

The Book of Poetry and the Construction of Confucian Religiosity: Heaven-Human Induction in Natural Phenomena

Qian Cheng

Department of China Language and Literature, Xi'an University of Finance and Economics, Xi'an 710100, ShannXi, China
2019010018@xaufe.edu.cn

Abstract: The developmental trajectory and patterns of Confucian religiousness are profoundly rooted in the religious archetypes embedded within the "Six Classics" (《六经》). Among these, The Book of Poetry preserves sacrificial hymns of the Zhou people, whose reverent religious sentiments during rituals resonate with the sincerity and piety upheld by later Confucians in moral cultivation. Beyond inward transcendence, The Book of Poetry also contributes to the outward transcendence of Confucianism. The expansion of the sage king's virtue not only fosters political harmony and social stability but also ensures the flourishing of nature and the proper ordering of all things—a transcendental political ideal imbued with religiosity as articulated in The Mao Commentary on the Book of Poetry (《毛诗》). Natural elements such as plants, animals, and insects in The Book of Poetry were integrated by Mao Poetry into the cosmological framework of Yin-Yang Qi Transformation (《阴阳气化论》), transforming them into spiritual entities capable of sensing celestial and political affairs. By retaining primitive beliefs in personalized deities while expounding new religious connotations of mutual responsiveness between nature and humanity, the Confucian interpretations in Mao Poetry served as both a precursor and classical prototype for Dong Zhongshu's theological system of Heaven-human induction. Furthermore, the political-educational theory of poetic criticism in Mao Poetry is underpinned by the religious notion of mutual influence between humans and nature.

Keywords: The Book of Poetry, Heaven-Human Correspondence, Confucian Religiousness.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of whether Confucianism constitutes a religion emerged as a scholarly debate following the integration of Chinese and Western studies, particularly after the introduction of Christianity. Scholars such as Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan, Tu Weiming, and Liu Shuxian have since the 20th century acknowledged the religious spirit inherent in Confucian humanism. However, the discursive construction of Confucian

religiousness remains underexplored. The culture and scholarship of the Zhou Dynasty laid the foundation for Confucianism. The "Six Classics" (六经) —including *The Book of Poetry* (《诗》), *The Book of History* (《书》), *The Book of Rites* (《礼》), *The Book of Music* (《乐》), *The Book of Changes* (《易》), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (《春秋》)—served as the doctrinal sources of Confucianism. The evolution of Confucian religiousness is closely tied to Zhou culture and the religious archetypes within these classics. During the Spring and Autumn Period, as official learning declined, Confucians reinterpreted the religious dimensions of the "Six Classics." While the Book of Changes (《周易》) and Record of Rites (《礼记》) are widely recognized as central to Confucian religiousness, the role of The Book of Poetry remains understudied. For example, some scholars study the concept of "enlighten people to follow the lead of hea"(神道设教) in Book of Changes and think that "enlighten people to follow the lead of hea"(神道设教) is "the connection between the way of gods, the way of heaven, and the way of humanity, so that the 'inner transcendence' and the 'outer transcendence' are integrated into one", Mou Zhong-jian asserts that, "The establishment of Confucian religiousness is also due to the Commentary on Book of Changes(《易传》)'.....'enlighten people to follow the lead of hea (神道设教)' has become the simplest summary of Confucian religious view". Among the rituals of the Zhou Dynasty Rites, "sacrificial rituals" held significant positions in traditional social and political life, with the phrase "All means of governing people urgently require rites. Among rites, nothing is more important than the rites of sacrifice" (From: Record of Rites· Sacrifice System 《礼记·祭统》). During the Axis period, Confucianism endowed new meanings to ancient sacrificial activities about nature gods and ancestral gods, and constructed systematic religious humanistic spirit in sacrificial ceremonies, "repaying the root and returning to the beginning (报本返始)," "treating the death as the life (事死如事生)," and "the offering of sacrifice as the foundation of education (祭为教本)", with these thoughts preserved in many articles of the Book of Rites. Some scholars pointed out that "the establishment of a Confucian religious

concept system should be marked by the completion of the Book of Rites. The Book of Rites synthesizes and standardizes the ancient religious sacrificial rites, and explains them from multiple levels and sides according to the basic spirit of Confucius religious view, forming a theoretical form with a system scale." However, The Book of Poetry preserves Zhou sacrificial hymns, many of which functioned as liturgical texts for communicating with deities. These hymns not only reflect Zhou religious beliefs but also established foundational patterns for Confucian religious development. For instance, later Confucian texts like Mencius (《孟子》) and The Doctrine of the Mean (《中庸》) frequently cited sacrificial verses from The Book of Poetry to substantiate transcendental concepts such as the Way of Heaven and human nature. Early religious emotions, such as awe during rituals (e.g., "To the Heavens" in *Qingmiao* 《清庙》), influenced later Confucian introspective cultivation and moral integrity. That is to say, the religious emotion of early sacrifice, as a cultural gene, influenced the religious spirit of inward cultivation in the axial period, including later generations, just as Yu Ying-shi noted: "The manipulation and application of Qi by the heart replaced the magic power of communicating with ghosts and gods before. Thus, by nourishing the sensitive chi in the heart, all individuals can become their own shamans." In the aspect of inward transcendence, Confucian moral cultivation and religious emotion in sacrifice are inherited. Besides, The Book of Poetry also constructs the outward transcendence of Confucian religiousness. During the Warring States Period and Qin and Han Dynasties, under the influence of the new view of heaven, Confucianism incorporated the natural objects such as plants, birds, animals, insects and fish of The Book of Poetry into the universe system of Yin-Yang Qi Transformation theory (阴阳气化论), and interpreted the natural objects of The Book of Poetry as divine objects that could sense heaven and government affairs. According to Mao Poems, the sage king's cultivation of virtue and the outward expansion of his benevolence can not only realize the perfection of political and moral order, but also affect all things in the universe, so that fish and trees flourish and everything in heaven and earth has its place. "Everything has its own way" (From: You Geng preface of Mao Poetry), "Everything is extremely tall" (From: Chong Qiu preface of Mao Poetry), "Everything is born properly" (From: You Yi preface of Mao Poetry), which also becomes the transcendental political enlightenment ideal with religiousness molded in Mao Poetry, and is also the yearning and

longing of China people for the harmonious and perfect world order between heaven and man. To probe into the Confucian discourse of the unity of heaven and man in Mao Poetry is of certain significance to the study of the ideological history of Confucian religiousness of heaven and man induction between the Warring States and Qin Dynasties, and also to restore the classic prototype of Dong Zhong-shu's Confucian religious system of heaven and man induction.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HUMAN AND THE RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS OF THE BOOK OF SONGS.

The Book of Songs: Odes of Zhou (《诗经·周颂》) and some of Ya Songs (《诗经·雅》) were songs sung at sacrificial ceremonies of Zhou people. They were roughly composed in the early Western Zhou Dynasty, representing the primitive worship belief of personality gods. “Ode is the work of reporting success to the gods” (From: Mao's Preface to the Book of Songs 《毛诗序》), expressing the religious desire of “offering prayers for blessings to the gods” in the lyrics of The Book of Poetry. At the same time, compared with the Shang Dynasty, the religious thoughts of the Zhou people also experienced a significant shift, where the premise of God's blessing was that the monarch obeyed the virtue of heaven. If the monarch could cultivate virtue and benevolence, heaven would come to blessing. Therefore, Zhou people also tried their best to shape the saint image of King Wen of Zhou in the sacrificial lyrics and the spiritual leader image of King Wen of Zhou who could be in harmony with heaven. Based on this, the gods continuously grant mandate of Heaven and blessings to Zhou people. When the blessing falls from heaven, human beings also thank heaven for their kindness through sacrifice (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). There are many lyrics in The Zhou-Dynasty Sacrificial Songs to repay gratitude. Therefore, respecting the virtue of heaven, blessing from heaven and gratitude to heaven have become religious beliefs repeatedly sung in the lyrics of The Book of Poetry (Peng, 2023a). And the system tradition of worshipping heaven and ancestors formed by this early religious belief has lasted for generations in traditional China. Moreover, the characteristics of the sacrificial lyrics in The Book of Poetry have also become a model and source for later generations to compose lyrics for ritual ceremonies. The tradition of recited poetry in the ritual ceremonies has maintained the same

line as that of the homage poetry from The Book of Poetry, with lyrics mainly in four-character phrases(Ge & Ge, 2020), respectful and elegant, in the sacrificial rituals, humanity promotes various virtues in a respectful manner, listens to the decrees of heaven, hoping to gain divine favor. However, the Shang culture tradition of paying attention to sound and color, or the romantic mode of entertaining gods in the lyrics of the "the Nine Songs" of the Chu Ci (《楚辞·九歌》), did not become the mainstream of official sacrificial lyrics in later generations. Although the sacrificial lyrics composed during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han displayed strong romantic elements, the official sacrificial modes ultimately reverted to the traditions of The Book of Poetry(Peng, 2023b). Although the worship of heaven and ancestors is very old, the institutional religion has been eliminated with the collapse of traditional systems. Scholars widely acknowledge that institutional religion has little cultural significance today. However, the reverence for heaven and earth revealed behind China's sacrificial tradition is still valuable for today's relationship between man and nature. As Tu Wei-Ming said,"Filial piety and reverence are not conservative but conservationist ideas(Qinghe, 2024). They attempt to establish a pattern of mutual dependence and organismic unity between heaven and humankind..... We show reverence toward heaven and, by implication, toward Earth and the myriad things because we depend on their support for existence and because the niche we find in their midst is not simply our attainment but is also their gift(Liu & An, 2019)." Another example is Hong Xiu-Ping's view that the religious tradition of worshipping heaven and ancestors goes hand in hand with the Chinese humanistic spirit." In fact, there is still a religious tradition of worshipping heaven and ancestors in China culture. This tradition goes hand in hand with the humanistic spirit of Chinese culture, interwoven with each other, and even integrated with each other, which is itself the embodiment of the characteristics of traditional Chinese beliefs. Confucianism clearly values not only human relations, but also the religious nature of the human-god relationship implied in the ritual." During the Warring States and Qin-Han periods, a new "Qi" (Vital Force气) -developed view of the universe cosmology was formed. The "heaven" constructed by yin-yang and five elements had replaced the personified god of "heaven". The operation of all things was the operation of Qi and followed the law of "Tao" (道). Government orders and personnel behaviors were also incorporated into the cyclical system of yin-yang and five elements. " The heaven constructed by yin-yang and five elements is not a personified god, not a pan-god, and

not a pantheist. It is the universal law of dynamic, orderly and responsive Qi, and the world of organisms thus formed." Through the interpretation of The Book of Poetry (Rosenlee, 2012), Confucianism integrated the new cosmology of the unity of heaven and human into the classical veneration system by way of annotation. For example, in addition to retaining the original belief of personality heaven in The Book of Poetry, Mao Commentary interprets the natural scenery of plants, birds and animals in The Book of Poetry as spiritual objects that can sense heaven and politics, that is, the Confucian classics annotation of natural objects in The Book of Poetry reflects a new religious concept of mutual interaction between heaven and man, which is a new interpretation of the Book of Songs after entering a new era discourse, while the Confucian classics interpretation of the induction between heaven and man in the Book of Songs, It also became the pioneer and classical basis of Dong Zhong-shu's Confucian theology. The religious discourse of Mao Poetry became an important part of Confucian religion by Zheng Xuan, Kong Yingda and so on (Zonggui, 2015). After the Warring States Period, the Confucian concept of heaven and man moved towards two paths: one is the separation of heaven and man represented by Xunzi, Xunzi pointed out that "heaven has a constant, not for Yao, not for Jie. Responding with order will bring auspiciousness; responding with disorder will lead to adversity." (From: "Xun Zi - Discourse on the Nature of Heaven" 《荀子·天论》) One is the Confucian system of natural induction represented by Dong Zhongshu: "The emperor will rise, and his beauty will also be seen first; The emperor will perish, and ominous signs appear first. Therefore, things are called to each other by their own kind." (From: "The Spring and Autumn Annals: Moving According to Category" 《春秋繁露·以类相动》) Similarly, Xunzi consciously ignores the religious character of "heaven" and emphasizes the natural side of "heaven" when interpreting sacrificial poems such as "Heaven's Creation" (《天作》) and "I Will" (《我将》). "Xunzi's interpretation of 'heaven' in Book of Songs is obviously different from Mencius. Xunzi emphasizes the natural character of 'heaven' and consciously ignores the divine side of his personality." Scholars widely acknowledge that Mao Poetry was inherited from Xunzi and inherited Xunzi's thoughts. Although Xunzi and Mao Poetry have many similarities, they have great differences in the relationship between heaven and man. "Xunzi" denied the religiousness of 'heaven' inherited from generation to generation until Mencius, and began to interpret The Book of Poetry with

a new natural concept of heaven." However, Mao's Book of Songs, while annotating The Classic of Poetry, retains the original religious beliefs centered around the personal god. At the same time, it interprets the poetic ideas through the new concept of "the interaction between Heaven and human," thereby elucidating the materialistic religious ideas in The Classic of Poetry. The religious-political thought in Mao Poetry is not only inherited from the theory of heaven and human nature of Master Si and Master Meng School (思孟学派), but also becomes an important link in the formation of Dong Zhongshu's Confucian theological system of the unity of heaven and man.

3. INTERPLAY BETWEEN NATURAL PHENOMENA AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS: A NEW INTERPRETATION OF PLANTS, INSECTS, AND FISH IN "THE BOOK OF SONGS

The concept of object interaction should have originated very early. For example, when The Book of Poetry records good governance and harmonious people, there will be auspicious signs such as phoenix, "Phoenixes fly, With rustling wings, And settle high. Officers of the king's, Employed each one, To please the Heaven's Son." (From: The Book of Odes: Juan'a 《诗经·卷阿》). The Analects of Confucius (《论语》

) also said: "If the phoenix bird does not come, the river does not come out of the map, my life is probably over!" (From: The Analects of Confucius·Zi han 《论语·子罕》). During the Spring and Autumn Period, the Warring States Period and the Qin and Han Dynasties, in addition to the auspicious feeling of primitive belief, all natural things and personnel politics were brought into the framework of mutual induction. The brief text of "The Great Drought of Lubang" (The Great Drought in the State of Lu 《鲁邦大旱》) records the world drought, Duke Ai of Lu (鲁哀公) asked Confucius countermeasures, Confucius replied: "The state drought, not to lose all punishment and virtue?" Confucius believed that drought was the result of losing punishment and virtue, which revealed religious sentiments inspired by the idea of harmony between Heaven and humanity of Confucianism. At the same time, Confucianism has integrated the religious thought of mutual perception between man and nature into the text interpretation of classics, incorporating the new cosmology into the exegetical tradition by annotating classics. The Book of Poetry often uses

the method of analogy and association(比兴手法) to express the emotion inspired by natural imagery. Therefore, the birds, animals, insects and fish in the Book of Songs are also regarded as a link of mutual inductance of all things by Mao Poetry, and are endowed with the meaning of being able to sense political affairs. The first chapter of the lyrics of Han-lu (《诗经·旱麓》) is “At the mountain’s foot, lo! How lush the hazels grow! Our prince is self-possessed, And he pray to blessed.”(瞻彼旱麓,榛桔济济。

岂弟君子,干禄岂弟)This verse begins with the imagery of "At the mountain’s foot, lo! How lush the hazels grow! " The word "lush" signifies abundance, yet according to "Mao's Interpretation of the Book of Songs," the lush hazels serve as a metaphor for the harmonious interplay of yin and yang (阴阳) between heaven and earth. For example, The biography of Mao Poetry (《毛传》) says: "when yin and yang are harmonized, mountains and saps proliferate, hence the gentleman enjoys a contented and easeful life with stable income," similarly, when yin and yang are combined, it enhances the operation and joy in human affairs, so the gentleman "enjoys a contented and easeful life with stable income. In the view of Confucianism, the natural world is able to achieve harmony between yin and yang, and has favorable weather and fertile land precisely because the virtue of the sage king extends even to plants and trees. As the commentary by Wei Zhao elaborates: "The emperor's benevolence spreads throughout the entire land, allowing harmony between nature's opposites. Therefore, as the vegetation flourishes, our hearts are filled with peace and pleasure, seeking our due rewards with ease and joy. " During the axial period, thinkers had transcended the primitive religious belief in the worship of supreme deities. Instead, they adopted the new religious belief of cultivating inner virtue, pursuing personal transcendence and striving to align with the heavenly Dao. The lyrics in Chapter 3 of Han-lu(《旱麓》) of The Classic of Poetry are: "the hawks fly in the sky; the fish leap in the deep. Our prince is self-possessed; He prays his men be blessed." (鸢飞戾天,鱼跃于渊。岂弟君子,遐不作人?) The Mao Poetry thinks that nature has the scene of "the hawks fly in the sky; the fish leap in the deep", because the ancestors of Zhou people such as King Wang can widely practice benevolence, extend the heart of benevolence upward to the birds flying in the sky, and cover the fish in the deep pool downward,

so that all things in nature are in their proper place, harmonious and happy, and the social order is harmonious and complete. Therefore, Kong Yingda clearly said when explaining the meaning of Mao Poetry: "The Tao is submerged, everything is in place, the transformation is clear(Li et al., 2018), so it can be transformed into the upper and lower levels, so it is beautiful." The moral cultivation of the Holy King has infinite power, which can influence all things in nature, so that all things can be wonderful and happy. This is also the Confucian religious aspiration for an ideal social order, where natural imagery in The Book of Poetry is seen as symbols that illuminate the way of Heaven and signify political affairs. Mao Poetry through the language of poetry, paints a poetic picture of the mutual influence and interconnection between the Sage Kings' virtuous governance and natural imagery(Pei & Pei, 2021). Indeed, The Ode of Great Elegance, "Xing Wei"(《大雅·行苇》) is originally a poem of feasting among the Zhou people, which opens with a "verse of accession" that goes, "Let no cattle and sheep Trample on roadside rush Which bursts up with root deep, and with leaves soft and lush" (敦彼行苇，牛羊勿践履。方苞方体，维叶泥泥) whereas, according to interpretation of Mao Poetry, this natural phenomenon can occur because the Zhou People possesses a heart of loyalty and benevolence, extending their kindness even to plants and trees, which is why the Zhou people can enjoy prosperity and good fortune(Xiao, 2024). The Great Elegies: Ling Tai(《大雅·灵台》) wrote about King Wen's operation of Ling Tai, Mao Poetry interpreted "Ling" as "the shrewd person of God is called the spirit", in the sentence of "In Wondrous Park the king, Saw the deer in the ring "(王在灵囿，麀鹿攸伏), The biography of Mao Poetry (《毛传》) interprets "wondrous park" as "spirit is in the Park". In the sentence of "The king by Wondrous Pond, Saw fishes leap and bound." (王在灵沼，於物鱼跃), The biography of Mao Poetry(《毛传》) interprets "wondrous pond" as "spirit is in the way", that is, King Wen receives the order of heaven, and the spirit is in the common people, birds, animals, insects and fish. Finally, he influences all natural things in heaven and earth, making all things happy. As the Preface to the Ling Tai of the Book of Songs (《毛诗·灵台序》) says: "Lingtai, people also attached. King Wen received the command of heaven, and people liked his spiritual virtue, as well as birds,

animals, insects and fish(Zhang et al., 2022)." Likewise, if virtue is abandoned and governance is neglected, it can lead to an imbalance of yin and yang, causing all things to lose their nature. The biography of Mao Poetry (《毛传》) criticizes King You of Zhou in "Yuzao" (《鱼藻》) for his waste of government affairs, resulting in the loss of nature of everything, the loss of life and the loss of happiness for all people. As the "Mao Preface" states: "'Yuzao' (《鱼藻》) criticizes King You. It laments that all things have lost their natural state. As the King resides in Hao, he seems unable to find his own joy, prompting the gentlemen to fondly recall the ancient King Wu." Zheng Xuan further explains: "To say that all things have lost their nature refers to the decline of the King's governance and moral education, the imbalance of yin and yang, and the disorder of all living beings. Being unable to find joy in oneself implies the looming disaster of peril and decay." The political and educational theory of poetic criticism of the Mao Poetry, which embodies the religious discourse of mutual perception between heaven and man, was further expanded by Zheng Xuan of the Eastern Han Dynasty, constantly improving and clarifying(Radice, 2022). In the interpretive tradition of Mao Poetry, the connection between the virtue of a sage and the external world is not only love for all things in nature and human affairs, and his extension of benevolence to plants, but also in his personal cultivation, constantly combining "humanity" with the way of heaven and expanding the virtue of heaven and earth, because the virtue of heaven is to achieve all things, so saints also need to grow and nurture all things through virtue cultivation. For example, "The Book of Songs: Heaven's Creation"(《诗经·天作》) is a song dedicated to the late king and his predecessor. The lyrics include "Nature created the lofty mountains, and the Grand King cultivated them." The word "cultivate" here has been interpreted differently by scholars of the Song Dynasty, The Song Confucians often interpret "cultivate" as the meaning of clearing wasteland, while understanding of Zhu Xi is that "heaven created Mount Qi, and the great king began to govern it." This interpretation is fair and objective. However, Mao Poetry interpreted "cultivate" of "the Grand King cultivated them" as "expand", implying that great kings magnify heaven's virtue. As The biography of Mao Poetry (《毛传》) elucidate, "Nature's bounty is abundant in the high mountains, King, by following the path, can magnify heaven's work." That is to say, heaven created this mountain. With this mountain, clouds and

rain can arise and nourish all things, so that yin and yang between heaven and earth can be combined. The king can expand the virtue of heaven and lead the people with benevolence to reproduce and live in a new place(Allen et al., 2021). As Zheng Xuan commented: "Heaven created this high mountain to generate clouds and rain, benefiting all living things. When Emperor Tai wang(太王) moved to Qishan (岐山) from Bin (邠), he was able to honor and magnify its significance, expanding its virtue and influence. In just one year, it was transformed into a bustling town, and in two, a thriving city, eventually becoming five times its original scale." The text then elaborates on King Wen's virtues: "Oh, their departure! At Qishan, a relaxed and smooth journey awaited them. Generations to come shall safeguard this legacy." (彼徂矣, 岐有夷之行。子孙保之) "Yi" is generally explained as simplicity, such as a relaxed and smooth journey, but the Mao Poetry interprets "Yi" as Zhou Wenwang's ability to practice the "the way of easy achievement" (倏易之道), which aligns with the heavenly principles, allowing the people to live and work in peace and contentment. "The way of easy achievement" (倏易之道) is consistent with the "heavenly way". The biography of Mao Poetry(《毛传》) interprets the vocabulary of The Book of Poetry in accordance with the new religious interpretation aligned with the view of Heaven, and such understanding widely existed in during the Warring States period as well, such as "Zheng Shuzhansaying: 'In The Ode of Zhou: 'Nature created the lofty mountains, and the Grand King cultivated them', 'cultivate' here means to make large. To make large what Heaven has created can be said to intimately own Heaven.'" (from: Jin Yu of Guo Yu 《国语·晋语》). The image of the sage-king created in Mao Poetry is to expand the heart of benevolence to all things in heaven and earth. Through continuous cultivation of inner virtue, to expand the virtue of heaven, it can finally influence all things in heaven and earth and achieve peace in the world. As the Doctrine of the Mean (《中庸》) states, "Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth(Ye, 2024). If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth."

“And since humanity is an integral part of the ‘myriad things’, a complete realization of humanity must lead to the realization of things as well.” The heart of saintly virtue expands continuously, and finally everything gets its place. Humanity coincides with heaven, which is the religious ideal of political education shaped by Mao Poetry. When Xunzi discussed “the pinnacle of political education,” he spoke of a well-ordered and rational political order: “Hence, duties are clearly defined and the people do not seek those they shouldn’t, hierarchies are established and order is not disrupted, the consolidated and informed ruling ensures matters are promptly handled. As such, ministers and officials down to the commoners strive for self-improvement before daring to lead a peaceful life, truthfully capable before accepting their posts; ordinary people adapt to new customs, petty individuals change their ways, malevolent creatures revert to sincerity—this is called the pinnacle of governance and education.” In terms of religious sentiment, Mao Poetry and “XunZi” differ. The political-educational ideals described in Mao Poetry have a religious implication of the correspondence between heaven and humanity. By employing the concept of mutual influence between heaven and man to interpret The Book of Poetry, Mao Poetry played a crucial role in promoting the integration of Confucianism with the doctrine of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, thereby steering it further towards religious transformation. Restoring the divination of poems with the concept of heaven-man interaction in Mao Poetry can help to fill the developmental trajectory of Confucian religion from the Warring States period to the Qin and Han dynasties.

4. CONCLUSION

The discourse construction of Confucian religiousness associated with The Book of Poetry manifests in two aspects: inward transcendence and outward transcendence. The former aligns the religious emotion of sincere respect in sacrificial lyrics is inherited from the heart of moral cultivation with the post-Confucian. The latter, as perceived by Mao Poetry, envisions the gradual external transcendence of the virtuous heart eventually leading to universal peace, social harmony, and the rightful place for all things in nature. The religious interpretation of Mao Poetry is not only the discourse support of the poetics theory of political education in The Book of Poetry, but also an important link to make up for the religious development of Confucianism between the Warring States Period and Qin Dynasty. In the

philosophical system of the Mao poetry commentary, the realization of the ideal world where "all things find their proper places" requires the sage-kings to continuously externalize their virtues. However, later Confucian scholars and literati no longer regarded political peace as a necessary condition; instead, they sought the harmony of their spiritual hearts with nature, allowing themselves and nature to each find their unique wonders. Just as Tao Yuanming depicted in "Reading the Mountains and Seas" (I), "All birds are happy, I also love my house," this poetic yearning has become a pursuit for scholars seeking a spiritual homeland. The religious nature of the political education ideal in Mao Poetry evolves into a poetic and aesthetic spiritual sustenance.

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