Lyricism and Subjectivity in *Shih Ching*: Some Preliminary Observations

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Discussing the nature of lyric, John Erskine maintains that musical setting and subjective expression are the two major distinguishing traits of the genre.[1] In fact, musicality and subjectivity are always understood as the two categorical principles of lyric poetry. However, concerning the temporal and spatial discontinuity of verse, Northrop Frye said:

> But we cannot simply identify the lyrical with the subject . . . the discontinuous element on poetry is often linked to a specific, usually ritual occasion, and the element of occasion means that the poem revolves around that occasion, instead of continuing indefinitely. If there is no public occasion, what corresponds to it may be a private occasion like drinking or loving-making.[2]

Perhaps it is just coincidence, or can be explained as universal human need, but the three occasions of composing lyric mentioned by Frye, namely, the ritual, drinking and love-making, coincide with the three common settings of the *sung* 頌, *ya* 雅, and *feng* 風 in *Shih Ching*.

This paper is an attempt to discuss the position of the lyrical subjects in some of the *Shih Ching* poems. *Shih Ching* is the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry. It includes most of the extant early lyric poems from ancient China. Through this analysis of lyrical self in *Shih Ching* poems, I will try to show that the subject in the poems in this first anthology of Chinese poetry plays a central, dominant role, and that the evolution of this dominant role defines the tradition of the Chinese lyricism. Since subjectivity and its relation to lyricism have long been complex issues in

Western poetics, I intend to approach the problem from two perspectives.[3] In this analysis, I understand the lyrical subject as (1) the perceiving "I" and (2) the uttering "I." The former denotes the subject as a centre of consciousness. I attempt to explore the correlative and corresponding relations of this perceiving subject with the phenomenal world as reflected in the poems I will discuss. The uttering "I" refers to the subject involved in the speech acts of the poems. The term "speech act" is used in a Jakobsonian sense, although at the end of the paper I will touch on the theory of Austin. Roman Jakobson said:

> Consequently four items are to be distinguished: a narrated event (E^n), a speech event (E^s), a participant of the narrated event (P^n), and a participant of the speech event (P^s), whether addresser or addressee.[4]

In this paper, a poem is conceived as a speech event, or a speech act, in which a message is conveyed. The discussion of the lyrical subject in the following analysis will be on the level of the "narrated event"; that is, the "I" in inside the message.[5] When analysing the speech act patterns in the following poems, special attention will be paid to the contexts of the speech acts and the use of verbal persons in the utterances of the texts.[6]

The first poem I am going to discuss is the *Yüeh ch'u* 月出 (poem 143) in *Ch'en feng* 陳風 .[7] The poem reads:

The moon comes forth bright;
How handsome is that beautiful one,
How easy and beautiful
My toiled heart is grieved.

The moon comes forth brilliant;
How handsome is that beautiful one,
How easy and tranquil
My toiled heart is anxious.

The moon comes forth shining;
How brilliant is that beautiful one,
How easy and handsome
My toiled heart is pained.

月出皎兮　佼人僚兮
舒窈糾兮　勞心悄兮

月出皓兮　佼人懰兮
舒懮受兮　勞心慅兮

月出照兮　佼人燎兮
舒天紹兮　勞心慘兮

This poem is composed of three stanzas. Because of the syntactic and phonic patterns of the stanzas, each stanza can be seen as a self-contained unit. In the first stanza, for example, the first line describes a motion (of the moon), while the second depicts a state (of the girl). However, they have similar "topic + comment" grammatical pattern. The words *chiao* 皎 (bright) and *liao* 僚 (beautiful) are "comments" on the "topics" of the moon's motion and the girl's appearance. Thus, this couplet can be reduced to:

Moon + 皎 (chiao)
Girl + 僚 (liao)

The two words "bright" and "beautiful" rhyme (*kiog*/*liog*; Karlgren, p. 90). By using the device of parallelism, the poet juxtaposes and correlates two entities in two separate lines. They are the "moon" and the "girl." Accordingly, the brightness and the brilliance of the moon and the pureness and prettiness of the girl enhance each other in the couplet. With the use of such a rhetorical technique, the poet creates a self-contained unit.

In the last two lines, the device of parallelism is replaced by continuity. After describing a peaceful and beautiful outside world, the subject expresses his internal grief. However, his grieved and anxious feeling is due to the girl he is yearning for. There is a causal link, an unspoken "therefore," between these two lines. This dynamic continuity reveals the movement of the mind of the subject.

Hence, there is a progression from parallelism to continuity in the stanza. Along with this movement, there is a shift of reference from the exterior world to the inner self. This shows, in fact, that the inner self is the centre of the whole poem. The external objects in the poem, i.e. the moon, the girl, always point back to the perception of the lyrical subject.

The phenomenal world in the text always reflects and corresponds to the sensory world of the self, that is, the meeting point of the subject and the object.

With only a few modifiers changed, the second, and third stanzas repeat the pattern of the first. They share the same movement from external to internal, from the object to the self. In addition, there are no temporal and causal relations from stanza to stanza. They are linked by the self's consciousness as their common centre. The stanzas form three harmonic worlds that are repetitions with variations, and all three rotate around the same experiential centre: the lyrical subject.

I have mentioned that the constitutive devices of the *Yüeh ch'u* are parallelism and continuity. A similar pattern can also be found in the *Tzu chin* 子衿 (poem 91):

Blue is your collar;
Long-brooding is my heart
Even though I have not gone (to you),
Why have I heard nothing from you?

Blue are your girdle-gems;
Long-brooding is my longing (for you)
Even though I have not gone (to you),
Why do you not come?

I come and go hastily,
At the look-out tower on the wall
One day on which I do not see you is like three months.

青青子衿
悠悠我心
縱我不往
子寧不嗣音

青青子佩
悠悠我思
縱我不往
子寧不來

挑兮達兮
在城闕兮

一日不見
如三月兮

The first couplet of the first stanza employs parallelism without duplication. In this form of parallelism, two lines are parallel but each uses all different words:

Blue	Blue	Your	Collar
Long- Brooding	Long- Brooding	My	Heart

"Blueness" is the quality of the collar, which is used as a metonymy of the *tsu* 子, the lover. *Yu yu* 悠悠 describes the internal feeling of the girl. Thus, while the first line of this couplet refers to an object, the second refers to the mind of the lyrical subject. This parallel couplet manifests the condition of correspondence between the self and the world. The two-fold structure of the poetic form itself embodies the correlative relationship; but at the same time, the relationship of separation between the man and the girl is also revealed. Hence, it is not only that the subjective feeling of the subject is dramatised in such a transparent frame. In fact, the lyrical form itself already reveals the message. The form helps to concretise the otherwise formless internal feeling.

The "I-you" relation established in the first couplet is further developed in the second. Here the "I" and "you" are contained in an interrogative sentence. Thus, as with the previous poem, we can find a movement from parallelism to continuity.

Moreover, there is a stylistic difference between the first and second couplets. The second couplet appears to be an utterance which the girl addresses to the man. It is obvious, however, that this utterance is not part of a real dialogue. It is only a self-addressing and self-meditative utterance of the girl. Nonetheless, this "I-you" mode of discourse achieves certain effects.

The formal device of the first couplet helps to build up the dualistic relations between object and mind, exterior and interior, "you" and "I." These dichotomies converge on the relationship between the girl and her lover, which can be further reduced to the sentiment of the lyrical self at a certain moment. The "you" is an object of yearning in the first couplet, whereas in the second couplet, it becomes the object of address in an

utterance. Thus, this "object" is inside the poem but outside the context of the utterance. On the one hand, this expression reveals the emotion of the girl. On the other hand, it enhances the tensions of absence and presence, accessibility and inaccessibility, separation and union in the poem.

Chih hu (poem 110) 陟岵 is another poem in which similar tensions can be identified.

Chih hu consists of three stanzas. They all start with actions of ascending a hill and gazing in the distance. Then the "I" in the poem hears three voices:

> My father says: Alas, my son, you have gone out on war service;
> Morning and Evening you never stop (working)
> May you be careful, may you still be able to come,
> and not remain (there).
>
> My mother says: Alas, my youngest son, you have gone out on war service;
> Morning and evening you never sleep
> May you be careful, may you still be able to come,
> and not be cast away (there).
>
> My brother says: Alas, my younger brother, you have gone out on war service;
> Morning and evening you must stand by (your comrades)
> May you be careful, may you still be able to come, and not die (there).

> 父曰：嗟予子　行役夙夜無已
> 上愼旃哉　猶來無止
>
> 母曰：嗟予季　行役夙夜無寐
> 上愼旃哉　猶來無棄
>
> 兄曰：嗟予弟　行役夙夜必偕
> 上愼旃哉　猶來無死

These three stanzas are not real utterances addressed to the subject from outside. Rather, they are only imagined voices in the subjective mind of the man. Nevertheless, the poetic impact of the poem lies exactly in these fictive embedded speeches.

In the poem, the position of the self is shifted and reversed from the "I" as the speaker to the "me" as the listener. In these stanzas, these utterances are addressed repeatedly toward a single common object; that is, the man who is away from his hometown. Furthermore, these speech acts are imaginary events, assuming the presence of the speakers (family members) and the hearer (the man) in the same speech event. The two situations of speech, i.e. the imagined and the real (hill-side of the foreign land) are juxtaposed and contrasted.

Therefore, the actions of climbing the hill, and gazing in the distance and the framed speech acts illuminate each other. From these fictive utterances, the reader is able to grasp the profound grief of the man at the present situation of "here-and-now." At the same time, the locality of the poem (on the hill-side, away from home) further deepens the emotional impact of the three imagined speech acts.

The mode of discourse I have discussed so far is mainly "I-I." Although there are imagined "speakers" and "hearers," the poem is actually in a mode of self-address. The "you" in the text, rather than an authentic, separate addressee, is nothing more than a fictive object of the expressive act. Now I am going to examine two more poems in which communicative and performative elements can be identified.

The first one is the *Ko sheng* (poem 124) 葛生 .

The supremacy of the lyrical subject is still applicable to this poem. In the sentences "My beautiful one is buried here, with whom can I associate – alone I dwell," "My beautiful one is buried here, with whom can I associate – alone I rest," "My beautiful one is buried here, with whom can I associate – alone I have my morning," 予美亡此 ，誰與獨處，予美亡此，誰與獨息 ，予美亡此，誰與獨旦，the common speaker is "I." These questions are all asked from and ultimately refer back to the lyrical subject. Moreover, in the poem *Tzu chin*, we have already encountered the subjective time of "One day on which I do not see you is like three months." In *Ko sheng* we read: "Days are long is summer; nights are long in winter. After a hundred years, I will sleep in the same grave." 夏之日冬之夜百歲之後歸于其居 These reveal the subjective experience of time for the sad and lonely woman. Finally, the wish to be buried with her husband in the same grave in the future ultimately refers back to the presence of 'here-and-now."

What distinguishes this poem from the above three is that the "here-and-now" at this point means not only the speaking context of an uttering

subject within the text, it also means the occasion of an actual speech that takes place in the real world.

The third sentence of the first three stanzas merit our special attention. The *tz'u* 此 (here) plays a particular role in the poem. *Tz'u* is a demonstrative pronoun which specifies a place. However, the word itself is an empty sign whose signification depends on the context of the speech act. Here the referent of this empty sign can be the "uncultivated tracts" in the first couplet. Nevertheless, it is also possible that it designates something outside the text.

We can speculate that this poem was a elegiac piece performed in a funeral rite. Accompanied by music, it was sung before the grave during the ritual. Accordingly, *tz'u* here refers spatially to the place where the dead were to be buried. On the level of discourse, the use of *tz'u* assumes the fact that both addresser and addressees participate in the same speech event. Here the "addressee" should be the dead body, or the other participants in the rite. The addresser should be the woman or her surrogate. And the poem was a message conveyed on a real occasion to fulfill certain communicative aims.

Nonetheless, when the performance text is put into a written form and is realised by a reader, the function of the *tz'u* changes. After the poetic work is put into printed characters, it loses its immediate function of designating a living speech event. Paradoxically, in return it works on the level of poetic discourse in order to effect a sense of immediacy by mediating between the reader and the scene of performance. Since the word *tz'u* itself suggests the presence of both the speaker and the hearer, it creates an illusion of personal participation in the actual speech and singing event for the reader. It links the reader to the "real" situation in which the woman before the grave is performing. In other words, the immediate communicative function fades out and is substituted by a rhetorical one.

Someone may challenge the idea that *Ko sheng* is an elegy which has been performed in the real world. However, few would deny that *No* 那 (poem 301) was performed in a religious ceremony. *No* is *sung* poetry. It is generally understood that most of the poems in this category were written in order to be sung in the rituals in which gods and ancestors were worshipped.[8]

The poem starts with:

How rich, how ample!

We set up our hand-drums and drums,
We beat the drums (greatly=) loudly,
And rejoice our illustrious ancestors.
The descendant of T'ang hastens forward and arrives
Please comfort us with (completion=) perfect happiness.

猗與那與　置我鞉鼓
奏鼓簡簡　衎我烈祖
湯孫奏假　綏我思成

The poem supposes a direct communication with the ancestors. Therefore, the speech acts inside the poem are practical in nature. The speaker assumes the presence of the addressee, who, however, is invisible in the communicative context. Then the poem proceeds to depict the musical performance in the ritual:

The hand-drums and drums din,
Resounding are the notes of the flutes
It is both harmonious and peaceful,
Following the sounds of our musical stones.
Oh, majestic is the descendant of T'ang,
August is his music.

鞉鼓淵淵　嘒嘒管聲
旣和且平　依我磬聲
於赫湯孫　穆穆厥聲

I have discussed the role played by the context of the discourses in the above poems. Interestingly, the content of this poem continuously refers back to the occasion of the speech, i.e. the process of the performance, the circumstances surrounding the subject "here-and-now."

Moreover, it is interesting to observe that the discourse in this poem functions in communicative, ritual, lyrical and performing aspects at the same time. I have already mentioned the communicative function of this poem. However, one should take note that the act of uttering the poem itself in the context of the ceremony is performing another act at the same time. This is the act of worshipping and praising the gods and ancestors. This is what J.L. Austin means by "illocutionary force" in the speech act. He wrote:

> I explained the performance of an act . . . as the performance of an 'illocutionary' act, i.e. performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something.[9]

In other words, on this public ceremonial occasion, ceremony, the utterer (or utterers), by reciting this poem, performs the ritual act of sacrifice. Again, when the poem is written down and later realised by a modern reader, this immediate ceremonial function is lost. To put this poem in a new context, the reader may try to understand the speaker's personal experience of admiration and appreciation towards his ancestors. This is the lyrical function of the discourse.

The last part of the poem reads:

> Of old, in ancient times,
> The former people instituted it
> Meek and reverent, morning and evening,
> We perform the service respectfully.
>
> 自古在昔　先民有作
> 溫恭朝夕　執事有恪

Here the meaning of the present act is linked to the past: the history and tradition of the whole race. Through such discourse, the individual self merges with the cultural collectivity. This is also one of the main purposes of the ritual.

In attempting to study the position of the lyrical subject in *Shih Ching* poetry, I examine the "I" in the poems discussed from an experiential and linguistic view-point. The phenomenal worlds in these poems correspond to the perceptual world experienced by the subject at a single moment. They reflect the subject's inner mind of here-and-now. Moreover, most of the speech acts of/in the poems revolve around a common core: the uttering subject. Consequently, the "I" can always be considered as the ultimate referential point of the discourse.

I began this analysis by quoting some statements on the generic nature of lyric. However, they were nothing more than some working definitions from which my analysis could start. It would be meaningless to be restricted by these concepts to the point of neglecting the cultural background in

which the poems originate. I have mentioned the important part the context of speech plays in foregrounding the internal tension in the poems. However, all poetic discourses and their contexts are unavoidably connected to a larger "context": the philosophical and cultural milieu. The predominance of subjectivity, rooted in Chinese philosophical thought, is one of the key characteristics of Chinese aesthetics.[10] The idea of poetry as self-expression and self-realisation is crystallised in the well-quoted dictum: *shih yen chih* 詩言志 in the *Great Preface* 詩大序 where *chih* refers to the internal mind of the subject, and *yen* signifies the medium, or here, the poetic discourse. Such aesthetic theory shaped the predominant tradition of Chinese lyricism.

The concept of "lyrical subject" was used in a formal sense in this paper to mean the "I" inside the text. The relation between this "textual self" and the poet's self is a complex problem. Furthermore, I have mentioned that the signification of the text changes when it is realised in a process of reading. This involves the reader's subjectivity. Moreover, is there any transcendental ego that exists outside the text; or is "subjectivity" nothing more than a "product" of the text? These complicated and controversial questions are, however, beyond the scope of this discussion.

Notes

1. *The Elizabethan Lyric* (1905; rpt. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1955), pp. 1-19.
2. "Approaching the Lyric," *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek, Patricia Parker (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 31-2.
3. For a discussion of subjectivity and lyric, refer to Rene Wellek, "Genre Theory, the Lyric, and Erlebris," in *Discrimination: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 225-52. Wellek's article is a response to Kate Hamburger's book, entitled *Logik der Dichtung* (1957), translated into English by Marilynn Rose and published by the Indiana University Press, 1973. In her book, Hamburger asserts that lyrical poetry is a "real utterance" of the same status as a letter or a historical narrative. The Lyrical I in lyrical poetry should necessarily represent a real subject, that is the poet himself. "The experience (in the poetry) can be 'fictive,' in the sense of its being invented, but the experiencing subject, and in turn the statement-subject, the Lyrical I, can be encountered only as a real and never as a fictive subject." (p. 278) In the following analysis, the term lyrical subject is used in most of the cases in a formal sense, to denote a subject inside the text.
4. *Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb* (Cambridge: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Harvard Univ. 1957), p. 3.
5. To avoid a further use of jargon, I do not bring in Anthony Easthope's terms of "enounced" and "enunciation," although Jakobson mentions these terms in the

above article. Easthope illustrates the difference between the speech event (enunciation) and the narrated event (enounced) as follows: "So if I say or write 'She was there yesterday,' the 'narrated event' or the *enounced* is the meaning or statement 'She was there yesterday' and 'She' is the *subject of the enounced.* The 'speech event,' the act of uttering these words in language is the *enunciation*, and the person who says 'She was there yesterday' is the *subject of the enunciation.*" This distinction is significant in distinguishing the existence of two subjects in a poetic discourse. See his *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 42.

6. For a detailed discussion on subjectivity and verbal person, refer to Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971). W. R. Johnson differentiates three categories of lyric from the viewpoint of the verbal person. The first one is the "I-you" poem, in which "the poet addresses or pretends to address his thoughts and feelings to another person." In this category the person addressed is a metaphor for readers of the poem and becomes a mediator between the poet and his reader. The second category is a kind of meditative poem in which the poet talks to himself or to no one in particular. The "persons" or inanimate entities addressed often act as a focusing device. In the third type, the poet disappears from the situation of discourse entirely and does not intervene in the happenings in the text. See his *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (Berkeley & Los Angeles & London: Univ. of California Press, 1982), pp. 1-23. Johnson's analysis is very likely influenced by Benveniste's theory. For an analysis of the "self" in the Chinese poetry, see Hans Frankel, "The 'I' in Chinese Lyric Poetry," *Oriens*, 10 (1951) 128-30; Eugene Eoyang, "The Solitary Boat: Images of Self in Chinese Nature Poetry," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 32, No. 4 (1973), 593-621; François Cheng, *Chinese Poetic Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 23-30; Liao Ping-hui 廖炳惠, "Jen-ch'eng-tai-ming-tz'u chih shan lüeh – ch'ien t'an Chung-kuo ku-tien shu-ch'ing-shih ti chu-t'i," 人稱代名詞之刪略——淺談中國抒情詩的主體 *Chieh-kou p'i-p'ing lun-chi* 解構批評論集 (Taipei: Tung-ta, 1985), pp. 289-311. While Cheng's critical method is basically structuralist, Liao employs the theories of Bakhtin and Derrida.
7. I have used the translation of Karlgren in most of the cases in this paper, although I have given my own translations when necessary. Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950). The Chinese text is from *Mao shih cheng yi* 毛詩正義 in *Ssu-pu-ts'ung-k'an ch'u-pien so-pen* 四部叢刊初編縮本 (Shanghai, 1936; rpt. Taipei: Commercial Press, 1967).
8. Professor C. H. Wang has written a detailed discussion of this topic, "The Countenance of the Chou: Shih Ching 266-296," *Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong*, 7, No. 2 (1974), 426-49. In a recent article, based on evidence from the *Shih Ching* and *Li Chi*, Professor Wang discusses the roles of impersonators in these rituals and their relation to the origin of Chinese drama. See "The Lord Impersonator: Kung-shih and the First Stage of Chinese drama," in *The Chinese Text*, ed. Y. H. Chou (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 1-14.
9. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Thing with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 99-100. M. Pratt has made a brief summary of Austin's theory. "To make an utterance is to perform an act. A person who performs a speech act does at least two and possibly three things.

First, he performs a locutionary act, the act of producing a recognizable grammatical utterance in the given language. Second, he performs an illocutionary act of a certain type. "Promising," "warning," "greeting," "reminding," "informing" or "commanding" are all kinds of illocutionary acts. . . . Finally, a speaker who performs an illocutionary act may also be performing a perlocutionary act; that is, by saying what he says, he may be achieving certain intended effects in his hearer in addition to those achieved by the illocutionary act." See *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 80-1.

10. See Hsü Fu-kuan 徐復觀, "Chung-kuo yi-shu ching-shen chu-t'i chih ch'en-hsien," 中國藝術精神主體之呈現 in *Chung-kuo yi-shu ching-shen*, 中國藝術精神 4th ed. (Taipei: Hsüeh-Sheng, 1974), 45-143.