there exists a single most “reasonable” (implicitly “original” in some cases) stanza permutation.⁵ However, as most repetitive stanzas and even some non-repetitive stanzas⁶ are essentially non-linear, and as there is no intrinsic order to the sequence of many poems in the “Guo feng”, I maintain that it is unproductive even to attempt to find a “superior” stanza order. Rather than comparing various stanza orders in this way, I would like to consider how the fact that there were changing stanza orders both in the Warring States period and after the Western Han might challenge traditional hermeneutics.

As the order of stanzas in the early period appears to have been unsettled, we have to re-evaluate the only early text that has clear references to stanza numbers, the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Commentary). While these references were previously considered evidence that a stanza order had been uniformly agreed upon before the empire,⁷ this opinion has been undermined by the Anda and Haihun manuscripts, which reveal that different stanza permutations existed in the Warring States period (453–221 BCE) and even in the early Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE). While some scholars use the *Shijing*-related materials in the

³ Before the discovery of the Anda manuscript, a few scholars had already paid attention to stanza permutations – though such studies are scattered – and earlier scholarship only had limited access to evidence from excavated texts. For example, both Zhao Maolin 趙茂林 and Ma Heng 馬衡 have noticed that several poems have different stanza orders between the *Mao shi* and the “three lineages” (*san jia* 三家) of the *Shijing*. See Zhao Maolin, *Liang Han sanjia Shi yanjiu* 兩漢三家詩研究 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2006) and Ma Heng, *Han shijing jicun* 漢石經集存 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957). Moreover, Martin Kern’s analysis of the four stanzas in the poem “Shi jiu” 鸛鳴 (“Cuckoo”; Mao no. 152) concludes that “they are nothing more than variations on one another”. See Martin Kern, “‘Xi shuai’ 蟋蟀 (‘cricket’) and its consequences: issues in early Chinese poetry and textual studies”, *Early China* 42, 2019, 25.

⁴ For example, Li Hui 李輝 has collected all the cases of different stanza orders from the Anda manuscript, Haihun strips, and other materials, and claims that repetitive stanzas led to stanzas being exchanged; Yuasa Kunihiro 湯淺邦弘 has examined the “stanzaic inversion” in the Anda manuscript, with a particular focus on “Sitie” 駟驥 (Iron-Black Horses; Mao no. 127); Cao Jianguo 曹建國 has suggested that the numerous discrepancies between the Anda manuscript and *Mao shi* are due to the former being used as a funerary object; and Xia Yunan 夏虞南 has studied the Haihun strips and attributed the different stanza sequences to the practice of “cutting out one stanza when reciting a poem”. See Li Hui 李輝, “*Shijing* zhangci yici kaolun” 《詩經》章次異次考論, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, 06, 2021, 52–64; Yuasa Kunihiro 湯淺邦弘, “On stanzaic inversion in the *Qin feng* 秦風 ode ‘Sitie’ 駟驥 (Iron-black horses) in the Anhui University Bamboo manuscript of the *Shi jing* 詩經 (Classic of Odes)”, *Bamboo and Silk*, 4/1, 2021, 149–71; Cao Jianguo 曹建國, “Misplacement, re-edition or funerary object: on the textual features of the Anhui *Shijing* Manuscript and its value”, *Bamboo and Silk*, 4/1, 2021, 94–127; and Xia Yunan 夏虞南, “Jianbo Shi wenben yu jinshuanben zhangxu chayi kaolun: cong Haihun jian Shi tanqi” 簡帛《詩》文本與今傳本章序差異考論——從海昏簡《詩》談起, *Jiangxi shifan daxue xuebao* (zhexue shehui kexue ban) 江西師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版), 54.06, 2021, 124–32.

⁵ For example, Li Hui, Yuasa Kunihiro, and Cao Jianguo have each expressed a preference for certain stanza permutations, which they argue are more “logical”, “rational”, or “closer to the original version”. However, as I will show below, many of their assertions lack sound justification. See Li, “*Shijing* zhangci yici kaolun”, 55–6; Yuasa, “On stanzaic inversion in the *Qin feng* 秦風 ode ‘Sitie’ 駟驥”, 167; and Cao, “Misplacement, re-edition or funerary object”, 112.

⁶ By “repetitive stanzas”, I am referring to instances where two or more stanzas within one poem have at least one couplet that is identical or at least similar. If there is only one line that is identical or similar, I do not classify it as a repetitive stanza. The only exceptions to this are Mao no. 128 and no. 154. These poems contain stanzas that share one similar or identical couplet, but as the other lines in those stanzas are unrelated and address different topics, I consider them to be poems with non-repetitive stanzas.

⁷ See Xu Zhigang 許志剛, “Hanjian yu *Shijing* chuanben” 漢簡與《詩經》傳本, *Wenxian* 文獻 1, 2000, 15.

Zuozhuan to support the way stanzas are ordered in the *Mao shi*,⁸ this approach is problematic due to the possibility that the *Zuozhuan* was revised according to the *Mao shi*.⁹ Nevertheless, the references to stanza numbers in the *Zuozhuan* may still reveal the early steps taken in the process towards stabilizing the order of stanzas, such as fixing non-repetitive stanzas in poems that are only partially repetitive.

Different stanza permutations also existed after the Western Han. The *Xiping shijing* 熹平石經 (stele inscriptions of Classics during the *Xiping* [172–178] era) at the end of Eastern Han (25–220) reveals differences in the way stanzas were ordered between the official *Lu shi* 魯詩 (Lu tradition of the *Shijing*) and the current *Mao shi*.¹⁰ Within the *Mao* transmission lineage, standardization has also been a long process. Some poems with repetitive stanzas might not have been fixed even as late as the third century CE. I will show below that the sequence of some stanzas in the *Mao shi* changed even after Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127–200) annotation of the text, taking several medieval comments on the “*Lü yi*” 綠衣 (The Green coat; Mao no. 27) and “*Zhonggu you tui*” 中谷有蓷 (In the valley there are motherworts; Mao no. 69) as examples.

The existence of various stanza permutations challenges a specific kind of traditional interpretation of the *Shijing*, namely the hermeneutical rule of “orderly progression”.¹¹ This approach imposes a progressive sequence on poems with repetitive stanzas and assumes that the current stanza order is unalterable and meaningful. This approach has been adopted in both pre-modern and modern annotations of the text. For example, according to Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), the three stanzas in the poem “*Fuyi*” 采芣苢 (Mao no. 8), which depicts women picking Chinese plantain, illustrate the process of gathering more and more wild vegetables. In this interpretation, the three stanzas establish a chronological order that can only be deciphered by interpreting the rhyming characters in each stanza in a particular way.¹² However, this kind of interpretation is missing from the Han commentaries. Just as establishing the order of stanzas took a long time, the development of this type of approach was gradual. As I will show below, the *Mao* and *Zheng* commentaries only applied the rule of orderly progression occasionally, while *Kong* applied it more frequently, a difference probably attributable to the disappearance of the other three lineages and the establishment of a single orthodox *Shijing* text.¹³ By the time of *Qing* (1644–1912) and modern commentators, however, this principle had

⁸ For example, Li Hui cites the *Zuozhuan* to support his argument that the stanza order of “*Huang niao*” 黃鳥 (Yellow birds; Mao no. 131) in the *Mao shi*, which aligns with that of the *Zuozhuan*, is more reasonable than the other three versions in either the *Anda* manuscript, the *Haihun* strips, or the *Xiping* inscription. See Li, “*Shijing zhangci yici kaolun*”, 55–6.

⁹ Martin Kern comes to a similar conclusion in his examination of textual variants in the *Shijing* in both excavated manuscripts and transmitted quotations. He notes that there appears to be “an overall retrospective standardization of the numerous *Odes* quotations throughout Eastern Zhou and early imperial texts”. See Martin Kern, “The *Odes* in excavated manuscripts”, in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 158.

¹⁰ According to Ma Heng's research, the first and second stanzas of “*Shi wei*” 式微 (Declining; Mao no. 36) are exchanged in the *Lu shi*, and the second and third stanzas of “*Huang niao*” 黃鳥 (Yellow birds; Mao no. 131) are reversed too. See Ma, *Han Shijing jicun*, 3, 7.

¹¹ Haun Saussy describes this rule as being an interpretive method of reading repetitive structures in a gradual way and translates this phrase from Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1918). See Haun Saussy, “Repetition, rhyme, and exchange in the *Book of Odes*”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57/2, 1997, 524.

¹² “*Fuyi*” 采芣苢 (The Plantain; Mao no. 8), in *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, annot. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 and Kong Yingda 孔穎達, 20 *juan*, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏, ed. Gong Kangyun 龔抗雲 et al. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), j. 1C, 61–3.

¹³ Martin Kern highlights that, while the *Mao* and *Zheng* commentaries had gained dominance since the Eastern Han, readers in the Six Dynasties period were still able to transcend the *Mao* exegesis. See Martin Kern, “Beyond the *Mao Odes: Shijing* reception in early medieval China”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, 2007, 140–42.

become widely accepted as the standard interpretation. Yao Jiheng 姚際恆 (1647–1715) was perhaps the first influential commentator to borrow critical vocabulary such as *zhangfa* 章法 (standards of structuring sections) from *wenzhang xue* 文章學 (the study of essays) to analyse the relationship between stanzas in the *Shijing*. Influenced by the presumption of *wenzhang xue* that a well-written composition should be logically arranged,¹⁴ Yao regarded the stanza permutation in the current *Mao shi* as significant and unchangeable. After the May Fourth Movement, the debate about whether repetitive stanzas are essentially the same or progressive became part of a larger discussion on the nature of the *Shijing*. Once the notion of “Guo feng” as a collection of folk songs took hold, repetitive stanzas came to be viewed as “developing”, rather than merely repetitive. This theory is now the mainstream interpretation and generally accepted by contemporary scholars, even after the discovery of the Anda manuscript. This belief in there being an unalterable stanza order not only influences how rhymes are interpreted but also shapes how lines and verses are annotated. Only by recognizing that the order of stanzas was neither fixed nor self-evident can we revise interpretations that derive from this assumption.

2. Analysing variations in stanza sequences in the “Guo feng”: Warring States Period to early Western Han

Both the Anda manuscript and Haihun strips provide clear information as to how stanzas were sequenced. The Haihun strips, while badly damaged, contain a record of the sequence of stanzas at the end of each stanza.¹⁵ These strips contain six poems in the “Guo feng” that have a different stanza order from the *Mao shi*.¹⁶ The well-preserved Anda manuscript includes 57 poems, all from the “Guo feng”,¹⁷ and both the slip numbers at the end of each strip and the markings on the back of the strips indicate how they were supposed to be arranged. Sixteen of these poems have different stanza sequences from the *Mao shi*, constituting almost 30 per cent in total.¹⁸ Many scholars have observed that the majority of the poems that have a different stanza order (13 out of 16) are repetitive (i.e. poems with repetitive stanzas), with some concluding from this that stanza inversion is more likely to occur in repetitive poems.¹⁹ However, Table 1 indicates that there is no difference in the proportion of stanza inversions between repetitive and non-repetitive poems in the Anda manuscript.

The limited number of examples of stanza inversions means that Table 1 may not be statistically significant. Nevertheless, the fact that three out of seven non-repetitive

¹⁴ The examination of the internal structure of an essay forms the essence of *wenzhang xue*. For a comprehensive exploration of the characteristics of *wenzhang xue*, see Wu Chengxue 吳承學 and He Shihai 何詩海, “Cong zhangji zhi xue dao wenzhang zhi xue” 從文章之學到章句之學, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 05, 2008, 26.

¹⁵ See Jiangxisheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 江西省文物考古研究所, Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所, and Jingzhou wenwu baohu zhongxin 荊州文物保護中心, “Jiangxi Nanchang Xi Han Haihunhou Liu He mu chutu jianpu” 江西南昌西漢海昏侯劉賀墓出土簡牘, *Wenwu* 文物, 11, 2018, 87–96.

¹⁶ See Li, “*Shijing* zhangci yici kaolun”, 61–62.

¹⁷ Although stanza exchange also occurs in the “Da ya” 大雅 (Major court hymns) and the “Xiao ya” 小雅 (Minor court hymns) sections of the Haihun strips, the focus of this discussion is on the “Guo feng”, since it contains the most poems with repetitive stanzas. Cases in the “Da ya” or the “Song” 頌 (Eulogies) sections could differ significantly and should be discussed separately.

¹⁸ Li Hui, Yan Shih-hsuan 顏世鉉, and Adam Smith identify 16 poems that have different stanza sequences in the Anda manuscript, including “Ding zhi fang zhong” 定之方中 (When Ding was at the zenith; Mao no. 50), although it is unclear whether this poem has a different stanza order. This paper follows their calculations. For a detailed description of the poems that have different stanza orders, see Li, “*Shijing* zhangci yici kaolun”, 52–64; Yan Shih-hsuan 顏世鉉, “A tentative discussion of some phenomena concerning early texts of the *Shijing*”, *Bamboo and Silk*, 4/1, 2021, 50–51; and Adam Smith and Maddalena Poli, “Establishing the text of the Odes: the Anhui University bamboo manuscript”, *BSOAS* 84/3, 2021, 551.

¹⁹ See Li, “*Shijing* zhangci yici kaolun”, 64.

Table 1. Percentages of stanza inversion in poems with repetitive and non-repetitive stanzas in the Anda manuscript

	Poems with different stanza permutations	Poems without different stanza permutations	Different stanza permutations (%)
Poems with repetitive stanzas ²⁰	Fully repetitive stanzas 11 (Mao nos 5; 18; 19; 22; 46; 113; 114; 118; 121; 131; 133) Partially repetitive stanzas 2 (Mao nos 3; 126)	Total 37	26.0%
Poems with non-repetitive stanzas	3 (Mao no. 50; 127; 128)	4	42.9%

poems have a different stanza permutation in the Anda manuscript does challenge the idea that stanza inversion is a characteristic primarily of repetitive poems. Although many poems with different stanza permutations are repetitive, this is likely due to the large number of repetitive poems in the “Guo feng” (138 out of 160). Non-repetitive poems in the “Guo feng” may also have undergone stanza inversion.

Moreover, scholars have noted that in most cases where stanzas in the Anda manuscript have been inverted (11 out of 16), the first stanza remains the same while other stanzas trade places. Eight out of 12 such cases in the Haihun strips are the same, and the first stanza is unchanged.²¹ The first stanza of a poem appears to be more stable than other stanzas, even in fully repetitive poems. Some scholars suggest that whether the first stanza was stabilized or not really depended on its first line. For example, Yuasa Kunihiro 湯淺邦弘 states that when the first line appears exclusively in the first stanza, the first stanza “is less likely to undergo inversion”, but when it is present in all stanzas, every stanza is likely to be inverted.²² Indeed, the first lines in each stanza of all five poems in the Anda manuscript that have undergone first-stanza inversion (Mao nos 19, 46, 113, 114, and 131) match this description. However, two poems in the Haihun strips (Mao nos 90 and 262) break this trend: the first lines in the first stanzas of these poems are unique, but the first stanzas have still been inverted. How do we explain this difference?

The first lines of each poem are important largely because titles are usually derived from them.²³ Compared to the first line, the title of a poem seems to function more effectively as an indication of the stability of the first stanza. Once the title is established, the title helps facilitate memorization of the poem and aids in differentiating one poem from

²⁰ Based on my definition of repetitive stanzas (see n. 6), 138 of the 160 poems in the “Guo feng” have repetitive stanzas. These repetitive poems can be categorized into two groups: those with “fully repetitive stanzas” and those with “partially repetitive stanzas”. In the former all the stanzas repeat, while in the latter there is at least one non-repetitive stanza.

²¹ For all cases where the order of stanzas changes, see Li, “*Shijing zhangci yici kaolun*”, 61–2.

²² Yuasa, “On stanzaic inversion in the *Qin feng* 秦風 Ode ‘Sitie’ 駟驥”, 155.

²³ Only four out of 160 titles in the “Guo feng” are not taken from the first couplet. They are Mao nos. 9, 25, 48, and 135. The titles for the latter three come from the last line of the first stanzas.

another. Users and transmitters of the *Shijing* may have easily been prompted by the title to remember how the poem begins. The significance of titles can be seen in the comparison of two fully repetitive poems that have different permutations, “Bao yu” 鵠羽 (Plumes of the bustards; Mao no. 121) and “Fengyu” 風雨 (The wind and rain; Mao no. 90). The first stanza of the former remains unchanged in the Anda manuscript, while the first stanza of the latter (in the Haihun strips) is the second stanza in the *Mao shi*. In both poems, the first lines appear only in the first stanza, but in “Bao yu” the title only appears in the first stanza. In “Fengyu” the title recurs in every stanza, and thus it could not be used to help stabilize the first stanza.²⁴ Therefore, it seems that titles play a more crucial role in fixing the first stanza than the first line.²⁵

Although it is unclear whether all the poems in the Anda manuscript had the same titles as those in the *Mao shi* (the only two extant titles are the same), from other excavated or looted texts that mention titles – such as the “Kongzi shilun” 孔子詩論 (Confucius’s discussion of the *Shijing*) in the Shanghai Museum strips – we know that most titles (in this case 52 out of 59) are the same as those in the *Mao shi*. That is to say – assuming that the looted “Kongzi shilun” is an authentic ancient text – most titles were fixed by the third century BCE, and some of the first stanzas were likely fixed in turn by the titles.

In Table 1, repetitive poems are further categorized by whether they are fully or partially repetitive. As shown above, stanzas in fully repetitive poems are relatively unfixed and the order of the stanzas is prone to change, though not if the title consists of unique words that only appear in the first stanza. Similarly, partially repetitive poems allow for the position of repetitive stanzas to be swapped and exchanged even while non-repetitive stanzas are rather stable. For example, the four-stanza “Juan’er” 卷耳 (Juan’er plant; Mao no. 3) has two non-repetitive stanzas (the first and last stanzas) and two repetitive middle stanzas. In the Anda manuscript, the first and last stanzas of this poem are the same, while the middle two stanzas trade places. Likewise, in Mao no. 126 in the Anda manuscript, only the non-repetitive stanza remains in the same place while the two repetitive stanzas switch positions. In brief, non-repetitive stanzas in partially repetitive poems in the “Guo feng” are always located at the beginning or end of a poem,²⁶ and it seems less likely that these stanzas would have been made to trade places.

To summarize, the analysis of early stanza permutations reveals three points. First, it seems no less likely that non-repetitive poems will undergo stanza inversion than repetitive poems. Second, the first stanzas in a poem are relatively stable, particularly when the title appears there exclusively. Finally, non-repetitive stanzas in partially repetitive poems, which are usually located at the beginning or end of a poem, are more likely to be fixed than are repetitive stanzas.

3. Different stanza orders after the early Western Han

Even after the establishment of the empire, poems in the *Shijing* had stanza orders that varied. The few surviving fragments of the *Xiping* stele inscription indicate that by the

²⁴ This also holds true for Mao no. 262, which has a unique first line but still undergoes first-stanza inversion in the Haihun strips.

²⁵ Similarly, Adam Smith and Maddalena Poli suggest that the *Shijing* in the Anda manuscript is reproduced “from standard lists of ode titles which they memorized”, although they do not elaborate on the rationale behind this claim, nor do they distinguish between the function of the first lines and the titles. See Smith and Poli, “Establishing the text of the *Odes*: the Anhui University bamboo manuscript”, 556.

²⁶ There are 103 fully repetitive poems and 35 partially repetitive poems in the “Guo feng”. Fifteen partially repetitive poems have a unique first stanza and 21 have a unique last stanza.

end of the second century CE, the order of stanzas for some poems in the official *Lu shi* was different from the order in the current *Mao shi*, which suggests that different scholarly lineages during the Han dynasty may have had their own preferred stanza arrangements. Some 300 years after the three lineages had been established as official traditions, there was still no stanza order that was universal across the different schools.

Moreover, even within one single lineage, the *Mao shi*, the order of stanzas could still be easily changed. The early transmission process of the *Mao shi* is highly obscure, and the text as it exists today is an accumulative patchwork that contains many layers of commentary.²⁷ Since the *Mao shi* was not established in the court until the end of the Western Han dynasty, it was not as settled as other *sanjia* recensions in the early stages of its transmission.²⁸ Even during the Eastern Han dynasty, when many famous scholars valued and annotated the *Mao shi*, it was still a marginal *Shijing* tradition. It was only after Zheng Xuan's exegesis (i.e. *Mao shi zhuan jian* 毛詩傳箋) at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty that the *Mao shi* began to become the mainstream tradition of the *Shijing*. There was, therefore, a period of nearly 400 years when the *Mao shi* was not fixed and when it could have been easily altered.

Although Zheng contributed substantially to the stabilization of the *Shijing*, his annotation was fiercely attacked by Wang Su 王肅 (195–256) almost immediately after his death.²⁹ This led to 400 years of disagreement between proponents of Wang and Zheng.³⁰ This rivalry was only settled in the 600s, after Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) stabilized the characters in the five classics at the emperor's behest in 630 and Kong Yingda presented his exegeses on the five classics – including his *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (The corrected interpretation of the *Mao shi*) – in 641. Twelve years later, Kong's work was honoured as the official standard for the imperial examination. Only at this point was the *Mao shi* truly fixed.

I will provide two examples showing that the stanza order of the *Mao shi* was altered after Zheng Xuan. One is found in Zheng's exegesis, and the other is from scattered *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the states) comments. Both suggest that there may have been another version of the *Mao shi* (or even several versions) that contained different stanza sequences around the third century CE.

²⁷ Commentaries in the *Mao shi* contain many kinds of annotations that cannot be neatly categorized. See Feng Haofei 馮浩菲, *Mao shi xungu yanjiu* 毛詩訓詁研究 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1988), 120–203. For evidence that some comments were added later, see Zhao Maolin 趙茂林, “Mao zhuan chengshu ji dingxing kaolun” 毛傳成書及定型考論, *Guoxue xuekan* 國學學刊 3, 2013, 183–93.

²⁸ While the other three lineages remained relatively steady in the Han, the *Mao shi* may have still been changing. For example, Yu Wanli notes that “Du renshi” 都人士 (Those officers of the capital; Mao no. 225) in the *Mao shi* contains an additional stanza at the beginning that is not found in the other three lineages. It is likely that some *Mao* scholars added this stanza, perhaps driven by their desire to excel over other lineages before the *Mao shi* was established in the court. See Yu Wanli 虞萬里, “Cong jianben ‘ziyi’ lun ‘Du renshi’ shi de zhuihe” 從簡本《緇衣》論《都人士》詩的綴合, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 6, 2007, 4–14.

²⁹ The debate between Zheng and Wang is a heated topic in the study of the medieval hermeneutical tradition of the *Shijing*. In the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Annotated Catalog of the Complete Imperial Library) this debate is depicted as a bitter controversy lasting several hundred years until Kong Yingda's exegeses were presented to the throne. See “Mao shi zhengyi tiyao” 毛詩正義提要 in *Siku quanshu zongmu huiding* 四庫全書總目匯訂 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 15.450–51. For a discussion of Zheng and Wang's comments on the *Shijing*, see Xu Peiling 許佩鈴, “Shu Mao’ yu ‘nan Zheng’: Wang Su *Shijing* xue de yujing huanyuan ji lishi jiangou” “述毛”與“難鄭”——王肅《詩經》學的語境還原及歷史建構, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 02, 2016, 111–50.

³⁰ Since the late Six Dynasties, the *Mao shi* has remained nearly identical to the version that exists today, as can be seen in the Dunhuang 敦煌 manuscripts. The *Shijing* in the *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (Explaining words in the classics) is also similar to the current version.

“Zhonggu you tui” 中谷有蕓 (In the valley there are motherworts; Mao no. 69) has a typical structure of three fully repetitive stanzas, with the title appearing in each stanza. The first couplets of each stanza in the sequence of the current *Mao shi* are listed below.

In the valley there are motherworts, scorched are the **dry** ones.

中谷有蕓，暵其乾矣。

In the valley there are motherworts, scorched are the **withered** ones.

中谷有蕓，暵其脩矣。

In the valley there are motherworts, scorched are the **wet** ones.³¹

中谷有蕓，暵其濕矣。³²

The rhyming words in the current *Mao shi* are *gan* 乾 (dry), *xiu* 脩³³ (withered), and *shi* 濕 (wet), in that order. However, Zheng Xuan expounds on the sequence of this poem differently:

When motherworts are damaged by water, at first, they become **wet**, then they **wither**, and after a long time, they become **dry**.

離之傷于水，始則濕，中而脩，久而乾。³⁴

It seems that Zheng saw a version of the *Shijing* that reversed the first and last stanzas, and he naturally followed this sequence in his summary. When Kong Yingda came to interpret Zheng’s annotation, seeing as he was working from the same version of the *Mao shi* as we have today, he struggled to reconcile the inconsistency:

[The poet] first presents what is important, and then goes back to examine the origin. Therefore, the first two lines at the beginning of each stanza mention *gan* first, then *xiu*, and finally *shi*.

先舉其重，然後倒本其初，故章首二句先言乾，次言脩，後言濕。³⁵

Kong’s rationalization of the sequence is rather unconvincing. Since the analysis of the Anda manuscript above has shown that the order of stanzas in fully repetitive poems could easily be altered, this further suggests that the concept of an authorial arrangement of stanzas may be an illusion. Regardless, the discrepancy between Zheng’s analysis and Kong’s comment implies that the order of the stanzas of this poem in the *Mao shi* changed after Zheng’s annotation.

“Lü yi” 綠衣 (The green coat; Mao no. 27) is similar in that the order of stanzas in this poem appears to have been changed after Zheng. We can infer this from a reference in the *Guoyu*, in which a female character recites the third stanza of it (賦《綠衣》之三章).³⁶ Wei Zhao 韋昭 (204–273), probably the most influential medieval commentator of the *Guoyu*, illustrates this recitation as follows:

³¹ Translation adapted and revised from Karlgren (trans.), *The Book of Odes*, 47. Karlgren’s translation of the character *shi* 濕 in the last line as “dry” is based on Wang Yinzhi’s 王引之 (1766–1834) assessment. As there is no evidence to support this theory, however, I have opted for the more standard translation of this character as “wet”.

³² “Zhonggu you tui” 中谷有蕓, in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 4A, 306–7.

³³ According to the *Mao* commentary, *xiu* refers to an intermediate state between dry and wet and means “almost dry” (*qie gan* 且乾).

³⁴ See Zheng’s annotation of “Zhonggu you tui” 中谷有蕓, in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 4A, 307.

³⁵ Zheng’s annotation of “Zhonggu you tui” 中谷有蕓, in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 4A, 307.

³⁶ Wei Zhao (annot.), *Guoyu* 國語 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1965), 71.

“Lü yi” is in the “Bei feng” section of the *Shijing*. The third stanza of it says, “I yearn for the departed ones, who really win my heart”.

綠衣，詩邶風也。其三章曰：「我思古人，實獲我心。」³⁷

Wei Zhao was likely referring here to the *Mao shi*, not one of the other three recensions, since a commentary on the *Mao shi* under his name is listed in the imperial library catalogue in the *Sui shu* 隋書 (*History of the Sui*). However, the couplets he quotes are not in stanza three in the present *Mao shi*. They appear instead in the last stanza (stanza four). If this annotation is not merely a mistake, then the version of the *Mao shi* that Wei saw was different from the one that currently exists. Both “Lü yi” and “Zhonggu you tui” illustrate that even after the third century CE the sequence of stanzas was still not stable for some poems with repeated stanzas.

This prompts us to reconsider at least three questions. First, how should we understand the references to specific stanza numbers in the *Zuozhuan*? Second, is it possible to find the “best” stanza order among all the different permutations? Is there an intrinsic order across stanzas in the *Shijing*? Third, since the order of stanzas has now been called into question, what do we do with traditional interpretations based on the idea that stanzas must progress teleologically and in an orderly manner, interpretations that presuppose an unalterable sequence of stanzas? How has this hermeneutic principle been established? What interpretations will have to be reconsidered when we abandon it?

4. Rethinking accounts of stanza numbers in the *Zuozhuan*

How might unstable stanza sequences affect our understanding of early texts? If all the quotations from the *Shijing* included only a few lines or couplets – as is the case with quotations from many pre-Qin texts – a varied stanza sequence would be of little concern. However, some quotations from the *Shijing* in the *Zuozhuan* are quite exceptional, in that they even mention the specific stanza being quoted (e.g. “reciting stanza X of a poem called Y” 賦某詩之某章).³⁸ This unique quotation pattern, referred to by a historical figure in the *Zuozhuan* as “cutting out a stanza when reciting the *Shijing*” (賦詩斷章 賦詩斷章),³⁹ suggests that these reciters are more concerned with the meaning of a specific stanza rather than with the poem as a whole. This approach was later emphasized by Du Yu 杜預 (222–285), one of the most influential pre-Tang commentators on the *Zuozhuan*.⁴⁰ Before the discovery of the Anda manuscript, some scholars treated these references to specific stanza numbers as evidence of the existence of a fixed version of

³⁷ Wei Zhao, *Guoyu* 國語, 71.

³⁸ In the *Zuozhuan*, there are 20 cases where a stanza is mentioned in this way. They are Lord Wen 7 ([荀林父]賦《板》之三章); Lord Wen 13 (子家賦《載馳》之四章; 文子賦《采芣》之四章); Lord Cheng 9 ([公]賦《韓奕》之五章; [穆姜]賦《綠衣》之卒章); Lord Xiang 14 ([公]使大師歌《巧言》之卒章); Lord Xiang 16 ([穆叔]賦《鴻鴈》之卒章); Lord Xiang 19 ([穆叔]賦《載馳》之四章); Lord Xiang 20 ([季武子]賦《常棣》之七章以卒; [季武子]賦《魚麗》之卒章); Lord Xiang 27 (子西賦《黍苗》之四章; 武請受其[《隰桑》]卒章); Lord Zhao 1 (《小旻》之卒章善矣; [令尹]賦《大明》之首章; 趙孟賦《小宛》之二章; 子皮賦《野有死麋》之卒章); Lord Zhao 2 (季武子賦《綿》之卒章; 武子賦《節》之卒章); Lord Zhao 4 (《七月》之卒章, 藏冰之道也); and Lord Ding 10 (臣之業, 在《揚水》卒章之四言矣). In Lord Ding 9, a comment by a gentleman also makes reference to the third stanza of Mao no. 42. Since this is not said by a specific protagonist, however, I would not include it.

³⁹ “Lord Xiang 28” in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, annot. Du Yu 杜預 and Kong Yingda 孔穎達, 60 *juan*, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏, ed. Pu Weizhong 浦衛忠 et al. (Beijing: Beijingdaxue, 2000), j. 38, 1239.

⁴⁰ Du suggests that when a title of a poem is referred to in the *Zuozhuan* without a specific stanza number, the reciter would often refer to the content of the first stanza (其全稱詩篇者, 多取首章之義). Although this theory is disputed by Liu Xuan 劉炫 (546–613), the prevalence and importance of “cutting out a stanza” in the *Zuozhuan* should be acknowledged. See Du’s annotation in “Lord Xi 23” in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, j. 15, 474.

the *Shijing* in the Spring and Autumn period (770–453 BCE), since the references indicated that both speakers and listeners would know which stanza the quotations were referring to.⁴¹ However, this assumption has now been shown to be invalid. Given that there were several stanza sequences at the time, how could the references to a stanza number have been comprehensible?

Most accounts of stanza numbers in the *Zuozhuan* (16 out of 20) are written from a third-person perspective. The protagonist himself does not say “stanza X of poem Y”; instead it is always presented in the narrative as “someone recited stanza X of poem Y”, with the stanza number written down by the narrator (or by later editors). Therefore, the problem of identifying which stanza was recited would have only concerned readers of the *Zuozhuan*, not the listeners in the scene. Since many “Guo feng” poems had different stanza sequences in the early period, mentioning a stanza number would only have been meaningful if there had been a relatively settled *Shijing* version that circulated within a certain group of readers alongside the *Zuozhuan*. This would have ensured that readers could have accurately identified the corresponding stanza without confusion. The *Mao shi* is the most likely candidate for what this specific version would have been, for two reasons. First, according to the limited records of the history of the text,⁴² the *Mao shi* is probably the version of the *Shijing* with the closest relationship to the *Zuozhuan* in the early transmission process. Master Mao 毛公, the first traceable teacher of the *Mao shi*,⁴³ passed the text on to Guan Changqing 貫長卿 (fl. the late second century BCE), who also learned the *Zuozhuan* from another teacher. This is the earliest record of a version of the *Shijing* and the *Zuozhuan* intersecting. At the end of the Western Han, the *Mao shi* was established in the court for the first time, together with the *Zuozhuan*. In the Eastern Han dynasty, these two texts were always mentioned together and many famous scholars learned both at the same time.⁴⁴ The transmission process of the *Mao shi* and the *Zuozhuan* were intertwined through the two Han dynasties. Second, because these two classics were frequently circulated together, they inevitably influenced each other.⁴⁵ Many researchers have noticed that many parts of the *Mao* commentary are identical to the corresponding accounts in the *Zuozhuan*.⁴⁶ In addition, the

⁴¹ See Xu, “Hanjian yu *Shijing* chuanben”, 15.

⁴² Some scholars have questioned the authenticity of the genealogy of classical studies recorded in the *Hanshu* 漢書. For example, Cai Liang points out that the connections the *Hanshu* claims existed between the interpretive schools that emerged after Emperor Zhao (r. 87–74 BCE) and the scholarly lineages compiled by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86 BCE) are questionable. Nevertheless, the records of scholarly lineages in the *Hanshu* remain the most dependable source of information on the early transmission of the *Mao shi*, and I rely on them as the basis for my arguments presented below.

⁴³ The transmission process of the *Mao shi* only seems to stretch back further and further. The *Shiji* does not mention the *Mao shi*, although a person with the surname Mao is recorded in the *Hanshu* (Mao Gong 毛公). Later, Zheng Xuan claimed that there were two Maos: Elder Mao (Da Mao Gong 大毛公) and Younger Mao (Xiao Mao Gong 小毛公). A scholar in the Three Kingdoms period (220–280 CE), Lu Ji 陸璣 (fl. early third century), provided a highly dubious lineage that dated back to Confucius and Xunzi 荀子 (c. 313–238 BCE) for two Maos, Mao Heng 毛亨 and Mao Chang 毛萇, although the names of both could hardly be seen in earlier texts. See *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 1A, 2, and Lu Ji 陸璣, *Mao shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 毛詩草木鳥獸蟲魚疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 21. Another scholar in this period, Xu Zheng 徐整 (fl. early third century), provided a different lineage that is not as widely accepted. For Xu’s theory, see Wu Chengshi 吳承仕, *Jingdianshiwen xulu shuzheng* 經典釋文序錄疏證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 88.

⁴⁴ This includes Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (?–83), Jia Kui 賈逵 (30–101), Zheng Xuan, and Fu Qian 服虔 (fl. late second century).

⁴⁵ Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908) suggests that the reason the two texts quote each other frequently is that both originated from scholars in Hejian 河間. See Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue tonglun* 經學通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), 149.

⁴⁶ Chen Huan 陳奐 (1786–1863) identifies more than 50 cases where the *Mao shi* copies passages from the *Zuozhuan* in *Shi Maoshi zhuan* 詩毛氏傳疏. Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) in *Shi gu wei* 詩古微 argues that

Shijing quotations in the *Zuozhuan* are, when compared to the text in all the lineages, the most similar to the text of the *Mao shi*.⁴⁷ In other words, not only did the *Mao shi* benefit from the *Zuozhuan* when developing its interpretation, but the *Shijing*-related materials in the *Zuozhuan* were also revised according to the *Mao shi*.

Therefore, we should be very cautious about using the *Zuozhuan* to support the sequence order of the *Mao shi*, since the transmission and connection between the two is essentially circular. For example, the Anda manuscript, the Haihun strips, the *Xiping* inscription, and the *Mao shi* each have a different permutation of “Huang niao” 黃鳥 (Yellow birds; Mao no. 131).⁴⁸ Many scholars have concluded that the stanza order in the *Mao shi* is the most reasonable.⁴⁹ Their evidence is one entry from the *Zuozhuan* which discusses three outstanding gentlemen who were buried with the deceased Lord Mu of Qin (r. 659–621 BCE).

The Liege of Qin, Renhao, died. He took three sons of the Ziche family, Yanxi, Zhonghang, and Zhenhu to be buried with him. They were all good men of Qin. People of the capital grieved over them and composed “Huang niao” for them.
秦伯任好卒，以子車氏之三子奄息、仲行、鍼虎為殉，皆秦之良也，國人哀之，為之賦《黃鳥》。⁵⁰

The three stanzas in the *Mao shi* list the three men in the same sequence as in the *Zuozhuan*, while other permutations do not. Consequently, some scholars argue that the stanza sequence in the *Mao shi* is fully justified. They believe that Zhonghang 仲行 must be placed in the middle, since *zhong* 仲 means “the second sibling”.⁵¹ However, this theory faces some intractable problems. First, we know nothing about these three individuals other than their names, and we cannot confirm whether Yanxi 奄息, Zhonghang, and Zhenhu 鍼虎 are given names or style names. The *Mao* commentary claims that they are given names, while the *Zheng* annotation suggests that Zhonghang is a style name and the others are given names. Given that terms of seniority among siblings usually appear only in style names, inferring the seniority of these three people based on their given names is far-fetched. Moreover, there is no indication that the names in the *Zuozhuan* are arranged in any particular order, let alone a “correct” order. Even if the three names were intentionally arranged, the account in the *Zuozhuan* may have been revised according to the *Mao shi* as mentioned above, making this insufficient proof to show the superiority of the stanza order in the *Mao shi*. It is

many of the matching passages are due to the deliberate distortions made by Liu Xin’s 劉歆 (50 BCE–23 CE) defence of the *Mao shi*. Both observations show that there is a close relationship between the two texts. For Wei’s argument, see Huang Kaiguo 黃開國, “Shiguwei gong Liu Xin de wanggai Zuozhuan” 《詩古微》攻劉歆的妄改《左傳》, *Shaoyang xueyuan xuebao* (*shehui kexue ban*) 邵陽學院學報 (社會科學版) 8.1, 2009, 1–4.

⁴⁷ For the percentage of textual variants between the four scholarly lineages and between quotations of the *Shijing* in the pre-Qin period, see Zhao Maolin 趙茂林, *Liang Han sanjiashi yanjiu* 兩漢三家詩研究 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2006), 70. While quotations from the *Shijing* in the *Zuozhuan* are most similar to the version of the text in the *Mao shi*, some textual variants also resemble those found in the *sanjia* recensions. This could be due to the dominance of the *Qi shi* 齊詩 (*Qi* tradition of the *Shijing*) and the *Lu shi* in the Han dynasty.

⁴⁸ If we consider the *Mao shi* permutation to be 1–2–3, then the stanza order in the Anda manuscript is 2–3–1, the sequence in the Haihun strips is 3–1–2, and the order in the *Xiping* stele inscription is 1–3–2.

⁴⁹ For example, see Li, “*Shijing* zhangci yici kaolun”, 55–56; and Kang Tingshan 康廷山, “Lun Anda jian *Shijing* yu jinben *Mao shi* de zhangci yitong” 論安大簡《詩經》與今本《毛詩》的章次異同, *Zhongguo shige yanjiu* 中國詩歌研究, 02, 2021, 28.

⁵⁰ “Lord Wen 6” in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, j. 19, 588.

⁵¹ Yang Ling 楊玲 and Shang Xiaoyu 尚小雨, “Bijiao shiyu xia de andajian *Shijing* zhangci huyi yiwen chansheng yuanyin he jiazhi tanxi” 比較視域下的安大簡《詩經》章次互易異文產生原因和價值探析, *Weinan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 渭南師範學校學報, 35.10, 2020, 70–71.

impossible to determine the most “reasonable” sequence of the three men, and early readers of the *Shijing* seem to have been unconcerned about the sequence, as evidenced by there being four different permutations. “Huang niao” is simply a typical example of a fully repetitive poem in which it is equally likely that every stanza could be moved.

Although the *Zuozhuan* cannot be used to choose the “best” sequence of stanzas, the references to stanza numbers in it can still provide some valuable information. Out of the 20 instances where stanza numbers are mentioned, 16 are in the “Xiao ya” and the “Guo feng”. These cases are sorted in Table 2.

Table 2. References to stanza numbers in the *Zuozhuan* (“Xiao ya” and “Guo feng” only)

	Last stanza mentioned	Other stanzas mentioned
Partially repetitive poems	Mao no. 27, no. 116, ⁵² [no. 170], ⁵³ no. 181, no. 191, no. 228	Mao no. 54 (stanza four) [twice], no. 167 (stanza four), no. 227 (stanza four)
Non-repetitive poems	Mao no. 23, no. 154, no. 164, no. 195, no. 198	Mao no. 196 (stanza two)
Total	11 times	5 times

It is not clear whether all the stanza divisions in the *Zuozhuan* match those in the current *Mao shi*. Since these two texts are closely interrelated, I have tentatively used the stanza sequence in the *Mao shi* as a reference. We can see from Table 2 that the last stanzas are especially interesting, with 11 of 16 examples being mentions of the final stanza. Why are the last stanzas especially noteworthy? Why did writers and compilers of *Zuozhuan* believe that protagonists would remember and recognize the last stanzas in particular? The last stanzas of fully repetitive poems are unlikely to have been settled, as demonstrated by the analysis of the Anda manuscript and the Haihun strips. However, the non-repetitive stanzas in partially repetitive poems and non-repetitive poems with a linear structure are relatively stable.⁵⁴ Almost all of the eleven cases in the *Zuozhuan* have non-repetitive last stanzas.

The importance of the last stanza is also supported by the Shanghai Museum manuscript. “Kongzi shilun” discusses nearly 60 poems, but there are only two mentions of a specific stanza. The first mention is to the fourth stanza of “Guan ju” 關雎 (Fishhawks; Mao no. 1) (“The fourth stanza is an analogy”. 其四章則喻矣),⁵⁵ and the

⁵² The poem referred to in the *Zuozhuan* is called “Yang shui” 揚水 (Coursing water), but the current *Mao shi* does not have a poem with this exact title; instead, there is only “Yang zhi shui” 揚之水. Moreover, there are three poems under this title: Mao nos 68, 92, and 116. The first two are fully repetitive poems, while the last stanza of Mao no. 116 differs from the previous stanzas. Therefore, many commentators of the *Zuozhuan*, including Du Yu and Kong Yingda, believe that this “Yang shui” refers to Mao no. 116, as its last stanza aligns with the context provided by the *Zuozhuan* excerpt. I have followed this interpretation and included Mao no. 116 in Table 2.

⁵³ Mao no. 170 is divided into six stanzas by Mao and Zheng, with the first three stanzas and the last three stanzas being repetitive respectively. Since the last three stanzas have only six lines in total, these stanzas, when separated from the preceding stanzas, could be considered unique last stanzas. Accordingly, I have classified this poem as being partially repetitive.

⁵⁴ According to Chen Anzhe 陳詒哲 and Li Cheng’s 李成 count, 60 per cent of poems in the *Shijing* have a different last stanza from the previous stanzas. See Chen Anzhe 陳詒哲 and Li Cheng 李成, “*Shijing* luanci kao” 詩經“亂”辭考, *Hebei shifan xueyuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 河北師範大學學報(哲學社會科學版) 40.4, 2017, 67–8.

⁵⁵ It is unclear whether this “Guan ju” has the same stanza permutation as the one in the *Mao shi*. Mao and Zheng commentaries present different divisions of this poem: the former splits it into three stanzas, while the

other is to the last stanza of “Da tian” 大田 (The big field; Mao no. 212) (“The last stanza of *Datian* is about understanding [proper] phrasing and having command of ritual.” 大田之卒章，知言而有禮).⁵⁶ The non-repetitive “Da tian”, which belongs to the “Xiao ya” section, has a last stanza that is distinct from other stanzas. It seems that by the third century BCE, some non-repetitive last stanzas in the “Xiao ya” and “Guo feng” were probably fixed, and they were likely arranged at the end of the poems.

According to Table 2, other stanzas of partially repetitive poems, such as the fourth stanzas of “Guan ju” and “Zai chi” 載馳 (Gallop; Mao no. 54), are also mentioned sometimes, though much less frequently than the last stanza. “Guan ju” and “Zai chi” may be among the most popular and influential poems in the “Guo feng”.⁵⁷ If the records in the *Zuozhuan* are to be trusted, “Zai chi” is one of the few poems in the entire *Shijing* that has a known author and which was composed in response to a famous contemporary event. It was being quoted by other politicians in official meetings only a few decades after its composition. As for “Guan ju”, it is not only the first poem in the *Shijing*,⁵⁸ but it is also the most well-known song in the corpus. “Guan ju” is often referenced for all of the “Guo feng”, and it is the only poem from the *Shijing* that Confucius comments on not once but twice in the *Analects*.⁵⁹ This poem was evidently of extraordinary importance. Significant and popular songs often receive greater attention, and the stanzas within them are likely to have been fixed earlier than stanzas in less famous ones. Overall, different poems and stanzas were stabilized at different times. Several well-known poems probably had a rather fixed stanza order at least by the Warring States period, and non-repetitive stanzas in partially repetitive poems (normally the first or last stanzas) are also more likely to have been settled in a specific position by this time. This observation aligns with my previous analysis of partially repetitive poems in the Anda manuscript.

5. Is there an intrinsic stanza order?

Many scholars have compared various stanza permutations with the *Mao shi*, with the aim of identifying the most “reasonable” order. However, is there an intrinsic order across stanzas? Can we possibly find it?

In the first section of this paper, I proposed that an analysis of the Anda manuscript suggests that non-repetitive poems in the “Guo feng” may have been no less likely than repetitive poems to have undergone stanza inversion. This conclusion may seem, at first glance, counterintuitive. Some non-repetitive poems do have an apparently linear structure. For example, the three stanzas in the “Cai pin” 采蘋 (Gathering the waterplants; Mao no. 15) describe the process of picking waterplants, placing them in vessels, and finally depositing them in the ancestral shrine. Since these three actions happen in chronological order, it would be hard to alter the sequence of the stanzas. However, not many non-repetitive poems in the “Guo feng” have this kind of unalterable stanza order. Some stanzas in the same poem are fundamentally about the same thing, but

latter separates it into five. The “Kongzi shilun” mentions the fourth stanza of this “Guan ju”, indicating that it must have had at least five stanzas.

⁵⁶ See *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu (yi)* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書（一），Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 ed., 6 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), 1: 139, 158.

⁵⁷ As for the two poems in the “Xiao ya”, Mao no. 167 and no. 227, they were probably used in military-related ritual ceremonies. It is likely that officials and noblemen would have been familiar with them due to how frequently they would have been performed.

⁵⁸ The sequence of poems in the *Shijing* prior to the Han dynasty remains uncertain, but in the Anda manuscript “Guan ju” is the first poem in the corpus. Since at least the very beginning of the Western Han dynasty this poem has been widely accepted as the start of the *Shijing*. See Sima Qian, *Shiji*, v. 6, j. 47, 1936.

⁵⁹ *Analects* 3/20, and 8/15.

the perspective changes. Take the non-repetitive “Pao you kuye” 匏有苦葉 (The gourds have bitter leaves; Mao no. 34) for example. All four stanzas in this poem describe the scene of a young lady waiting for a gentleman on the riverbank. Some stanzas are from the point of view of the lady and directly express her thoughts, while other stanzas describe the surroundings, but there is no underlying order across the stanzas as a whole. For these non-repetitive poems, the order of the stanzas can be easily changed without affecting the content, just as with repetitive poems.

While one may be tempted to think of non-repetitive stanzas as intrinsically fixed in their order, it is often impossible to determine any particular sequential logic between them. Therefore, the attempt to search for the most “logical” permutation might be unproductive. For example, both Yuasa Kunihiro 湯淺邦弘 and Kang Tingshan 康廷山 suppose that the Anda version of “Sitie” 駟驥 (Iron-Black Horses; Mao no. 127) is better than the *Mao shi* version (in which the last two stanzas are reversed), with Kang arguing that the order of the three stanzas in the Anda manuscript is more logical, for it depicts the hunting event starting with its inception (stanza one), then moves to the preparation for the hunt (stanza two), and finally shows the hunt itself (stanza three).⁶⁰ Yuasa similarly believes that the spiritual composure of the rider in stanza two “enables success in the subsequent hunt (stanza three)” and further states that “the Anda preserves the original state of the text, whereas the *Mao shi* seems to have been miswritten”.⁶¹ Nevertheless, all three stanzas are essentially about the same topic – a hunt – and the *Mao shi* version may be equally valid. The *Mao shi* version is as follows:

Stanza one	Stanza two	Stanza three
Four iron-black horses are very big, the six reins are in hand; The ruler's favourites, follow him to the hunt.	They present these male animals of the season, the males in season are very large; The ruler says, “To the left of them”, and then he lets go of his arrows and hits.	He moves in the northern park, his four horses are well-trained. Light carriages, with bells on the horses' bits, convey the long and short-mouthed dogs. 遊於北園，四馬既閑。 輶車鸞鑣，載獫狁騶。 ⁶²
駟驥孔阜，六轡在手。 公之媚子，從公於狩。	奉辰牡，辰牡孔碩。 公曰左之，舍拔則獲。	

Zheng Xuan interprets the last stanza as a flashback depicting the way the hunt was carried out, thus stating that it should precede the second stanza. However, there is a lack of substantial textual evidence for his argument. Kong Yingda, on the other hand, contends that all three stanzas portray the scene of hunting, including the pleasure enjoyed in the northern park (the park where the ruler goes hunting) in the last stanza.⁶³ Kong’s understanding seems to be supported by the content of this poem, as each stanza focuses on a slightly different aspect of the hunt. The first stanza mentions the participants, the second focuses on the ruler, and the third portrays the relatively peaceful time between active chases when the hounds rest in the carriages. As these periods of rest could occur at any point during the hunt, it is difficult to establish a definite order to the stanzas. Readers should not therefore impose an order on the stanzas of this poem.

The “intrinsic order” of repetitive poems, if indeed it even exists, is even more challenging to ascertain. A few repetitive poems (fewer than 10%) seem to have an intrinsic

⁶⁰ Kang, “Lun Anda jian *Shijing* yu jinben *Mao shi* de zhangci yitong”, 24–5.
⁶¹ Yuasa, “On stanzaic inversion in the *Qin feng* 秦風 ode ‘Sitie’ 駟驥”, 160, 167.
⁶² *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 6C, 481–3.
⁶³ *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 6C, 481.

order across repeated stanzas, and this order is driven by a logic that is chronological, spatial, or numerical. For example, the first two repetitive stanzas in Mao no. 10 describe two scenes, one where the protagonist of the poem has not seen the gentleman, and one where the protagonist catches sight of the gentleman. In the three stanzas of Mao no. 98, the person waiting for the protagonist first stands between the gate and a screen wall, then he stands inside the courtyard, and finally he stands in the hall. Mao no. 53 describes a set of horses, and the number of horses increases across the three stanzas from four to five, and then from five to six. However, even among these poems where the order seems fairly immutable (e.g. the number of horses going from four to six and then from six to five would be very awkward), it is still possible to reverse the sequence of the three stanzas without altering the poem's overall meaning (e.g. a pattern of six, five, and four sounds equally reasonable).

Most of the repetitive stanzas seem to lack this kind of unalterable structure. Many contemporary readers perceive these poems as having a progressive order mainly because they rely on existing commentaries, not the poem itself, to determine the “best” order. For example, the stanza sequence of “Chou mou” 綢繆 (Tightly bound; Mao no. 118) in the *Mao shi* has been generally considered to be superior to the one in the Anda manuscript. This assessment is based on the inherited interpretation of the rhyming words in the first couplets of each stanza. The couplets are listed below as they appear in the *Mao shi* version.

Tightly bound is the bundled firewood; the Three Stars are in the sky.

綢繆束薪，三星在天。

Tightly bound is that bundled hay; the Three Stars are [seen] in the corner.

綢繆束芻，三星在隅。

Tightly bound is the bundled thornwood; the Three Stars are [seen] through the door.

綢繆束楚，三星在戶。⁶⁴

These couplets contain two groups of rhyming words: one group refers to different plants (薪-芻-楚) while the other refers to different positions of the Three Stars (天-隅-戶). The second group has attracted much more attention since a hierarchical system cannot be found among the plants. Li Hui 李輝 and Cao Jianguo 曹建國 both believe that the *Mao shi*'s sequence is better than the Anda version's sequence of “*zai tian* 在天 -*zai hu* 在戶 -*zai yu* 在隅”. Cao follows the Mao commentary and asserts that the stanza order of the Anda manuscript “goes against common sense and must have been a transcription error”.⁶⁵ Similarly, Li follows Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) annotation and claims that “the stanza order of the *Mao shi* version is better since it is arranged chronologically”.⁶⁶ Since Zhu's annotation of these words shares the same logic as the Mao commentary, I list the comments from the Mao commentary on the rhyming words below:

(Stanza one) “In the sky” means at that time, [the Three Stars] appeared in the east.

【一章】在天，謂時見東方也。

(Stanza two) “The corner” is the south-east corner.

【二章】隅，東南隅也。

(Stanza three) The Three Stars, when in the middle of the first month, [can be seen] straight through the door.

【三章】參星正月申中直戶也。⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “Chou mou” 綢繆 (Tightly bound; Mao no. 118), in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 6A, 454–57.

⁶⁵ Cao, “Misplacement, re-edition or funerary object”, 112.

⁶⁶ Li, “*Shijing zhangci yici kaolun*”, 8.

⁶⁷ *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 6A, 454–7.

The Mao explanation presents an unalterable sequence of stars rising from the east, the south-east, and the south.⁶⁸ However, there is no clear indication of direction or position in the poem itself. Although *zai hu* probably refers to the south, the *yu* mentioned in the second stanza is ambiguous since there are multiple corners in each direction.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the comment on *zai tian* is especially questionable as there is no evidence in the early texts to support the explanation that this is “in the east”. *Zai tian* means only “in the sky”,⁷⁰ so the Three Stars mentioned in this stanza could conceivably be visible from every direction. In other words, Mao’s interpretation of the motion of stars across the stanzas can only be valid if we accept his unsupported explanation of each rhyming word – and this explanation is based entirely on the presumption that there is a stable order to the stanzas. As in this example, previous comments cannot serve as reliable evidence for determining which order of stanzas is most reasonable. In short, readers should avoid assuming that there is an intrinsic order to the stanzas without checking for substantial evidence within the poem itself. As most of the repetitive stanzas are essentially non-linear, seeking a “better” stanza order, as exemplified by “Chou mou”, is futile.

6. The history of the hermeneutical tradition of “Orderly Progression” – and a reconsideration

As shown above, most non-repetitive and repetitive stanzas of the poems in the “Guo feng” do not have a logical order, despite the belief of many traditional commentators that the stanza order of such poems was gradually progressive. However, this belief was not dominant in the early stage of *Shijing* hermeneutics, and it took considerable time to become well established. An examination of the formation of this tradition can help undermine its tacit acceptance that dominates scholarship today.

The earlier analysis of “Chou mou” in this paper revealed that while signs of this hermeneutic approach are visible in the Mao commentary, the approach was only used to interpret a few poems. Another noteworthy case is the Mao comment on “Tao yao” 桃夭 (The peach tree is young and beautiful; Mao no. 6). The first couplets of each stanza and the corresponding Mao comment are as follows:

The peach tree is young and beautiful, brilliant are its flowers.

Mao: This is a stimulus. Peach trees are plants that have flourishing flowers.

Yaoyao means the tree is young, and *zhuozhuo* depicts the prosperity of its flowers.
桃之夭夭，灼灼其華。

【傳】興也。桃，有華之盛者。夭夭，其少壯也。灼灼，華之盛也。

⁶⁸ Mao identifies the Three Stars as Alnitak (ζ Orionis), Alnilam (ε Orionis), and Mintaka (δ Orionis), which together form the well-known Orion’s Belt (known as *shen xiu* 參宿 in Chinese culture). These three stars rise from the south-east in the spring and set in the south-west in the autumn. Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi argue that these Three Stars are Alniyat (σ Scorpii), Antares (α Scorpii), and Alniyata (τ Scorpii) in the *xin xiu* 心宿, which has a similar movement to *shen xiu*. Therefore, the criticism of Mao’s sequence also applies to the theories of Zheng and Zhu. See Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shi ji zhuan* 詩集傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 70.

⁶⁹ In ancient China, buildings were often constructed facing south, which implies that their doors (*hu* 戶) were likely facing south, too. However, as there are four corners in each direction and even eight corners when intercardinal directions are considered, it is unreasonable to conclude that the *yu* in this poem refers specifically to the south-east corner.

⁷⁰ *Zai tian* can be understood as “high above in the sky”, as evidenced by the phrase “*feilong zai tian*” 飛龍在天 (the flying dragon is in the sky) in the *Zhouyi* 周易 (Changes of Zhou). Thus, the stanza with *zai tian* refers to the highest position of a star in the sky, which is in the south, not in the east as Mao claims.

The peach tree is young and beautiful, well-set are its fruit.

Mao: *Fen* refers to the appearance of abundant fruit. **Not only does she have a flower-like look, but she also has the virtues of a wife.**

桃之夭夭，有蕢其實。

【傳】蕢，實貌。非但有華色，又有婦德。

The peach tree is young and beautiful, luxuriant are its leaves.

Mao: *Zhenzhen* refers to the appearance of great prosperity. **Having both beauty and virtue, [her] body is perfectly flourishing.**

桃之夭夭，其葉蓁蓁。

【傳】蓁蓁，至盛貌。有色有德，形體至盛也。⁷¹

The lines in bold lend support to a progressive interpretation where the flower-like appearance comes first, followed by female virtues and, finally, perfect prosperity. Still, there is little evidence in the poem to support this interpretation. It is unclear why it is the fruit of a peach tree, not anything else, that is analogous to a woman's virtues, or why the description of fruit precedes the reference to leaves, which obviously goes against the natural process of growth. The word *zhenzhen* is also problematic, as it is unclear why it means the "greatest" prosperity (*zhi sheng* 至盛). As in the case of "Chou mou", this annotation of the rhyming words seems to be influenced by a pre-existing interpretation. It is notable that the bold lines are distinct from the preceding annotations of specific words. These lines focus on the metaphorical and moral meaning of the couplets, rather than on explaining individual characters or phrases. Such abstract comments are rare among the many layers of materials in the Mao commentary and may have been added later than the plain annotations that proceed them. For the majority of the Mao commentary, there is no progressive interpretation of the order of stanzas, even when the poem itself seems to proceed in a seemingly apparent way. Take for example the first couplets of each stanza and the relevant Mao comment on "Shu li" 黍離 (That glutinous millet hanging down; Mao no. 65):

That glutinous millet [has ears that are] hanging down; those sprouts of that panicked millet!

彼黍離離，彼稷之苗。

That glutinous millet [has ears that are] hanging down; those ears of that panicked millet!

Mao: *sui* is the ear of grain. The poet looked from hanging glutinous millet to the ears of panicked millet, so he enumerated the things that he saw.

彼黍離離，彼稷之穗。

【傳】穗，秀也。詩人自黍離離見稷之穗，故曆道其所更見。

That glutinous millet [has ears that are] hanging down; that grain of that panicked millet!

Mao: [The poet] looked from the hanging glutinous millet to the grain of the panicked millet.

彼黍離離，彼稷之實。

【傳】自黍離離見稷之實。⁷²

⁷¹ "Tao yao" 桃夭 (Mao no. 6), in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 1C, 56–7.

⁷² "Shu li" 黍離 (That glutinous millet hanging down; Mao no. 65), in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 4A, 297–300.

It seems natural to take the sprouts, ears, and grain of panicked millet in these three stanzas as marking three moments in the growth of a plant. If so, these stanzas are listed in chronological order. However, it seems unlikely that the writer of the Mao commentary, based on the comment, would have been enthusiastic about this interpretation. The Mao commentary suggests that each stanza be read independently, and it is unclear whether the commentator believes that the poet saw different parts (or stages) of panicked millet all at once or that the poet was viewing the millet at different times. The silence about this in the Mao comment indicates that the commentator refused to build a link from one stanza to another. In addition to this, the Mao commentary rarely differentiates between rhyming words but tends to group them into the same semantic category. The typical way the Mao commentary annotates rhyming words is by commenting “rhyming word A is like rhyming word B” (A, 猶 B也).⁷³ In other words, these comments do not often reflect the thematic rule of orderly progression.

In contrast, Zheng Xuan’s annotations show a greater application of such a rule. For example, he connects the three stanzas in the “Zhonggu you tui” and interprets them as describing the damage inflicted on the motherworts increasing over time. We cannot find such an interpretation of this poem in the Mao commentary. Similarly, Zheng interprets the repetitive stanzas in the “Guan ju” as being in chronological order.

Of varying length is the *xing* waterplant, to the left and the right we seek it.

Mao: *Xing* refers to the yellow floating heart (*Nymphoides peltata*). *Liu* means to seek. The empress and concubines have the virtue of fishhawks, so they can respectfully offer the yellow floating heart and prepare all things for the ancestral sacrifices.

Zheng: *Zuoyou* means attendants. [This couplet] mentions that the empress and concubines **are going to** respectfully offer the pickle made from the *xing* waterplant, so there must be some attendants helping to seek it.

參差荇菜，左右流之。

【傳】荇，接餘也。流，求也。後妃有關雎之德，乃能共荇菜，備庶物，以事宗廟也。

【箋】左右，助也。言後妃將共荇菜之菹，必有助而求之者。

Of varying length is the *xing* waterplant, to the left and the right we gather it.

Zheng: [This couplet] mentions that since the empress and concubines **have already got** the *xing* waterplant, there must have been some attendants helping to gather it.

參差荇菜，左右采之。

【箋】言後妃既得荇菜，必有助而采之者。

Of varying length is the *xing* waterplant, to the left and the right we select it.

Mao: *Mao* means to select.

Zheng: Since the empress and concubines **have already got** the *xing* waterplant, there must have been some attendants helping to select it.

參差荇菜，左右芣之。

【傳】芣，擇也。

【箋】後妃既得荇菜，必有助而擇之者。⁷⁴

⁷³ For example, in “Fa tan” 伐檀 (Cutting the sandal trees; Mao no. 112), Mao explains that all three rhyming words – *gan* 幹, *ce* 側, and *chun* 棼 – are like *ya* 厓 (riverbank). See Mao’s comment on “Fa tan” 伐檀 (Mao no. 112), in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 5C, 432–4.

⁷⁴ *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 1A, 29–32.

In the Mao commentary there is no implication of a progressive order across these stanzas, but Zheng obviously understands these stanzas to be in chronological order. He believes that there is a transition from “not yet gathered” plants to “already gathered” plants across the poem, although there is hardly any support for his argument that the three stanzas describe events that happened at different times. It seems that in Zheng Xuan’s time this hermeneutical principle of orderly progression was more widely accepted by commentators, which resulted in more poems being interpreted using this principle.

We can see the theory of orderly progression gaining significant traction 400 years later when Kong Yingda explained almost twice as many poems using this rule. Table 3 compares how many repetitive poems were interpreted by Mao, Zheng, and Kong using this hermeneutical rule.

Table 3. Numbers of repetitive poems with orderly progressive annotations by Mao, Zheng, and Kong

	Mao comment	Zheng comment	Kong comment
Clear indication of progression ⁷⁵	2	9	21
Unclear indication of progression ⁷⁶	11	8	7
No indication of progression	125	121	110

Although the majority of repetitive poems were not understood as having a progressive order, there is a notable increase in the application of this principle in Kong’s annotations. Kong sometimes tries to explain the structure of a poem and the function of each stanza in his exegesis of poem titles and prefaces, a popular annotation practice since the Six Dynasties.⁷⁷ In doing so, he inevitably imposes a linear progression on repetitive stanzas. For example, he interprets the order of the three stanzas in the fully repetitive “Fuyi” as follows:

The first stanza says **gathering** and **having** plantains. The word “**gathering**” indicates the start of the activity, while “**having**” conveys that the plantains have already been collected. This stanza summarizes the start and end of the process. The second stanza depicts the scene of gathering the plantains, where some **pick** them while

⁷⁵ There are several different ways that commentators express stanza progression. The most common is to indicate time with words like *jiang* 將 (be about to) and *ji* 既 (already); *shi* 始 (at the beginning) and *yi* 已 (already); or *xian* 先 (at first) and *hou* 後 (later). Some commentators also provide explicit explanations as to the relationship between stanzas, as seen in Kong’s annotations.

⁷⁶ This refers to commentators interpreting rhyming words in different stanzas in a progressive way without clearly stating the relationship between the stanzas.

⁷⁷ Influenced by the tradition of Buddhist exegesis, a specific form of annotation known as *yishu* 義疏 (meaning and explanation) flourished after the Eastern Han. While *zhangju* 章句 (sections and sentences) had been the popular method of commentary in the two Han dynasties, this new method, known as *keduan* 科段 (sections and paragraphs), spent much more energy expounding (sometimes imposing) the logic that extended across the text, rather than separating a text into smaller units. Kong’s annotation was probably affected by this tradition, and it is also referred to as *shu* 疏. For a detailed discussion of this feature of the *yishu* tradition and *keduan*, see Hashimoto Hidemi 喬秀岩, *Yishuxue shuailiang shilun* 義疏學衰亡史論 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2013), 5–13. In Wu Chengxue 吳承學 and He Shihai’s 何詩海 examination of the transition from the study of *zhangju* to the study of *wenzhang* 文章 (essays) represented by the *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*) they argue that Kong’s annotations of the *Shijing* are deeply influenced by the theory of literary composition in the *Wenxin diaolong*. See Wu and He, “Cong zhangju zhi xue dao wenzhang zhi xue”, 30. It is well known that the author of *Wenxin diaolong* was a man of great Buddhist attainment, and it is possible that the transition shown in his work was also shaped by Buddhist exegesis.

others **pluck** them. The final stanza describes the location where the activity is completed, with some **carrying the plantains in held-up flaps**, while others **carry them in tucked-in flaps**.

首章言采之、有之。采者，始往之辭；有者，已藏之稱，總其終始也。二章言采時之狀，或掇拾之，或捋取之。卒章言所成之處，或拮之，或瀨之。⁷⁸

This chronological order sounds far-fetched, and it does not appear in either Mao or Zheng's annotations; it seems to have been fabricated by Kong. It is just as possible that all the activities in bold happened simultaneously. The three stanzas are also essentially non-linear, and if the order of the stanzas was inverted, the understanding of this poem would not be affected.

What factors contributed to Kong's interest in interpreting poems in a progressive way? Aside from the rise of a new type of interpretation, *yishu* 義疏 (meaning and explanation), it is also possible that the disappearance of the other three lineages influenced Kong's choice. According to Lu Deming 陸德明 (c. 550–630), by the very beginning of the Tang the *Qi shi* had long been extinct, the *Lu shi* had no influence in northern China, and although the *Han shi* 韓詩 (Han tradition of the *Shijing*) still survived, no scholar was transmitting it.⁷⁹ With few alternative permutations available, the *Mao shi* was the only available *Shijing* text, and it is natural that Kong adopted the *Mao shi* stanza order as the only reasonable sequence. Moreover, as the person responsible for standardizing the *Mao shi*, it would have been essential for Kong to further legitimize the text, including its stanza order.

Despite this, Kong only interpreted around 20 per cent of repetitive poems in a progressive way. In terms of his general argument about repetitive stanzas, he does not appear to believe strongly in the progressive order. On the contrary, he claims that many stanzas deal with essentially the same topic. For example:

Since the “feng” and “ya” sections address human affairs, criticize the faults, evaluate the achievements, and intend to rescue [the world] from disasters, a single stanza is insufficient. Hence, multi-stanzas are used to restate the poets' profound emotions. Consequently, there is no poem in the “feng” and “ya” sections that consists of only one stanza The ways to establish stanzas are not always the same. Some multi-stanzas in a poem narrate the same thing throughout, such as “Cai pin”. Sometimes a single subject is repeated in several stanzas, as seen in “Gan tang”. 以其風、雅敘人事，刺過論功，志在匡救，一章不盡，重章以申殷勤，故風、雅之篇無一章者。.....立章之法，不常厥體，或重章共述一事，《采蘋》之類；或一事疊為數章，《甘棠》之類。⁸⁰

Kong focuses more on common themes rather than highlighting differences between stanzas. In his comment above, for example, even though three stanzas in the “Cai pin” seem to describe the different stages of preparing a sacrifice, Kong still regards the stanzas as being about the same thing. Thus while he advances orderly progression more than previous commentators, such progression had not yet become a commonly accepted hermeneutical rule.

⁷⁸ *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 1C, 61–3. The phrases in bold are the rhyming words in the poem.

⁷⁹ Lu Deming 陸德明, *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), 39. In addition, the *Lu shi* and the *Qi shi* works are not listed in the “jingji zhi” 經籍志 (“Monograph on the Classics and Writings”) from the *Sui shu* 隋書 (*History of the Sui*), while only three works on the *Han shi* are mentioned in it. See *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987) 32.915–18.

⁸⁰ *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 1A, 34.

An important pre-modern commentator who contributed more substantially to this interpretive tradition is Yao Jiheng, a scholar from the early Qing period. In his *Shijing tonglun* 詩經通論 (General discussions of *Shijing*), he clearly proposes orderly progression as a rule for interpreting repetitive stanzas (*shi li* 詩例). He argues that the rhyming words in repetitive stanzas must vary in either order or degree and strongly opposes Kong's general statement about how multi-stanzas "restate the profound emotions".⁸¹ Consequently, in almost all of his exegeses of repetitive poems, he regards the stanza order as unalterable and perfectly reasonable. Look at some examples from his explanations in the first section, "Zhou nan" 周南, for instance:

(Mao no. 3) The second stanza says that the mountain is high, making it difficult for horses to walk. The third stanza mentions the mountain ridge, which is more challenging for horses to walk on. The fourth stanza mentions a rocky mountain, which is even harder for horses to walk on. The second and third stanzas talk about the illness of horses and the fourth stanza talks about the illness of a servant. **These are examples of stanza sequences.**

【卷耳】二章，言山高，馬難行。三章，言山脊，馬益難行。四章，言石山，馬更難行。二、三章言馬病，四章言僕病，皆詩例之次敘。

(Mao no. 6) Originally, [the poet] uses the "flower" as an analogy for beauty. "Its fruit" and "its leaves" are mentioned because of the flower. The sequence of an exemplary poem is like this.

【桃夭】本以“華”喻色，而“其實”、“其葉”因華及之，詩例次第如此。

(Mao no. 11) This poem talks about the unicorn, thus enumerating the "toe", the "forehead", and the "horn" of the unicorn. This is indeed an example of stanza sequence. The "toe", the "forehead", and the "horn" are listed from below to above, and the "sons", "people of the same surname", and the "clan" are listed from near to far. This is the order and composition of the poem.

【麟之趾】詩因言麟，而舉麟之“趾”、“定”、“角”為辭，詩例次敘本如此。惟是趾、定、角由下而及上，“子”、“姓”、“族”由近而及遠，此則詩之章法也。⁸²

In his explanations of the structure of the poems, Yao repeatedly emphasizes *li* 例 (rules) and *zhangfa*. These terms are not his innovations and were already established in the study of essays (*wenzhang xue* 文章學) that greatly flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties.⁸³ Although the tradition of *wenzhang xue* has a long history dating back to the Six Dynasties, for most of its history it largely focused on formal essays rather than on poems.⁸⁴ In the late Ming, however, the methodology of *wenzhang xue* began to be applied

⁸¹ Yao claims that "there are many poems with repetitive stanzas in the 'Guo feng', but the usage of (rhyming) words is different either in their sequence or in their degree. How could one simply state that (all the stanzas) are repeated to restate the profound meaning!" (風詩多疊詠體，然其用字自有先後、淺深之不同，安得概謂之“申殷勤”之意乎！) See Yao Jiheng 姚際恆, *Shijing tonglun* 詩經通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 22.

⁸² Yao, *Shijing tonglun*, 21, 25, 30.

⁸³ For example, *zhangfa* is a core idea in the study of essays and is frequently emphasized as a significant component of *wenfa* 文法 (rules of writings) in the works of *wenzhang xue*. For writings focusing on *wenfa* in the late Ming (1368–1644), see Gong Zongjie 龔宗傑, "Wan Ming wenfa huibian de biankan yu wenzhang xue yanjin" 晚明文法彙編的編刊與文章學演進, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, 02, 2018, 81–92.

⁸⁴ Following the publication of the *Wenxin diaolong*, meticulously arranging sections and sentences became an essential part of both appreciating and composing essays. During the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) in particular, the emphasis on maintaining a consistent structure throughout a text became central to *wenzhang xue*. This notion stimulated some scholars to rearrange classical texts in order to enhance their coherence. For example, Zhu Xi reorganized sections in the "Da xue" 大學 (Great learning), even though he did not show much interest in suggesting that stanzas in the *Shijing* be ordered in specific ways. For the development of *wenzhang xue* from the Song to the Ming, see Ning Junhong 寧俊紅, "Lun gudai 'wenzhang xue' de xingqi yu shanbian"

to other texts, including novels and poetry.⁸⁵ According to this methodology, every sentence and paragraph in a well-written article should be logically connected to previous sentences and paragraphs, and the structure of both cannot be altered. Yao brought this basic assumption to the field of poetic criticism and borrowed some terms from *wenzhang xue* in his examination of the sequence of stanzas in the *Shijing*. In other words, the establishment of orderly progression as the dominant explanation for poems in the *Shijing* was greatly facilitated by applying another hermeneutical system, one first refined through its use on a different genre of texts.

After the May Fourth movement, the question of how to understand repetitive stanzas resurfaced and was closely intertwined with a larger debate, namely the nature of the *Shijing*. The two most representative scholars in this debate are Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Wei Jiangong 魏建功 (1901–80). Gu believed that most repetitive stanzas are fundamentally the same, since only one of them would have been taken from the original folk song and other similar stanzas would have been added later by court musicians trying to stretch the song out.⁸⁶ Wei wrote a very influential article, “The most important method of folk song’s expression: repetition” (歌謠表現法之最要緊者: 重奏復沓), to refute Gu’s argument, in which he takes several fully repetitive poems in the *Shijing* as examples and states that the rhyming words across the stanzas must exhibit meaningful differences. He further argues that repetitive stanzas are the most significant feature of folk songs, and concludes that poems in the “Guo feng” are essentially folk songs.⁸⁷ The central issue in this debate is whether or not the *Shijing* should be considered a collection of unmediated folk songs,⁸⁸ but this question is distinct from whether or not repetitive stanzas have an intrinsic order. Even if there is a progressive sequence across stanzas, this does not necessarily indicate that the *Shijing* was produced by non-elites, and vice versa. Despite this, the belief that the *Shijing* is a collection of folk songs has become widely accepted since the 1920s, with Wei’s opinion being the more commonly accepted. The theory of orderly progression had been regarded almost as an unalterable truth – at least until the discovery of the Anda manuscript.

In summary, the development of the hermeneutical principle regarding the order of stanzas has been a long process stretching from the end of the Eastern Han to the present day. At the time of Mao and Zheng, this theory was not widely accepted. Kong’s annotations applied it to more poems than earlier commentators, probably due to the scarcity of extant *Shijing* versions and the rise of *yishu* hermeneutics at the time. This rule really only flourished in the late Ming and early Qing, when scholars like Yao Jiheng came to believe firmly that repetitive stanzas must have had an intrinsic order, similar to paragraphs in an essay. The principle was further confirmed in post-May Fourth scholarship, where the notion of the *Shijing* as a collection of folk songs helped solidify this belief.

The first half of this long process more or less corresponds with efforts to standardize the order of stanzas in the *Shijing*. When the order of stanzas was largely settled and there was only

論古代“文章學”的興起與嬗變, *Zhongnan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 中南大學學報 (社會科學版), 22.06, 2016, 168–72.

⁸⁵ Zhang Yongwei 張永藏, *Baishi wenxin: Ming mo Qing chu baihua xiaoshuo de wenzhanghua xianxiang yanjiu* 稗史文心——明末清初白話小說的文章化現象研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian, 2013), 21.

⁸⁶ Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, “Cong *Shijing* zhong zhengli chu geyao de yijian” 從《詩經》中整理出歌謠的意見, and “Lun *Shijing* suolu quanwei yuege” 論《詩經》所錄全為樂歌, in *Gu shi bian* 古史辨, ed. Gu Jiegang (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), vol. 3, 591, 623–5.

⁸⁷ Wei Jiangong 魏建功, “Geyao biaoianfa zhi zui yaojin zhe: chongzou futa” 歌謠表現法之最要緊者: 重奏復沓, in *Gu shi bian*, vol. 3, 592–608.

⁸⁸ Although Zhu Xi suggested in his preface to the annotation of the *Shijing* that many poems in the “Guo feng” originated from folk songs, this opinion only gained prominence in the early twentieth century. The popularity of this idea should be understood as relating to the increasing influence of Western cultural anthropology (represented by Marcel Granet) at the time, and the ideological needs of the emerging Chinese nation state.

one orthodox stanza order in circulation, commentators were more likely to justify that order. Conversely, when a certain order of stanzas is accepted by readers, commentators are less likely to change it. Also, changes in the way poems were composed and appreciated from the pre-Qin period to the Six Dynasties affected the way people understood the order of stanzas in the *Shijing*. During this time poems came to be expected to embody a coherent and sequential progression of thoughts, which is in accordance with the principle of orderly progression. However, poems in the “Guo feng” had been formed and transmitted in a fundamentally different cultural context, and they should not be evaluated by later poetic norms and rules.

By accepting the fact that many “Guo feng” poems lack a set sequence and refraining from trying to find – or, more precisely, trying to *impose* – a logical order across stanzas, traditional interpretations of changing characters and entire stanzas can be re-examined. How the order of stanzas is interpreted has never been about just one poem, but is instead part of how interpretation itself is done. Therefore, a reconsideration of this hermeneutical rule offers an opportunity to rethink the entire way in which *Shijing* interpretation has been done. Here, I briefly discuss two cases where the rule of orderly progression has affected not only the explanation of rhyming words, but also how other parts of the poem and even other poems have been approached.

First, once commentators decided on the sequence and logic that extends across stanzas, they became prone to interpret other phrases in a poem in a way that supports their overall logic. For example, Zheng’s annotation of the word *zai* 載 in the “Sitie” is deeply influenced by his understanding of the timeline of this poem. He regards the last stanza (stanza 3), which talks about the preparation for the hunt that took place in the second stanza, as a flashback. Therefore, his annotation of the last stanza is as follows.

He wandered in the northern park, his four horses have been well-trained.

Zheng: The reason why the ruler could successfully obtain his prey is that when he wandered in the northern park, he had already trained well four types of horses. Light carriages with bells on the horses’ bits, the long and short-mouthed dogs started [to successfully fight and bite].

Zheng: **Zai means “to start”**. “The hunting dogs started” means that dogs were led to fight and bite. They started to be fully trained. This all happened when wandering in the northern park.

遊於北園，四馬既閑。

【箋】公所以田則克獲者，乃游於北園之時，時則已習其四種之馬。

輶車鸞鑣，載獫狁驕。

【箋】載，始也。始田犬者，謂達其搏噬，始成之也。此皆游於北園時所為也。⁸⁹

Here, Zheng explains the meaning of the word *zai* in this stanza as “to start”. Given the context, this appears awkward, and so he provides an additional explanation, specifying that *zai* refers to the starting of the dogs. It seems that Zheng’s only reason for annotating *zai* as such is to provide support for his understanding of the chronological order of the poem as a whole. If *zai* means “at the beginning”, then the third stanza must have happened before the previous stanzas, which would validate Zheng’s understanding of the third stanza being a prerequisite for the actions that take place in the previous stanzas. On the other hand, Zhu Xi believes that *zai* means “to carry”, and he interprets the last stanza as being the scene that occurs after the hunt is finished. His interpretation of the last stanza is as follows:

⁸⁹ Mao shi zhengyi, j. 6C, 483.

Zhu Xi: The hunt has finished, so [the ruler] wandered in the northern park.... [They] used chariots **to carry** dogs, probably in order to save their strength of paws.
朱熹：田事已畢，故遊於北園。.....以車載犬，蓋以休其足力也。⁹⁰

By providing a different exegesis of one single word, Zhu’s interpretation, based on a different logic of the way the stanzas are arranged, drastically changes the meaning of the last stanza. Of course, *zai* can mean either “to start” or “to carry”, and there is nothing incorrect about choosing one explanation over the other. However, it is risky to build one’s understanding of the whole stanza or the whole poem on the explanation of one word, as has been done by both Zheng and Zhu. As readers, we should approach such examples with caution, recognizing that even annotations that seem objective might also have been influenced by pre-existing notions.

Second, in some cases, commentators may summarize a pattern derived from one poem and apply it to other poems. For example, in both Mao no. 4 and no. 12, two fully repetitive poems, the rhyming word in the last stanza is *cheng zhi* 成之 (to accomplish it). Judging by the Mao comment, it seems that this pattern has been extended to some rhyming words in other last repetitive stanzas, which are also interpreted as *cheng*. The Mao comments on some words in the repetitive stanzas in three poems (Mao no. 2, no. 32, and no. 85) are shown in Table 4.⁹¹

Table 4. Mao comments on the repetitive stanzas in Mao no. 2, no. 32, and no. 85

	Mao no. 2	Mao no. 32	Mao no. 85
Stanza one	How the ko-hemp spreads, it reaches the middle of the valley; Its leaves are luxuriant ; the yellow birds go flying. 葛之覃兮、施于中谷。 維葉萋萋、黃鳥于飛。	Warm breezes come from the south, they blow on the heart of the jujube tree; The heart of the jujube tree is luxuriant; our mother toils and works. 凱風自南、吹彼棘心。 棘心夭夭、母氏劬勞。	Withered leaves, withered leaves, the wind blows you; You uncles, sing before and I will join you. 蓀兮蓀兮、風其吹女。 叔兮伯兮、倡予和女。
Related Mao comment on stanza one	<i>Qiqi</i> , refers to the appearance of luxuriance. 萋萋，茂盛貌。	The jujube tree is hard to nurture. 棘，難長養者。	The ruler sings before, and the subordinates join him. 君倡臣和也。
Stanza two	How the ko-hemp spreads, it reaches the middle of the valley; Its leaves are rich ; I cut them and boil them. 葛之覃兮、施于中谷。 維葉莫莫、是刈是漙。	Warm breezes come from the south, they blow on the brushwood of the jujube tree ; Our mother is wise and good, but we are not good men. 凱風自南、吹彼棘薪。 母氏聖善、我無令人。	Withered leaves, withered leaves, the wind tosses you; You uncles, sing before and I will keep in tune with you. 蓀兮蓀兮、風其漂女。 叔兮伯兮、倡予要女。
Related Mao comment on stanza two	<i>Momo</i> , refers to the appearance of accomplishment . 莫莫，成就之貌。	The brushwood of the jujube tree is the accomplished part of it. 棘薪，其成就者。	<i>Yao</i> means to accomplish . 要，成也。 ⁹²

⁹⁰ Zhu, *Shi ji zhuan*, 75.
⁹¹ The first two poems are partially repetitive, whereas the third is a fully repetitive two-stanza poem. All the rhyming words that Mao explained as meaning *cheng* appear in the last stanzas of the repetitive parts.
⁹² *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 1B, 36–8; j. 2B, 157–8; j. 4C, 355.

All three comments on the words in bold in stanza two are tenuous at best. The definition of *momo* and *yao* as “to accomplish” are not obvious understandings of these words. Although the Mao commentary could have given explanations more closely related to how these words are commonly used, the commentary persistently imposes this meaning on them. The most plausible explanation for this is that the commentator already had a preconceived notion of what should have been expressed in the last repetitive stanzas, likely influenced by the *cheng zhi* in the last stanzas of Mao no. 4 and no. 12. In other words, the Mao interpretation of these three poems is not solely based on the text of the poems but is also affected by other poems in the *Shijing*. The Mao comments on different poems within this large corpus are all interrelated, not isolated. This holds true for all other commentators; no commentator annotates just one single poem, and the way in which they approach various poems in the large corpus is systematic.

In conclusion, the belief in there being an intrinsic order across stanzas can be seen in various aspects of the interpretation tradition, from the exegesis of individual words and phrases to the overall comprehension of the nature of the *Shijing*. It is crucial to scrutinize each annotation and uncover the underlying ideology, rather than accepting it as being self-evident. Reconsidering the theory of orderly progression is a step towards re-evaluating the tradition of *Shijing* interpretation.

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