Philology, anthropology and poetry in Arthur Waley's translation of the Shijing.

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Abstract
The topic of my thesis is Arthur Waley and his translation of the Shijing, or The Book of Songs (1937), as Waley entitled it. The Book of Songs is especially noted for its philological ingenuity, anthropological insight and poetic appeal; during my preliminary research I discovered that there exists an interesting interplay between these three aspects of this translation. In this thesis, I hope to examine the hermeneutics of The Book of Songs.

Waley did not read the Shijing as a scriptural text inscribed with authority; rather, he returned it to its folkloric origin, presenting the Shijing as an anthropological document of the lives of ancient Chinese people, an imaginative expression of the desires, beliefs and values of a primitive society, and a vivid mimesis of ancient life. Waley’s philological decisions were underpinned by this general interpretive orientation, informed by his understanding of the anthropological significance of the Shijing and guided by an attentive concern for poetic and anthropological aspects were mutually implicated. The Book of Songs displays a keen interest in the common people, and Waley’s comparative anthropology enabled the Western reader to hear distant echoes from their own traditions. These anthropological underpinnings articulate and enrich the poetics of The Book of Songs. Waley’s poetic language he employed bring forth these anthropological aspects in a poetic manner. The “folk” elements in the Shijing were foregrounded and deemed to be aesthetically interesting. The style and voice of his translation communicate the naive appeal of a folk aesthetic, the compositional features and modes of experience of the “primitive” imagination. In Waley’s translation, the remote, difficult text of the Shijing is transformed into natural, evocative English poetry, and the philological, anthropological and poetic aspects of The Book of Songs coalesce into a Chinese aesthetic that is enjoying a pristine intimacy with Nature.

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