

The origin of Chinese word order

- Illustrations from *The Book of Songs*

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中文摘要

诗经为我们提供了巨大的语言研究信息。现代使用的词语构成顺序可以追溯到孔子时代之前。这篇文章通过语言词语的组成说明中文语言的发展。所使用的资料从诗经所记载的诗歌而来，试图说明中文词语的构成受到社会等级制度和人们对外部世界的认知所制约。尊卑观念、阴阳观念、事务及行动的顺序形成中文词语构成及语言表达中的次序。语言词语的发展及诗经所表达的内容，展示了中国文明在 2500 多年以前已经非常发达。

1. The significance of *The Book of Songs*

In the 1970s, American scholar William McNaughton observed: “In spite of the many interpretations and commentaries written generations later, *The Book of Songs* influence on Chinese literature is overwhelming and undeniable by any one at any time.”¹ William McNaughton² ponders the following questions in his work entitled, *The Book of Songs*;

Why has this book of poems meant so much to the Chinese? Why has it lasted so long?

¹ ‘Shijing (*The Book of Odes*)’, (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/chinese/shijing>)

² William McNaughton: *The Book of Songs*, (1971) Twayne Publishers, New York, p11

What influence has it had on Chinese literature and on Chinese civilisation during the twenty-five hundred years of its existence?

The Book of Songs has fascinated many scholars around the world, and research concerning the book, in regard to the above questions, has been extremely fruitful. A recent study conducted by Ma Yinqin (2006) examined the evolution of the book and the historical background of the poems. In her book *The history of the Songs in the Zhou Dynasty* (2006), Ma states that *The Book of Songs* “is not only a collection of literal poems, more importantly, it is the direct product of the Li (礼-Rite) and Yue (乐-Music) systems and they form a part of the entire systems.” (2006:1) Her study reveals the social hierarchy and the practical Rite and Music systems of the Zhou Dynasty. This study can be considered as a thorough examination of the book’s evolution and the ‘birth date’ of poems. Crucially, it is significant monograph in the field of study of *The Book of Songs*.

However, the research appears to lack consideration of the poems’ linguistic features at the level of word order, although the study has reviewed some previous research in relation to language styles and date of word appearance of the poems.

This paper will focus on the linguistic features rather than repeat a textual examination of the poems’ historical background.

2. Civilization in ancient China

Although the paper does not intend to examine the social events or relics from ancient China, it will be valuable to briefly describe how civilization developed in ancient China in order to discuss the language development of the poems.

Evidence gathered from archaeological findings in China continues to captivate the world. These findings include city sites, living villages, tombs, ancient cooking vessels, and bamboo slips with characters written in ancient times. The findings of Jiaguwen (甲骨文) inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (c.16th-11th century B.C.) have enlightened scholars about who the emperors of the Shang Dynasty were. Wang Guowei (1877-1925) identified the order of the 29 kings of the Shang Dynasty and this in turn proved the accuracy of *The Record Book of History* (Shiji-史记) written by Sima Qian (145-86BC).

The recent ambitious project 《The Division Project of Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties》(夏商周断代工程), which commenced in 1996, has determined that the Xia Dynasty started around 2069BC (2070BC according to Peng Lin (2001:63-65)), and lasted 471 years with 17 kings. The Shang Dynasty emerged around 1600BC and lasted over 552 years with 30 kings, while the establishment of the Zhou Dynasty is considered to be around 1046BC. In the same year, the King of Zhou overturned the last

king of Shang. The Western Zhou Dynasty survived for 275 years from (1046-771BC) with 12 kings, while the Eastern Zhou Dynasty existed for 514 years with 25 kings from 770 to 256BC, and by 256 BC the Qin Dynasty had ascended to power.

According to *Gangjianyizhilu* (纲鉴易知录),³ thousands of years before the Zhou Dynasty, the Chinese commenced agricultural works, engaged in architecture and town planning, manufactured textiles and cookery, developed musical instruments, identified medicines and their uses, distinguished the seasons, divided and allocated land - especially in the development of ruling hierarchies. The civilisation and social hierarchies were also written into the *Record Book of History* by Sima Qian. Archaeological findings and historical records concur that these prehistoric civilisations, the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, were rich and splendid, and the ancient Chinese cultural, political and social structures well developed. In saying the above, this paper aims to make the point that Chinese poems from *The Book of Songs* have a solid foundation within society and, as literature, were oriented with the development of Chinese civilisation. *The Book of Songs* recorded in written form aspects of 'real life' of the society from which it emerged. During this era however, stories and songs were passed from generation to generation in the West orally. As a common (Chinese) saying expresses, "nothing can be developed from emptiness without establishment". So as the culture in Zhou Dynasty, "the culture of Zhou people was obviously developed on the basis of inheriting of the Yin people (people of Shang Dynasty)". (Ma 2006:101).

Ma (2006) and other scholars such as Wang Xiaodun, (1998) and Wang Kunwu (1998) have identified the period in which *The Book of Songs* evolved, indicating that the poems were formulated from the early period of the dynasty (Western Zhou) and were finalised in the time of Confucius during the Eastern Zhou period. These scholars submit that *The Book of Songs* was edited and finalized by Confucius (551-479BC) on the bases of its 5th evolution during the Qi Huangong period (齐桓公, Duke Qi 685-643BC). Other scholars (such as: Zhou, 2005: preface) argue that the record by Sima Qian of Confucius editing the book by selecting them from some 3000 existing poems is incorrect. Confucius neither selected the poems nor edited the book but inherited a completed version of it, they claim. This paper will not examine the accuracy of the above claims, but will focus on the language word order from the poems. However, most scholars believe Confucius edited the book after he returned from Wei State to his home country of Lu State in the year 484BC, and the current definitive edition remains as it was in Confucius' time, with the words used in the book remaining unchanged through the last 2500 years.

3. The research on language features

³ *Gangjianyizhilu* (纲鉴易知录), Zhonghua Book Company, 2007 reprint, Beijing.

Some of the previous studies have provided us with knowledge of the language styles⁴ and the date certain words appeared⁵, in order to determine the date certain poems came into being. Other studies have focused mainly on the yin-yun (音韵 phonologic) and yuyan (语言 word) factors. Research of 音韵 (phonologic) can be viewed from the publications of Wang Jian'an (1992), Wang Li (1986), and Wang Kunwu (1998). Yuyan (语言 word), division occurs as two phases: (1) the formulation of expression structures, in other words, certain formats of expressions in the poems (e.g.: Yang Heming 1982); and the appearance of certain words in the dynasty, which carry information about the social and economic changes at particular points in history (e.g.: Li Shan 1997:51; Ma 2006:225).

Xiang (2002) has also conducted research on the yin-yun (音韵 phonologic) and yuyan (语言 word) factors. He identified that *The Book of Songs* consisted of 1797 phonologic words, with the vocabulary containing a limited number of dialect words. This means 雅言 (official language) was popular among the sovereign states "due to the location of the capital, the easy traffic, prosperity of business and the developed culture" (2002:29). Xiang has identified 2938 single characters and 4000 words. Among them, there are 1329 polysyllabic words (复音词). These polysyllabic words are nouns, verbs and adjectives. Xiang (2002:53-67) has also identified compound words (复合词) as they are in the forms of (1) attachment (附加式 23 words); (2) modification, (偏正式 484 words), (3) combination (联合式 209 words), and (4) verb-object compounds (动宾式 13 words).

The studies by Wang Li (1986), Wang Jian'an (1992), Wang Kunwu (1998) and Xiang Xi (2002) contribute greatly to the research of *The Book of Songs*. However, there is no examination of the word order of some popular phrases in *The Book of Songs*, which is the concern of this paper. This paper will discuss and explore the nature of these words.

4. Word order from the poems

Word order in this discussion has two phases: on the formation level of a word combined with two parallel single words, e.g.: parents (父母), brothers (兄弟), and on the sentence level of the word appearance, e.g.: first..., then (second)... (...先, ...后...) and so on.

⁴见李山《诗经的文化精神》中对“载芟”和“良耜”的讨论, 东方出版社, 1997, p51
(Li, Shan, *The cultural spirit of The Book of Songs*, Dongfang Publisher, 1997, p5)

⁵见马银琴《两周诗史》对“天子”一词出现年代的讨论, 社会科学文献出版社, 2006, p225
(*The History of the Songs in the Zhou Dynasty*, Social Science Academic Press, China, 2006, p225)

4.1 Date of the appearance of the poems

In order to identify the time of the appearance of these words, it is necessary to provide an overview of the time period of the poems where these words.

Ma (2006) has defined the evolution of the book into 5 stages; (1) King of Kang (for 26 years on the throne from 1007BC), (2) King of Mu (for 43 years on the throne from 962BC), (3) King of Xuan (for 46 years in the crown from 827BC), (4) King of Ping (for 51 years on the throne from 770BC), and finally (5) the Duke of Qi (齐桓公, for 43 years as Duke from 685BC). The above identification provides the time-frame of the poems collected into *The Book of Songs*. Poems were divided into three categories according to the tunes in which they were sung. These categories include the ballads (风), the festival songs (雅) and the sacrificial hymns (颂). Many scholars have argued about the exact creation date of each poem. The most well established and widely accepted chronology is from Ma (2006). Therefore, I will take her argument as the frame work of the study.

Ma (2006) has identified the time-frame for the appearance of the poems as the following:

1) King Wu period: (1057-1043BC)

The sacrificial hymns (颂):

Wojiang-我将, Lai-赉, Zhuo-酌, Shimai-时迈, Ban-般, Tianzuo-天作;

The major festival songs (大雅):

Mian-绵.

2) Duke Zhou (1042-1036BC) and King Cheng period (1035-1008BC)

The sacrificial hymns (颂):

Qingmiao-清庙, Weitianzhiming-维天之命, Weiqing-维清, Wu-武, Huan-桓, Siwen-思文, Fengnian-丰年, Liewen-列文, Zhenlu-振鹭, Yougu-有瞽;

The major festival songs (大雅):

Wenwang-文王, Daming-大明, Siqu-思齐;

The ballads (风):

Binfeng: Chihxiao 邶风: 鸛鸣.

3) During the King Kang period (1007-982BC)

The sacrificial hymns (颂):

Yixi-噫嘻, Chengong-臣工, Haotianyouchengming-昊天有成命

The major festival songs (大雅):

Xiawu- 下武

4) King Mu period (962-920BC):

The sacrificial hymns (颂):

Wenyuxiaozi- 闵予小子, Fangluo- 访落, Jingzhi- 敬之, Xiaobi- 小毖,

Zhijing- 执竞, Qian- 潜, Zaijian- 载见, Yong- 雍;

The major festival songs (大雅):

Yupu- 棫朴, Wenwangyousheng- 文王有声, Lingtai- 灵台, Huangyi- 皇矣,

Shengmin- 生民, Xingwei- 行苇, Jizui- 既醉, Fuyi- 鳧鷖.

5) During the King Li period (857-840BC):

The major festival songs (大雅):

Minlao- 民劳, Ban- 板, Dang- 荡, Yang- 仰, and Sangrou- 桑柔.

6) King Xuan period (827-782BC): includes about 33 poems:

The sacrificial hymns (颂):

Zaishan- 载芣, Liangsi- 良耜.

The major festival songs (大雅):

Jiale- 假乐, Gongliu- 公刘, Juan'e- 卷阿, Yunhan- 云汉, Songgao- 崧高,

Zhengmin- 烝民, Hanyi- 韩奕, Jianghan- 江汉, Changwu- 常武.

The minor festival songs (小雅):

Luming- 鹿鸣, Huanghuangzhehua- 皇皇者华, Simu- 四牡, Changdi- 常棣, Famu-

伐木, Tianbao- 天保, Caiwei- 采芣, Chuche- 出车, Didu- 杕杜, Yuli- 鱼丽,

Nanyoujiayu- 南有嘉鱼, Nanshanyoutai- 南山有台, Liaoxiao- 蓼萧, Zhanlu- 湛露,

Tonggong- 彤弓, Jingjingzhe'e- 菁菁者莪, Liuyue- 六月, Caiqi- 采芣, Chegong- 车

攻, Jiri- 吉日, Hongyan- 鸿雁, Sigang- 斯干, Shumiao- 黍苗, Caishu- 采芣, Chuci-

楚茨, Xinnanshan- 信南山, Futian- 甫田, Datian- 大田, Yuanyang- 鸳鸯;

Mianshui- 沔水, Qifu- 祈父, Huangniao- 黄鸟, Woxingqiye- 我行其野.

7) King You (781-771BC) and King Ping period (770-720BC):

The major festival songs (大雅):

Zhanmao- 瞻卯, Zhaomin- 昭旻;

The minor festival songs (小雅):

Jienanshan- 节南山, Zhengyue- 正月, Shiyuezhijiao- 十月之交, Yuwuzheng- 雨无

正, Xiaomin- 小旻, Xiaowan- 小宛, Xiaobian- 小弁, Qiaoyan- 巧言, Qingying- 青

蝇, Liao'e- 蓼莪, Siyue- 四月, Beishan- 北山, Hecaobuhuang- 何草不黄, Jiaogong-

角弓, Yuanliu- 苑柳, Baihua- 白华, Binzhichuyan- 宾之初宴, Mianman- 绵蛮;

The ballads (风):

Zhounan (周南) 11 poems:

Guanju- 关雎, Geqin- 葛覃, Juan'er- 卷耳, Jiumu- 樛木, Zhongsi- 螽斯, Taoyao- 桃

夭, Tuju- 兔置, Fuyi- 芣苢, Hanguang- 汉广, Rufen- 汝坟, Linzhizhi- 麟之趾;

Zhaonan (召南) 14 poems:

Quechao-鹊巢, Caifan-采芣, Caochong-草虫, Caiping-采蘋, Gantang-甘棠, Xinglu-行露, Gaoyang-羔羊, Yinqilei-殷其雷, Biaoyoumei-標有梅, Xiaoxing-小星, Jiangyousi-江有汜, Yeyousijun-野有死麕, Hebinongyi-何彼禿矣, Zouyu-驹虞.

The above list does not include the 13 states' ballads although they would provide the colloquial and vernacular language in the states covering different regions of China at that time. While these ballads are not included in this paper, the above is adequate to demonstrate the word order of some particular phrases.

4.2 Long-life Parents, brothers, day and night, left and right, up and down

The initial poem in the Ballads from *The Book of Songs* is the famous song “Guanju” (关雎). According to the time-frame identified, the poem appeared during the King You (781-771BC) and King Ping periods (770-720BC), at the turning point between Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou Dynasties. It is about 220 years before Confucius (551-479BC) was born. From the contents and the language of the poem, we may observe that the language expression and the word formation are more mature, precise and clear in the understanding of modern Chinese.

The translation of the poem may not reflect the literary accomplishments of the original, but it will provide clear information of the language structure and especially the word order of popular phrases.

Guanju⁶

Guan-guan go the ospreys,
On the islet in the river.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:-

For our prince a good mate she.

Here long, there short, is the duckweed,
To the left, to the right, borne about by the current.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady: --
Waking and sleeping, he sought her.

He sought her and found her not,
And waking and sleeping he thought about her.

⁶ *Shi Jing [Book of Odes]* <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/conditions.html>

Long he thought; oh! long and anxiously ;
On his side , on his back , he turned , and back again .

Here long, there short, is the duckweed;
On the left, on the right, we gather it.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady: --
With lutes, small and large, let us give her friendly welcome.

Here long, there short, is the duckweed;
On the left, on the right, we cook and present it.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady: --
With bells and drums let us show our delight in her.

The expression of the feelings of love from a young man towards a gentle pretty girl is vivid and touching. All his love is conveyed by the language and various popular phrases, which are still used today. These phrases include “the modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady”/ “gentle and graceful young girl” (窈窕淑女), “on his side, on his back, he turned, and back again”/ “toss and turn on bed” (辗转反侧) and “waking and sleeping, he thought about her” (寤寐求之). Moreover, some well formed single words were also used: “long and short” (参差), “left and right” (左右), “bell and drum” (钟鼓) and so on. Additionally, some phrases which we define as modern “Chinese language grammar” were used thousands of years ago: on the river islet (在河之洲), which follows the rule to organise a prepositional phrase nowadays. The prepositional phrase structure can also be traced back to the King of Wu period and appeared in the sacrificial hymns “Wenwang” (King Wen-文王). This was: “the movement of King Wen’s spirit is always at the left and right of (around) the God of the Heaven” (文王陟降, 在帝左右), which is over 300 years earlier than the King of You period when Guanju (关雎) appeared. Further, the idiomatic usage in the Guanju (关雎) poem: “can not obtain/reach” (求之不得), is popularly used in the modern Chinese language.

This poem is one example demonstrating that words and phrases were well established during the King of You and King of Ping periods 2700 years ago. In fact such words and expressions can be traced back to the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty, some 3000 years ago. In order to find out what the governing factors were for the creation of these words and phrases, this paper collects more words and phrases which appeared during the time of the different kings:

During the King of Wu, Duke of Zhou and King of Cheng periods (1057-1008BC):

day and night (夙夜), first and after (先后), left and right (左右), elder brother and younger brother/brothers (兄弟), children and grandchildren (子孙).

During the King of Kang and King of Mu periods (1007-920BC):

Father and mother/parents (父母), up-and down (上下), Cow and sheep (牛羊), bow and arrow (弓矢), pine and cypress (松柏), bell and drum (钟鼓), happiness and handsome salary (福禄), gold and jade (金玉).

During the Li and Xuan periods (857-782BC):

Death and unrest (丧乱), overturn (颠覆), famine (饥馑), mountain and river (山川), wife and child (妻子/妻孥), drink and food (饮食), poplar and willow (杨柳), rain and snow (雨雪), bachelor/widowers and widows (鳏寡), wind and rain (风雨), bird and mouse (鸟鼠), civil and military (文武).

And the following words appeared during the King of You and King of Ping periods (781-720BC):

Death and unrest (丧乱), father and mother/parents (父母), official and servant (臣仆), female and male (雌雄); day and night (夙夜), cloud and rain (阴雨), sun and moon (日月), famine (饥馑); face and eyes (面目), reed pipe wind music instrument and chime stone (笙磬); broomcorn millet, rice and sorghum (黍稷稻粱), cow and sheep (牛羊); bell and drum (钟鼓), elder brother and younger brother/brothers (兄弟), children and grandchildren (子子孙孙), wind and rain (雨雪), wine and food (酒食), morning and evening (朝夕), cold and heat/cold winter and hot summer (寒暑), wife and child (妇子), left and right (左右), happiness and handsome salary (福禄), pine and cypress (松柏), mountain and river (山川), bow and arrow (弓矢), children and grandchildren (子孙).

A number of words and phrases used in the poems demonstrate the order of their formation on the sentence level.

These words and phrases also appeared during the periods of the different kings:

Not before me, not after me (不自我先, 不自我后); to be the ridge and to be the hill (为冈为陵); high bank to be the valley and deep valley to be the hill (高岸为谷, 深谷为陵); no crime and no guilt (无罪无辜); state monarch and dukes (邦君诸侯); as crossing deep abyss, as walking on thin ice (如履深渊, 如履薄冰); as if treading upon thin ice (战战兢兢, 如履薄冰), nothing higher than the mountain, nothing deeper than the spring (莫高匪山, 莫浚匪泉), having neither strength nor courage (无拳无勇), to be as ghost and evil spirit (为鬼为蜮); no grass can avoid death, no tree can avoid withering (无草不死, 无木不萎); without father who can you rely on, without mother who can you depend on (无父何怙, 无母何恃); what a noble man does, it is what the people of low position will see (君子所履, 小人所视); go and come (既往既来); the star Venus on the east, and the star Venus on the west (东有启明, 西有长庚); On the South it has the Winnowing Basket and on the north it has the Big Dipper (维南有箕, ..., 维北有斗); guests and visitors, drink and eat ones' fill (维宾维客, 既醉既饱); your wine is very fine and your dishes are delicious (尔酒即旨, 尔肴既嘉); not hungry, not

thirsty, while singing and dancing (匪饥匪渴, 式歌且舞); provide him drinks and provide him food, teach him and instruct him (饮之食之, 教之诲之); an infinitely long life (万寿无疆).

As can be observed from the above, the most frequent words are: day and night (夙夜), first and after (先后), left and right (左右), elder brother and younger brother/brothers (兄弟), children and grandchildren (子孙), father and mother/parents (父母), up-and down (上下), cow and sheep (牛羊), bow and arrow (弓矢), pine and cypress (松柏), bell and drum (钟鼓), happiness and handsome salary (福禄), gold and jade (金玉), mountain and river (山川), sun and moon (日月), drink and food (饮食), wind and rain (风雨), death and unrest (丧乱), overturn (颠覆), famine (饥馑), wine and food (酒食), morning and evening (朝夕), cold and heat/cold winter and hot summer (寒暑), bird and mouse (鸟鼠), civil and military (文武), an infinitely long life (万寿无疆). When read there are many reasons to feel astonished as they are frequently used in present language, having not changed for 2500 - 3000 years.

We could continue to render a long list, however, the words have demonstrated adequately that word order of current modern language is in fact inherited from at least the Zhou Dynasty and perhaps even earlier dynasties.

If we categorise these words in different ways, we may find the formation of the words follow certain word orders: (1) the superior, senior or male was mentioned first and then the lower, younger or female second. These words include state monarch and dukes (邦君诸侯), father-mother (父母), older brother and younger brother (兄弟), wife and children (妻子/妻孥/妇子), children and grandchildren (子孙, 子子孙孙), left and right (左右), up and down (上下). (2) The feminine or negative and masculine or positive (Yin-Yang 阴阳) factors: Yang was mentioned first and Yin second: day and night (夙夜), the sun and the moon (日月), mountain and river (山川) morning and evening (朝夕), or (3) from the action orders: first and then second (先后) and (4) the compound phrase (并列词语) which combines two individual words indicating equal ranks or importance of phenomenon, issues, or objects: cold and heat/cold winter and hot summer (寒暑), wind and rain (雨雪), bell and drum (钟鼓), gold and jade (金玉), bow and arrow (弓矢), pine and cypress (松柏), poplar and willow (杨柳), bachelor/widowers and widows (鳏寡), wine and food (酒食), drink and food (饮食), happiness and handsome salary (福禄). Certainly, someone may argue that all words in the above categories can be considered as compounds by different individual words. It is hard to identify which word of the combined word phrase appeared first and which word appeared second before the Zhou Dynasty, but we are certain they cannot be transposed in any other way or order after the Zhou Dynasty.

However, we may find examples of word combinations we do not consider to follow the combination rules of words mentioned above, e.g.: small and big-小大 (小雅: 楚茨), sheep and cow-羊牛 (王风: 君子于役), handsome salary happiness and-禄福 (小雅: 瞻彼洛矣), and female and male-雌雄 (小雅: 正月), feminine or negative and masculine or positive - 阴阳 (大雅: 公刘). These words were either reorganised with their order:

big and small - (大小), sheep and cow-牛羊 (大雅: 生民), handsome salary happiness and-福禄 (大雅: 旱麓; 大雅公刘); or remained unchanged throughout history: female and male-雌雄, feminine or negative and masculine or positive - 阴阳 (大雅: 公刘). The typical examples may be the words female and male (雌雄), and feminine or negative and masculine or positive - 阴阳, which seems against or contrary the above governing rule for word combination. However, if we consider these words in the context of their cultural background, we may find the explanations and answers. In regards to the word phrase feminine or negative and masculine or positive - 阴阳, this may be because it relates to the belief by the ancestors in which 阴 (feminie or negative) represents a different world where their ancestors went to live after they passed away, to show their respect, and also because of the influence of the latter frequent appearances of the word in the *Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching)* by Laozi (老子).

We must say that the word combination in such a word phrase order might not be developed completely before the Zhou Dynasty. The findings from the Jiguwen (甲骨文) inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (c.16th-11th century BC) reveals that some of the words were still in the reverse word order in most cases, e.g.:⁷

- 1) The king goes on an expedition, low and high ranks agree
王自正 (征), 下上若,
- 2) Lower and higher ranks do not agree,
下上弗若, 不我其受 (授) [又],
- 3) From the high to the low agree
又自上下于若
- 4) The king led three armies: right, middle and left
王作三师: 右、中、左;
- 5) Left, right and middle three hundred people
左右中人三百;

Examples 1 and 2 clearly indicate the word order of “low and high” is different from example 3, so is the word order of “left”, “right” and “middle” from examples 4 and 5. This is perhaps strong evidence that word order formation was in the process of change during the Shang Dynasty.

Viewing the word order of such popular phrases collected from *The Book of Songs*, we can conclude that the Zhou Dynasty was the crucial period for word order formation and created spontaneous language and forms of expression. It recorded and kept the Chinese view of the universe, society, and the way of ancient Chinese life in written form and context.

5. Conclusion

⁷ From Hu, liuyuan and Feng, Zhuohui: *Legal Systems of Xia, Shang and West Zhou: A history*, Commercial Press, 2006.

Many scholars agree that *The Book of Songs* occupies a unique place in Chinese classical literature. This is in part because it records ancient Chinese traditions and the systems of hierarchy. Written in Chinese characters, *The Book of Songs* portrays the language and lifestyles of real people in the prehistoric period.

With regard to language and linguistics, it has been one of the most valuable ancient Chinese texts due to the existence of well maintained records about it. It is reasonable to suggest that the most important legacy of the book is on Chinese culture with its contribution to the creation of spontaneous language. In this regard, this paper has reviewed previous studies and discussed the word order of certain language phrases. If any of the above reasons as to why *The Book of Songs* is one of the most famous ancient poetry anthologies has not been accepted, the following reason cannot be disputed; the ancient Chinese had developed word phrases with certain word orders which are used verbatim, or with minor modifications, in spontaneous written essays and conversations. The importance of this information is that many of these phrases and words appear in other ancient literary works and even continue to feature in works and speeches to this day.

The Book of Songs also provides modern readers with an invaluable source of information about life in the Zhou Dynasty, as carried in the language, Chinese culture and civilization, handed down generation after generation. These songs and poems depict happiness, love, separation, bitterness and suffering through vivid expressions of language. This is notwithstanding the fact that some essential subjects of the *Book* deal with Chinese ideas concerning tradition and the Chinese rulers' system of hierarchy; in other words, the "rite" system.

When we read the *Book*, we find the people in the Zhou Dynasty are very close and familiar to us. One of the major reasons is because the book has been continuously influential with its ideas, tradition and civilisation. We understand and share the feelings of the people of that time due to the language which has shaped the Chinese nation and we are still using the words and phrases today. Without any doubt, *The Book of Songs* remains one of the most influential and important collections of Chinese poetry and will continue to influence our language and our lives in the future.

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