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Article

The Classification of Reclusive Poems in *The Book of Songs* and the Interpretation of Its Main Chapters

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the classification of reclusive poetry in *The Book of Songs* and the interpretation of its main chapters. Broadly speaking, reclusive poetry is defined as a type of verse that primarily expresses the idea of seclusion. Its core content includes praise for the character of hermits, advocacy of the value of seclusion, detachment from worldly fame and success, and aesthetic pursuit of natural and serene environments. The paper then provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of reclusive poetry in *The Book of Songs*, categorizing 26 poems with themes related to seclusion into five types: Seeking Seclusion Poems, Friends of Virtue Poems, Retaining Virtue Poems, Singing of Seclusion Poems, and Admiring Seclusion Poems, and interprets each chapter. Although this classification is an initial attempt, it aims to offer new academic perspectives on the multifaceted meanings of *The Book of Songs* through dual attention to themes and interpretations.

Keywords: *The Book of Songs*; reclusive poetry; division; interpretation

1. Introduction

The Book of Songs, as the source of realism in Chinese literature, has long been obscured by traditional exegesis, which has concealed the reclusive spirit hidden within its verses. Most chapters in *The Book of Songs* have ambiguous themes, and their interpretations exhibit significant pluralistic ambiguity. This ambiguity stems not only from the metaphorical nature of poetic imagery and its detachment from historical context but also from the varying political stances and academic approaches of different interpreters throughout history. According to my statistics, there are 26 chapters in *The Book of Songs* that touch on the theme of reclusion, accounting for about 8.5% of the entire book. This article focuses on the classification of reclusive poetry types in *The Book of Songs* and the interpretation of its main chapters.

2. Definition of the Concept of Reclusive Poetry

If one wishes to study the reclusive poems in *The Book of Songs*, it is essential to understand what "reclusive poetry" entails. According to existing literature, the earliest document that uses the term "reclusive poetry" specifically is the *Taiping Yulan*. During the Southern Song Dynasty, Luo Dajing further explored and discussed "reclusive poetry" in his work *He Lin Yu Lu*: "Even if a greedy person writes about integrity, or an official writes about reclusiveness, how can they escape the eyes of discerning readers? Take Bai Letian's

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poetry, for example; it is broad-minded and leisurely, with a lightness towards officialdom. Who could doubt this? However, Zhu Wengong alone claimed that Bai Letian often spoke of his own nobility, but in reality, he loved his official position. In his poems, he speaks fondly of wealth and honor, as if drooling over them. This reveals some of his true feelings. Alas! Even Bai Letian's words cannot be entirely trusted, let alone others" [1]. The term "reclusive poetry" was officially adopted as a specialized vocabulary in Chinese literature by the Southern Song Dynasty at the latest [2].

Due to the differences in research subjects, various scholars have their own definitions of reclusive poetry. In his work "*From Reclusiveness to Palace Style*", Hong Shunlong from Taiwan categorizes reclusive poetry into broad and narrow categories. "Broadly speaking, reclusive poetry should include immortal wandering poems, landscape poems, metaphysical poems, pastoral poems, etc., but these immortal wandering poems are also byproducts of reclusive sentiments. However, they either focus on landscape description or emphasize the chanting of abstract moral theories... The reclusive poetry I refer to is narrow, which celebrates a frugal life, admires ancient scholars, recluses, and hermits, yearns for remote places like mountains, forests, rivers, seas, farming, fishing, and other secluded realms, and even views worldly troubles as burdens and reclusiveness as a noble ideal. Therefore, what we call reclusive poetry must directly touch upon the essence or concept of reclusiveness". Narrowly defined, reclusive poetry refers to pure reclusive poems that reflect a reclusive life. Later, in his work "*A Systematic Study of Six Dynasties Thematic Poetry*", he further divides it into three categories: "admiration for reclusiveness, opposition to reclusiveness, and thoughts on reclusiveness". Besides pure reclusive poetry, he also includes opposition to reclusiveness in this category, expanding the scope of reclusive poetry. Qi Juan, in her work "*On Han-Wei-Six Dynasties Reclusive Poetry*", argues that "any poem that expresses admiration and praise for a reclusive life, describes the non-official behavior, thoughts, and actions of recluses, or conveys such reclusive sentiments, can be called reclusive poetry". She primarily defines reclusive poetry based on content. From a formal perspective, reclusive poetry comes in various forms, including rhapsodies on inviting recluses and opposing them, historical odes, object odes, emotional odes, imperial responses, and harmonies. Huo Jianbo, in his work "*Research on Reclusive Poetry (from Pre-Qin to Wei-Jin)*", believes that any poem with significant reclusive ideas can be called reclusive poetry [2]. Li Chunyan, "*Recluses and Reclusive Poetry in The Book of Songs*": Believes that reclusive poetry is poetry that reflects the daily life, interests, aspirations, and emotions of recluses. For now, poems in *The Book of Songs* that praise the behavior of recluses or describe their living environments are also referred to as "reclusive poetry" [3]. Based on existing research, scholars believe that defining reclusive poetry can be approached from both form and content, with the focus primarily on content.

From a broad perspective, this paper holds that reclusive poetry is a type of poetry whose core expression object is the idea, behavior or life of reclusion. Its core connotation includes the praise of the personality of hermits, the promotion of the value of reclusion, the estrangement from secular fame and success, and the aesthetic pursuit of natural and secluded environment.

3. The Theme Types of Reclusive Poems in *The Book of Songs*

Regarding the classification of poems in *The Book of Songs*, the modern academic community has yet to reach a unified consensus. The diversity of thematic interpretations and the openness of textual meanings have led to ongoing debates over classification criteria. From the perspective of reclusive themes, based on the definition of reclusive poetry provided earlier, relevant poems can be categorized into five types: Seeking Recluses, Friends of Virtuous Men, Retaining Virtuous Men, Singing of Recluses, and Admiring Recluses.

(1) Poetry of seeking the hidden

All poems that tell of the search for or recruitment of reclusive sages can be called "search-for-recluses" poetry. This category of reclusive poetry in *The Book of Songs* is characterized by its distinct political metaphor, with its core lying in the narrative of "seeking recluses", reflecting the Zhou Dynasty's societal longing for virtuous talents. To qualify as search-for-recluses poetry, two conditions must be met: first, the seeker must be a ruler, envoy, or representative of power; second, the sought-after individual must possess both a reclusive identity and political value.

Such poems often employ symbolic techniques, combining natural imagery with human activities to construct a deeper meaning of "the difficulty in finding virtuous people". Major works include: "*Zhou Nan · Juan Er*", "*Zhou Nan · Tu Zhi*", "*Zhou Nan · Han Guang*", "*Yong Feng · Gan Mao*", "*Zheng Feng · Ye You Man Cao*", "*Tang Feng · Yang Zhi Shui*", "*Tang Feng · You Di Zhi Du*", and "*Qin Feng · Jian Jia*".

"*The Zhou Nan · Juan Er*" has the poetic theme of "the aspirations of empresses", satirizing the gentlemen's appreciation for talent. As the third piece in "*Zhou Nan*", it is considered alongside "*Shao Nan*" as the "righteous beginning and foundation of royal governance". "*Juan Er*" consists of four chapters, one of which reads: "Gathering the tender leaves, not filling even a basket, sighing at my longing for you, placing them in the round path" [4]. Zhuang Youke points out in his commentary on the *Mao Shi* that "King Wen recommended virtuous men who suffered hardships. Repeatedly gathering tender leaves but never filling the basket, it symbolizes how rare and precious virtuous men are" [5,6]. The line "sighing at my longing for you, placing them in the round path" has multiple layers of interpretation. If "round path" is interpreted as "official rank" (i.e., official positions), then the main idea of this line points to the intense desire for talented individuals, reflecting the ruler's emphasis on talent and his eager pursuit of capable people. The last three chapters describe the elusive nature of reclusive virtuous men, who live without a fixed abode. The searchers wander aimlessly like headless flies, yet they never find their traces. The searchers ride horses through rugged mountains, climbing to the ridges, traversing the "steep" terrain, "high hills", and "wastelands", but all efforts are in vain, returning empty-handed. The state of these recluses, constantly on the move, exhausts the searchers' horses, causing them to fall ill from overwork, staggering, and eventually losing their vision due to excessive fatigue, leading to blindness and the death of the horse. The searchers themselves, too, are unable to walk due to extreme exhaustion, suffering greatly, and uttering the lament, "painful indeed".

The poem "*Zhou Nan · Han Guang*" begins with the line "In the south there stands a tall tree, not to be thought of", using the vastness of the Han River and the Yangtze River (as in "The Han is wide" and "The Yangtze is long") to metaphorically suggest the profound seclusion of virtuous men and the lack of sincerity from rulers. This echoes the core message of "Shi Qie", which criticizes the Zhou Nan ruler for failing to seek out virtuous men. The image of the "wandering maiden" in the poem possesses both mythological archetypes and political allegories: her ethereal figure inherits the legend of the Han River goddess but is also transformed into a symbol of the unattainable virtue of high-minded individuals. From "not to be thought of" to "not to be sought after", "not to be swum in thoughts", and "not to be pondered", the three stanzas progressively negate each other, reinforcing the tragic tone of the seclusion of virtuous men who cannot be found, while also revealing the insincerity of those seeking them. This structural design shares a similar effect with "*Zhou Nan · Juan Er*", where the decline of horses is described as "hui niu–xuan huang–xiao yi", all using progressive metaphors to convey the futility of searching for recluses.

In contrast to the insincerity of the seeker in "*Zhou Nan · Han Guang*", the poem "*Yong Feng · Gan Jing*" is described in the "*Mao Shi Xu*" as: "It is beautiful and virtuous. The ministers and sons of Duke Wen of Wei were many who loved goodness, and the wise enjoyed imparting good ways". Gan Jing and others all represent the etiquette of respecting scholars at that time. The banner stands alone atop the sails, drawing particular attention. From "gan mao" to "gan yu", and then to "gan jing", the decorations at the top of the banner become increasingly splendid and dazzling. At the same time, the ritual for inviting scholars becomes more grand and solemn, with silk threads interwoven, tied, and blessed, fine horses placed in four, five, or six rows. This progressive intensification vividly reflects the king's deep longing for talented individuals, in a state of urgent desire for talent. The poem meticulously describes the layered layout of the sails, which unfold in sequence and are arranged with grace, just like the procession seeking virtuous talents slowly advancing along the path leading to the mountains where recluses live, carrying solemnity and anticipation as they approach step by step. The steady and dignified demeanor displayed during this process shows no signs of impatience or panic, indirectly highlighting the king's sincere sincerity in his quest for talent, not a fleeting show but a genuine yearning from the heart for virtuous individuals to come forth and assist in achieving great endeavors. In "*Yong Feng · Gan Jing*", "shu zhe zi" is a metaphor for recluses living in seclusion. This poem calls out to beautiful and virtuous women, actually summoning the wandering virtuous ones who reside in the outskirts of Suo, the

capital of Jun, and the city of Jun. The entire poem consists of three chapters, with repeated verses, vividly conveying the intention to invite virtuous talents.

The theme of the poem "Wild Grasses" from the Zheng Odes has been a subject of diverse interpretations by scholars throughout history, ranging from love songs to romantic gatherings, friendships, and relationships between rulers and ministers. The point of contention has always centered on the line "There is a beautiful person, with clear and graceful features". The Preface to the Mao Anthology states that it expresses "the desire to meet at the right time". This interpretation places the poem within the cultural context of the Spring and Autumn period, where poetry was used to express aspirations, suggesting that beneath the surface narrative of romantic love lies a longing for an ideal political partner. The beauty and fragrant herbs symbolize the gentleman, and the recluse depicted in the poem possesses a demeanor as pure and graceful as a maiden, "clear and graceful", "graceful like a clear and graceful one". His noble character perfectly aligns with the poet's wishes, fittingly described as "meeting my desires". The ambiguity of this interpretation precisely highlights the interpretative potential of reclusive poetry.

The poem "*Tang Feng · You Di Zhi Du*" in the "*Shi Ji Zhuan*" states: "This person admires virtue but fears he may not be worthy enough to achieve it, hence he speaks of this autumn-growing du tree on the left side of the path" [7]. "Shi Ken Shi Wo" and "Shi Ken Lai You", two stanzas repeated, express through recitation the longing for a reclusive sage. It is only natural that those who seek virtue are eager for it. The poem depicts the scene of the sage drinking with the author, reflecting the theme of "urgently seeking virtue", and showcasing the poet's urgent desire for talented individuals.

"*The Reed*" is a famous poem from *The Book of Songs*, with its creation background and authorship subject to various interpretations. Fang Yurun mentions in his "*The Original Meaning of The Book of Songs*": "*The Reed*, lamenting the difficulty in attracting virtuous men". He also notes that "the wise ministers and old loyalists of Zhou, living by the water's edge, refused to serve in office; the poet laments this and uses it as an allusion to the reclusion of these men, expressing his own aspirations through this poem" [8]. It is believed that the "lamented one" symbolizes the wise ministers of the Zhou dynasty who chose seclusion, reflecting the reality during the reign of Duke Xiang of Qin, where rites were not yet established and talents were hard to gather. In the poem, the wise men who chose seclusion are elusive, like "on the other side of the water", or "at the bank of the water", or even "by the shore of the water". "The virtuous men of Qin embraced their principles and went into hiding; the poet knows their whereabouts but cannot pinpoint them, finding it difficult to follow them, hence he begins with the reeds to evoke their presence" [9]. The wise men have no fixed abode, making it hard for the ruler seeking them to locate them, leading to sighs of frustration. As time progresses from "white dew turning to frost", "white dew not yet dried", to "white dew not yet gone", the seeker in the poem continues to pursue with unwavering determination.

"*The Lesser Ya: The Crane's Cry*" employs extensive use of "bi" to depict the reclusive virtuous man, weaving natural images such as the crane's cry, swimming fish, sandalwood, and mountain rocks into a sophisticated web of symbolism. The Mao Commentary on *The Book of Songs* once stated: "The entire poem is an ode. The crane, fish, sandalwood, and stone all symbolize the virtuous man" [10]. Modern scholar Cheng Junying, in his *Translation and Annotation of The Book of Songs*, says: "In the poem, the crane is used to compare the recluse who is virtuous". "The poet uses the fish being in the depths or on the shore to compare the virtuous man either living in seclusion or serving in office". "Garden, garden. A metaphor for the state". "Tree sandalwood, sandalwood tree, symbolizing the virtuous man". "Wilted leaves, fallen branches, symbolizing the petty person". "Stone from another mountain, referring to the virtuous men of other countries". The symbolic paradigm established by "The Crane's Cry" with "crane—hermit" not only makes the crane a natural image in poetry but also embodies the author's aspiration for seclusion. The crane's call echoes far and wide, subtly implying that the noble character of the recluse can be spread far and wide. The appearance of the crane in the hermit poems of *The Book of Songs* laid the foundation for the tradition of loving and admiring cranes in later generations, which continued to grow through anecdotes like the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" wearing crane robes during the Wei-Jin period and Lin Bu's "plum wife and crane child" in the Song Dynasty.

(2) Poem by Zhi Xian

The author believes that these are poems that record the friendship between scholars and recluses or praise the deep bond between them. The category of "friendship with virtuous men" in *The Book of Songs* 'reclusive poetry reflects the spiritual interactions among scholars, with its core lying in narrating the narrative of "associating with reclusive virtuous men", reflecting the Zhou Dynasty's admiration for ideal personalities and the commitment to noble sentiments in turbulent times. Such poems use natural imagery to metaphorically represent political ecology, elevating activities such as feasts, advice on seclusion, and farewells into a symbolic system of moral resonance, constructing an ethical landscape where "virtue is the friend, and harmony is the virtue". Major works include: "*The North Wind*" from *Bei Feng*, "*Felling Trees*" from *Xiao Ya*, and "*A Fine Fish in the South*" from *Xiao Ya*.

The theme of "*The North Wind*" in *The Book of Songs* has long been a subject of debate, but traditional commentaries mostly support the interpretation of "satire on tyranny". The Preface to the Mao Anthology of Poetry suggests that this poem criticizes the tyrannical rule of the State of Wei, where people flee due to "tyranny and oppression". Although Zhu Xi questioned whether Wei's downfall was due to licentiousness, he still interpreted the "gloomy atmosphere" as a metaphor for social unrest, emphasizing the urgency of fleeing. The poet uses the fierce wind and snow to symbolize political cruelty and tyranny, while the cunning red fox and greedy black crow subtly represent the unjust actions of the rulers and ministers of Wei. Faced with a dire situation, the poet urgently advises his friend to leave the perilous political arena together, thus retiring into seclusion. Phrases like "hand in hand", "returning hand in hand", and "riding in the same carriage" repeatedly highlight the poet's deep concern and care for his friend, and also convey an urgent hope—hoping that his friend will join him in escaping from this dangerous place.

"*The Woodcutting*" from *The Book of Songs* is an important banquet poem that centers on themes of "seeking virtuous and reclusive friends" and "pursuing the sound of friendship", embodying the political ethical implications of the Zhou Dynasty's ritual and music culture, where rulers and ministers harmonize with each other and virtuous scholars join in. Regarding the interpretation of this poem, Qing scholars Wei Yuan in "*Ancient Poetic Subtleties*" and Wang Xianqian in "*Collected Explanations of the Three Schools of Poetry*" both link the "woodcutting" imagery with the story of King Wen seeking virtuous men. The poet begins with "woodcutting", truly seeking the "sound of friendship", yearning to find like-minded and loyal friends. To this end, he prepares newly brewed fine wine "pouring wine with lush vines" and succulent black sheep "having fat mutton", to warmly entertain his reclusive friends. The third chapter of the poem is the climax, where the poet drinks with recluses, a delightful experience in itself. More remarkably, during these moments of shared drinking, one can cast off worldly troubles, be carefree, and indulge fully. As they drink, phrases like "brothers are not far apart" and "the people's loss of virtue" weave together a warm and harmonious scene, where everyone feels the intimate bond between them amidst laughter and joy. When the mood is high, they can also beat drums, play music, and dance gracefully, adding more elegance to this gathering. Later, Tang poet Du Fu used the poetic imagery of "woodcutting" to mention his friendship with recluses, "In spring mountains, I seek alone without companions; the sound of woodcutting makes the mountain even more serene" [11] (from "*Two Poems on Zhang's Seclusion*").

"*The Ode to the Southern Fish*" mentioned in the *Preface of the Mao Anthology of Poetry*: "*The Ode to the Southern Fish* expresses joy and admiration for the virtuous. It conveys that during times of peace, gentlemen sincerely wish to share joy with the virtuous". The Commentary also explains: "During the prosperous era of Duke Zhou and King Cheng, those who held official positions had duties and salaries, all with sincere and earnest hearts. They were happy to stand together with virtuous people from the countryside in court, sharing their aspirations, enjoying both rank and fortune, and reveling together". These interpretations indicate that during the time when Duke Zhou assisted King Cheng and the world was at peace, the gentlemen in office all harbored sincere and genuine hearts, yearning to join the virtuous scholars in the mountains and fields, serving as officials together, sharing their ranks and joys, and enjoying mutual companionship and happiness. Phrases like "the southern fish, roiling and shimmering" not only depict the abundant natural scenery of the Yangtze and

Han river basins but also create an atmosphere of joy and harmony through the repetitive structure of "when a gentleman has wine, guests gather to feast and rejoice". The views expressed in the *Preface of the Poems*, *the Commentary on the Mao Anthology of Poetry*, and *the Preface of the Mao Anthology of Poetry* are consistent, all agreeing that this poem expresses the noble desire of gentlemen in times of peace to share governance and joy with the virtuous.

(3) Poem on retaining talent

Lianxian poetry refers to poems that record the attempts of monarchs, ministers or virtuous people to retain those virtuous people who insist on living in seclusion by using various methods. The main poems include*: Zheng Feng Zun Da Lu*, *Wang Feng Qiu You Zhong Ma*, *Xiao Ya Bai Ju*.

The opening of "*Zheng Feng-Zun Da Lu*" unfolds with the vivid scene of "following the great road, holding your sleeve tightly". The protagonist constructs a highly charged farewell scene through physical actions such as "holding the sleeve" (pulling at the sleeve) and "holding hands", complemented by earnest words like "I do not hate you, for I am not a villain" and "I do not find you ugly, for I am not a villain". This surface-level imagery of romantic parting between men and women has been subject to multiple interpretations by scholars since the Han Dynasty. Wei Yuan proposed in his work "*Shi Gu Wei*" that "using words of love between men and women to express the retention of virtuous officials", interpreting the poem's poignant emotions as political metaphors. If we follow this interpretation, the actions of "holding the sleeve" and "holding hands" in the poem actually symbolize the relationship between ruler and minister, while "not being a villain" implies that virtuous officials should not abandon their posts and retreat due to flaws in the ruler's virtue.

"*The Odes of the King: The Mulberry in the Hill*", Fang Yurun's "*The Original Meaning of The Book of Songs*" interprets it as follows: "In the hill, virtuous men gather to live in seclusion.... As the Zhou dynasty declined, virtuous men were abandoned and either went to other states or remained with the Zhou, so they would invite each other to retreat to the hills for their own enjoyment" [12]. The entire poem unfolds through natural images such as "mulberry in the hill", "wheat in the hill", and "plum in the hill", echoing the behavioral expectations of "bringing them slowly", "bringing them to eat", and "giving me a jade pendant". This forms a unique summoning structure. The middle two lines of each section are repeated, with the phrase "those who remain..." being used repeatedly to express the poet's lingering attachment to the recluses. This repetitive technique not only enhances the rhythm and musicality of the poem but also deepens the poet's emotional expression through repeated chanting, allowing readers to more truly feel the poet's cherishing and longing for the virtuous men.

The poem "*Xiao Ya · Bai Ju*" is interpreted by Cheng Junying in his "*Poetry Translation and Annotation*" as: "This is a poem of parting with friends and thoughts of virtuous people". The poem breaks away from the conventional "first mentioning something else to introduce what is being sung" pattern of *The Book of Songs*, achieving an artistic elevation through "inspiration and comparison". Zheng Xuan points out in his "*Mao Shi Jian*": "Bai Ju, a white jade colt, symbolizes the pure nature of virtuous people", revealing the essence of its metaphor. Notably, "Bai Ju" and "yi ren" form an intertextual relationship in the imagery cluster: the former highlights the noble character of the virtuous through the form of an animal, while the latter abstracts the ideal personality of a recluse with a personal pronoun. This interplay of reality and abstraction is a unique feature in *The Book of Songs*. "Bai Ju" held special symbolic significance in the Zhou Dynasty's ritual system. According to the "*Rites of Zhou · Xia Guan*", "the Son of Heaven drives six, feudal lords drive four", and white horses, as "the most prestigious among yin categories", were often used as ceremonial steeds for inviting virtuous scholars. In the poem, the poet laments the recluse's white horse being tethered to retain the virtuous, urging them not to leave without a return or to lose all contact, hoping that the virtuous will heed the poet's plea to stay.

(4) Poetry on seclusion

The core of yin ying poetry lies in praising hermits and characters with hermit traits through poetic form, aiming to extol their noble character and transcendent spiritual realm. This type of poetry focuses on the "hermit" as the main subject, avoiding scenarios of rulers seeking or retaining them. Instead, it concentrates on the inner aspirations of recluses, constructing an ideal model of their character. Major works include: "The Boat

of Bo" from Bei Feng, "*Jian Xi*" from *Bei Feng*, "*Kao Pan*" from *Wei Feng*, and "*Dongmen Zhi Chi*" from *Chen Feng*.

The poem "*Bozhou*" from *The Book of Songs*, as mentioned in the *Preface to the Mao Commentary*: "Bozhou speaks of benevolence not being met with recognition. During the reign of Duke Qing of Wei, virtuous people were not recognized, while petty individuals were around". The repeated lamentation in the poem, "My heart is not a stone, it cannot be turned; my heart is not a mat, it cannot be rolled", contrasts the immutability of a stone and the flexibility of a mat. It expresses that one's inner self is neither like a mirror, reflecting everything, nor like a millstone, easily moved, nor like a mat, casually rolled over, but rather as firm as a mountain, unshakable. This vividly conveys the author's unwavering resolve to live in seclusion, showcasing the poet's steadfast commitment to his ideals and character. This spirit is not only reflected in inner conviction but also through an outward demeanor of solemnity and dignity, "majestic and unyielding", demonstrating a dignified and composed attitude in the face of adversity. The metaphors of "not a mirror", "not a stone", and "not a mat" in the poem construct the character of a recluse, ultimately achieving unity between external solemnity and internal firmness.

The poem "*Jian Xi*" from *The Book of Songs*, as recorded in the Commentary on *The Book of Songs*: "The virtuous, frustrated and unfulfilled, serve as entertainers, harboring a disdain for the world and indulging in their own desires" [13]. In the poem, the term "beauty" of the "beauty from the West" does not merely refer to appearance but also signifies outstanding character and talent. *The Book of Songs* often uses "beauty" to metaphorically represent a gentleman, who is frequently interpreted as a wise and virtuous person with both talent and virtue. The virtuous, disillusioned by officialdom, choose to retreat into the ranks of entertainers. Why does he leave the political stage? And why does he choose to retreat among the entertainers? It is because he holds onto his aspirations, living a life of seclusion with his noble ideals. Although the position of entertainer is not prestigious, it is closely tied to rites and music education. By participating in rituals such as the "Ten Thousand Dances", the virtuous continue to pursue the spirit of rites and music through artistic means, indirectly realizing their political ideals. However, his choice of seclusion is not about distancing himself from worldly affairs but rather immersing himself among the entertainers. This choice is not a passive retreat from the world but a unique way to uphold his noble ideals.

The poem "*Kao Pan*" from the *Wei Wind* section of *The Book of Songs*, as recorded in *Kong Congzi*: "In '*Kao Pan'*, I see a man who has withdrawn from the world but finds no distress in it" [14]. *The Commentary on The Book of Songs* states: "(The first chapter) praises the virtuous for their secluded retreats among streams and valleys, where they are vast and spacious, without any sense of sorrow. Even when alone, they speak of sleep, yet they swear never to forget this joy" [15]. "*Kao Pan*" from the *Wei Wind* section describes a virtuous person who can find contentment in poverty and enjoy the pleasures of seclusion. "The entire poem does not use the words 'reclusive' or 'joyful', but every sentence speaks of seclusion, every word speaks of joy". The poem centers on the image of a "great person" in seclusion, constructing a transcendent model of reclusive life through a fluid mode of dwelling and a self-sufficient spiritual state. The spatial shifts from "Kao Pan in the stream", "Kao Pan on the bank", to "Kao Pan on land" not only depict the elusive nature of a recluse's travels but also hint at the breadth and freedom of their spiritual realm. The "great person" achieves a poetic interpretation of reclusive life through a fluid mode of dwelling, artistic solitude, and a contented transcendence. This form of reclusion is neither an escape from reality nor a compromise with ideals, but rather a transformation of inner mindsets that convert worldly "troubles" into spiritual "comforts", providing future literati with a ultimate path for "poetic dwelling".

The poem "*Chen Feng: The Pond at the Eastern Gate*" centers on the theme of a virtuous lady, establishing an intertextual connection between feminine beauty and the spiritual character of recluses, thus constructing a unique aesthetic paradigm of seclusion. The pond at the eastern gate can be used for "soaking hemp", "soaking ramie", and "soaking rush". The beauty of the virtuous lady can be compared to "meeting songs", "meeting words", and "meeting speech". The use of terms like "virtuous" and "beautiful" in the poem not only praises the gentle and graceful qualities of women but also subtly conveys a metaphorical expression of the noble character of hermits.

(5) Mu Yin poetry

The core of Mu Yin's poetry lies in expressing the desire for seclusion. Through his yearning and longing for a reclusive life, the poet reflects dissatisfaction with real life and a pursuit of freedom and tranquility. Major poems include: "*Bei Feng-Bei Men*", "*Wang Feng-Junzi Yangyang*", "*Wang Feng-Tu Yuan*", "*Wei Feng-Shi Mu Jian Zhi*", "*Chen Feng-Heng Men*", "*Hui Feng-Xi You Chang Chu*", "*Xiao Ya-Si Yue*", "*Xiao Ya-Xiao Ming*", and "*Xiao Ya-Xi Sang*."

"*The Northern Gate*" from *The Book of Songs* is a poem that describes a virtuous man suffering in the harsh realities of life and yearning for seclusion. The poem uses a straightforward narrative style to portray a virtuous man deeply mired in real-world difficulties. Through economic hardship, heavy administrative burdens, and cold familial ties, it reveals the plight of scholars who are "trapped in poverty", ultimately leading to a longing for the freedom of reclusion. The poem begins with "In the end, I am poor and destitute", directly highlighting the extreme scarcity of material life for the virtuous man. The consecutive use of verbs such as "adapt", "increase", "support", and "leave behind" creates a rapid rhythm that simulates the heavy workload of official duties. The phrases "all my relatives have been exiled" and "all my relatives have been destroyed" push the virtuous man into complete isolation. He is burdened by political affairs outside and criticized by his family at home, filled with deep concern, which fosters a desire for seclusion—"Enough is enough".

"*The Odes of the King: The Gentleman Yangyang*", as noted by Fang Yurun in his "*Original Meaning of The Book of Songs*": "The virtuous find joy in serving as musicians. It seems that many virtuous men and gentlemen of the Three Dynasties chose to live in seclusion among musicians" [16]. This poem, with its repetitive structure and lively imagery, portrays a sage who is "hidden among musicians". Through the subtle changes in the instruments "huan" and "xiao", and the actions "zhao you fang" and "zhao you ao", it creates a rhythmic pattern that loops back and forth. This repetition is not only a musical echo but also hints at a yearning for a life of seclusion. The words "yangyang" and "taotao" in the poem are not just descriptions of expression; they are metaphors for the essence of seclusion—When individuals face real hardships with an aesthetic attitude, seclusion elevates from a survival strategy to an art of existence.

"*The Wang Feng · Tu Yuan*" profoundly reveals the survival predicaments and spiritual choices of intellectuals against the backdrop of the Zhou Dynasty's decline through the imagery contrast between "rabbit" and "pheasant". In the poem, "There is a rabbit wandering", using the rabbit as a metaphor for recluses, while "the pheasant is caught in the net", uses the pheasant as a metaphor for the suffering masses. The former symbolizes the choice of living in seclusion, while the latter subtly alludes to the painful reality of being ensnared by political traps. This juxtaposition of animal metaphors not only concretely presents different paths in times of social turmoil but also implicitly questions the transcendent state of recluses: Can the rabbit's "wandering" truly avoid the crises of chaos? The poet's response presents three layers of contrast: First, "encountering countless calamities" contrasts with "still asleep without awakening", reflecting a clear understanding and eventual despair. At this moment, despite having the wisdom to perceive the situation, there is no power to save the state. Second, "after birth" contrasts sharply with "at birth", highlighting the stark contrast between reality and the past, revealing the wavering belief in the mandate of heaven among the Zhou people. Third, "the rabbit can escape" contrasts with "the pheasant must fall into the net", representing the freedom of choice versus the fatalistic fate of human beings, hinting at the uncontrollability of individual destinies in chaotic times. The repetitive structure of the poem, with phrases like "still asleep without awakening", "still asleep without awareness", and "still asleep without hearing" progressively moving from rejecting speech to closing off senses, ultimately isolating cognition, forms a self-destructive loop filled with disappointment and indignation.

The most fitting interpretation of the theme in "*Wei Feng · Shi Mu Zhi Jie*" is Zhu Jia's view: "When the government is in chaos and the state is in peril, virtuous men do not wish to serve in court but instead think of returning with their friends to the fields and gardens; hence their words are thus" [17]. This accurately highlights the theme of reclusion in the poem. The poem constructs an ideal paradigm for Confucian scholars to "retreat to the fields and gardens" through its simple pastoral imagery and the tension between reclusive choices. Although

the poem does not explicitly state the reasons for the virtuous men's retreat, it sets the stage for their post-retirement life through the depiction of sericulture. The poet uses "between ten acres" as a spatial metaphor, unfolding a scene of leisurely farming and silkworm breeding, effectively building a spiritual barrier that isolates them from the noise beyond the "ten acres".

In "*Chen Feng · Hengmen*", the recluse is content with a simple dwelling, never forgetting its joy. *The Book of Songs* states: "The wise find joy without seeking". In the poem, "Hengmen" and "Bishui" form a metaphorical system: the former symbolizes the ultimate dissolution of material desires, though humble, it can be a place to dwell; the latter, "can be enjoyed even in hunger", subtly conveys the transcendence of spiritual fulfillment. This choice of living in simplicity and substituting water for food not only negates the secular value system but also, through the expression of "enjoying even in hunger", inevitably reveals a hint of bitterness in the tone of contentment and happiness, a mix of self-mockery and self-consolation.

"*The Wind of Cypress · In the Marshes, the Tall and Strong*" employs a repetitive structure in three stanzas to highlight the poet's suffering in turbulent times through the carefree nature of plants—unaware, homeless, and without a home. The poem repeatedly praises the vibrant life of the tall and strong, contrasting sharply with the poet's own worries through the characteristic of plants being devoid of perception and free from the burden of a home. This technique of "using joy to accentuate sorrow" pushes the survival predicaments of people in chaotic times to their extreme—even the ignorance and lack of awareness of plants become a luxury, highlighting the harshness of reality. The poet deliberately omits specific perilous situations, allowing readers to sense the depth of suffering through the contrast between plants and humans, as if reading between the lines.

"*The April of Xiao Ya*" is a poignant work in *The Book of Songs* that portrays the intense conflict between ideals and reality for scholars and officials during turbulent times. The poet laments the twists and turns of fate, penning this poem to express his sentiments. "*A Direct Interpretation of The Book of Songs*" states: "The official recounts his journey, from summer to autumn and then winter, recounting what he has seen and heard along the way, as well as his worries, troubles, exhaustion, and thoughts of seclusion—various complex emotions" [18]. The entire poem follows the timeline from "April is like summer" to "the cold of winter", depicting the harsh environment through the four seasons, metaphorically reflecting the poet's suffering over the year, including slander, exile, and wandering in the southern lands. The question "What harm have I done?" directly points to the absurdity of individual fates under political persecution. At its core, the poem explores the contradiction between "exhausting oneself in service" and "the desire for retirement", where the poet professes "exhausting oneself in service" but faces "better not to be me". The poet's resolve to retreat into seclusion is evident. His lament, "I wish I could avoid disaster like a hawk or a carp", reveals the essence of his "desire for retirement" as a cry of helplessness in a chaotic world with no place to call home.

"*The Minor Odes of Ya · Xiao Ming*" is written from the perspective of an official who has been away on duty for a long time, expressing his conflicting feelings in turbulent times. Phrases like "its poison is great and bitter", "thinking of me alone", "dreading that I have no time", "politics become more pressing", and "my heart is filled with sorrow" reflect his deep weariness of the busy political life. These lines convey the heavy burden of governance and the loneliness he feels. He often thinks of ancient virtuous recluses, "thinking of those who share my fate", which is both a tribute to these reclusive sages and a lament over his own predicament. The final line, "calm down and take your place", further reveals his helplessness and endurance in the face of realpolitik, making it a typical portrayal of a minister regretting his career in troubled times.

In "*Xiao Ya · Xi Sang*", the lush imagery of "Xi Sang has a slope" is often interpreted as an erotic poem in traditional annotations, but it actually contains political implications. The vitality of the mulberry grove, with its "fertile soil" and "secluded shade", can symbolize passionate love or represent an ideal governance. The phrase "virtuous words are sticky" has a double meaning: it refers to tender affectionate words and also aligns with the interpretation in the Zheng Commentary that "good words govern the way", pointing to a wise ruler. The final line, "hidden in my heart, when will I forget it?" echoes the sentiment in "*Chu Ci*" where one "thinks of the prince but dares not speak," revealing the collective anxiety of virtuous individuals who fear disaster when seeking office and find it hard to abandon their reclusiveness.

4. Conclusions

This article, through a systematic review and close reading of the reclusive poems in *The Book of Songs*, categorizes these poems into five thematic types: seeking seclusion, befriending virtuous men, retaining virtuous men, praising seclusion, and admiring seclusion. This classification system not only breaks through the limitations of traditional exegesis but also opens new avenues for understanding the spiritual world of scholars during the Zhou Dynasty. It is evident that the reclusive poems in *The Book of Songs* are not merely depictions of withdrawal from the world; they are comprehensive texts interwoven with political metaphors and philosophical reflections on life. From the frustration expressed in "Seeking Virtuous Men" from "*Zhou Nan · Juan Er*" and "*Reeds*" from "*Qin Feng*", to the earnest plea for retaining virtuous men in "*White Colt*" and "*Following the Great Road*"; from the self-sufficient model of recluses portrayed in "*Kao Pan*" from "*Wei Feng*" and "*Heng Men*" from "*Chen Feng*", to the poignant laments of turbulent times reflected in "*Xi You Chang Chu*" from "*Hui Feng*" and "*April*" from "*Xiao Ya*", all highlight the spiritual tension between engagement and detachment among scholars in the pre-Qin period.

Some poems construct symbolic systems through imagery clusters such as "the crane's cry from the nine ridges" and "on the other side of the water", which not only deeply reflect on the ritual and music civilization of the Zhou Dynasty but also lay the prototype for subsequent reclusive literature. Of particular note is the survival wisdom of "floating and dwelling" in "*Kao Pan*" from the *Wei Odes*, the steadfastness of character in "*Bo Zhou*" from the *Bei Odes* with its phrase "not stone, not mat", and the aesthetic paradigm of "comparing virtues to nature" in "*He Ming*" from the *Xiao Ya*. Together, these elements shape the spiritual genes of Chinese reclusive culture. The elaborate ritual descriptions in "*Gan Jing*" from the *Yong Odes* and the repetitive calls in "*You Di Zhi Du*" from the Tang Odes further reveal the deep interaction between reclusive poetry and the Zhou Dynasty's system for attracting talented individuals. The image of the recluse serves both as a critical symbol of political disorder and as a potential resource for rebuilding order.

The Book of Songs, as the origin of Chinese reclusive literature, is valued not only for its 26 poems accounting for 8.5% of the text. As the fountainhead of Chinese reclusive literature, they have had a profound impact on subsequent reclusive works. Reclusive poetry underwent diversified development during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, and reached full prosperity in the Sui and Tang periods, ultimately becoming a spiritual gene of the Chinese people. Although this article's classification is an initial attempt, it aims to provide new academic perspectives for reevaluating the multifaceted meanings of *The Book of Songs* through dual examination of themes and interpretations.

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