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A Study on the Authorship of the Prefaces in Mao-shi

by Si-joon KIM

Shi-jing is a collection of 311 songs probably composed by aristocrats and plebeians during the 500 years between early Zhou and late Chun-qiū periods. It must be the most ancient collection of songs as well as the first collection of literary works in the history of China. But the term, "a collection of literary works," is merely an invention of modern scholars. On the contrary, at least up to Qing period, it had been traditionally revered as a classic of the Confucian society, and also as a sacred book, interpreted and annotated in reference to the religious thoughts.

Shi-jing is also called Mao-shi, because the existing text of *Shi-jing* came from that of Mao version. The original texts of *Shi-jing* disappeared during Qin's "burning of books." In Han period, there appeared 4 kinds of revived versions from the four families; Qi, Lu, Han and Mao. During the early period of the dynasty, former three versions were prevailing while Mao version gradually became popular in late Han period. As the Mao version became dominant, other three versions ceased to be read and gradually disappeared. In Sui period, all of the other three versions completely perished except for a fragment of Han version. This was the very reason why Mao version was inherited even to the present as the only extant text of *Shi-jing* and regarded as a representative version of *Shi-jing*, called Mao-shi.

In Mao-shi, there are prefaces on the heads of each songs and Mao's interpretation(傳) and Zheng-xian's annotations(箋) as well as the words of songs. The first thing we face when reading *Shi-jing* is the prefaces. Beginning with sentences of a certain form, such as "this is a poem to praise something" or "this is a poem to satire something," these prefaces play the role of introduction or guide for the readers who go about the appreciation of the poems. Therefore, readers are led by the prefaces to appreciate the poems with some preoccupations. However, we can see there are some differences between the original meanings of poems and the contents of the prefaces. This was the very problem which gave rise to the long controversies on the authenticity and authorship of the prefaces.

Historically, there have existed many different opinions on this question. Zheng-xian,

one of the greatest scholars in late Han period and who wrote an annotation to Mao's version of *Shi-jing*, asserted that these prefaces were written by a student of Confucius, Zi-xia. This opinion in Han period gained wide recognition among Confucian scholars. This general belief was so solid that Fan-ye of Jin dynasty, who argued that the prefaces were created by Wei-hong in his annotation to Hou-han-shu (the History of Late Han), received little scholarly attention.

It was not until Tang period that any positive refutations and suspicions against this general belief came into being. Many scholars of Tang period, including Han-yu made challenges to Zheng-xian's opinion, refuting that these prefaces were written by someone who was ignorant of the original meanings of the poems. From this time on, the traditional attribution of the authorship to Zi-xia began to face strong challenges, and many active discussions and explorations on the authorship of the prefaces were accordingly made. In Sung period, this question became even more controversial in the study of *Shi-jing*, and Zhu-xi even eliminated the prefaces from *Shi-jing*. From Yuan, Ming, Qing periods up to the present, there have been rising various opinions on this question, among which the following are the most remarkable:

1. Zi-xia wrote the prefaces.
2. Wei-hong wrote the prefaces.
3. The prefaces were created through the joint-work of Zi-xia and Wei-hong.
4. The prefaces were created through the joint-work of Zi-xia, Wei-hong and Mao-gong.
5. The prefaces were created by unknown Han scholars.
6. The prefaces were written by the royal historian(s).
7. The prefaces were created by people who composed songs of *Shi-jing*.
8. The prefaces were written by Confucius.
9. The prefaces were written by the scholar(s) living in seclusion at rural areas.
10. The prefaces were written by students of Mao-gong.
11. The prefaces were written by Meng-zi.

Among these opinions, our attention can be focused on two persons: Zi-xia and Wei-hong. Through a comparative research on these opinions, we can find a possibility of solution on this question.

In the prefaces to *Shi-jing*, there are many citations from the books by Han people after Zi-xia. And we can see that the writer of the prefaces tried to explain the poems

in terms of the educational, political aspects without paying a due regard to its original meaning. Furthermore, these prefaces had never been mentioned in the writings of Han people, and referred to only in Wei-shu for the first time. Fan-ye wrote a chapter of the biography of Wei-hong at Wei-shu simply to emphasize the fact that the prefaces were written by him. Considering the chronological data of Zheng-xian and Wei-hong, there is a 200-year gap between these two people. We can hardly imagine that Fan-ye might have had no knowledge whatever of Zheng-xian's assertion on this question. Therefore, we can safely assume that Fan-ye's position could have been supported by some unknown evidence. If this assumption is acceptable, there may be a question as to why Zheng-xian asserted that the prefaces were written by Zi-xia.

Han was a state whose dominant ideology was the Confucianism. However, as Apocrypha and Prognostication(圖讖說) began to flourish in late Han, the annotation and interpretation of Confucian classics came to be influenced by these unorthodox theories, and this resulted in a total shaking of Confucian traditionalism. In case of *Shi-jing*, the versions of the three families, Qi, Lu and Han, were already polluted by those unorthodoxy of *Shi-jing*, in order to revive Confucian traditionalism, through the promotion of the Mao version of *Shi-jing*, which was found less polluted, and of the prefaces of Mao-shi created 150 years later than the Mao version by an unknown writer. But he fabricated the author of the prefaces as Zi-xia, for he was afraid that other scholars would not believe his opinion if he named Wei-hong, an unknown scholar at that time, as the author of the prefaces.

Consequently, it can be said that the prefaces of Mao's version of *Shi-jing* was not created in pre-Qin period, but created by Confucian scholars in late Han period to help to engender a renaissance of Confucian traditionalism, and there is certain gap between the original meaning of songs in *Shi-jing* and the explanations in the prefaces.

The prefaces of Mao-shi can be used as an important reference to the questions: with what attitude did pre-modern scholars study *Shi-jing*? It is difficult to find any inherent value in the prefaces, but when we approach to the literary and historical aspects of this great collection of songs, these prefaces can certainly be used as important source materials.