

Template Songs of Chǔn 陳

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Introduction. The Fǔng division of our Shī 詩 supposedly has folk origins,¹ but most folk elements seem to have been lost or moralized in our present text. I here attempt to identify a folk trait in the Chǔn section (Shī 136-145) of the Fǔng.

Template. One type of folksong is procedural: a template capable of indefinite extension. Granet **Festivals** noted the antiphonal nature of some Shī. Improvising in an antiphonal context is implied by Shī 139: 彼美叔姬，可以晤歌 (Waley: “That beautiful Shú Jī / Is good at capping songs”). Note the improvisation: the implied skill is not memory, but spontaneous verbal agility and adroitness in response.

Shī 139 *describes* such verbal agility, but it does not *exemplify* it. More plausible, as an actual example of extension by variation, is Shī 138BC:

138B	豈其食魚	Why does the fish one eats	x
	必河之魴	Have to be a River fāng?	A
	豈其取妻	Why does the wife one weds	y
	必齊之姜	Have to be a Chí Jyāng?	A
138C	豈其食魚	Why does the fish one eats	x
	必河之鯉	Have to be a River lí?	A
	豈其取妻	Why does the wife one weds	y
	必宋之子	Have to be a Sùng Dǐ?	A

The first stanza establishes a metrical form; the second shows where the variables are.² I suggest that they define, not a text, but an improvisation template, which can be extended by substitution until one player runs out of rhymes. Note the teasing tone: the girl is not *compared to*, but *contrasted with*, the great ladies of the Jyāng and Dǐ clans.

Formally, then, we may regard this as a recipe for a poetic process, a process whose principal aim is the display of skill at rhyming, here in a context of badinage.

Framing. That conclusion leaves out of account 138A, the first stanza of the song as we have it. This is probably to be understood as Karlgren renders it:

138A	衡門之下	Under a cross-beam door	x
	可以棲遲	One can be at rest;	A
	泌之洋洋	By the ample flow from the spring	x
	可以樂飢	One can cure hunger	A

¹Thus, more or less, the orthodox view. These points are mightily contested among Shī theoreticians; for some issues that can arise, see Legge 2. A related question is whether culture flows upward or (with LY 12:19) downward.

²Nonrhyming lines, x, are written x when their content is fixed from one stanza to the next; two x with different content in the same stanza are distinguished as x, y)

One might have expected “thirst” to be satisfied from the spring, but quibbles aside, and apart from the abstract linking theme of “contentment with little,” this has nothing to do with the rest of the poem, 138BC. It is a general statement, as are the remarks of 138BC, but it does not address the same person or situation as 138BC. It is better seen as a preface: drawing a moral for the reader, but not taking part in the social encounter implied in 138BC. This prefatory stanza was probably added to 138BC for the elite readers of the Shī collection, and specifically for their edification. It displays a didactic purpose which is common in our present Shī.

Literary Outcome. This conclusion does not render 138A devoid of analytical interest. On the contrary, we may usefully notice what happens when the framing 138A is added to the original process 138BC. There are two outcomes of importance: (1) The 1 + 2 stanza Shī form is either created or strengthened. Shī 139, above, had 3 stanzas, but all on the same presentational level. In 138, the two levels are different. (2) Specifically, the form of Shī 138 is a preface plus its exemplification. This may be technically related to the “flashback” quotation (Waley’s “elliptical” form), seen in the “dead doe” poem, Shī 23, which ends with the girl recapitulating her seduction in her own words at the time. Though the poems themselves are about ordinary people, these *poetic devices* seem to be literary effects.

Shī 136. This 1+2 stanza structure recurs in Shī 136, where stanzas B and C are variants of the same module, and A diverges. Do 136B and C fit the pattern of an extensible unit, as illustrated above by 138BC?

136B	坎其擊鼓	Kam goes the struck drum	A
	宛丘之下	There below Wǎn Hill –	A
	無冬無夏	Winter or summer,	A
	值其鸞羽	Holding his feather	A
136C	坎其擊缶	Kam goes the struck jar	A
	宛丘之道	Over toward Wǎn Hill –	A
	無冬無夏	Winter or summer,	x
	值其鸞翮	Holding his plume	A

It seems they do. Since it is unlikely that a court performance was held both in season and out, this is probably a dancer practicing. Nor does he stay put: at the prompting of the changing rhyme, he is by turns at the foot of, or on the road to, Wǎn Hill. His self-accompaniment, again rhyme-determined, is now a drum, now a jar. Still further variations would be limited only by the thesaurus. The tone is one of mocking interest; a girl watching a doubtless elite dancer. Stanza A (here as translated by Karlgren) offers to provide a context and indeed a corrective for this social laxness:

136A	子之湯兮	How reckless you are,	A
	宛丘之上兮	On the top of the Yün-k’iu	A
	洵有情兮	I certainly have love for you	x
	而無望兮	But no admiration	A

Clearly, stanza A is addressed to the dancer (dǐ 子 “you”). Equally clearly, it expresses a moral judgement. By contrast, B and C are descriptive, and though bantering in tone, they imply friendly interest, not disapproval, on the singer’s part. The whole stance and tendency are different. Adding stanza A puts B and C into a new possible relation with a future reader: a *moral example* relation. That is the point of adding stanza A.

A difference in form (penultimate rhymes preceding the breath pause syī 兮) also separates 136A from 136B and C. We may plausibly see 136A as a moral preface to 136BC. Then like Shī 138, Shī 136 as we now have it is a hybrid poem.

Shī 137. No two stanzas are parallel, but the first two are descriptive. Thus:

137A	東門之枌	Elms of the East Gate,	x
	宛丘之栩	Oaks of the Wǎn Hill –	A
	子仲之子	Daughter of Dǔ-jùng	x
	婆娑其下	Dances beneath them	A
137B	穀旦于差	Lucky day coming:	A
	南方之原	Southwark’s Miss Ywǎn,	A
	不續其麻	Leaving her spindle,	A
	市也婆娑	In the square dances	A

These stanzas do not define a substitution module, but 137B agrees with previous examples in its teasingly pejorative tone: a girl puts aside her spinning to dance, and becomes available for comment on her dancing. In Karlgren’s version, we then have:

137C	穀旦于逝	An auspicious morning they proceed, yea,	A
	越以勳邁	They come forward and go:	A
	視爾如薺	We look on you as (if you were) a Malva!	B
	貽我握椒	She gives us a handful of pepper-plants.”	B

Waley sees the last two lines as alternating between male and female speakers (“You are lovely as the mallow” / “Then give me a handful of pepper-seed”). The shift to direct address, in either the Waley or the Karlgren variant, distances that stanza from the others. It suggests a literary device, one of whose functions is to bring the poem to an end. 137C also introduces the element of gift exchange, which was vital to Warring States ideas of premarital propriety. In both these ways it runs counter to the open extension process which we seem to see in 137B. Then 137C can be seen as a later addition with a didactic purpose: to provide a positive ethical example.

Restoration. Is it possible to restore that original? Maybe. If we take Shī 136 as a model, the stanza with all lines rhyming (here, 137B) may be the core; it would then be followed by further stanzas in which the odd lines are held constant, while the even lines rhyme on new words, substituted by the improviser. Possibly:

*137B1	穀旦于差	Lucky day coming:	A
	南方之原	Southwark’s Miss Ywǎn	A
	不續其麻	Leaving her spindle,	A
	市也婆娑	In the square dances	A
*137B2	穀旦于差	Lucky day coming:	A
	南方之□	Southwark’s Miss []	B
	不續其麻	Leaving her spindle,	A
	市也□□	In the square []	B

This would let successive singers name several girls in turn and describe their dancing (and note that 婆娑 is not necessarily complimentary), as long as the rhymes held out.³

³The Chūn/Chyōu (CC, Jwāng 27:3) mentions the funeral of Ywǎn Jùng 原仲 in Chǔn, verifying Ywǎn as a Chǔn surname; the “Dǔ-jùng” of Shī 137A3 is probably this individual.

Rhyme. Elsewhere in the Shī (7x), ywǎn 原 rhymes in [Baxter] -an. In 137B it must rhyme in a vowel [Baxter -aj]. Lù and Baxter give the rhyme scheme BBBB for 137B, but do not adjust the sound of 原; Jyāng Yǒu-gǎu 江有誥 suggests the obvious adjustment -an > -a. This may represent a special pronunciation, such as is often found in surnames; Karlgren takes 原 not as “high plain” (thus Legge, also Chyw Wàn-lǐ) but as the surname of Ywǎn Dž-jùng.⁴ This is probably a phonetic localism.⁵

Shī 139 is a worked-out three-stanza song. It does not *exemplify* repartee; it describes a girl *skilled* at repartee (in songs 歌, sayings 語, and remarks 言). It is decorous; the Kāng-syī editors find nothing in the language “indicating any undue familiarity” (Legge 209). It is an evocation of oral atmosphere rather than a specimen of oral procedure. It may have been added to the preceding poems for the same reason the framing stanzas were added to those poems: to bring the series to an end with something calculated to serve as a positive ethical example for Shī readers.

Linguistic Note. If the substitution songs are older than their framing elements, they may also be more linguistically local than those elements. In confirmation, I note that the one probable localism (原, 137B2) is in the improvisation base, not the frame. Future linguistic study of Shī material may need to take account of Shī layering.

Conclusion. I suggest that Shī 136-138 contain an improvisation base which once served as a blueprint for extension by substitution. In reshaping the originals for our Shī, material was added to that base, and a new poem (Shī 139) was added at the end of the series for didactic purposes. It would seem that an important part of Shī history is the process by which originally popular poetic material was given a didactic form: no longer “open,” but literarily and ethically “closed.”

Appendix: Full Texts

The proposed original substitution songs are given in **bold**

Shī 136 (Chǔn 1) tr Karlgren (stanza A):

136A	子之湯兮	How reckless you are,	A
	宛丘之上兮	On the top of the Yün-k’iu	A
	洵有情兮	I certainly have love for you	x
	而無望兮	But no admiration	A
136B	坎其擊鼓	Kam goes the struck drum	A
	宛丘之下	There below Wǎn Hill	A
	無冬無夏	Winter or summer,	A
	值其鷺羽	Holding his feather	A

⁴The Máu commentary takes 子仲 as itself a surname, but there is no evidence for this, and it would make 子仲 (in 137A) and 原 (in 137B) synonymous. Compare Shī 144, which for all Waley’s efforts to avoid that conclusion, must refer to Syà Nán, son of the notorious Lady Syà, whose exploits constitute “the filthiest narrative . . . in the [Dzwǒ Jwǎn]” (Legge 218). I suggest that 136B is all that is left of the original song template, that 136A is an early historicizing addition (still in the dialect of the original song), and that 136C is a later *moralizing* addition.

⁵In the Sūjōu dialect, 麻 (mo) “hemp” and 原 (niø) “plain” *nearly* rhyme (information from Thomas Chin **Dialects of China**, a resource which as of 2009 is no longer on-line).

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|--|------------------------------|---|------------------|
| 136C | 坎其擊缶
宛丘之道
無冬無夏
值其鷺翮 | Kam goes the struck jar
Over toward Wǎn Hill
Winter or summer,
Holding his plume . . . | A
A
x
A |
| Shī 137 (Chǔn 2) tr Karlgren (stanza C): | | | |
| 137A | 東門之枌
宛丘之栩
子仲之子
婆娑其下 | Elms of the East Gate,
Oaks of the Wǎn Hill –
Daughter of Dǔ-jūng
Dances beneath them | x
A
x
A |
| 137B | 穀旦于差
南方之原
不續其麻
市也婆娑 | Lucky day coming:
Southwark's Miss Wá
Leaving her spindle,
In the square dances . . . | A
A
A
A |
| 137C | 穀旦于逝
越以勗邁
視爾如薺
貽我握椒 | An auspicious morning they proceed, yea,
They come forward and go:
“We look on you as (if you were) a Malva!
She gives us a handful of pepper-plants.” | A
A
B
B |
| Shī 138 (Chǔn 3) tr Karlgren (stanza A): | | | |
| 138A | 衡門之下
可以棲遲
泌之洋洋
可以樂飢 | Under a cross-beam door
One can be at rest
By the ample flow from the spring
One can cure hunger | x
A
x
A |
| 138B | 豈其食魚
必河之魴
豈其取妻
必齊之姜 | Why does the fish one eats
Have to be a River fāng?
Why does the wife one weds
Have to be a Chí Jyāng? | x
A
x
A |
| 138C | 豈其食魚
必河之鯉
豈其取妻
必宋之子 | Why does the fish one eats
Have to be a River lǐ?
Why does the wife one weds
Have to be a Sùng Dǔ? . . . | A
A
x
A |

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