

Some Common Lines in the Shī

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A notable feature of the Shī 詩 is the line which recurs identically in other poems. Such lines have been thought to prove the “oral-formulaic” character of the Shī, or illustrate its poetic homogeneity.¹ But do they? The claim would be stronger if the pattern of recurrence suggested local bardic practice, but common lines rarely recur within one section of the local Fvng; they more often repeat between different Fvng, or between the Fvng and the courtly Yǎ. This raises the possibility of literary imitation. I here consider the probable directionality of five of these common-line relationships. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the analytical value of the common line as a tool by which we may gain an idea of how the Shī repertoire was formed.²

Data. Identifying common lines is difficult due to text variants and near-identical lines.³ I recognize 253 lines or couplets. These occur in a total of 213 poems, or 70% of the Shī.⁴ The rarity of common line links *within* a Fvng section is seen in Jōu-nán: of those 11 poems, only Shī 6 and 9 are linked by the line 之子于歸, which also occurs in other Fvng sections (Shàu-nán in the east, Bèi in the center, Bīn in the west). Shī 3 and 4 are linked solely, and Shī 10 principally, to Yǎ poems. No Fvng section is linked more often to itself than to other Fvng sections, or to the Yǎ and Sùng.

Typology. The minimal common line links two poems, as 陟彼高岡 (Shī 3C1 and 218D1). These poems form a group, since neither is linked to other poems by other common lines. The commonest common line is 心之憂矣, found in 11 poems (26E3, 27AB3, 63ABC, 109AB3 and 109AB9, 150ACC3, 183B7, 192H1, 197ACDEF7, 27ABC7, 233A3, 264FGH3). I will call “promiscuous” those poems with eight or more common lines: Shī 162 (8 common lines), 167 (12), 168 (16), 178 (8), 192 (12), 197 (10), 209 (11), and 212 (8) in the Syǎu Yǎ section; 256 (9), 258 (8), and 260 (11), in the Dà Yǎ; and 290 (8), in the sacrificial Jōu Sùng.⁵ It will be seen that these poems tend to occur closely together. Whether they are sources of lines used by *later* poems, or assemblages of lines taken from *earlier* poems, they obscure other relationships, and I will not deal with them as wholes in this preliminary survey.

¹Wang **Bell** 14f (for the Homeric claim); compare Dobson **Language** 247.

²The analytical potential of the common line, first noticed by Tswēi Shù, was developed in modern times by Péi Pǔ-syén (1974), who has informed me (personal communication, 2011) that her work has not so far been followed up.

³In arriving at my own working list, I have carefully considered those of Dobson and Péi.

⁴That is, 93 Shī poems have *no* common line; each such poem forms a “group” of its own.

⁵The Fvng poem with the most common lines is the notably long Shī 154 (Bīn 1), with 7. All the contacts of Shī 154 are with Yǎ and Sùng poems; none link it to other Fvng poems.

I will call poems sharing a common line a *series*,⁶ irrespective of other linkages. Thus, the series defined by the line 陟彼高岡 contains 2 poems, and the 心之憂矣 series has 11 poems. Neither of these series constitutes a closed *group*, however, since some poems in both series are linked by other lines to poems outside the series. Thus Shī 3 is linked to Shī 218 by one common line and to Shī 225 by another. Shī 218 in turn is linked by other common lines to three further poems (one of them twice):

3C1 陟彼高岡 = 218D1 陟彼高岡
 225E6 云何吁矣 = 3D4 云何吁矣
 218D4 其葉漙兮 = 214A4
 218D6 我心寫兮 = 173A4, 214A4-5
 218E3 四牡駢駢 = 162AB1

Nor do the relationships stop there: Shī 162, a “promiscuous” poem, has 8 such links, and 7 of the poems thus linked lead in turn to still other poems. The resulting group includes 110 poems, an analytically unwieldy tangle. I will consider two of its strands.

1. Shī 3C1 and 218D1 陟彼高岡. These poems use the common line in strongly contrasted ways. Shī 3 portrays the hardships of a soldier (M or male; stanzas B-D), introduced by a vignette of the wife back home (F or female; stanza A):

3A (F)	I was gathering the cocklebur, But did not fill my basket. Sighing for my loved one, I set it down on the highway. ⁷	
3B (M)	I ascend that rocky height, My horses are tired; I pour a drink into that metal flask, That I may not have to suffer endless longing. ⁸	
3C (M) 陟彼高岡	I ascend that lofty ridge, My horses are weary; I pour a drink into that horn goblet, That I may not have to suffer endless pain.	= 218D1
3D (M)	I ascend that prominence, My horses are hurting; My driver has fallen ill, Oh, how great the sorrow!	= 225E6

This is a sophisticated poem, not a rustic antiphonal teasing song. The soldier’s lament is not a substitution of rhymewords in a template,⁹ but is rounded off by new wording in its third stanza. The juxtaposition of the wife and the soldier who may be unable to return is poignant: a picture of unfulfilled hope, seen from both its ends.

⁶Péi’s term for what I call a series is *dǔ* 組 (see 相同句 11f). I here follow my own nose, analytically speaking, but invite readers to compare Péi’s conclusions for poems here discussed.

⁷This action links her to the soldier husband who departed down that road.

⁸His longing is such that his only hope is to forget it in drink.

⁹For this form, see Brooks **Template**. The ascent of a height symbolizes the hardship of an elite soldier in Shī 110, 156, 167, and 232. The non-elite soldier in Shī 36 (a template piece) has no horses and no heights, and only complains of slogging through the mire.

2. **Shī 3D4 and 225E6** 云何吁兮. Shī 3 we know. Shī 225 is a portrait of an officer and his decorously attractive lady; it concludes, in Waley's version:

225E	He did not dangle it, His sash was extra long. She did not curl it, Her hair had its own wave. I no longer see them –	
	云何吁兮 Oh, how great the sorrow!	= 3D4

The lack of artifice in these attractive people is most reassuring, but who are they? Earlier stanzas say of the gentleman that his words were full of elegance (有章), and that in his conduct he went back to the ways of Jōu (行歸于周); in addition, the masses of the people looked up to him (萬民所望). This is a lament for the virtuous officers of old (and their proper but beautiful womenfolk). The common line 225E6 is no longer a primary emotional expression; it has become a gesture of political moralizing. The likely sequence is then Shī 3 > Shī 225, and Shī 3, though itself sophisticated, seems to be primary to both the Yǎ poems with which it shares material.

I now turn to a completely self-contained group, with the minimum two poems.¹³

3. **Shī 53ABC5 and 99AB2** 彼姝者子. In 53, onlookers ask how to entertain an arriving guest; in 99, a girl reports the approach of a lover. Despite the “woman” determinative of shū 姝, the persons described by the common line seem to be male. Both poems are in template form, with only the rhymewords varying in later stanzas. The respective first stanzas (adjusting Waley's plural to singular) are:

53A	High jut the pole-pennons On the outskirts of Jywn; White silk enwraps them, Fine horses, four of them; ¹⁴	
	彼姝者子 That elegant gentleman – What shall we offer him? . . .	= 99A2
99A	Oh, the sun in the east! ¹⁵ 彼姝者子 That elegant gentleman: is in my dwelling, is in my dwelling – His foot is on my doorstep . . .	= 53A5

In both poems, a person comes near, but in 99 we have a lover's visit, a situation with no moral dimensions, whereas 53 is a welcome to an admirable visitor. A line in 99 referring to physical beauty is used in 53 to suggest high moral quality.

¹³There are 7 such groups. The others are Shī 107/203 (linked by 2 common lines), 122/133 (compare Péi 105, with whose conclusion, that 122 > 133, I agree), 129/186 (Péi 91 cites Tswēi Shū, Shirakawa Shizuka, and Granet, concluding that some points need further study), 153/227, 278/280, and 295/296 (consecutive). For the last, see below.

¹⁴良馬四之 “fine horses, four of them” is grammatically awkward, and the horses increase in later stanzas (五之, 六之) to match the rhyme. The rhyme has run away with the poem.

¹⁵In the next stanza, “the moon in the east.” Both suggest the beauty of the suitor, and are not to be taken as descriptions of the sky at the time of his visit.

We need not follow the commentary in referring Shī 53 to a particular Wèi ruler, but even so, Legge's remark seems to hold: on the traditional interpretation there is great difficulty with some of the lines.¹⁶ Then the more natural poem is probably the source of the line in the less natural poem, and I conclude that Shī 99 > Shī 53.

These examples suggest that it is not uncommon for one Shī poem to borrow from a poem already established in the Shī repertoire and thus providing familiar diction,¹⁷ to which the second author contributes a new overall perspective which is more moral, more conventional, or more in line with the current political order, than its source.

In conclusion, I will consider two common-line pairs where the linked poems stand next to each other, and the later poem seems to have been meant to replace the earlier.

4. Shī 77A1 and 78A1 叔于田. In both poems, a girl misses her lover Shú, who is off hunting. Shī 77 is the poem with the simpler and more repetitious structure (three short stanzas, which vary only by synonym substitution).

77A	叔于田	Shú has gone a-hunting, And no one is living in our lane. How can no one be living in our lane? But they are not like Shú, Both handsome and kind . . .	= 78A1
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This is concerned only with her feelings. Shī 78 has a more complex structure: longer stanzas, which develop the description of the hunt. It begins:

78A	叔于田	Shú has gone a-hunting, Riding in his chariot.	= 77A1
	執轡如組	He holds the reins like they were ribbons, The outside horses seem like dancing. Shú is at the marsh, The fires break out on every side, With sleeves rolled up he braves a tiger And presents it to the Prince; Oh Shú, do not be careless, Beware lest you be hurt . . .	= 38B2 ¹⁸

This presents her as solicitously concerned for him, and him as loyal to the ruler who is in charge of this higher-status hunt. In Shī 78, both he and she are models which the young may properly imitate. That is, the prosodically more developed poem is also the more culturally acceptable poem. I conclude that Shī 77 > Shī 78, and that the later Shī 78 was meant to supersede the earlier Shī 77, and so was placed next to it.

¹⁶Legge ad loc. For such supposedly moral poems, some of which are difficult for the commentators to explain, Waley provides more naturalistic readings, which sometimes create problems of their own. There are surely erotic Shī which were later given a moral or historical interpretation, but there are also Shī that were *written by* moralists or dynastic apologists, and do mean what the commentaries say. Granet or no Granet, not everything in the Shī is youths and maidens courting each other across a river. Other agendas exist, and have their poets too.

¹⁷See n11 above.

¹⁸Present space will not permit following up this second common line link, and I leave it as an exercise for the interested reader. For other aspects of Shī 38, see Péi 117.

5. **Shī 295:5 and 296:7** 時周之命. These are the last two poems in the Jōu Sùng. They are linked by one common line into a two-poem group. Each poem consists of a single stanza. Traditional analysis finds no rhymes in either, but Lù Jī-wéi and William Baxter agree that 295 is rhymed (however roughly), whereas 296 is not.

295	King W'ín saw to it assiduously,	A	
	We have accordingly received it.	A	
	He spread abroad his bounties,	A	
	And we must seek to secure them.	B	
時周之命	The Mandate of that Jōu –	B	= 296:7
	Oh, the bounties!	A	
296	How great is that Jōu!		
	We ascend its high hills,		
	Its narrow ridges, its high peaks,		
	And we follow the River		
	Everywhere under the Heavens,		
	Gathering in all those who respond:		
時周之命	The Mandate of that Jōu!		= 295:5

The first, Shī 295, is like many Jōu Sùng poems in expressing gratitude to King W'ín or King W'ǔ for their efforts in founding the Jōu Dynasty, and accepting the duty to maintain it. That is, 295 is at home in the Jōu Sùng. The second, Shī 296, goes beyond this to depict the Jou *people* spreading everywhere, gathering in all who respond to the Jōu Mandate. It is not the founding figures, as elsewhere, but Jōu itself which is here praised; a great destiny is predicted for it. This unprecedentedly expansive poem is then probably later than, and probably meant to supersede, the more conventional one, and I accordingly reach the conclusion Shī 295 > Shī 296.

Unrhymed poems in the Jōu Sùng seem older than the rhymed ones, but here, the unrhymed 296 turns out to be later than the rhymed 295. Why? I suggest that the ancient poets also knew this distinction, and (especially when writing for future ages) were perfectly capable of simulating, to some extent, the voice of an earlier age.

Conclusion. These Shī examples imply, not the use of a pre-existing stock of metrically convenient lines (all four-word lines in Chinese are metrically convenient), but the not always adroit literary *reuse* of older poetic material in new poems. To reverse the Homeric allusion with which I began, may not the duplication of whole lines, even within the Iliad and the Odyssey, be sometimes of a literary rather than a technically “formulaic” character?

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