
Farmer, Priest, and Poet: Knowledge Transmission and Wisdom in *Works and Days* and *Gelimu*

Duoduo Xu
National University of Singapore

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Volume 21 Issue 6 (September 2019) Article 2**Duoduo Xu,****"Farmer, Priest, and Poet: Knowledge Transmission and Wisdom in *Works and Days* and *Gelimu*"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss6/2>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 21.6 (2019)**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss6/>>

Abstract: This paper aims at a comparison between a classic poem from ancient Greek literature, the *Works and Days* by Hesiod, and ancestral records of hemerology from Daba Culture, entitled *Gelimu*, collected during my fieldwork in South-West China. Both traditions use constellations to mark important dates throughout the year, providing similar instructions on how to deal with daily work in the fields. Moreover, their mnemonic strategies and formulaic verses reflect their origins from oral traditions passed down from generation to generation. Starting from these basic similarities, the author analyzed the roles of Daba priests, the calendars authors, and Hesiod, the poet prophet of ancient Greece. Being the community's singers, the wisest men in primitive agricultural societies, they hand down the gods' knowledge to human beings, the farmers. The gods' world, holding the supreme knowledge and setting up the rules, is reverberated in the image of Nature. The poet, in other words, is the link between the sacred world and the profane world. This original comparative study illustrates deep similarities between these two texts developed in different times and geographical areas. My philological and linguistic analysis highlights, for the first time, the common ideological *milieu* of those two contexts, developed according to oral poetry principles and through the application of formulaic expressions.

Duoduo XU,

Farmer, Priest, and Poet: Knowledge Transmission and Wisdom in *Works and Days* and *Gelimu*

In many oral traditions all over the world, formulas and themes have been analyzed and recorded. For example, the Turkic folklore (Radloff), the African oral literature (Finnegan,), and the Yugoslavic epics (Lord, *The Singer*). Some ancient classics in written forms also reveal to be oral compositions, like Homeric poems (Parry, *L'Épithète*), Chinese *Shijing* ("The Classic of Poetry"; Wang), and the Old English narrative poem *Beowulf* (Foley). It is possible that these classics of today were originally oral texts. Indeed, the discovery of formulas in Homeric epics has originated Oral-Composition Theory.

In illiterate societies, people hand down their knowledge orally. Since formulaic expressions share similar metric patterns or narrative plots, formulas and themes provide suitable elements for people to memorize and to communicate their history, experience, and wisdom accumulated generation by generation. Formulaic expression is one of the mediums contributing to education other than writing systems. A comparable notion can be the so-called "embodied knowledge." It refers to the skills or habits acquired through the body, highlighting the natural accumulation of knowledge in daily life (Dewey 125; Merleau-Ponty 144; Lakoff & Johnson).

The texts analyzed in this paper are two oral poems: the Daba Hemerology and the *Works and Days* by Hesiod. The content of *Gelimu* of Daba and *Works and Days* by Hesiod can be both classified as hemerologies that describe the suitable moments or the taboos in activities related to peoples' daily lives according to the dates and sometimes the stars. *Gelimu* of Daba, following the lunar calendar, uses 28 lunar mansions to calculate days. Each mansion represents certain divination fortunes related to the daily life and works of Moso People. The section of Hesiod *Works and Days* from line 383 to line 764 is about the knowledge of agriculture and navigation connected to atavistic phenomena. Besides the common sense of how to deal with daily work, prescriptions to instruct people to work hard, and how to behave properly in community, timing of certain works are sometimes connected with the constellations. Despite their diverse cultural backgrounds and visions of the *kosmos*, it is possible to relate these two texts with each other because of their intrinsic nature, being both oral poems focused on wisdom and on the cycles of seasons.

Daba hemerology is recorded in various versions, while the main content describing the 28 lunar mansions remains the same. They are the only written texts of Dabaism discovered so far. Dabaism is the indigenous religion of Moso People. It shares the same origin with Dongbaism, the western branch of Moso People living in Lijiang area, Yunnan Province. The designations of the religion derive from the local words for "priest": "Daba" or "Dongba." Between January 2011 and July 2014, I have conducted several fieldwork trips in Moso villages on the border between Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces. My field works focused on Daba writing, Daba oral tradition, and language documentation of local languages. Thanks to the patient cooperation of Daba priests, I have been able to interpret seven versions of Daba hemerologies. Daba hemerologies are called *Gelimu*, *Gemu*, or *Ge'ermu* according to Daba priests from different villages. These words literally mean "the book to look at the stars" in the local language. More explanations about these texts' variants can be found in Xu ("From Daba" 4). Besides their significance in the history of Daba and Dongba writings, they are the carriers of Moso People's astronomical knowledge and taboos in daily activities related to the lunar mansions. Detailed information about the divination meaning of each lunar mansion in Daba hemerology (taking the version from Wujiao Village for example) is presented in Xu ("Interpretation" 58-66).

The ancient Greek *Works and Days* (Hes. *WD.* hereafter) is an oral poem prescribing to people times and ways to deal with daily works and activities to make their own livings. Hesiod is considered the first identifiable poet in ancient Greece, while Homer can be considered as a name for the group of poets singing / reciting Homeric epics. Since he is chronologically at the border between oral culture and literacy (with the introduction of alphabet in Greece), Hesiod has also been the last poet in oral tradition (Athanasakis xii).

Even though these two oral texts are from distant traditions, the comparison is feasible in various aspects. It is innovative to compare East Asian oral tradition with ancient Greek oral poetry. However, it is not rare that oriental elements are attested in ancient Greek culture. According to West (*East* viii, xxi), some concepts and expressions in Greek texts can be derived from West Asiatic literatures (Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Sumerian, Hittite, Egyptian, etc.). The convergence of Greek and Middle East cultures (Egyptian, Iranian, Babylonian, and Hebrew) has also been noticed by other scholars (Burstein; Mairs).

Daba hemerology *Gelimu* and Hes. *WD.* are both oral poems carrying on wisdom about time. They are schemes of daily activities figured out by ancient people based on their observation of the nature.

Moreover, these two works are both composed according to certain formulaic mechanisms and transmitted around in oral community contexts. In other words, Daba hemerology *Gelimu* and Hes. *WD* share their resemblance in content, form, and mnemonic mechanism. This paper tries to provide a punctual philological and linguistic survey on these two heritage poems from diverse backgrounds. Such comparative study could also further on contribute to generalizing cultural paradigms in broader fields.

At a first glance, it is possible to notice several equivalent stars in both texts. The two traditions show independent ways in naming the stars. The correspondences of Daba / Dongba 28 lunar mansions with those constellations in the surrounding major cultures, including Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese, are discussed in Xu ("A Comparison" 75-8). Whether Hesiod's calendar was lunar or solar still remains a controversial topic (Samuel 428; Fisher 58). Nevertheless, some of the remarkable constellations for agricultural society mentioned by Daba priests and the ancient Greek poet are the same.

Pleiades are one of the common constellations Daba and ancient Greek people used to mark the time. In Daba hemerology, two asterisms are chosen from Pleiades. They are called "the horn of *Kezha*" and "the body of *Kezha*." In the local language, "Kezha" can be the word "sixty" (Li, *A Dictionary* 119). When Pleiades are on duty, it is not suitable to work in the fields, either to kill or exchange livestock. They are good days for hunting. Since Daba calendar is based on lunar mansions, there are two days in each month under control of Pleiades. According to Hes. *WD.*, Pleiades mark the time to start harvest, and their setting down marks the time to plough:

when the Atlas-born Pleiades rise, start the harvest --- the plowing, when they set. They are concealed for forty nights and days, but when the year has revolved they appear once more, when the iron is being sharpened. This is the rule for the plains, and for those who dwell near the sea and those far from the swelling sea in the valleys and glens, fertile land: sow naked, and plow naked, and harvest naked, if you want to bring in all of Demeter's works in due season, so that each crop may grow for you in its season, lest being in need later you go as a beggar to other people's houses and achieve nothing---just as now you have come to me. (Hesiod and Most 119)

he tracks of Pleiades provide important references for people dwelling by the sea to avoid storms. English translators annotate that the rising of Pleiades refers to May, while the vanishing of Pleiades happens in November (Athanasakis 96; Hesiod and Most 119, 137). When they are hidden in the fog, all kinds of storms start: "when the Pleiades, fleeing Orion's mighty strength, fall into the murky sea" (Hesiod and Most 137).

In many ancient cultures, Pleiades are used to mark important calendar times (Schaefer 19). In the Greek tradition, Pleiades are interpreted as seven daughters of Atlas. This is similar to the idea reflected in Indian mythology, which shows that the six brightest stars of Pleiades, called *nakshatra Kritika*, are wives of the Great Seers (Harness 11). Tibetan mythology of the Pleiades is the same as Indian culture (Johnson-Groh 12). However, in Dongba culture, the branch sharing the same origin with which Daba culture, they are depicted as six brothers. Li (*A Dictionary* 7) records the myth: Pleiades were an asterism containing sixty units in all. After having been eaten by "Big Dipper", only six of them retained.

Sirius and Orion are other two constellations described in both Hes. *WD.* and Daba *Gelimu*. According to Hes. *WD.*, Sirius is defined as the mark for shorter days and longer nights: "for that is when the star Sirius goes during the day only briefly above the heads of death-nurtured human beings and takes a greater share of the night" (Hesiod and Most 121).

When Sirius and Orion are in the middle of the sky, it is the right time for making wine. The English translator annotated that it is mid-September (Hesiod and Most 137): "when Orion and Sirius come into the middle of the sky, and rosy-fingered Dawn sees Arcturus, then, Perses, pluck off all the grapes and take them home. Set them out in the sun for ten days and ten nights, then cover them up in the shade for five, and on the sixth draw out the gift of much-cheering Dionysus into storage-vessels." (Hesiod and Most 136).

In Daba culture, Sirius is called "[sołtʰɑkwɪpʰwɪ]". It is one star from the Daba "Three Stars" Constellation, which corresponds to Orion. During the days when the stars/asterisms from the Three Stars Constellation are on duty, it is auspicious to take in instead of giving out stuff. They are days suitable to build up houses and to work in the fields. It is not auspicious to sell sheep.

Hyades from Taurus can also be considered a common asterism in Greek and Daba calendars. The set of Hyades and Orion happens in October, the time to plough, marking the completion of the year: "when the Pleiades and Hyades and the strength of Orion set, that is the time to be mindful of plowing in good season. May the whole year be well-fitting in the earth." (Hesiod and Most 137).

Hyades are an asterism belonging to the constellation Taurus, surrounding the bright star Aldebaran. While Aldebaran is one of the lunar mansions in Daba hemerology. It is called [ɲjæ̃lh̃ṽɪ] in local

language, literally meaning "red eye". The day when the star of "red eye" is on duty is not suitable for going into the mountains. It is a day to avoid fire.

In the three examples above, the locations of the stars mark the time points of seasons in ancient Greek. Conversely, in Daba culture, the lunar mansions relate to the days and gradually lose their astronomical meanings, i.e. the movement of real asterisms. Scholars distinguish these two stages of hemerology as astrology and conventional hemerologies. Astrology turns into conventional hemerologies when astronomical observation is no longer necessary (Liu 54).

Another common content of these two texts lies in their descriptions of divination meanings of the thirty days of a month. In Hes. *WD.*, the thirty days of a Greek month are illustrated from line 765 to line 828. The contents vary from which are the holy days and the propitious days for the birth of children and for marriage, to the appropriate time for business and for farming works (including sowing, planting, strengthening livestock's fold, gelding livestock, training livestock, etc.). In Daba culture, the first for the starting day of a year is specifically established. The following days correspond to the 28 lunar mansions in standardized sequence. Generally, each month has thirty days. However, for some months, the number of days can be modified according to the real moon's movement across the lunar mansions. Each lunar mansion represents certain divination meanings and circulates around the entire year.

The divination meanings of the Greek days and the Daba lunar mansions can seem not immediately understandable to modern science. Indeed, they are regarded as knowledge by gods in the Ancient Greek context ("bear well in mind the days that come from Zeus and point them out according to their portion to the slaves." Hesiod and Most 149; and by the wisest man (literal meaning of "Daba priest", cf. Z. He 1) in the community in Daba *milieu*).

Nevertheless, some underlying connections can be highlighted between the Ancient Greek divination meanings and the lunar mansions in Daba culture. For example, there are certain days assigned to train livestock. The fourteenth day in Greek month is a good day to tame sheep, oxen, shepherd dog, and mules: "on that day place your hand upon sheep and rolling-footed curving-horned oxen and a jagged-toothed dog and hard-working mules, and tame them." (Hesiod and Most 151). The twenty-seventh day is the best to put yokes on oxen, mules, and horses: "then again, few know that the thrice-ninth day is the best of the month for starting in on a storage-jar and for placing a yoke on the neck of oxen and mules and swift-footed horses" (Hesiod and Most 153). In Daba hemerology, on the day of the star "pheasant" (Beehive Cluster), it is suitable to teach bulls and horses how to work.

Moreover, there are days considered good for working. The eleventh and twelfth in Greek calendar are excellent for shearing sheep and for reaping fruits, as well as for weaving: "both of them are fine, for shearing sheep and for gathering together the gladdening wheat but the twelfth is much better than the eleventh. It is on that day that the high-flying spider spins its webs in the fullness of the day and the canny one gathers together its heap. On that day a woman should raise her loom and set up her work." (Hesiod and Most 149-51). Four days of each Daba month, when the lunar mansions from the Frog Constellation are on duty, are good days for taking care of the crops. Further on, there are good days for building houses or ships.

Furthermore, there are days considered auspicious for some specific building activities. The fourth day of each Greek month is good to start to build narrow ships: "on the fourth begin to build narrow boats." (Hesiod and Most 153). and the seventeenth day is good to cut beams for house and ship building: "on the middle seventh day inspect Demeter's holy grain very well and winnow it on a well-rolled threshing-floor, and the woodcutter should cut boards for a bed-chamber and many planks for a boat, ones which are well fitting for boats." (Hesiod and Most 153). In Daba calendar, the five days when lunar mansions from the Mdzo Constellation are on duty are favorable for building the foundations of the houses and to erect columns.

According to Hes. *WD.*, it is possible to highlight distinct categories of information on Greek society, which are not mentioned in Daba hemerology: 1) verses about navigation / sailing; 2) the arrangement of making wine; 3) tips in managing a good marriage; 4) auspicious dates for birth. Conversely, the exchange of livestock and hunting in Daba hemerology are not emphasized in Greek calendar. Hesiod encourages people to raise their own livestock instead of cherishing the hope to borrow from others: "that is the time to fatten the curving-horned oxen indoors: for it is easy to say, 'Give me a pair of oxen and a cart', but it is also easy to refuse, saying, 'There is already work at hand for my oxen.'" (Hesiod and Most 125).

These differences between the two traditions could derive from the respective agricultural patterns. In Daba society, activities such as navigation are rare, since Moso People live in mountainous areas (around 3,000 meters above sea level). The climate does not allow the growth of grapes for making wine. The local alcohol is barley wine, which depends on crop harvest and is not an independent product. Moreover, Moso people have maintained a matrilineal society pattern. Their marriage is called "walking

marriage." The man goes to visit his spouse during the night. During the day, people live with their mothers and their mothers' relatives. In such matrilineal context, the concept of private property is less emphasized. The days for the birth of children could represent a way of praying for the safety of the children in Greek culture (cf. Gallant 20-21). In Daba tradition, a kind of primitive religion believing in animism, all sorts of illnesses are considered invasions of ghosts. Daba priests try to safeguard or to heal the children and pregnant women by chanting specific classics and conducting related rituals to expel the ghosts.

The mnemonic strategies of the two communities attested in these two texts are different. In Daba hemerology, the 28 lunar mansions are used in a circular way. The luck of each day of the month is different; it corresponds to the lunar mansion on that day. The lunar mansions are classified into several groups according to their designations. The lunar mansion groups could be the equivalent of constellations, and each lunar mansion represents a part of the figure (usually an animal) the constellation is imagined to be.

In Hes. *WD.*, the thirty days are divided into three decadal groups: the first ten days (first decade), the second ten days (second decade), and the third ten days (third decade). The days with the same internal numbers in each three groups of decades sometimes are explained together. For example, from line 794 to line 801 and from line 819 to 821, the appropriate activities of every tenth day and of every fourth day of the month are described. Moreover, when the poet is talking about the fourteenth day ("the middle fourth"), he also talks about the fourth day and the twenty-fourth day:

The tenth is fine for a man to be born, for a maiden the middle fourth: on that day place your hand upon sheep and rolling-footed curving-horned oxen and a jagged-toothed dog and hard-working mules, and tame them. Bear in mind to avoid the fourth day, both of the waning month and of the beginning one, spirit-devouring pains: this is a particularly authorized day. On the fourth day of the month lead a wife to your house, after you have distinguished the bird-omens that are the best for this kind of work. (Hesiod and Most 151)

The grouping of days analyzed above can be considered "themes" ("a subject unit, a group of ideas, regularly employed by a singer", cf. Lord, "Homer" 440) in Oral Composition Theory. Correspondingly, mnemonic strategies are also realized through the phrases, i.e. "formulas" ("a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea," cf. Parry, "Studies" 80). Formulaic expressions in the two hemerologies are different from the classical definition codified by Parry in the Homeric epics context. However, analyzing their language and versification, they are not divergent from the metric tradition. It is possible to highlight "parallels of sound" (Edwards, Chapter 6 *passim*), or "analogical constructions" (Beall 3), as well as expressions in identical meters that are considered the traces of epic compositions.

In Daba context, formulas constitute the whole knowledge-system. Most of Daba / Dongba scriptures, as typical oral compositions, are long rhythmic poems. They are chanted in rituals to worship the natural gods or the ancestors, to expel ghosts, etc. Daba hemerology, being the classic used for the fortune of day's divination, shows to be a specific category among all the Dabaism texts. It is composed in a concise prosaic style. However, formulaic expressions are spread all through the lines in to explain, as soothsayers, the meanings behind each lunar mansion. For example, some fixed quadrisyllabic expressions repeatedly appearing, as [gv:ɪpʰoɪbɑɪpʰoɪ] "to sow crop seeds," [kʰv:ɪsæɪɪɪdiɪ] "to pull dog, to spread fish net," and [ʔæɪtsoɪmɪɪɪɪɪ] "what is not," have this specific function. The first one is used to talk about the work in the field, the second one is a stereotyped phrase expressing the action "to hunt", while the third one means "whatever."

Moreover, the sentence structures are simple and stable. A sentence frame recurrently used is: "animal" + [təɪɪ] "to sell" + [mɪɪdzɪɪ] "not good", [ɪɪχwɪɪ] "to buy" + [mɪɪdzɪɪ] "not good." It means that on a specific day it is not good to exchange a certain kind of livestock. When some lunar mansions are on duty, in order to emphasize the concept that it is not good to do anything with a specific livestock linked to a specific lunar mansion, three parallel phrases are used in sequence: "animal" + [təɪɪ] "to sell" + [mɪɪdzɪɪ] "not good," [qʰoɪ] "to kill" + [mɪɪdzɪɪ] "not good," [χwɪɪ] "to buy," [mɪɪdzɪɪ] "not good."

Formulas and rhythm are significant mnemonic devices to oral societies. Their regularity allows people to memorize and to retell the same information. This kind of regularity can have deep connection to psychological status and physical construction of human being. Jousse (27-9) named these deep connections as anthropological laws: "Le rythmo-mimisme," "Le bilatéralisme," and "Le formulisme." The three terms reveal man as an imitator of rhythm, whose expressions can only be in accordance with his physical structure, and who tends to create habits to ensure immediate replay (Sienaert 96-7).

Moreover, people can expand their knowledge repertoire by adding verses following a similar format. According to Solmsen (305-6), behind the composition of those verses (ll. 794-801, ll. 819-21), it is possible to consider Hesiod as the name hiding different poets involved in the making of this part of the poem.

According to the empiricist school of thought, knowledge derives from experience. Following this point of view, Hesiod's poem and Daba hemerology can be regarded as verbal summaries of information from all kinds of sources. West (*Hesiod* xvi-xvii) has highlighted the influence of oriental literature on Hesiod's works adding a comparison with the Sumerian, Babylonian, Hebrew, and Egyptian traditions, and the ancient Greek sapiential wisdom findable as a pattern in the Hesiod poem.

However, the two types of hemerologies analyzed in this paper suggest that people believed that this kind of knowledge comes from the gods. In the beginning of Hes. *WD.*, Hesiod acknowledged the wisdom of Zeus's times. The father of the gods oversees the days and time: "These are the days that come from counselor Zeus" (Hesiod and Most 149). Human beings are considered as entities created by the Olympian Gods (Hes. *WD.* ll. 110-69). The decline of humans, delineated through the succession of metal ages, is part of the interpretation process of human origins through the myth (Clay 81). This legend, shaped in verses by the poet and shared by ancient Greek people, reflects the ancestral search for equilibrium between mankind and the Nature. In Daba context, according to the Dongba Scripture *Origin of Moso Divination*, Daba and Dongba priests' knowledge, including the rhythmic classics, the divination classic, and the manner to host guests, was bestowed by a goddess called "Pozisamei," living in the Heaven's Palace (Li, Translations 95; Fu 45).

This knowledge could also be called "wisdom." Allen (88) defines it "witch-wisdom" with a specific reference to those contexts. The connection of works and activities with constellations could have scientific evidence. For example, the constellations can mark important times for seasons. Additionally, the solstices in winter and summer have to be mentioned: "if you plow the divine earth first at the winter solstice, you will harvest sitting down, covered in dust, grasping only a little with your hand and tying it together in opposite directions, not at all pleased, and you will carry it off in a basket; few will admire you." (Hesiod and Most 127). Being two critical points in time, they are widely mentioned in ancient civilizations. It is natural to think, in this context, to the stony observatory of Machu Picchu, the monumental Inca's remains in Peru, built around 600 years ago. The usage of constellations also expresses the metaphor according to which the knowledge transmitted by the poems is from the sky, something beyond and superior to the human world, i.e. the gods.

These gods can be interpreted as the gods of the respective *pantheons*, ancient Greek and Daba, but also as Nature itself, in a sort of immanent vision of the transcendent that pervades and enters the contingent (*deus sive natura*, as a paraphrasis of what Spinoza said in *Ethics*). Dabaism and Dongbaism are primitive animistic beliefs, worshipping nature and the anthropomorphism of the gods of nature (Z. He 27). The names of gods in *Hesiod* are just names, while the Nature as a transcendent image (*gestalt*) of itself and as the territory of men's work is the only absolute deity. The transcendent Nature becomes a physical entity imbued with divinity and is, sometimes, interpreted through the cycle of the seasons and the Earth's rhythms (Slatkin, *Measuring Authority* 28).

According to this perspective, the transcendent gods foreshadowed in the immanent Nature have established the rhythms of nature and the rules of behaviors for human beings. Morality and social order (the *kosmos*) are symbolized by the farming activities, involving a mutual relationship between the humans and the Nature (Slatkin 29). Nelson and Grene (59-81) interpreted farming, in *Hesiod*, as a metaphoric way to describe hardship. Hardship, in its turn, is considered a kind of rule / law through which human beings could earn their goods working in equilibrium within nature. Nature can also be interior. Brown (313) has pointed out the Hesiod's simple and dialectical sentiment telling people to treat neighbors well, so that in the future they can be reliable when you fall into need. The scholar called it "the law of human nature."

Despite the superficial difference in organizing the poem and the contents, the roles of the singers, Daba priests and Greek poet, share similarities in their deep cultural meanings. Even if traditional and empiric knowledge could be accumulated according to the experience in daily work, this kind of atavistic wisdom could be considered a sort of gift or background given by the god(s). This knowledge, apparently belonging to the human sphere, is originally not human at all. It comes from gods, the gods of nature, and, ultimately from the Nature itself, immanent representation of gods' transcendence. As Eliade pointed out, the sacred knowledge originates from the absolute Truth in primordial time.

People cannot know those rules (that are traditional laws from the transcendent sphere) without the work of an intermediary: the poet. This poet is Hesiod in the case of ancient Greek farmers, and the singer-priest in the case of Moso people. This parallel has been metaphorically explained by the same poet in his *Theogony*. In that poem, at line 38, the Muses sing to Zeus the past, the present, and the

future. This episode illustrates the origins of the all-embracing knowledge of the father of gods. In the same poem, the Muses reveal the same mysteries also to Hesiod. The poet is, therefore, linked to Zeus in sharing this universal knowledge (Hes. *Th.* 31-32; Bussanich 212; Arrighetti).

Hence, the poet / priest is like a prophet. He bears the words of gods to the human context. And he gives people the rules necessary to live in harmony with nature and to be fed by the nature itself through the everyday work developed according to proper actions. In other words, knowledge (wisdom) exists before the poet, but without the poet it cannot be passed down to the farmers. This knowledge is handed down from generation to generation, but the system could not work without the presence of the poet / priest of the community, the collector and bearer of the ancient sapiential knowledge coming from gods. *Daba* is the shaman connecting the human beings with the gods, the singer providing humans with transcendent words from the divine wisdom. When *Daba* priests are performing rituals, they are believed to be on the border of the white and black worlds, metaphoric expression representing the frontier between the human sphere and the spiritual level (Li, Translations 121).

Such intermediate passage of knowledge needing an interlocutor acting between the sacred and the profane is comparable to "liminality" in anthropology. Van Gennep (20) distinguished the three phases in rites of passage: *préliminaires* (preliminal), *liminaires* (liminal), and *postliminaires* (postliminal). Turner extended the notion "liminal phase" to a more generic concept, "in-between status." Therefore, all kinds of rituals that associate with social transitions can be interpreted through this perspective. Among these situations, Turner analyzed the communication of the *sacra* as the vital issue. The instructions given by *sacra*, chanted through formulas, fall into the same type of text as Hes. *WD.* and *Daba* hemerology.

The poet is the ring linking the divine knowledge to the life of people, connecting the transcendent world with human beings. The poet is trustable because he is the depositary of the true knowledge. For this reason, he is the guarantor of it, as well as its dispenser. The poet is a singer, but also necessarily a priest and a prophet. Without the poet, the law of Nature would not be shown to human beings; the farmers would not be able to trust the words of gods and to follow them, respecting the nature and the movements of the constellations.

In this paper, I have compared two ancient hemerologies from two different traditions: *Dabaism* in South-West China and Ancient Greek in Hesiod's poem (Hes. *WD.* II 383-828). The contents of the two calendars are both focused on human activities, especially the farming works typical of agricultural societies. Even if these two traditions are far from each other both in geographical and chronological contexts, several activities and taboos coincide with each other, reflecting common customs between the two cultural communities.

The empirical knowledge accumulated in both traditions relates to the constellations, including several same asterisms chosen for marking time. Such kind of "coincidence" between geographically incompatible traditions is also called "cultural manifold" in Lloyd and Sivin (xi-xii). The constellations in ancient Greek are symbols marking the seasons or certain times. Conversely, the lunar mansions in *Daba* / *Dongba* culture have been given conventional divination meanings, which indicates the astronomical observations are not necessary. The two types of relationships between asterisms and divinations represent the transition of astrology to conventional hemerology.

The classifications of dates are attested in both traditions. In Hes. *WD.*, the thirty days of each month are divided into three ten-days. The divination meanings of the same day in each decadal unit are paralleled or connected. In *Daba Gelimu*, the lunar mansions named after a same animal, the local constellation, are explained as a group. Merging the explanations of similar days can be interpreted as an economic approach for memorization.

The surprising similarities in the content and the mnemonic strategies between these two farming-poetries inspired me in this comparative reasoning on the poets' role in linking human beings to the gods and/or to the Nature. In the perspective of Oral Composition Theory, the divination meanings of the days correspond to themes, while the specific phrases appear to be formulas. The hemerologies bear ancient sapiential knowledge accumulated from experience and wisdom struggling in the nature. Nature is intended as the space of an immanent deity or as the territory of transcendent gods. And the knowledge of gods has its solemn expression in the law of Nature. Therefore, formulas and themes in these farming-poetries are not only instruments useful to memorize and hand down the prescriptions provided by gods, but an indispensable part of the rhythm of the law, the law of Nature. Formulaic verses expressing that knowledge are in themselves the meaning of Nature's rule and explain how to deal with Nature and with the physical world. Through the words and verses, knowledge and wisdom of the gods come from a superior world to this world.

The law from the transcendent world prescribes the respect for the contingent world and for the timing established by gods. The respect for this sacred gift from gods can be interpreted as the effort

of men to work in harmony with nature: following the cycles of seasons and the movements of constellations, becoming adepts of a sapiential knowledge affecting their everyday life and accompanying them throughout the years, month by month, day by day. People's respect for the gods, therefore, is configured as the respect for Nature. In this passage of knowledge, the poet/singer acts as the interlocutor transmitting the sacred knowledge to the profane world. The poet, the singer, the priest, the prophet, is the liminal phase, the guarantor of the harmony of the world, through his words/formulas the *kosmos* (supreme order) is preserved and made stable.

It is touching and significant to see, through the comparison developed in this paper, the spiritual efforts of people, in Ancient Greece and in Daba contexts, to work in their fields according to established rules. Those Nature's laws were and are universally recognized as good and valuable, since they work. Above all, they were and are universally believed to be gods' words and, therefore, sacred. They come from the poet, who bears them from the gods. The poet is the community's singer and, at the same time, its priest and its prophet.

The everyday effort to change the landscape to make it more human, in the respect of the rhythms of seasons and of the orientation of constellations, gives the perspective of this tripartite relationship between gods (the Nature) and men. "Tripartite", since between gods (the immanent Nature) and men there is always the figure of the poet, placed at an intermediate level and impossible to be replaced in these dialectics connecting the gods' world (ideally located among the constellations) with the humans' world.

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Author's profile: Dr Xu Duoduo is a postdoctoral fellow at School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological University. She has achieved her Ph.D. in Chinese Philology and Linguistics at the Nanyang Technological University, School of Humanities, Chinese Program, Singapore. Her Research interests include Chinese Philology, Chinese Oral Literature, Comparative Literature, Ancient Greek Philology, European Oral Traditions, History of Writing & Grammatology, and Language Documentation of minority populations and cultures in China. Xu's major publications include: "Lunar mansion names in South-West China: An etymological reconstruction of ancestral astronomical designations in Moso, Pumi, and Yi cultures compared with Chinese and Tibetan contexts", *Onoma* (2016/2019); "The Five-Color Theme in Dongba Scriptures", *Asian Highlands Perspectives* (2018); "From Daba Script to Dongba Script: A Diachronic Exploration of the History of Moso Pictographic Writings", *Libellarium* (2017). Email: <duoduo.xu@ntu.edu.sg>