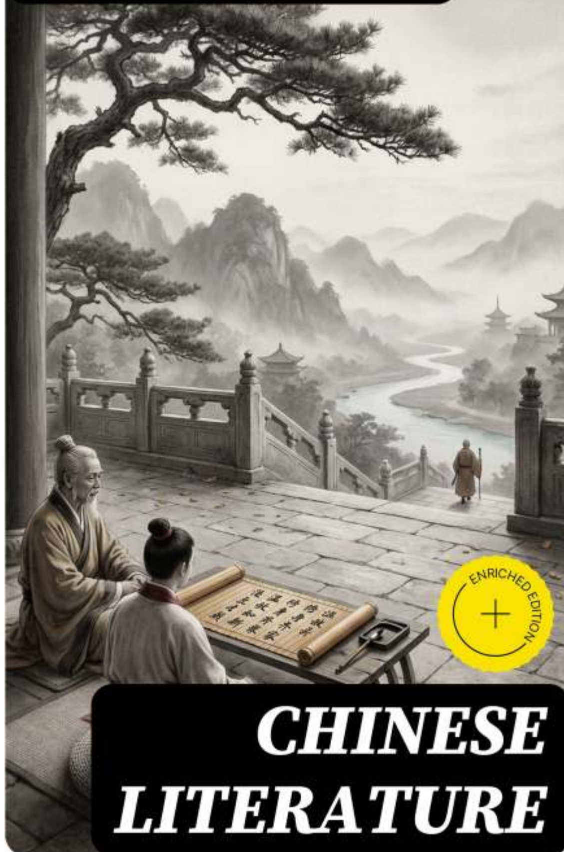
VARIOUS AUTHORS

CHINESE LITERATURE


VARIOUS AUTHORS
ENRICHED EDITION
CHINESE LITERATURE

Confucius, Mencius, Faxian

Chinese Literature

Enriched edition. Comprising the Analects of Confucius, the Sayings of Mencius, the Shi-King, the Travels of Fâ-Hien, and the Sorrows of Han

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Introduction

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This collection draws together foundational voices and forms that chart how moral reflection, poetic memory, spiritual travel, and dramatic imagination shaped Chinese thought. The sequence of Confucian books, the Sayings of Mencius, the Shi-King in its parts and decades, the extensive Travels of Fâ-Hien, and the four-act drama The Sorrows of Han together trace a single concern: how words order a life, a community, and a polity. Across aphorism, ode, itinerary, and stage, the works ask what should be preserved, how it should be enacted, and where authority resides. Their shared commitment to exemplary conduct and meaningful language provides the unifying thread.

Books II through XX present a Confucian discourse of teaching and response, marked by succinct guidance and attention to conduct. The Sayings of Mencius stands nearby as a sustained conversation elaborating principles of governance, disposition, and judgment. Read together, these texts reveal recurring dilemmas: the relation between ritual and sincerity, the shaping of character, and the responsibilities of rulers and learners. Their tonal contrast is productive. Concision in the Confucian books sets axioms and examples, while the Sayings of Mencius permits fuller argument and extended reasoning. Together they offer a grammar of ethical life, testing virtues against circumstance without abandoning aspiration.

The Shi-King widens the field from counsel to chorus. Part I, Lessons from the States, gathers regional voices in odes named for places such as Shaou, P'ei, Ch'ing, Ts'e, Wei, Tang, Ts'in, Ch'in, Ts'aou, and Pin. Part II, the Minor Odes to the Kingdom, arranges decades with titles like Luh Ming, Pih H'wa, Tung Rung, K'e-Foo, Seaou Min, Sang Hoo, and Too Jin Sze. Parts III and IV present Greater Odes and Odes of the Temple and Altar, including Sacrificial Odes of Chow. These layers display poetry as civic memory and moral texture, complementing the prescriptive clarity of the earlier books.

The Travels of Fâ-Hien introduces motion and encounter across forty chapters that follow the itinerary of a pilgrim. Its chapters trace stages of a journey, turning teaching into lived search and geography. The work reframes questions implicit in the sayings and odes: how practices move across boundaries, how communities preserve teachings, and how perseverance tests conviction. Its narrative builds a cartography of devotion, yet remains attentive to practical details of passage and settlement. Against the inward discipline of Confucian counsel and the communal chorus of the Shi-King, this travel record shows learning as movement, exchange, and patient observation.

The Sorrows of Han closes the collection with theater, presenting a prologue and four acts framed by a dramatis personae. Stagecraft brings the stakes of state and emotion into relief, translating themes of rule, loyalty, and memory into embodied speech. The play’s very structure invites reflection on scene, transition, and the tempos of public crisis and private feeling. In contrast to aphoristic instruction or anonymous ode, here characters bear and

contest authority through dialogue and gesture. The title signals a mood of loss and reckoning, giving the collection a poignant counterbalance to counsel, song, and journey.

Across the sequence, motifs recur and refract: cultivation and duty in the Confucian books, deliberation and response in the Sayings of Mencius, communal voice in the Shi-King, passage and return in the Travels of Fâ-Hien, and sorrowful statecraft on the stage. Each work suggests resolutions that the others test. Ritual ideals face the realities of terrain and travel; lyric feeling measures public order; theatrical conflict probes the capacity of counsel. Differences in tone—terse, lyric, documentary, dramatic—do not fragment the whole, but form a dialogue about how traditions persist, adapt, and speak to both rulers and ordinary lives.

Today, this constellation resonates as a study in how cultures sustain meaning through multiple arts. The collection engages readers seeking guidance, artists attentive to form and voice, and thinkers concerned with the ethics of leadership, community, and remembrance. Confucius and Mencius articulate principles and dilemmas; the Shi-King demonstrates how song binds locality and nation; the Travels of Fâ-Hien models curiosity, endurance, and transmission; The Sorrows of Han gives those tensions flesh and feeling. Together they invite renewed attention to the responsibilities of speech, the uses of poetry in civic life, the discipline of travel, and the drama of power.

Historical Context

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Socio-Political Landscape

The Shi-King captures the sociopolitical horizons of the Western Zhou and early Eastern Zhou world, when power radiated from a ritual center yet depended on feudal kinship bonds. 'Lessons from the States' and regional odes chart the tensions between royal authority and ambitious lords, as envoys, marriages, and punitive campaigns knit and frayed alliances. Harvests, levies, and border alarms register how governance reached ordinary households. The 'Sacrificial Odes of Chow' voice the court’s claim to cosmic sanction, while the 'Greater Odes' admonish rulers to uphold order. Together, these songs encode a landscape of ceremony, coercion, and negotiation under the shifting mandates of early Chinese statecraft.

The Sayings of Mencius unfolds amid the Warring States, when competing polities sought consolidation through reform, war, and persuasion. Mencius appears as an itinerant counselor confronting rulers whose legitimacy was measured against popular welfare. Debates over land, taxation, corvée, and military aggression surface through pointed interviews, as he contrasts a 'kingly way' of humane governance with hegemony sustained by fear. Refugees, famines, and displaced laborers haunt the background, giving ethical urgency to policy. The anthology’s organization preserves the feel of court debate and remonstrance, where philosophical principles collided with

realpolitik in an environment that prized eloquence, precedent, and effective administration.

The Sorrows of Han, set in an imperial court, reflects the vulnerability of dynastic power to factional intrigue and perilous frontier diplomacy. Marriages and treaties with steppe rivals, anxieties over succession, and the moral obligations of ministers frame a cautionary political world. Centuries later, The Travels of Fâ-hien records journeys across Central and South Asia during an era of Chinese fragmentation, revealing how Buddhist institutions, sea lanes, and caravan routes linked kingdoms despite shifting borders. His punctilious notes on monastic discipline and local law illuminate the interface between state authority and religious community, underscoring the plural, transregional dimensions of governance.

Intellectual & Aesthetic Currents

The Shi-King’s artistry grows from ritual performance and oral song. Its divisions—'Airs', 'Minor Odes', 'Greater Odes', and 'Sacrificial Odes'—mark social registers from village courtship to royal liturgy. Poetic technique relies on parallelism, incremental variation, and the triad of fu, bi, and xing—statement, comparison, and evocative stimulus—to encode ethical counsel within sensuous imagery. Bells, drums, and dance once accompanied many pieces, embedding aesthetics in ceremony. Natural scenes double as admonition, while refrains and antiphony preserve communal memory. The anthology’s sequencing, including 'Lessons from the States' and temple hymns, demonstrates

how lyric intensity and public instruction coexisted within a classical poetics.

The Sayings of Mencius distills moral philosophy into nimble dialogue. Central is the claim that human nature tends toward goodness, cultivated through the heart-mind’s 'sprouts' of compassion, shame, deference, and discernment. Against appeals to profit, Mencius advances ren and yi—humaneness and righteousness—as foundations of durable rule, arguing that consent rests on material security and ritual propriety. His analogies, concise parables, and citations of earlier classics model an interpretive tradition that links ethical introspection with institutional design. The work’s cadence of challenge and rebuttal also showcases persuasive techniques—strategic silence, reframing, and historical precedent—that shaped literati debate for centuries.

The Travels of Fâ-hien joins devotional purpose with proto-ethnography. It favors itinerary clarity, precise placenames, and close attention to monastic codes, compassionate practices, and textual lineages, revealing how translation and pilgrimage advanced canon formation. Its sober tone and episodic structure influenced later travel records. The Sorrows of Han exemplifies zaju craft: a framed prologue, four acts, and role-based aria suites that bind poetry to action. Music and set lyrics carry psychological nuance, while historical distance licenses political critique. Together, these works show how ethical inquiry, religious documentation, and theatrical spectacle generated distinctive Chinese modes of narrative authority.

Legacy & Reassessment Across Time

Across dynasties, the Shi-King and The Sayings of Mencius became pillars of orthodoxy. The former stood among the Five Classics; the latter, elevated among the Four Books, shaped examination curricula and ideals of governance. Commentarial traditions elaborated allegorical readings of odes as moral remonstrance, while philologists defended local, performative origins. Debates over human nature pitted Mencian optimism against sterner views, yet his articulation of benevolent rule anchored mainstream pedagogy. Modern reassessments highlight the Shi-King's multivocality—women's laments, soldiers' complaints—alongside renewed attention to the editorial processes behind Mencian dialogues, balancing canonical authority with historical texture and social diversity.

The Travels of Fâ-hien long served historians of Buddhism and early transcontinental exchange, its routes and descriptions tested against inscriptions and archaeology. Translators and editors framed it alternately as pious testimony, geography, or ethnography, shaping reception. The Sorrows of Han persisted on stage and in opera repertories, its courtly tragedy adapted to changing musical systems and political climates. Directors mined its historical allegory to comment on frontier policy, ministerial responsibility, and the perils of indulgent kingship. Together with Mencius and the Shi-King, these works continue to invite comparative readings that reassess genre boundaries, voice, and the ethics of rulership.

Synopsis (Selection)

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The Analects (Books II–XX)

Aphoristic dialogues and reflections attributed to Confucius set out a program of self-cultivation through ritual propriety, humane conduct, and exemplary leadership, in a spare, pragmatic tone focused on everyday ethics and social harmony.

Its terse counsel sets the ethical baseline that Mencius develops politically, gives skeletal structure to the lived feeling voiced in the Shi-King, and stands in productive tension with the spiritual cosmopolitanism of Fâ-hien and the tragic tests of duty in The Sorrows of Han.

The Sayings of Mencius (Book I)

Through debates and illustrative cases, Mencius argues for the innate goodness of human nature and a model of benevolent rulership that secures livelihood and dignity for the people, blending moral psychology with practical governance.

It extends the Analects' virtues into an activist vision of humane statecraft, illuminates the political grief beneath the Shi-King's laments, and offers a worldly counterpoint to Fâ-hien's renunciant path and the courtly crises staged in The Sorrows of Han.

The Shi-King (Parts I–IV)

An ancient treasury of songs—ranging from regional airs and minor odes to grand hymns—captures love, labor, war, and ancestral rites, giving a multivocal, lyrical record of early Chinese life and sentiment.

These voices humanize and test the maxims of the Analects and Mencius, prefigure the theatrical pathos of The Sorrows of Han, and contrast with the itinerant devotion and cross-cultural vistas of Fâ-hien.

The Travels of Fâ-hien (Chapters I–XL)

A pilgrim's overland and maritime journey in search of sacred texts and exemplary monastic practice yields a calm, observational travelogue of laws, customs, hospitality, and faith across many realms.

Its horizon-broadening narrative reframes Confucian concerns with order and benevolence on a transregional, devotional scale, throwing into relief the court-bound anxieties of The Sorrows of Han and the earth-rooted songs of the Shi-King while complementing Mencius's care for human welfare.

The Sorrows of Han

A historical court drama where private emotion and imperial duty collide, depicting how intrigue and desire unsettle the moral center of rule in an atmosphere of ritualized spectacle and elegiac rhetoric.

It tests Confucian ideals of loyalty and rectitude under pressure, echoes the laments and ceremonials of the Shi-King, and stands as a worldly foil to Fâ-hien's spiritual quest

while dramatizing the stakes Mencius theorizes in humane governance.

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INTRODUCTION

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The strangest figure that meets us in the annals of Oriental thought is that of Confucius. To the popular mind he is the founder of a religion, and yet he has nothing in common with the great religious teachers of the East. We think of Siddartha, the founder of Buddhism, as the very impersonation of romantic asceticism, enthusiastic self-sacrifice, and faith in the things that are invisible. Zoroaster is the friend of God, talking face to face with the Almighty, and drinking wisdom and knowledge from the lips of Omniscience. Mohammed is represented as snatched up into heaven, where he receives the Divine communication which he is bidden to propagate with fire and sword throughout the world. These great teachers lived in an atmosphere of the supernatural. They spoke with the authority of inspired prophets. They brought the unseen world close to the minds of their disciples. They spoke positively of immortality, of reward or punishment beyond the grave. The present life they despised, the future was to them everything in its promised satisfaction. The teachings of Confucius were of a very different sort. Throughout his whole writings he has not even mentioned the name of God. He declined to discuss the question of immortality. When he

was asked about spiritual beings, he remarked, "If we cannot even know men, how can we know spirits?"

Yet this was the man the impress of whose teaching has formed the national character of five hundred millions of people. A temple to Confucius stands to this day in every town and village of China. His precepts are committed to memory by every child from the tenderest age, and each year at the royal university at Pekin the Emperor holds a festival in honor of the illustrious teacher.

The influence of Confucius springs, first of all, from the narrowness and definiteness of his doctrine. He was no transcendentalist, and never meddled with supramundane things. His teaching was of the earth, earthy; it dealt entirely with the common relations of life, and the Golden Rule he must necessarily have stumbled upon, as the most obvious canon of his system. He strikes us as being the great Stoic of the East, for he believed that virtue was based on knowledge, knowledge of a man's own heart, and knowledge of human-kind. There is a pathetic resemblance between the accounts given of the death of Confucius and the death of Zeno. Both died almost without warning in dreary hopelessness, without the ministrations of either love or religion. This may be a mere coincidence, but the lives and teachings of both men must have led them to look with indifference upon such an end. For Confucius in his teaching treated only of man's life on earth, and seems to have had no ideas with regard to the human lot after death; if he had any ideas he preserved an inscrutable silence about them. As a moralist he prescribed the duties of the king and of the father, and advocated the cultivation by the individual man

of that rest or apathy of mind which resembles so much the disposition aimed at by the Greek and Roman Stoic. Even as a moralist, he seems to have sacrificed the ideal to the practical, and his loose notions about marriage, his tolerance of concubinage, the slight emphasis which he lays on the virtue of veracity—of which indeed he does not seem himself to have been particularly studious in his historic writings—place him low down in the rank of moralists. Yet he taught what he felt the people could receive, and the flat mediocrity of his character and his teachings has been stamped forever upon a people who, while they are kindly, gentle, forbearing, and full of family piety, are palpably lacking not only in the exaltation of Mysticism, but in any religious feeling, generally so-called.

The second reason that made the teaching of Confucius so influential is based on the circumstances of the time. When this thoughtful, earnest youth awoke to the consciousness of life about him, he saw that the abuses under which the people groaned sprang from the feudal system, which cut up the country into separate territories, over which the power of the king had no control. China was in the position of France in the years preceding Philippe-Auguste, excepting that there were no places of sanctuary and no Truce of God. The great doctrine of Confucius was the unlimited despotism of the Emperor, and his moral precepts were intended to teach the Emperor how to use his power aright. But the Emperor was only typical of all those in authority—the feudal duke, the judge on the bench, and the father of the family. Each could discharge his duties aright only by submitting to the moral discipline which

Confucius prescribed. A vital element in this system is its conservatism, its adherence to the imperial idea. As James I said, "No bishop, no king," so the imperialists of China have found in Confucianism the strongest basis for the throne, and have supported its dissemination accordingly.

The Analects of Confucius contain the gist of his teachings, and is worthy of study. We find in this work most of the precepts which his disciples have preserved and recorded. They form a code remarkable for simplicity, even crudity, and we are compelled to admire the force of character, the practical sagacity, the insight into the needs of the hour, which enabled Confucius, without claiming any Divine sanction, to impose this system upon his countrymen.

The name Confucius is only the Latinized form of two words which mean "Master K'ung." He was born 551 B.C., his father being governor of Shantung. He was married at nineteen, and seems to have occupied some minor position under the government. In his twenty-fourth year he entered upon the three years' mourning for the death of his mother. His seclusion gave him time for deep thought and the study of history, and he resolved upon the regeneration of his unhappy country. By the time he was thirty he became known as a great teacher, and disciples flocked to him. But he was yet occupied in public duties, and rose through successive stages to the office of Chief Judge in his own country of Lu. His tenure of office is said to have put an end to crime, and he became the "idol of the people" in his district. The jealousy of the feudal lords was roused by his fame as a moral teacher and a blameless judge. Confucius

was driven from his home, and wandered about, with a few disciples, until his sixty-ninth year, when he returned to Lu, after accomplishing a work which has borne fruit, such as it is, to the present day. He spent the remaining five years of his life in editing the odes and historic monuments in which the glories of the ancient Chinese dynasty are set forth. He died in his seventy-third year, 478 B.C. There can be no doubt that the success of Confucius has been singularly great, owing especially to the narrow scope of his scheme, which has become crystallized in the habits, usages, and customs of the people. Especially has it been instrumental in consolidating the empire, and in strengthening the power of the monarch, who, as he every year burns incense in the red-walled temple at Pekin, utters sincerely the invocation: "Great art thou, O perfect Sage! Thy virtue is full, thy doctrine complete. Among mortal men there has not been thine equal. All kings honor thee. Thy statutes and laws have come gloriously down. Thou art the pattern in this imperial school. Reverently have the sacrificial vessels been set out. Full of awe, we sound our drums and bells."

E. W.

THE ANALECTS

BOOK I

On Learning—Miscellaneous Sayings:—

"To learn," said the Master, "and then to practise opportunely what one has learnt—does not this bring with it a sense of satisfaction?

"To have associates in study coming to one from distant parts—does not this also mean pleasure in store?

"And are not those who, while not comprehending all that is said, still remain not unpleased to hear, men of the superior order?"

A saying of the Scholar Yu:—

"It is rarely the case that those who act the part of true men in regard to their duty to parents and elder brothers are at the same time willing to turn currishly upon their superiors: it has never yet been the case that such as desire not to commit that offence have been men willing to promote anarchy or disorder.

"Men of superior mind busy themselves first in getting at the root of things; and when they have succeeded in this the right course is open to them. Well, are not filial piety and friendly subordination among brothers a root of that right feeling which is owing generally from man to man?"

The Master observed, "Rarely do we meet with the right feeling due from one man to another where there is fine speech and studied mien."

The Scholar Tsang once said of himself: "On three points I examine myself daily, viz., whether, in looking after other people's interests, I have not been acting whole-heartedly; whether, in my intercourse with friends, I have not been true; and whether, after teaching, I have not myself been practising what I have taught."

disposition and institutional structure mutually stabilize governance.

Mencius warns that penal enforcement without benevolence breeds resentment; the Shi-King's Odes of Wei and Ts'e echo this instability through laments over conscription and anxious marches. Fa-Hien records regions where monastic observance is rigorous and others where it has decayed, correlating communal peace with disciplined compassion. Across prose and song, social disarray appears when ritual is hollow or divorced from humane intent. The texts together imply that sustainable order depends less on coercion than on a lived consensus—virtue embodied, rehearsed, and refreshed within rites that people recognize as meaningful.

Question 2

What tensions arise when borders test ethical duty in Odes, Fa-Hien, and The Sorrows of Han?

The Shi-King often sets familial bonds against frontier demands. In the Odes of Ch'in, martial readiness defines communal pride, yet the Odes of Wei dwell on separation, homesickness, and the grinding strain of levies. Duty to the ruler summons men beyond city walls, while duty to kin tethers them home. These songs record the double claim of loyalty, exposing ethical abrasion where service to state disrupts the ordinary rites of marriage, burial, and harvest that sustain moral life. The border thus appears not only geographic but also within divided obligations.

In The Sorrows of Han, court scenes revolve around negotiations with a powerful neighbor beyond imperial lines.

The prologue and early acts stage debates in which marriage diplomacy, ceremonial exchange, and personal affection must be weighed against calculations of security. Rituals meant to harmonize realms instead expose fault lines: whose suffering counts when a single union promises peace for thousands? The drama's structure—audiences, messengers, and formal decrees—makes the ethical tension audible, showing how border policy can convert private lives into instruments of statecraft while claiming the mantle of propriety.

Fa-Hien's Travels chronicles repeated crossings—from desert tracts to riverine kingdoms—where grants of passage, alms, and sanctuary depend on local norms. He highlights rulers who provision monasteries and protect pilgrims, suggesting an ethic that treats strangers as bearers of shared religious law. Yet customs vary, and the pilgrim adjusts to statutes, languages, and currencies. Read beside the Shi-King and The Sorrows of Han, his journey reframes borders as tests of hospitality: policy can harden lines or open corridors, and ethical duty is measured by how power treats the vulnerable in transit.

Question 3

How do differing genres shape moral memory across Analects, Shi-King, Fa-Hien, and Han drama?

Confucius's Analects preserves brief encounters and sayings whose compactness invites memorization and recitation; moral insight survives as portable maxims tethered to named books, such as Book II or XII. The Shi-King's refrains and strophic patterns lodge exemplars in

song—sacrifices, harvests, and departures become communal memory through repetition in sections like the Sacrificial Odes of Chow and the Decade of Luh Ming. Together, aphorism and ode build a curriculum of feeling and judgment, embedding lessons in rhythm and cadence so they can be both remembered and socially performed.

Fa-Hien organizes remembrance by itinerary. Chapters enumerate routes, monasteries, and relic sites, fixing doctrine to geography and practice to place. Memory becomes a map: crossing from Khotan to Pataliputra, he locates rules of the Vinaya within specific communities, enshrining institutional memory in the description of councils, stupas, and charitable houses. This place-bound narrative complements the Shi-King's ritual spaces and the Analects' instructive halls, converting moral teaching into landmarks. Recollection is not merely verbal but spatial, encouraging future travelers to retrace paths where ethical life has already been cultivated.

The Sorrows of Han shapes memory through enactment. Characters step into ritual roles—emperor, envoy, court attendant—so audiences witness conflicts between policy and sentiment. Scenes and props function as mnemonic anchors, making political choices memorable as staged gestures rather than abstract axioms. Where the Analects preserves the teacher's voice, and the Shi-King carries communal choruses, the drama externalizes deliberation as spectacle, inviting judgment through empathy. Across these genres, moral memory survives by changing form—from maxim to ode to itinerary to scene—yet in each, the community learns whom to emulate and why.

Question 4

How do images of nourishment express moral cultivation across Mencius, Analects, Shi-King, and Fa-Hien?

Mencius develops the sprouts of virtue, arguing in early books that benevolence, righteousness, ritual, and wisdom grow when rulers secure material sufficiency. Food and farmland are not mere background but the soil of ethics. Confucius's Analects complements this with the program of self-cultivation through ritual practice, emphasizing steady habits over sudden feats. Read together, their counsel suggests that nourishment—of bodies and early moral impulses—conditions character. Without stable grain and measured rites, the heart's inclinations wither; with them, ethical discernment ripens from inclination into dependable conduct.

In the Shi-King, agricultural labor and feasting repeatedly align plenty with propriety. The Decade of Luh Ming praises generous banquets that honor guests and restore community ties, while pieces in the Decade of K'e-foo and the Greater Odes celebrate tillage, storage, and offerings. The sequence from field to table to altar renders nourishment as ethical choreography: harvest feeds people, ritual thanks ancestors, and gratitude feeds social trust. The poems imply that just distribution and timely ceremony transform calories into cohesion, letting daily bread enact the order moralists describe.

Fa-Hien's Travels adds a monastic economy of nourishment. Alms rounds regulate receiving; kitchens and refectories discipline taking; charitable houses relieve the