

## The Wǔ 武 Dance

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**Abstract.** The Máu Preface says of Shī 285 that it accompanies a Great Wǔ, understood as a mime dance (奏大武也), of Shī 293 that it “announces the end of the Great Wǔ” (告成大武也), and of 294 that it shows “the purpose of Wǔ” (武志也). Seemingly to the same end, DJ 7/12:2 identifies the texts of three of seven movements of the Wǔ 武 dance, supposed to represent King Wǔ’s conquest of Shāng. These texts, either couplets or single lines, are now found in Shī 285 and 294-295, two of the three poems mentioned by Máu as involved with this dance. I here pursue these hints.

**The DJ Evidence.** The three fragments are said to be from the 3rd, 6th, and last [7th] strophes (章) of the dance song. This gives the following picture of the song text:

- I  
[missing]
- II  
[missing]
- III
- Shī 295:3 鋪是繹思 “Amplify shall I continue it”  
Shī 295:4 我徂維求定 “I shall proceed to seek to make it secure”
- IV  
[missing]
- V  
[missing]
- VI
- Shī 294:1 綏萬邦 Tranquil the myriad realms  
Shī 294:2 屢豐年 Many the fruitful years
- VII
- Shī 285:7 耆定爾功 “Forever secure is your achievement”

III seems to represent King Wǔ referring to his heritage, undoubtedly from King Wǎn, and his determination to honor and extend it (leaving it to I-II to detail that heritage). VI seems to describe the peace consequent on the conquest (leaving IV-V to describe the conquest itself). In VII, King Wǔ is assured that his great achievement is secure; a type of sentiment with which many Jōu Sùng poems conclude.

The picture is intriguing; it implies that the text of an early dance-song later served as the basis for several Shī poems. Can we complete the song text? The Máu Preface associates these poems with Wǔ: Shī 274 (sacrifice), 283 (his temple), and the previously noted Shī 285, 293, and 294. From the DJ story we may now add Shī 295. This is the most likely material in which to search.

**Scenario.** Noting that the DJ units tend to be couplets, we may suspect that the last unit was originally a couplet too: the final couplet, not just the final line, of Shī 285.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly Shī 285 (“武”) will not provide all of our text, but since Máu identified it with that text, it may give us a hint as to the scenario of the original. Here it is:

285:1	於皇武王	August was King Wǔ:
285:2	無競維烈	Irresistible, his ardor.
285:3	允文文王	Accomplished was King Wǎn
285:4	克開厥後	To open a way for his successors;
285:5	嗣武受之	Wǔ the Heir received it.
285:6	勝殷遏劉	“You conquered Yin and ended its cruelties,
285:7	耆定爾功	“Forever secure is your achievement.”

We thus expect the dance-song to have included: (1) praise of Wǔ, probably our I; (2) mention of the previous virtue of Wǎn; probably our II; (3) Wǔ’s receipt of that legacy, our III; (4) the conquest itself, not present in Shī 287 but probably our IV-V; (5) the peace following the conquest, our VI; and (6) a final address to Wǔ, our VII.

Unit I can be supplied from 274:1-2 (the only part of that poem relevant to King Wǔ, and a near- duplicate of 287:1-2). Shī 293:1-4 seem apt for the conquest in IV-V. For the virtue of Wǎn in II, the likeliest possibility is 285:3-4. We would then have:

I (Preface)		
274:1	執競武王	Strong was the arm of King Wǔ,
274:2	無競維烈	Irresistible, his ardor.
II (Precedent)		
285:3	允文文王	Accomplished was King Wǎn,
285:4	克開厥後	To open a way for his successors
III (Acceptance: Wǔ speaks)		
295:3	敷是繹思	“Amplly shall I continue it”
295:4	我徂維求定	“I shall proceed to seek to make it secure”
IV (Wǔ’s Covert Preparation)		
293:1	於鑠王師	Splendid, the King’s army;
293:2	遵養時晦	He nurtured it in darkness
V (Wǔ’s Open Challenge)		
293:3	時純熙矣	But when the time came clear,
293:4	是用大介	Then he put on his heavy armor
VI (The Following Peace)		
294:1	綏萬邦	Tranquil the myriad realms,
294:2	屢豐年	Many the fruitful years
VII (Apostrophe to Wǔ)		
285:6	勝殷遏劉	“You conquered Yīn and ended its cruelties”
285:7	耆定爾功	“Forever secure is your achievement”

Not the least virtue of this reconstruction is the thematic consistency of the couplets, lending themselves readily to the limits and possibilities of mime.

<sup>1</sup>Why were not both lines quoted? Perhaps because it refers to the conquest, and this pacific DJ passage (which etymologizes 武 “military” as 止 “stop” + 戈 “arms”) found it offensive.

**The Jōu Sùng.** If so, we would seem to have an original dance-song text which was later broken up, with the fragments being expanded into five poems, Shī 274, 285, and 293-295. This includes all but Shī 283 of the poems which the Máu Preface associates with King Wǔ, and Shī 283 in fact contains no direct reference to King Wǔ. The placement of the real King Wǔ poems within the Jōu Sùng (three groups, roughly a “decade” apart) is already interesting. Further, except for its dance-song derived first couplet, Shī 274 goes on to discuss [Kings] Chǐng and Kāng. And apart from 271, Chǐng-wáng figures only in four laments (Shī 286-289) of the young and helpless Chǐng-wáng – the Chǐng-wáng familiar from the Shū, who depends on Shàu-gūng and/or Jōu-gūng. These four Chǐng-wáng pieces follow one King Wǔ poem, Shī 285. In terms of the “decades” of our Jōu Sùng, we have this placement:

266	276	286 Chǐng lament
267	277	287 Chǐng lament
268	278	288 Chǐng lament
269	279	289 Chǐng lament
270	280	290
271	281	291
272	282	292
273	283 [no ref to Wǔ]	293 < <b>Wǔ Dance</b>
274 < <b>Wǔ Dance</b>	284	294 < <b>Wǔ Dance</b>
275 Hòu Jì	285 < <b>Wù Dance</b>	295 < <b>Wǔ Dance</b>
		296 People of Jōu

If the five Wǔ Dance pieces were expanded from a previous dance-song text, and thus late, and if the four Chǐng laments were reflections of a political myth of King Chǐng, and thus perhaps also late, and if we exclude the anomalous Hòu Jì poem, Shī 275 (and the also anomalous 296, which honors the People of Jōu rather than any ruler) as perhaps also late, what is left to be early? What is left is the following, which includes poems honoring Kings Wǎn and Chǐng, and (once) Tàì-wáng, an ancestor of Wǎn. There are also harvest and guest poems, and other poems with a sacrificial element, but which are not themselves plausible as literal sacrificial texts:

266 Wǎn	276 Harvest	290 Harvest
267 Wǎn	277 Harvest	291 Harvest
268 Wǎn	278 Guest	292 Ancestors
269 Address to Lords	279 Harvest	
270 Tàì-wáng, Wǎn	280 Musicians	
271 Chǐng	281 Fish offerings	
272 Wǎn	282 Present King	
273 Royal Progress	283 Presentation	
	284 Guest	

We seem to have royal sacrifices or royally related poems (266-273) followed by local or ancestral poems (276-284, 290-292). The royal pieces mention the two peaceful Kings Wǎn and Chǐng, but except for an inference in 271, never the conqueror Wǔ, who appears in the Jōu Sùng only when his mime dance is broken up and distributed. This agrees with the disapproval of Wǔ in the Confucian literature (eg LY 3:25).

Note that poems with a strong royal association are in column 1. This is a more logical arrangement than the present one, and may reflect an earlier state of the text.

**Common Line Check.** What are the common-line relations of these poems to others in the Shī, and are those relations consistent with an early date?

They are. If from the first column, above, we eliminate Shī 269 (describing a royal reception) and Shī 273 (a royal progress), and retain only those which might have accompanied a sacrifice (the probably earliest poems), and if we mark with an asterisk poems having common line relations elsewhere, we get:

*266 (Wín)	~ 235, 299
267 (Wín)	
268 (Wín)	
*270 (Tài-wáng, Wín)	~ 269
271 (Chóng)	
272 (Wín)	

The links of Shī 266 are to Shī 235 (the “Wín-wáng Ode,” to which 04c and 03c texts often refer, and thus probably a late piece), and to Shī 299 (from the Lǚ Sùng, a section which did not exist as of the 04c story in DJ 9/29:13, and thus also late). Then Shī 266 is the source and not the borrower in these relationships. Shī 270 is linked to the neighboring 269, a prosodically more sophisticated and thus later piece. Then none of the six poems need be assigned a date later than anything else in the Shī; they may have been, at one point, the entire royal component of the Jōu Sùng.

**The Máu Preface.** We have seen that the Máu Preface is not an infallible guide to the old Wǔ dance-song (the late 04c DJ passage, as far as it goes, being superior), but neither is it worthless. Other points at which the Máu Preface betrays knowledge of a state of the text earlier than the one with which it is now associated are its listing of the six lost Syǎo Yǎ poems, and especially a long note at Shī 177, in which it gives an overview of all the Syǎo Yǎ poems to that point, including the six later lost poems. The Preface may then be a useful source of hints about the early Shī repertoire; it may in part go back to a time earlier than the text with which it is now associated.

**Music and Poetry.** The Lǚ Sùng were in place by c0322, when “Confucius” first refers to a memorized 300-poem collection (LY 13:5), and unmistakably by c0317, when “he” cites a line from the Lǚ Sùng poem Shī 297 as its essential idea (LY 2:2). Then the breakup of the Wǔ dance-song text occurred before that date.

Exactly *how far* before cannot be specified on present evidence, but there is a relevant consideration, which has to do with the way the Shī are taught, and to how many people. Students in general can fairly be asked to *memorize* a written text, but not to *dance* it. The transformation of the Shī from a performance repertoire to a memorized text may be seen a generation earlier than our terminus ad quem, when “Confucius” quizzes a student about the meaning of a word (LY 3:8, c0342), and still more clearly when his son is told to memorize the Shī in LY 16:13 (c0285). The loss of the Music Classic (rarely referred to after early Hàn) would appear to be a later milestone along this path toward the obliteration of the old Shī performance tradition.

That tradition is now indeed obliterated, but modern students of the Shī should nevertheless keep in mind the possibility that traces of its earlier performance nature may still survive in the present reading text.