Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*

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ACCORDING to any historical account, Han dynasty literature is dominated by the *fu* 賦.[1] No other genre comes to mind that might have rivalled the eminence of the *fu* during the four centuries of the Western and Eastern Han. The *Hanshu* 漢書 "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Monograph on arts and letters), the first bibliography of the Chinese literary tradition, lists in its section on songs (*shi* 詩) and *fu* 1005 pieces as *fu* and 314 as *shi*. This does not simply mean three times more *fu* than *shi*: the vast disproportion between the two genres becomes even more obvious as soon as we take into account that Western Han songs rarely exceed a dozen lines while a single

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[1] See, e.g., David R. Knechtges, "Introduction," in Gong Kechang 龔克昌, *Studies on the Han* Fu (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1997), p. 1: "The *fu* is in fact the genre most intimately associated with the Han. It is in many ways the essence of Han literature, which exerted a profound influence on the entire Chinese literary tradition." In the same

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fu can run through hundreds of them. Moreover, as noted almost fifty years ago by Hellmut Wilhelm in a short but influential article,[2] the "Yiwen zhi" list of *fu* is not complete. Apart from the lack of any mention of Zou Yang's 鄒陽 (ca. 206–ca. 129 B.C.) literary work, there is the remark of Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) that Mei Gao 枚皋 (fl. 130–110 B.C.), in addition to one hundred and twenty morally acceptable *fu*, also composed several dozen others "too frivolous to be readable" (*you manxi bu ke du zhe* 尤嫚戲不可讀者). This note appears in Mei Gao's biography and corresponds to a number of one hundred and twenty *fu* given under Mei's name in the "Yiwen zhi"; evidently, the original compilers of the imperial catalogue, Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 B.C.) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. A.D. 23), had barred the "frivolous" pieces from even being registered.[3]

The "Yiwen zhi" catalogue incorporates in abridged form Liu Xin's "Qi lüe" 七略 (Seven epitomes) which itself is a condensed version of Liu Xiang's "Bie lu" 別錄 (Separate listings). The "Bie lu" was the original catalogue of the imperial library, compiled after Emperor Cheng's 成 (r. 33–7 B.C.) edict of 26 B.C. to collect and put into order the books from all over the empire.[4] The brief historical outline of the *fu* in the "Yiwen zhi" is mostly Liu Xin's work. To this, Ban Gu added some remarks together with quotations from Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18), the most prominent literary author of late Western Han times who during the Wang Mang 王莽 interregnum (9–23) was employed as a collator in the imperial library.[5] It is thus clear that the *Hanshu* account of Western Han literature, which has been granted highest authority in both traditional and modern discussions of the *fu*, is based directly on late Western Han sources.

During most of the twentieth century, the strongly pejorative view of the *fu* that can be traced back to Yang Xiong has not merely dominated but largely paralyzed the field of *fu* studies. Disparaged as a genre of empty formalism and meaningless verbosity, condemned for its intimate relation to elitist court culture and imperial representation, and charged with neglecting the sincere expression of genuine personal sentiment, the *fu* was anathema to modern literary criticism.[6] The political exploitation of these values and ideals of the May Fourth movement during the first three decades of the PRC only worsened the situation, making it literally impossible for Chinese scholars to devote their efforts to a poetic genre that seemed to embody everything that was wrong with the literary tradition. More than any other major Chinese poetic genre of the past, the *fu* was rejected for purportedly having failed in both the expression of

book, p. 52, Gong Kechang states that the *fu* "indeed is a genre that typifies Han literature. It is a literary form rich in creativity and achievement that truly manifests the character of the Han empire, and conveys the spirit of the Han imperial era." For Western Han times (but not for later periods) Knechtges's translation of *fu* as "rhapsody" is preferable over its common alternatives "rhyme-prose" and "poetic exposition" because it emphasizes the performative aspect of the genre instead of its formal features. With regard to the early performances, Knechtges is fully justified in comparing the *fu* to the Greek rhapsody; see his *The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the* Fu *of Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.–A.D. 18)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 13, and compare Andrew Ford, "The Classical Definition of Rhapsōdia," *Classical Philology* 83 (1988): 300–307. However, translating a technical term from ancient Chinese into one from ancient Greece creates its own problems. As an alternative, I wish to submit that Sinologists do not need a translation for *fu* and that scholars of other literary traditions might be able to see the advantage of making the Chinese word part of our common lexicon of literary history, criticism, and comparison. (In this spirit, Knechtges himself now no longer translates *fu*.) In the following, I will thus leave the term untranslated, especially as the present paper is meant to clarify the nature of the *fu* in its formative period, the Western Han.

[2] Hellmut Wilhelm, "The Scholar's Frustration: Notes on a Type of *Fu*," in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 310–19, 398–403 (notes).

[3] For Ban Gu's remark, see *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987) 51.2367. For the listing of Mei Gao's *fu* in the "Yiwen zhi," see 30.1748.

[4] For the collection of books and Liu Xiang's work in the imperial library, see *Hanshu* 10.310 and 30.1701, and Piet van der Loon, "On the Transmission of Kuan-tzu," *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952): 358–66.

[5] On Yang Xiong's work as an imperial collator, see *Hanshu* 87B.3584; Franklin M. Doeringer, "Yang Hsiung and His Formulation of a Classicism." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1971, pp. 198–201; David R. Knechtges, *The* Hanshu *Biography of Yang Xiong (53 B.C.–A.D.18)* (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1981), p. 60. Yang Xiong's eminent stature as a scholar of the classical textual heritage is further apparent from the fact that he is credited with two dictionaries: the character dictionary *Cang Jie xunzuan* 蒼頡訓纂, apparently a glossary to complement Li Si's 李斯 (d. 208 B.C.) earlier *Cang Jie* 蒼頡 dictionary (see *Hanshu* 30.1720–21), and the dialect word compendium *Fangyan* 方言 (see *Suishu* 隋書 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987], 32.937). On the latter, see Paul Serruys, *The Chinese Dialects of Han Time According to* Fang Yen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); Knechtges, "The Liu Hsin/Yang Hsiung Correspondence on the *Fang Yen*," *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977/78): 309–25. The *Cang Jie xunzuan* is not explicitly listed in later bibliographies and was lost at an early date, certainly no later than during the Song dynasty.

[6] See Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, pp. 109–10.

the self and the reflection of social realities. It is only since the late 1970s that Chinese scholars have dared to rehabilitate the genre, and thus to legitimize their own scholarly pursuit of it.[7]

Since then, *fu* scholarship in the PRC and Taiwan has developed rapidly. So far, five international conferences have been held over the years, the most recent one in Zhangzhou 漳州 (Fujian) in November 2001. The published papers of the fourth conference, held in Nanjing 南京 (Jiangsu) in 1998, fill an 800-page volume and testify to the amazing achievements, vitality, and originality of current *fu* scholarship.[8] Yet even in the less ideologically charged scholarly climate of the last two decades of the twentieth century, the core of the earlier reservations retained its presence. Ma Jigao, the prominent historian of the *fu*, submits that the tension between eulogy and admonition is not resolved in the Han *fu*, and that excessive verbal display diminishes, instead of enhances, the literary value of certain pieces.[9] Jiang Shuge 姜書閣 holds that the Han "grand *fu*" (*da fu* 大賦), exemplified in the monumental works by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 B.C.), Yang Xiong, and others, succeeds merely in broadly arrayed description but fails in the expression of intent and emotion.[10] Gong Kechang, while praising Sima Xiangru for his

[7] As Ma Jigao 馬積高, *Fu shi* 賦史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1987), p. 10, notes, the only Chinese literary history that during the previous three decades had seriously discussed the *fu* was Liu Dajie's 劉大杰 *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi* 中國文學發展史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1982) of 1962. Liu devotes more than thirty pages to the genre (pp. 128–60), most of which deal with the Han *fu*; a mere eight pages are given to the *fu* of later periods.

[8] Zhou Xunchu 周勛初 et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji* 辭賦文學論集 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu, 1999). A chief representative of current *fu* scholarship from its very beginning is Gong Kechang. His eminent work is now best exemplified in his English language publication *Studies on the Han Fu*, which in many respects goes beyond his *Han fu yanjiu* 漢賦研究 (Jinan: Shandong wenyi, 1990). A good annotated survey of *fu* scholarship from Han times through the late twentieth century is given in Ye Youming 葉幼明, *Cifu tonglun* 辭賦通論 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1991), pp. 166–281. A bibliography of Chinese works on the *fu* from 1920 through 1988 is provided by Xu Zhixiao 徐志嘯, *Lidai fulun jiyao* 歷代賦論輯要 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue, 1991), pp. 146–73. Accounts of recent *fu* scholarship are He Xinwen 何新文, "Jin ershi nian dalu fuxue wenxian zhengli de xin jinzhan" 近二十年大陸賦學文獻整理的新進展, in Zhou Xunchu et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji*, pp. 750–68; Jian Zongwu 簡宗梧, "1991–1995 nian zhongwai fuxue yanjiu shuping" 1991–1995 年中外賦學研究述評, in *ibid.*, pp. 769–90.

[9] Ma Jigao, *Fu shi*, pp. 138–41.

[10] Jiang Shuge, *Han fu tongyi* 漢賦通義 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1988), p. 291.

artistic achievement, states: "The major faults of Sima Xiangru's *fu* include the rather narrow reflection of society and life, an insufficiently high degree of ideological content, the cataloguing and piling up phrases in the description, and the difficult and ornate quality of the language."[11] Echoes of such judgments can be found in numerous other works. They measure the *fu* against a distinct set of literary values and find it wanting. Explicit statements to the contrary are comparatively rare.[12]

While in line with May Fourth literary ideology, the concerns expressed by Gong Kechang and others can be traced back to Yang Xiong. The problem with this is not the respectable age of Yang's criticism but its original context. In terms both political and cultural, the last quarter of the Western Han was a time of ideological contestation and reform extending over the whole imperial arena of ritual, literary, and political representation.[13] In particular the period after, roughly, 30 B.C. was one of the great watersheds in early and medieval Chinese cultural history, a time when the imperial ritual system was thoroughly criticized and redefined in its values, goals, and display, and when Yang Xiong challenged the legitimacy of the very literary genre—the *fu*—that according to our accounts had dominated the literary culture at the imperial court since the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 B.C.). From this perspective, Yang Xiong's criticism that informs both the *Hanshu* account as well as modern discussions of the Western Han *fu* is not

[11] Gong, *Studies on the Han Fu*, p. 162. Interestingly, Gong Kechang's critical remarks about Sima Xiangru to some extent appear to continue the very didacticism he otherwise faults Yang Xiong and other Han classicists for; see *Studies on the Han Fu*, pp. 78–92.

[12] A notable exception can be found in the magnificent history of the *fu* by Guo Weisen 國維森 and Xu Jie 許結, *Zhongguo cifu fazhan shi* 中國辭賦發展史 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu, 1996), p. 34, who insist that the *fu* should be judged on its own terms instead of being disparaged as falling short of the moral and political intentions that purportedly governed the ancient *Odes*.

[13] See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), chapters five through nine; Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 267–99; Martin Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *wen* in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 87.1-3 (2001): 43–91; and Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141–87 B.C.)," *Chūgoku shigaku* 中國史學 10 (2000): 1–31.

unproblematic.[14] Dealing with the dominant genre of imperial court literature, it comes from a period of cultural upheaval, and indeed from one of the principal actors engaged in the critique and reform of imperial culture. As such, we can expect Yang's judgment to be not merely descriptive but prescriptive, providing not a distanced and unbiased record but an active, interest-driven intervention toward some fundamental cultural change at the time it was voiced. From this perspective, I wish to suggest that the established history and evaluation of the Western Han *fu* may be seriously compromised, if not downright distorted, that we need to reflect upon this fact, and that a different image of the genre, one that is less confined to its late Western Han criticism, is possible.

The following pages are intended to put Yang Xiong's views into their own historical context and to compare them with what other evidence we have for the nature and function of the Western Han *fu*. In a first step, I will revisit the established account of the *fu* to bring into focus the fundamental and unresolved tension between aesthetic expression and moral claims that governs so much of traditional and even present-day scholarship of the genre. To which extent is this tension indeed characteristic of the *fu* proper and not primarily a product of its historiography? This question leads to the consideration of a two-sided phenomenon: on the one hand, the multiple forms and functions of the Western Han *fu* resist the literary historian's attempt at a unified characterization and stable categorization of the genre. On the other hand, Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 B.C.) *Shiji* 史記, a work that covers the historical period during which the *fu* achieved its prominence and that itself was

[14] There is no question that Ban Gu's views on literature are based on the same classicism—including an orientation at the model of the ancient *Odes*—that stands also behind Yang Xiong's judgments. Like Yang, Ban was deeply engaged with the traditional canon, as is manifest in his imperially commissioned compilation *Baihu tongyi* 白虎通義 (The comprehensive meaning of [the discussions in] the White Tiger Hall) of the discussions on the *Five Classics* (*wu jing* 五經) in A.D. 79–80. He shared with Yang the same pejorative sentiment about Western Han music (and aesthetics in general) as not being in accord with the ancient models, and he concurred with Yang's ambivalent stance on Qu Yuan's 屈原 (fourth century B.C.) moral and literary qualities. Finally, he quotes with unqualified approval Yang's criticism of the *fu*. For a succinct account of Ban Gu's literary views, see Jiang Fan 蔣凡, "Ban Gu de wenxue sixiang" 班固的文學思想, *Zhongguo gudai, jindai wenxue yanjiu* 中國古代, 近代文學研究 (*Fuyin baokan ziliao* 複印報刊資料) 1985.9: 67–75.

written in this very period, offers very little support for the traditional account of the early and mid-Western Han *fu* as presented by Yang Xiong, Liu Xin, and Ban Gu. In a departure from this account, the main part of the paper then offers a new view of the *fu*, presenting it as a performative genre of rhetoric, entertainment, and moral instruction. Because the *fu* so overwhelmingly represents Western Han literary culture, this discussion explores the core issues of third and second century B.C. aesthetic and rhetorical discourse, including its expression in recently excavated manuscripts. By embedding the *fu* and its inherent tensions in its contemporaneous context, its relevance for the cultural history of the early imperial state will become apparent.

THE TENSION BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND MORALITY

Despite its great prominence in its own times, we know preciously—and precariously—little about the actual phenomenon of the Western Han *fu*, its forms and contents as well as its modes of composition and reception. Of the 1005 *fu* listed in the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi," only a few dozen are extant. In the analysis of actual literary pieces, we are thus left with some two or three per cent of the works mentioned in the earliest—itself incomplete—catalogue. In addition, Yang Xiong's remarks on the nature and function of the *fu* consist of just a few laconic lines, and the received textual record does not include much from other sources. If there originally was any sustained discourse on matters of poetry and rhetoric among the Western Han elite—something one may very well doubt—it has mostly disappeared.[15] Thus, while keeping the very limited nature

[15] In this respect, early China—a culture replete with political argument and poetic expression—differs decidedly from the mediterranean classical period. Nobody in pre-Han or Han China wrote anything even remotely comparable to Aristotle's *Technē rhētorikē* and *Peri poiētikēs*, Cicero's *De inventione* and *De oratore*, Horace's *Ars poetica*, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, or the anonymous *Auctor ad Herennium*. Instead, only some shorter treatises are known, e.g., the "Shui nan" 說難 (Difficulties of persuasion) chapter in *Han Feizi* 韓非子 or the "Shun shui" 順說 (Smooth persuasion) chapter in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. One reason why there are no major early Chinese works on topics like rhetoric, grammar, and poetics might be that early China did not develop the professionalization and institutionalization of scholar-teachers, their disciplines, and their public arena in the way ancient Greece and Rome did. One treatise sometimes related to early rhetoric, but of uncertain—and very possibly post-Han—origin,

of our received account in mind, Yang Xiong's, Liu Xin's, and, later, also Ban Gu's contributions may well have been of particular stature, elevating them above and transmitting them beyond an otherwise more occasional and ephemeral literary discussion. The alternative would be to charge Ban Gu with substantial and systematic censorship in compiling the *Hanshu* from his existing sources, a stance I remain reluctant to take.

Yang Xiong and his predecessor Sima Xiangru, both from the old southwestern region of Shu, are regarded as the pre-eminent Western Han authors of the *fu*. By the sheer number of their literary works neither man was among the most prolific writers of his time; but both are known to us as having defined and refined the aesthetics of the "grand *fu*." Yang's ambivalence about the genre is mirrored in his changing attitude to Sima Xiangru: while he first regarded Sima's work as the foremost model to follow,[16] he later used his forerunner's compositions as the prime example to illustrate the serious shortcomings and ultimate failure of the genre. Yang Xiong's criticism of the *fu* is presented in two different places: in his autobiography included in the *Hanshu*,[17] and in his *Fayan* 法言, a work of brief philosophical statements modelled on the *Lunyu* 論語.[18] As Yang's pronouncements on the *fu* are familiar to students of Han literature, I will here only summarize the salient points. According to Yang, the purpose of the *fu* is "indirect admonition" (*feng* 風); yet by "adducing analogies" (*tui lei* 推類), using "extremely gorgeous and lavish phrases" (*ji limi zhi ci* 極麗靡之辭), and grandly exaggerating its topic, the *fu* achieves just the opposite: its addressee indulges in its literary aesthetics while missing its moral message. Thus, with the ornate language overpowering the matter, "it is clear

is *Guiguzi* 鬼谷子, traditionally attributed to the teacher of the two master rhetoricians of the 4th century B.C., Su Qin 蘇秦 and Zhang Yi 張儀; see Michael Robert Broschat, "'Guiguzi': A Textual Study and Translation," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1985.

[16] See *Hanshu* 87A.3515.

[17] *Hanshu* 87A–B: 3513–87, translated in full by Knechtges, *The* Hanshu *Biography of Yang Xiong (53 B.C.–A.D. 18)*.

[18] Yang's remarks on literature are found mainly in the chapter "Wu zi" 吾子 (My master); see Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶, *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987) 3.45–4.83. An English translation of "Wu zi" is provided by Knechtges, "*Exemplary Sayings*, Chapter 2," in *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 530–33. See also Doeringer, "Yang Hsiung and His Formulation of a Classicism," pp. 119–79.

that the *fu* only encourages and does not restrain" (*fu quan er bu zhi ming yi* 賦勸而不止明矣); due to its delightful appearance and lack of moral force, it is on par with the work of court jesters. Yang therefore concludes that he will no longer engage in the genre of the *fu*, the beauty of which he disparages as "merely a defect in a seamstress' work" (*nü gong zhi du yi* 女工之蠹矣) and something not worthy of a grown man.[19] His criticism culminates in the comparison of the *fu* as a recent literary genre with *fu* as a poetic mode of exposition in the ancient *Odes*:

> The *fu* of the *Odes* poets are gorgeous and provide standards; the *fu* of the epideictic poets are gorgeous and lead to excess.[20] If the followers of Confucius had used the *fu*, Jia Yi would have mounted the hall and Sima Xiangru would have entered the inner compartments. But they did not use the *fu*, so what of it?[21]

This conclusion is cited with approval by Ban Gu who adds this and other passages to Liu Xin's historical account of the *fu* in the "Yiwen zhi." Taken together, Liu's and Ban's remarks, supported by the quotation from Yang Xiong, reveal which tensions were considered inherent in the genre.[22] Beginning his outline with a quotation from an anonymous "tradition" (*zhuan* 傳), Liu Xin immediately connects the genre to the ancient practice of *Odes* recitation:

> To recite without singing is called *fu*. He who climbs on high and can *fu* may become a grandee.[23]

[19] See *Hanshu* 87B.3575; Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu* 3.45, 60.

[20] For reasons that will become clear below, I believe that the sexually charged term *yin* 淫 ("excess," but also "licentiousness") here does not simply refer to literary style but also, and perhaps even primarily, to the effect of such literary style on the audience and its social behavior.

[21] Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 3.49–50. To "mount the hall" (*sheng tang* 升堂) and "enter the inner compartments" (*ru shi* 入室) refers to *Lunyu* 論語 11/5, where both expressions refer to different stages of philosophical insight.

[22] *Hanshu* 30.1755–56.

[23] The line is perhaps deliberately ambiguous. It may well refer to ascending to a high position at court, yet the root metaphor is that of climbing a mountain; see *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 ed.) 7.15b, where Confucius addresses his disciples during a mountain tour: "When a gentleman climbs on high, he always sets out [his intentions]" (*junzi deng gao bi fu* 君子登高必賦). See also Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127–200) commentary to "Ding zhi fang zhong" 定之方中 (Mao 50) in *Mao Shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* ed.) 3–1.48b. Likewise, when the Qin First Emperor toured the mountains of the newly conquered eastern states, his officials "recited" (*song* 誦) his merits before carving these eulogies (*song* 頌) into stone; see Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), pp. 143–44. The homophonous words "to recite" and "eulogy" are clearly cognate, and both relate to *fu* in the sense of "to display, to present, to spread out" (see below).

Fu as the practice of poetry recitation, well-documented in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語,[24] is not primarily a matter of political admonition but one of coded communication among members of the cultural elite who on diplomatic and other occasions express their thoughts—intentions, desires, predictions, warnings—in this indirect fashion. With men of such talent, knowledge, and subtle expression (*wei yan* 微言), Liu Xin holds, one can contemplate important affairs; yet the decline of the Zhou after the Spring and Autumn period led to the demise of this cultured intercourse. As a result, scholars of the *Odes* were hiding among the common folk and "the *fu* of worthies not accomplishing their ambitions arose" (*xianren shi zhi zhi fu zuo yi* 賢人失志之賦作矣). Liu's argument may perhaps be historically problematic, but it is certainly rhetorically elegant. On the one hand, Liu distinguishes between *fu* as a poetic presentation of a commonly known repertoire of songs and *fu* as a distinct poetic genre with its own theme and aesthetic features. On the other hand, he describes this difference as a result of historical change. The new literary genre arises *because* the old practice of literary communication has disappeared. Learned men no longer recite the inherited songs and thus create their own, new literary compositions to express their resentment. With this shift, the figure of the literary author and his personal motives appears:

> The great *ru* scholar Sun [Xun] Qing and the Chu minister Qu Yuan, when encountering slander and grieving about their states, both created *fu* of indirect admonition which all contained the ancient *Odes*' meaning of concealed pain.[25]

At this point, Liu takes another sharp turn that brings him into line with Yang Xiong's conclusion on the aesthetic excesses and moral shortcomings of the *fu*. Having praised Qu Yuan and Xun Qing as the two progenitors of the new genre,[26] Liu states that already Qu Yuan's immediate successors Song Yu 宋玉 and Tang Le 唐勒 (both third century B.C.), and after them the Western Han authors of the *fu*, were "vying to compose phrases greatly gorgeous and grossly aggrandizing" (*jing wei chili hongyan zhi ci* 競為侈麗閎衍之詞) and thus "drowned the meaning of indirect suasion and moral illustration" (*mo qi fengyu zhi yi* 沒其風諭之義) of the genre. Two generations later, Ban Gu, the leading praise poet and *fu* author of his time,[27] offers another, and this time highly eulogizing, appraisal of the *fu* in the preface to his "*Fu* on the two capitals" ("Liang du fu" 兩都賦). Here, he identifies the *fu* as "a class of the ancient *Odes*" (*gu shi zhi liu ye* 古詩之流也) and relates its development during the Western Han to Emperor Wu's imperial ritual and sacrificial hymns. Praising the imperial library catalogue and its more than one thousand *fu* listings, Ban Gu calls the cultural splendor of the Han equal to that of the ancient "three dynasties" (*san dai* 三代), that is, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou. His list of *fu* authors includes both the illustrious poets from the Emperor Wu reign onwards and an impressive group of high-ranking officials.

> Some, expressing the feelings of their subordinates, conveyed indirect criticism and advice; some, spreading their superior's virtuous power, gave full expression to loyalty and piety. Harmonious and embracing, extolling and extending, [their compositions] became manifest to posterity, and they were second only to the *Elegantiae* and *Eulogia* [of the *Odes*].[28]

[24] See Zeng Qinliang 曾勤良, *Zuo zhuan yinshi fushi zhi shijiao yanjiu* 左傳引詩賦詩之詩教研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1993); Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 155–76; and Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 38–44.

[25] *Hanshu* 30.1756. For *ceyin* 惻隱 as "concealed pain" (versus the Mencian "sympathy"; cf. *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子注疏 [*Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* ed.] 3B.27a [2A.6]) see Liu Xiang's "Jiu tan, You ku" 九歎, 憂苦 in Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986) 16.300. It is clear that Qu Yuan and Sun Qing 孫卿 (i.e., Xun Qing 荀卿 [ca. 335–ca. 238 B.C.], the author of the *Xunzi* 荀子) are mentioned here not as commiserating others but as being troubled by their own personal fate.

[26] Chapter 26 of *Xunzi* is entitled "Fu" 賦 and contains five poetic riddles; see Knechtges, "Riddles as Poetry: The *Fu* Chapter of Hsün-tzu," in *Wen lin*, vol. 2, ed. Chow Tse-tsung (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1987), pp. 1–31. The word *fu* does not occur in the *Xunzi* text proper but only as chapter title, given probably by Liu Xiang in his function as an imperial editor; see John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988–94), vol. 1, pp. 105–10. However, the riddles share important features with the works attributed to Qu Yuan as well as with some of the Western Han *fu*: rhyme and meter, a delight in words and sounds, an (albeit very simple) dialogical structure, and the literary topos of the world upside down. Especially the last point may have inspired Liu Xin to mention Xun Qing together with Qu Yuan.

[27] See Knechtges, "To Praise the Han: The Eastern Capital *Fu* of Pan Ku and His Contemporaries," in *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China: Studies Dedicated to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Wilt L. Idema and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), pp. 118–39.

[28] *Liu chen zhu Wen xuan* 六臣注文選 (*Sibu congkan* ed.) 1.3a. Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 93–99, has translated the whole preface.

From the various statements on the *fu* by Yang Xiong, Liu Xin, and Ban Gu, the unresolved tensions in the perception of the genre become readily apparent—tensions between eulogy and admonition, between entertainment and political engagement, and between literary aesthetics and moral norms. To some extent, these tensions result from the subtle conflation of three different meanings of the word *fu* in late Western Han usage. The term covers at once, and relates to one another, the Western Han poetic genre, the earlier practice of *Odes* recitation (i.e., presentation), and the poetic mode of "exposition" that as part of the triad *fu*, *bi* 比, and *xing* 興 appears in early discussions of the *Odes* themselves.[29] While "to recite without singing is called *fu*" refers primarily to the performative recitation of an *Ode*, Eastern Han commentators have used the sense of "exposition" to define the genre of the *fu* by glossing the word *fu* 賦 (pju-) paronomastically as *fu* 敷 (phju), *pu* 鋪 (phju), or *bu* 布 (pwo-),[30] all meaning "to spread out, to unfold."[31] In this understanding, the genre of the *fu* is defined by its characteristic mode of grand and profuse description. In other words, *fu* denotes both the performative external aspect of the genre and its internal mode of broad exposition of a given topic.[32] When Yang Xiong says, "The *fu* of the *Odes* poets are gorgeous and provide standards; the *fu* of

[29] For the last point, see *Zhou li zhushu* 周禮注疏 (*Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* ed.) 23.158a; and the "Great preface" (*Da xu* 大序) to the *Mao Shi* 毛詩, in *Mao Shi zhengyi* 1-1.3a.

[30] Reconstructions are taken from W. South Coblin, *A Handbook of Eastern Han Sound Glosses* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983).

[31] See Zhan Ying 詹鍈, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1989) 8.270-71; Ou Tianfa 歐天發, "Fu zhi mingshi kaolun: fu zhi feng bi xing yi shuo" 賦之名實考論—賦之風比興義說, in Zhou Xunchu et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji*, pp. 8-14; Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, pp. 12-13. In the meaning of "to spread out; to promulgate," 賦 is already used in the *Odes*; see "Zheng Min" 烝民 (Mao 260; *Mao Shi zhengyi* 18-3.300b-c). Furthermore, in the late Western Han manuscript of the "Shenwu fu" 神烏賦 (*Fu* on the spirit crow), discovered in 1993 in Yinwan 尹灣 tomb no. 6 (Lianyungang 連雲港, Jiangsu; tomb sealed ca. 10 B.C.), 賦 is written 傅, likely to be taken as *fu* 尃 (phju), another loan character for 敷; for a brief discussion, see Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, "'Shenwu fu (fu)' chutan" 《神烏傅 (賦)》初探, in *Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun* 尹灣漢墓簡牘綜論, ed. Lianyungang shi bowuguan 連雲港市博物館 and Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo 中國文物研究所 (Beijing: Kexue, 1999), p. 7. Another early Zhou meaning of *fu*, "taxation," I take to be a specific case of "presentation" rather than the original meaning of the word.

[32] For an excellent discussion of the multiple aspects of *fu* and its relation to *ge* 歌 ("song"), see Cao Daoheng 曹道衡, *Han Wei liuchao cifu* 漢魏六朝辭賦 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1989), pp. 1-16.

the epideictic writers are gorgeous and lead to excess," he distinguishes between the earlier, morally appropriate "exposition" that was used in the ancient *Odes*, and its recent immoderation at the hands of the Western Han authors. Thus, while suggesting a direct relation between the ancient *Odes* and the recent *fu*, Yang all the more forcefully emphasizes their fundamental difference.

Following Liu Xin, Yang Xiong, and Ban Gu, and depending on their own positions of literary ideology, subsequent critics have emphasized either the admirable or the reprehensible aspects of the genre. "Poems and *fu* aim for gorgeousness" (*shi fu yu li* 詩賦欲麗), notes Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) in his "Lun wen" 論文 (Discourse on literature).[33] "Giving form to the objects [it describes], the *fu* is clear and shining" (*fu ti wu er liu liang* 賦體物而瀏亮), writes Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) in the "Wen fu" 文賦 (*Fu* on literature).[34] Zhi Yu 摯虞 (d. 311) in his "Wenzhang liubie lun" 文章流別論 (Discourse on the currents and divisions of literature) provides a more substantial discussion, beginning with the—by his times well-established—equation of *fu* with *fu* 敷 ("to spread out"). He takes up Ban Gu's phrase that the *fu* is "a class of the ancient *Odes*" but he does not follow the positive evaluation of the Western Han genre in Ban's preface to the "Liang du fu." Instead, he repeats the note from the "Yiwen zhi" that the prime examples of the *fu* are found in the works of Sun Qing and Qu Yuan and that thereafter, the genre suffered from excessive verbosity at the expense of the expression of genuine emotion.[35] He quotes Yang Xiong's condemnation that the Han *fu* is "gorgeous and leads to licentiousness," and refers to a passage in Sima Xiangru's *Shiji* biography which he understands as Sima Qian saying that he had censored the larger part of Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu" 天子游邏賦 (*Fu* on the excursion hunt of the Son

[33] *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 52.9a. I translate *shi* 詩 as "poems" to distinguish the term from *ge* 歌 ("songs").

[34] *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 17.6a.

[35] Only fragments of Zhi Yu's treatise—which originally accompanied a (now lost) literary anthology—have survived in the Tang and Song commonplace books *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (early 7th century), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (624), and *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (984). For an annotated collection of these fragments, see Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 190-204. An annotated translation can be found in Joseph Roe Allen III, "Chih Yü's *Discussions of Different Types of Literature*: A Translation and Brief Comment," *Parerga* 3 (1976): 3-36.

of Heaven) for its extremely hyperbolic and unreasonable wording.[36] By contrast, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 467–522) in his *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 offers a less conservative judgment. Acknowledging the Western Han compositions as outstanding examples of the *fu*, he declares that its characteristically elaborate language is not antagonistic to, but emerging from, the expression of emotion. Thus, the *fu* maintains the perfect balance between "gorgeous phrases" (*lici* 麗詞) and "correct and elegant principles" (*yayi* 雅義), multiple "patterns" (*wen* 文) and "substance" (*zhi* 質), "sensual appearance" (*se* 色) and what is "essential" (*ben* 本). Only in the final paragraph before formally eulogizing (*zan* 贊) the beauty of the *fu* does Liu Xie return briefly to Yang Xiong's criticism, acknowledging that there could be cases where "profuse flowers damage the twig, and rich fat hurts the bone" (*fan hua sun zhi, gao yu hai gu* 繁華損枝, 膏腴害骨).[37]

THE WESTERN HAN *FU* AS A PROBLEM OF LITERARY HISTORY

The issues of these early discussions remain present through later writings of literary criticism. They make it clear that the Han *fu* cannot be reduced to a single intent or narrow set of contents. Obviously, the "frustration *fu*" has received particular attention from Yang Xiong onward. Yet Hellmut Wilhelm's assertion that it should be regarded as the core of the genre because "almost all *fu*

[36] See *Shiji* 117.3043, parallel *Hanshu* 57A.2575. As quoted by the *Shiji* commentator Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (8th century), Yan Shigu's 顏師古 (581–645) uncle Yan Youqin 顏遊秦 (fl. late sixth/early seventh century) maintained the same reading as Zhi Yu. The crucial question in this very ambiguous passage is that of the subject implied in the expression *shanqu qi yao* 刪取其要 ("to cut something down and take up its essentials"). As several Tang commentators of both *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, including Yan Shigu, have pointed out, *shanqu qi yao* may not mean that the author of the Sima Xiangru biography had deleted passages from Sima Xiangru's *fu*. I tentatively, although without any concrete evidence, understand the passage as saying that Sima Xiangru himself, after all his fanciful descriptions, had in the final passage of his work "cut [his presentation] down to the essentials" of his ultimately moral message. The phrase "Tianzi youlie fu," used in *Shiji* 117.3002 and *Hanshu* 57A.2533, refers to what in the *Wenxuan* is split into the "Zixu fu" 子虛賦 (*Fu* on Sir Vacuous) and the "Shanglin fu" 上林賦 (*Fu* on the imperial park). In the following, I stay with the phrase, although it is unclear whether or not it was the original title of Sima Xiangru's work.

[37] See Zhan Ying, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 8.269–311. Note that in his description of the *fu*, Liu Xie uses the term *lici* 麗詞 ("gorgeous phrases") according to the meaning of *li* in previous *fu* criticism, and not in the more narrow sense of "parallel phrases" as in chapter 35 of the *Wenxin diaolong*.

have a political purport, and, in addition, almost all of them deal with the relationship between the ruler and his officials"[38] is at odds with the *fu* as eulogy, appreciated and practiced by Ban Gu. It also does not account for the *fu* as entertainment, a very prominent function the excesses of which are hinted at by the censorship of Mei Gao's allegedly too frivolous compositions. Thus, as David R. Knechtges has put it, "the *fu* is somewhat illusory in that it existed in many different forms, and was constantly changing throughout the Former Han period. For this reason, it is virtually impossible to provide a succinct definition of the genre that would apply to all specimens of *fu*."[39] Knechtges proposes that "the notion of *fu* was extremely broad in Han times, and almost any long rhymed composition could be called *fu*."[40] Yet he also suggests that with Sima Xiangru, "the rhapsody became a mature and highly sophisticated genre, with clearly identifiable conventions."[41]

The apparent multivalence of the *fu* is at least in part a problem not of history but of historiography and retrospective literary judgment. Yang Xiong's emphasis on the political meaning of the *fu* contrasts sharply with the virtual absence of the genre in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, as does the elaborate *Hanshu* account of literary activities at the Emperor Wu court. According to the *Hanshu*, the three decades after Emperor Wu's ascension to the throne in 141 B.C. were the period during which the *fu* developed into the dominant literary genre at the Western Han imperial court. By the time Sima Qian received Sima Tan's 司馬談 (d. 110 B.C) deathbed charge to complete the father's universal history, most of the leading *fu* authors of the Emperor Wu period were, or just had been, flourishing. But we know all this—like almost everything the literary and scholarly tradition holds about the Western Han *fu*—only from the *Hanshu*, not from the *Shiji*; we are reading the early and mid-Western Han *fu* almost exclusively through an Eastern Han source informed by late Western Han ideas. Thus, the principal critical voice remains Yang Xiong's. While referring to Sima Xiangru's work, Yang is

[38] Wilhelm, "The Scholar's Frustration," p. 311.

[39] Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, p. 14.

[40] Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, p. 28.

[41] Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, p. 29.

consumed with the heritage of the Emperor Wu period in his own times.

The problem is that the *Shiji* narrative mentions the literary genre of the *fu* in only two chapters: in chapter 84, the joint biographies of Qu Yuan and Jia Yi 賈誼 (ca. 200–168 B.C.), and in chapter 117, the Sima Xiangru biography.[42] Chapter 84 is a patchwork of various sources, betraying serious textual problems; chapter 117 is almost certainly a later interpolation into the *Shiji*, probably on the basis of the *Hanshu* account, that may have replaced an existing chapter whose original contents and form we do not know.[43] Except for Sima Xiangru, none of the many mid-Western Han writers credited with dozens of *fu* in the *Hanshu* appears as a literary author in the *Shiji*.[44] Most of these men are indeed mentioned in the *Shiji*, and some even have biographies devoted to them. We find information about their official careers and canonical learning, or—in the cases of Mei Sheng 枚乘 (d. 141 B.C.) and Zhuang Ji 莊忌 (ca. 188–105 B.C.; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Ji 嚴忌)—see them mentioned as *youshui zhi shi* 游說之士 (wandering persuaders), that is, men of eloquent speech. In no case is any of them praised as a literary talent or author of a certain type of writings. Yet according to the later *Hanshu* account, they were the most active writers in the most prestigious, most widely-practiced literary form at Emperor Wu's court.

While the Sima Xiangru and the Qu Yuan/Jia Yi biographical chapters in the *Shiji* contain the two eminent moral and political claims that according to Eastern Han sources define the *fu*—the

[42] Outside of the narrative proper, the word *fu* in connection with literary composition appears once in Sima Qian's overall outline of the *Shiji*, the "Taishi gong zixu" 太史公自序 (130.3317), where the phrase *daren fushuo* 大人賦說 ("rhapsodic exposition on the Great Man") is used with reference to Sima Xiangru. *Fushuo* is not a genre designation in the narrow sense but seems to be pointing to the performative nature of Sima Xiangru's composition on the "Great Man." Finally, the word *fu* appears many times as "to present" or "taxation," yet always unrelated to the genre designation.

[43] See my "The 'Biography of Sima Xiangru' and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian's *Shiji*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, *forthcoming* 2003.

[44] *Hanshu* 30.1747–49. For an excellent account on the literary climate at the Wudi court, and on the *fu* writers who were active there, see Knechtges, "The Emperor and Literature: Emperor Wu of the Han," in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 51–76.

expression of personal frustration and the performance of indirect admonition—neither one of them is followed up anywhere else in the *Shiji*. This fundamental contradiction only adds to the serious questions of textual integrity and authenticity that surround chapters 84 and 117; neither one can thus be used without extreme caution. Yet in searching for the early *fu*, we also should not simply replace contemporaneous *Shiji* silence with retrospective and ideologically charged *Hanshu* verbosity; instead, the general absence of the *fu* in the *Shiji* suggests itself a fundamental question: how clearly defined was the genre of the *fu* at the Emperor Wu court, that is, in Sima Qian's and Sima Xiangru's own times?

Throughout Western Han times, the genre designation of *fu* was not stable with respect to individual pieces. Even the very few *fu* contained in the problematic *Shiji* accounts—not to mention the many titles known from later sources—form a very diverse group of texts: which literary features do "Huai sha" 懷沙 (Embracing sand), a poem attributed to Qu Yuan and designated *fu* in the *Shiji*,[45] Jia Yi's "Funiao fu" 鵩鳥賦 (*Fu* on the owl), and Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu" share that could make their common designation as *fu* appear meaningful?[46] At the same time, throughout the Western Han, the terms *fu*, *ci* 辭, *cifu* 辭賦, *song* 頌, and *fusong* 賦頌 remained largely interchangeable. Not only were *ci*, *fu*, and *cifu* used indiscriminately,[47] but the demarcation between "eulogies" or "odes" (*song*) and *fu* also was far from strict.[48] Within the *Shiji*, what is once called Sima Xiangru's "Daren fu" 大人賦 (*Fu* on the great man) appears also as "Daren zhi song" 大人之頌 and "Daren fushuo."[49] Similarly, Wang Bao's 王褒 (d. 61 B.C.) work called

[45] See *Shiji* 84.2486.

[46] See Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, p. 28: "If one were to forget that 'The Owl' is called *fu*, he would probably classify it, along with Pope's *Essay on Man*, as a verse essay on philosophy . . . 'The Owl' represents a form of the rhapsody rarely seen in Chinese literature, and is almost an anomaly."

[47] E.g., when Qu Yuan's works are called *fu* in his biography but *ci* in the "Taishi gong zixu"; for the latter, see *Shiji* 130.3314.

[48] On the instability of genre designations in relation to the *fu* during Han times, see also Xu Zongwen 徐宗文, "Ci, fu, song bianyi" 辭賦頌辨異, *Jianghai xuekan* 江海學刊 1984.6: 132–36; Wan Guangzhi 萬光治, "Handai song zan ming zhen yu fu tongti yiyong" 漢代頌贊銘箴與賦同體異用, *Shehui kexue yanjiu* 社會科學研究 1986.4: 97–102. *Song* is not always a "eulogy" but often, in more neutral terms, an "ode," e.g., in Wang Bao's "Dongxiao fu."

[49] *Shiji* 117.3056, 3063, 130.3317.

"Dongxiao fu" 洞簫賦 (*Fu* on the panpipes) in the *Wenxuan* is mentioned as "Dongxiao song" 洞簫頌 in the *Hanshu*.[50] The case of the "Daren fu" is particularly interesting, as Yang Xiong had chosen this particular "eulogy" as the prime example for Sima Xiangru's failed attempt of admonition "when the emperor was interested in gods and immortals."[51] It is in connection with the "*Fu* on the great man" that Emperor Wu is openly ridiculed as having entirely missed the message, indulging instead in megalomaniac delusion and feeling elated like "traversing the clouds" and "roaming Heaven and Earth."[52]

In addition to the conflation of *fu* and *song*, there are several other genres that by their formal characteristics are indistinguishable from the *fu* Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong are celebrated for: the "staged discussions" (*shelun* 設論) or "responses to questions" (*duiwen* 對問),[53] the "sevens" (*qi* 七), the "sorrows" (*sao* 騷), and also the "lament" (*diaowen* 弔文). Not all of these designations were necessarily used already during the Western Han dynasty, but they were common by Six Dynasties times. Where the *Shiji* notes that Jia Yi "made a *fu* to lament Qu Yuan" (*wei fu yi diao Qu Yuan* 為賦以弔屈原),[54] the *Wenxuan* lists this piece not among the *fu* at the very beginning of the anthology but separately as a *diaowen* and only in its final chapter 60. Qu Yuan's "Li sao" 離騷, called *fu* in the *Shiji*, is categorized as *sao* in chapter 32 of the *Wenxuan* and chapter 5 of the *Wenxin diaolong*. Mei Sheng's "Qi fa" 七發 (Seven stimuli), a seminal work in the development of the Western Han "grand fu" and probably implied in Yang Xiong's discussion of the *fu* quoted above, not only appears under the category *qi* ("sevens") in chapter 34 of the *Wenxuan* but already in Eastern Han times had inspired a series of other *fu* structured in seven distinct units.[55] The *shelun*, represented with

[50] *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 17.15a, *Hanshu* 64B.2829.

[51] *Hanshu* 87B.3575.

[52] *Shiji* 117.3056, 3063, *Hanshu* 57B.2592, 2600, 87B.3575. For a comparison of these passages, see Kern, "The 'Biography of Sima Xiangru' and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian's *Shiji*."

[53] *Shelun* is the designation given in the *Wenxuan*, *duiwen* the one given in the *Wenxin diaolong*.

[54] *Shiji* 84.2492.

[55] A string of Eastern Han and Six Dynasties *qi* are quoted in the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類舉 of 624; see Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, *Yiwen leiju* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985) 57.1020–35. Altogether, the titles of thirteen "sevens" are known from Eastern Han times; see Fei Zhengang 費振剛, Hu Shuangbao 胡雙寶, and Zong Minghua 宗明華, *Quan Han fu* 全漢賦 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1993), pp. 5–15.

Dongfang Shuo's "Da ke nan" 答客難 (Responding to a guest's objections) and Yang Xiong's "Jie chao" 解嘲 (Dissolving ridicule) in chapter 45 of the *Wenxuan*,[56] are like the *qi* defined by the major *fu* elements of a dialogical setting, the alternation of rhymed and unrhymed passages, and a language filled with binomes and synonyms.

As all of these works can be called either *fu* or something else, and as some appear under different designations as early as in Han times, it is clear that the word *fu* did not yet denote a clear and stable genre in the Western Han, but could be used for any type of longer verbal "presentation"—in the performative sense of *fu*—that was distinguished from plain speech or prose by its particular poetic form. This form included at its basis the elements of rhyme and meter, a certain length, and an intensified vocabulary, all drawing attention not only to the matter discussed but also to the language of this discussion itself. The extremely broad meaning of *fu* may explain the virtually complete absence of *fu* as a specific genre designation throughout the *Shiji*: not because there were no *fu* but, on the contrary, because any more or less substantial poetic creation was a formally marked "presentation." According to our evidence, the very notion of literary "genres," that is, a system of more or less strict descriptive and prescriptive categorization of literary texts according to formal and/or functional features, may not yet have developed by early and mid-Western Han times. In Han historical sources, the only genre designation to be juxtaposed to *fu* was that of *ge* 歌 (or *geshi* 歌詩 in the "Yiwen zhi"),[57] denoting the short song. However, *ge* is a poetic form defined by two aspects only: it was relatively short, and it was sung. Liu Xin's definition of the *fu* as "to recite without singing" (*bu ge er song* 不歌而誦) focuses only on the performative aspect; it does nothing to restrict the general notion of *fu* in any other sense.

The broad and performative concept of *fu* may even have

[56] In the *Wenxin diaolong*, both *qi* and *duiwen* are discussed under the title *zawen* 雜文 ("miscellaneous compositions") in chapter 14.

[57] *Hanshu* 30.1753–55.

embraced both a situative presentation of an argument and the representation of an argument as a piece of formalized writing. Such conflation can be demonstrated through two prominent cases. The first is the text that the received *Chu ci* anthology contains as "Yu fu" (The fisherman), a short dialogue, partly rhymed, and traditionally ascribed to Qu Yuan. With certain textual differences, the piece is also included in Qu Yuan's *Shiji* biography.[58] Here, compared to the *Chu ci* version, the phrasing at the beginning of the prose introduction is slightly different, the final "song" (*ge* 歌) together with its own prose introduction of twelve characters is missing, and a number of graphic and lexical variants appear throughout the text. The most fundamental difference, however, is that in the *Shiji* the piece is not formally demarcated as a discrete literary work (while the immediately following "Huai sha" indeed is). Instead, the poetic dialogue is given as part of the narrative and constitutes the entire account of Qu Yuan's wandering in the south. There are two ways to explain the difference between the *Shiji* and the *Chu ci* representation of "Yu fu": either the *Shiji* author tried to integrate an existing literary piece into the biography to lend drama and authenticity to his narrative, or someone transformed the direct speech of this narrative into the literary text that we see in the *Chu ci*. I am inclined toward the first explanation because of the relatively elaborate literary form of the passage, structured by rhyme and meter.[59] Whoever compiled the Qu Yuan biography appears to have found it possible and legitimate to transform a literary text into the representation of an actual situation.

The second example concerns a text already mentioned, Dongfang Shuo's "Da ke nan." In Dongfang's brief *Shiji* biographical account, compiled by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 (ca. 105–ca. 30 B.C.) and interpolated into the *Shiji* chapter on "eloquent wits" (*guji* 滑稽),[60] the

[58] *Shiji* 84.2486.

[59] Of course, this also means that any details we know about Qu Yuan's banishment come from a poetic text that is ascribed to him but must be the work of a later poet lamenting Qu Yuan's fate.

[60] In *Shiji* 126.3203, Chu Shaosun identifies himself here as the contributor. Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier: A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssu (280?–208 B.C.)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), pp. 110–11, has argued that the whole chapter cannot come from Sima Qian.

larger part of what in later sources appears as the literary work "Da ke nan" is presented as an actual debate between Dongfang Shuo and a group of court academicians.[61] By contrast, Dongfang's *Hanshu* biography includes a longer version of "Da ke nan," separated from the surrounding narrative as a unified and discrete literary text. This dialogical text is formally introduced by the following note:

> [Dongfang] Shuo thereupon composed a disquisition in which he set up a guest who raised objections to him. He used this as an illustration of how he consoled himself about his low position. Its phrases are: . . .[62]

In Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, "Da ke nan" is thus formally demarcated from its embedding narrative and identified as a "disquisition" (*lun* 論) that was "composed" (*zhu* 著). The *Hanshu* version is slightly longer than, and occasionally different from, that of the *Shiji* (although, on the other hand, some passages in the *Shiji* text are missing in the *Hanshu*). The main difference between the two versions is similar to the case of "Yu fu," if even more explicit. For "Da ke nan," we are now informed about the act of composing, the purpose of composition, and the literary nature of the text: "illustration" (*yu* 諭) is a technical term of rhetoric, denoting an example or comparison.[63] In other words, "Da ke nan" is now recognizable as a literary artifact. As such, the text has been anthologized as a "staged debate" (*shelun*) in the *Wenxuan* and is briefly mentioned as an example of a "response to questions" (*duiwen*) in the *Wenxin diaolong*.[64] We are not in the position to challenge the authenticity of the longer text preserved in the *Hanshu*. As in the case of the "Yu fu," I assume that the literary composition was primary and was

[61] *Shiji* 126.3206–07.

[62] *Hanshu* 65.2864.

[63] In this sense, *yu* appears in the Western Han "Wu xing" 五行 (Five conducts) manuscript from Mawangdui where it is used in the discussion of the *Shijing* song "Guan ju" 關雎; see Jeffrey Riegel, "Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57 (1997): 150–51, 164. Likewise, *yu* appears already on slip ten of the so-called "Kongzi shilun" 孔子詩論 (Confucius' discussion of the *Odes*) bamboo manuscript that probably dates from around 300 B.C.; see Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物管藏戰國楚竹書, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), p. 139.

[64] In the following, I will stay with the more common designation *shelun*.

then used to dramatize the biographical narrative. However, it is instructive to witness the *Shiji*'s historiographical representation of a literary text as a rhetorical "real life" performance, as this editorial move reverses the process that led to the poetic composition in the first place. In their dialogical structure, texts like "Da ke nan," "Yu fu," and indeed most Western Han *fu* are ostentatiously modelled on spoken rhetorical exchanges. Even as literary compositions (often explicitly fictionalized by the use of bizarre names like "Sir Vacuous," "Master Improbable" or "Lord No-such,"[65] a rhetorical pleasure familiar in particular from *Zhuangzi* 莊子), such texts repeat and exaggerate situations and conventions of oral disputation and the performance of face-to-face eloquence.

When Ban Gu incorporated "Da ke nan" into his *Hanshu*, he recognized the text as a literary composition and also assigned it a specific purpose. As Dominik Declercq has demonstrated, this understanding of Dongfang Shuo's work goes directly back to Yang Xiong's reading of the text.[66] What did Yang do? He composed a text with the title "Jie chao" 解嘲 (Dissolving ridicule) in which he emulated Dongfang Shuo's earlier work: in both texts, the author defends himself against accusations of not holding high office or of not seriously engaging in political affairs. In appropriating the earlier text as his model, Yang radically reinterpreted Dongfang Shuo's initial message in his own terms. Dissociated from the performative context that is foregrounded in Chu Shaosun's account—perhaps an original context that indeed may have prompted the literary text—"Da ke nan" now is turned into an isolated "frustration *fu*" with a political message. For Yang Xiong, the text was not the literary recreation of an actual debate but a written composition in which Dongfang expressed frustration about his low position, combined with a thinly veiled criticism of his ruler, Emperor Wu. All later readers of "Da ke nan" followed Yang in his understanding of this work. However, "Da ke nan" differed from the *fu* not by its form but through a particular set of contents; it probably was labeled

[65] All in Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu."

[66] Declercq, *Writing Against the State: Political Rhetoric in Third and Fourth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 73–76; for a discussion and annotated translation of both Dongfang Shuo's and Yang Xiong's *shelun*, see pp. 20–59.

as "staged debates" or "responses to questions" only in Six Dynasties times. Whether or not Yang Xiong perceived of it as a specific literary genre remains doubtful, even though he appropriated "Da ke nan" as the model of his own "Jie chao"—a work that later readers then came to regard as the second example of the particular genre that had originated with Dongfang Shuo. After Yang Xiong, and in full accordance with his view of "Da ke nan," a number of Eastern Han and Jin writers—among them Ban Gu—continued to write in this genre of ostentatious self-defense according to the conventions now firmly established in "Jie chao."[67]

Another aspect of the Western Han *fu* that needs to be stressed is its function as imperial entertainment. Yang Xiong mentions this element in passing when comparing the *fu* to the practices of court jesters. More explicitly, Ban Gu notes that Mei Gao "was not well versed in classical learning but played the buffoon in the manner of the comedians and delighted in frivolous jokes when composing *fu* and eulogies."[68] Mei Gao himself laments that he is merely regarded as a jester,[69] while Dongfang Shuo—to whom Ban Gu had likened Mei—reportedly indulged in bizarre and occasionally brutal jokes.[70] Such descriptions provide the necessary balance to Ban Gu's assertion in the preface to the "*Fu* on the Two Capitals" that the *fu* was the genre of high officials and dignitaries at the imperial court.[71] There is no indication that any *fu* writer of the Western Han gained official recognition as a political advisor by virtue of his literary abilities.[72] Moreover, in no case do we see a *fu* author advancing to

[67] Declercq, *Writing Against the State*, is the definite study of this early tradition, which after the Jin seems to have died out.

[68] *Hanshu* 51.2366. Elsewhere (*Hanshu* 64A.2775), Ban Gu again mentions that the emperor treated Mei Gao and Dongfang Shuo as mere jesters.

[69] *Hanshu* 51.2367.

[70] For his perhaps most famous joke, see *Hanshu* 65.2843: Dongfang first announced to the dwarfs at court that because they were of no use, the emperor had decided to have them executed. When the unsuspecting emperor saw the dwarfs in desperate fear and finally realized the prank, Dongfang responded that the dwarfs, while only a third of his own size, were given the same amount of grain and salary like himself—"the dwarfs will eat themselves to death, and I will starve to death!" The emperor laughed loudly and promoted him.

[71] The verdict on Mei Gao and Dongfang Shuo as being mere jesters is repeated by Liu Xie; see Zhan Ying, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 15.531.

[72] See Wan Guangzhi 萬光治, *Han fu tonglun* 漢賦通論 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1989), pp. 126–34.

high office because of his literary skills in conveying political advice and indirect admonition. This is not to say that men of high office did not compose literary works that at least by late Western Han times were considered *fu*: in accordance with the "Liang du fu" preface, the "Yiwen zhi" lists *fu* by high officials like the Grandee Secretary Ni Kuan 倪寬 (d. 102 B.C.), the Grand Minister of Ceremonies Kong Zang 孔臧 (ca. 201–123 B.C.) and others; even Emperor Wu himself is credited with two pieces. But while literary performance and verbal eloquence might have contributed to one's popularity at court, they were not considered sufficient qualifications for imperial office. Instead, many if not most of the verbal presentations at the Emperor Wu court that were later subsumed under the category of *fu* served the purpose of entertainment.[73]

Considering the various issues raised above, it becomes clear that the Western Han *fu* constitutes much more of a problem of literary history than the traditional account would have us believe. When Yang distinguishes between the "*fu* of the *Odes* poets" (*shiren zhi fu* 詩人之賦) that through their beauty offer standards of moral behavior and the "*fu* of the epideictic poets" (*ciren zhi fu* 辭人之賦) that through their empty verbosity merely lead into excess, he insinuates a history of moral and aesthetic decay. This criticism is based on a double assumption: that the *fu* author acts as a politically and morally inspired official who tries to indirectly criticize and reprimand his ruler, and that his literary compositions are primarily intended to serve this very purpose of suasion. For Yang Xiong, Sima Xiangru's work failed not because of its lack of moral intent but because of this intent being buried under its particular form of expression. As with Dongfang Shuo's "Da ke nan," Yang invokes Sima's verbal artistry as a predecessor of his own practice of political criticism and admonition. This retrospective appropriation, however influential for all later *fu* criticism, is to some extent anachronistic, providing not just a definition but a redefinition of

[73] See Knechtges, "The Emperor and Literature: Emperor Wu of the Han," pp. 57–59; Gong, *Studies on the Han Fu*, pp. 72–74, passim; Cao Minggang 曹明綱, "Ye tan 'Fu chu yu paici'" 也談"賦出于俳辭", in Zhou Xunchu et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji*, pp. 57–62; Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君, "Han fu yu gu you" 漢賦與古優, in *Feng Yuanjun gudian wenxue lunwen ji* 馮沅君古典文學論文集 (Jinan: Shandong renmin, 1980), pp. 78–94. Feng's analysis of the *fu* is part of her larger effort to reconstruct the culture of buffoonery and how it generated multiple literary forms in early China; see *Feng Yuanjun gudian wenxue lunwen ji*, pp. 3–123.

the earlier *fu*. It ignores, consciously or not, the fundamental differences in literary aesthetics and ideology that occurred over the course of a full century, separating mid- from late Western Han times.

THE PERFORMATIVE AESTHETICS OF RHETORIC, PLEASURE, AND MORAL GUIDANCE

Apart from the Yang Xiong/Liu Xin/Ban Gu line of thought, the received sources provide us with preciously little information on the Western Han *fu*. There is no question that there was a large body of literary works that at least by late Western Han times, when Liu Xiang compiled the first version of the imperial catalogue, was referred to as *fu*. The great diversity of the works we have, or have heard about, gives us a first idea of the richness of poetic composition during the Western Han, calling the narrow focus on political criticism and eulogy into question. Some small additional information comes from the final part of the *fu* listings in the "Yiwen zhi." Here, in a section of 233 anonymous works—probably all of them lost[74]—called "miscellaneous *fu*" (*za fu* 雜賦), the standard information that includes merely the author's name and the number of his pieces is replaced by the mention of one or more topics and the number of related pieces:

(a) "*Fu* on [dialogues between] Guests and Hosts" (*kezhu fu* 客主賦), eighteen pieces;
(b) "Miscellaneous *fu* on excursions and eulogizing virtue" (*za xingchu ji songde fu* 雜行出及頌德賦), twenty-four pieces;
(c) "Miscellaneous *fu* on the barbarians of the four directions and on warfare" (*za siyi ji bing fu* 雜四夷及兵賦), twenty pieces;
(d) "Miscellaneous *fu* on the loyal and worthy failing in their aims" (*za zhongxian shiyi fu* 雜中賢失意賦), twelve pieces;[75]

[74] Some titles preserved in later—and somewhat dubious—sources like the Six Dynasties *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 or the Song dynasty anthology *Guwen yuan* 古文苑 have been tentatively related to these "Yiwen zhi" categories; see Gu Shi 顧實, *Hanshu "Yiwen zhi" jiangshu* 漢書藝文志講疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1987), pp. 181–83. In a study of a number of *fu* included in the *Xijing zaji*, Knechtges shows that they cannot be regarded as Western Han pieces but must come from later periods; see Knechtges, "The *Fu* in the *Xijing zaji*," *Xin Ya xueshu jikan* 新亞學術集刊 13 (1994): 433–52.

[75] With Wang Xianqian 王先謙, I read *zhong* 中 as *zhong* 忠 ("loyal"); see Wang, *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補主 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983) 30.56a.

(e) "Miscellaneous *fu* on yearning and longing, grieving and lamenting the dead" (*za simu beiai si fu* 雜思慕悲哀死賦), sixteen pieces;
(f) "Miscellaneous *fu* on performances on the zither and sword-play" (*za gu qin jian xi fu* 雜鼓琴劍戲賦), thirteen pieces;[76]
(g) "Miscellaneous *fu* on mountains and hills, water-bubbles, clouds and vapors, rain and drought" (*za shanling shuipao yunqi yuhan fu* 雜山陵水泡雲氣雨旱賦), sixteen pieces;[77]
(h) "Miscellaneous *fu* on birds and beasts, the six domestic animals, and insects" (*za qinshou liuxu kunchong fu* 雜禽獸六畜昆蟲賦), eighteen pieces;
(i) "Miscellaneous *fu* on utensils and implements, plants and trees" (*za qixie caomu fu* 雜器械草木賦), thirty-three pieces;[78]
(j) "Grand (?) miscellaneous *fu*" (*da zafu* 大雜賦), thirty-four pieces;[79]
(k) "Miscellaneous compositions on accomplished assistance [in rulership]" (*cheng xiang zaci* 成相雜辭), eleven pieces;[80]
(l) "Writings of concealed [illustration]" (*yinshu* 隱書), eighteen pieces.[81]

[76] This category is unclear; another possible—in my eyes equally valid—translation of *gu qin jian xi* is "drums and zithers, swords and games."

[77] I am not sure about *shuipao* 水泡 as "water-bubbles," which follows Yan Shigu's commentary.

[78] The binome *qixie* "utensils and implements" may refer to two separate categories of things. In a note to the use of the binome in the *Zhou li* 周禮 (The Zhou institutions of ritual), the Tang commentator Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (fl. 627–656) holds *qi* to refer to ritual and musical instruments and *xie* to weapons; see *Zhou li zhushu* 7.44a.

[79] I do not understand this title. Some versions of the *Hanshu* write *wen* 文 ("refined" or "patterned") instead of *da* ("greatly" or "grand"); see Wang Xianqian, *Hanshu buzhu* 30.56a. To my mind, it seems most likely that the phrase is incomplete, missing a character in the second position. The entry may in fact be parallel to the following one.

[80] The title is unclear. The commonly accepted understanding of *cheng xiang* 成相 is derived from Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907) who in his *Zhuzi pingyi* 諸子平議 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1988) 15.289, speculated that *cheng xiang* in *Xunzi* 荀子 as well as in the "Yiwen zhi" may refer to some chants of the "heave-ho!" variety (see also Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 3, p. 168; Wang Xianqian, *Hanshu buzhu* 30.56a; Gu Shi, *Hanshu "Yiwen zhi" jiangshu*, p. 183). This late-19th-century interpretation might be correct, but the evidence for it is slim and circumstantial. As the songs in the *Xunzi* chapter "Cheng xiang" focus on the proper relation between ruler and minister, I understand *cheng xiang* plainly as "accomplished assistance [in rulership]" or, in a verbal phrase, "to accomplish assistance." (I would not rule out a pun, with *xiang* meaning both "working chant" and "assistance.") Compared to the other entries, only this and the previous one follow a different syntax, with the word *za* ("miscellaneous") being moved from the very front to the penultimate position. I therefore also consider it possible that *cheng xiang*, and the perhaps incomplete *da* in the previous entry, refer not to the topics of these compositions but to their anonymous authors. Thus, *cheng xiang za ci* might be "Miscellaneous compositions by accomplished ministers."

[81] Yan Shigu (*Hanshu* 30.1753) explains *yin shu* 隱書 as "riddles"; see also Gu Shi, *Hanshu "Yiwen zhi" jiangshu*, p. 183. My translation follows Liu Xie's interpretation in his *Wenxin diaolong*; see Zhan Ying, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 15.539. Note that "riddles"—like those in *Xunzi*—were also seen as didactic and monitory in nature.

This brief list, comprising almost a quarter of all *fu* listed in the "Yiwen zhi," displays the breadth of literary composition in Western Han times. Moreover, its broad variety corresponds well to the names and fragments of other Western Han *fu* preserved in a number of later works.[82] The most comprehensive account of the Han *fu* provides the texts, fragments, or names of 294 pieces ascribed to 83 authors.[83] About 100 of these *fu* have been transmitted in complete or near-complete form; not all of them are considered authentic.[84] Prior to the works attributed to Liu Xiang (fragments of three pieces and the names of six others) and Yang Xiong, 40 titles ascribed to 17 authors are known, covering such subjects as trees, birds, insects, other animals, screens, musical instruments, and ale, in addition to the well-known canon mostly transmitted in *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Wenxuan*. It would be premature to speculate from mere titles and fragments about the nature and purpose of such compositions; practically any topic could be used for entertainment as well as an illustration of moral principles—or, in Yang Xiong's view, as indirect admonition. However, judging from transmitted compositions and even mere titles, the different kinds of Western Han *fu*, regardless of their possibly serious moral and political purposes, were probably all inspired by the quest for linguistic artistry, the sensual delight of poetic expression, and the performative nature of verbal recitation (*fu*).

When trying to envision the aesthetics of the Western Han *fu* as performance texts—"to recite without singing is called *fu*"—we are disadvantaged. Not only do we see but a fragment of the actual literary production of the time; frustrating our efforts even more profoundly, the original context of *fu* presentation at the imperial court is irretrievably lost, leaving us as silent readers of mute texts—instead of as a perceptive audience of eloquent verbal artistry.[85] By contrast, in Yang Xiong's interpretation of Sima Xiangru's "*Fu* on

[82] Gu Shi, *Hanshu "Yiwen zhi" jiangshu*, pp. 181–83, relates some of those titles to the categories listed in the "Yi wen zhi."

[83] Fei Zhengang, Hu Shuangbao, and Zong Minghua, *Quan Han fu*.

[84] E.g., pieces contained only in works of unknown origin like the *Xijing zaji* or the *Guwen yuan* cannot be accepted without reservation.

[85] This point has been aptly recognized by Guo Weisen and Xu Jie, *Zhongguo cifu fazhan shi*, p. 123.

the great man," the text eclipses the moral purpose, leaving the emperor blissfully elated where he should have felt sincerely admonished. In full accordance with Yang Xiong's view on the problematic nature of the *fu*, this account seems to assert that Emperor Wu was so overwhelmed by sheer aesthetic force that he entirely missed the actual message.

Obviously, Yang Xiong's late Western Han didacticism is not an isolated phenomenon. It belongs to the same classicist culture that elevated the moral and political Mao 毛 exegesis of the *Odes* to imperial recognition under Emperor Ping 平 (r. 1 B.C.–A.D. 6) and provided the basis for Wang Yi's corresponding interpretation of the *Chu ci* anthology.[86] With a strictly didactic approach emerging to both the *Odes* and the *Chu ci*—an approach that mainly through Zheng Xuan's *Mao Shi zhuan jian* 毛詩傳箋 gained orthodoxy by late Eastern Han times—the integration of the *fu* into the same set of moral and political paradigms was only logical, sealing the entire early poetic tradition. In later periods, this line of interpreting poetic texts has always been labelled "Confucian" and related to the "victory of Confucianism" in Western Han times. Yet apart from the facts that recent scholarship has increasingly questioned the reality of any such "victory," and that the very terms "Confucianism" and "Confucian" are anachronistic and misleading labels to describe early imperial culture,[87] Yang Xiong's critique of the *fu* is more than just another instance of some dry "Han Confucian" didacticism. It recognizes, first of all, the notion of beauty and the aesthetic pleasure derived from elaborate verbal compositions. For Yang Xiong, the pleasure is there, and it is the problem.[88]

[86] Not only the Mao exegesis but also the didactic interpretation of the *Chu ci* dates from an earlier period of the Western Han. This is reflected in several second or first century B.C. works in the *Chu ci* anthology that, while being traditionally ascribed to Qu Yuan, are imitations of his style. Their own didacticism can thus be understood as an early, albeit indirect, commentary on the "Li sao."

[87] See Michael Nylan, "A Problematic Model: The Han 'Orthodox Synthesis,' Then and Now," in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 17–56; Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 36–39; Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon."

[88] In a short but highly original article, Shimizu Shigeru 清水茂 has suggested that there were indeed theatrical *fu* performances at the Han imperial court; see his "Cifu yu xiju" 辭賦與戲劇, in Zhou Xunchu et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji*, pp. 52–56.

In Western Han times, this pleasure probably rested as much in the text itself as in its recitation, that is, poetic performance. The emphasis on presentation and reception, surfacing in the phrase "to recite without singing is called *fu*," defines the very core of what in Western Han times was understood as *fu*: a certain poetic form, yet also a particular art of textual performance. Obviously, there are common formal elements identifiable in the representative pieces especially of the grand epideictic *fu* from Sima Xiangru to Yang Xiong to Ban Gu and others. But these elements do not necessarily stand for an abstract and normative concept of poetic genre—such a concept may not have been fully developed even by late Western Han times. Instead, they represent a set of literary conventions derived from the aesthetics of a performative, reception-oriented rhetoric that can be ultimately traced back to the religious spells and political persuasions of pre-imperial times. As such, the epideictic *fu* is defined by a dialogical setting (following a brief prose introduction) that mimetically reproduces an actual debate; the irregular alternation of rhymed and unrhymed passages that maintains a lively and varied rhythm of speech; the overall length of a single piece as well as exhaustive catalogues of plants, animals, trees, minerals and so on that exhaust both the topic and its audience; and an abundance of rare words, hyperbolic descriptions, and rhyme changes as well as alliterative, rhyming, and reduplicative binomes.

These structural characteristics contribute primarily to the aural effect of the composition,[89] constituting a tangible texture of sensual splendor. As noted by Arthur Waley with respect to Sima Xiangru's compositions, "such a glittering torrent of words has never since poured from the pen of any writer in the world. Beside him Euphues seems timid and Apuleius cold. He sports with language as dolphin sports with the sea."[90] Yet Waley goes further, asserting that the *fu*

[89] See Kamatani Takeshi 釜谷武志, "Fu ni nankai na ji ga ōi no wa naze ka: Zen-Kan ni okeru fu no yomarekata" 賦に難解な字が多いのはなぜか：前漢における賦の讀まれかた, *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本中國學會報 48 (1996): 16–30; Guo Weisen and Xu Jie, *Zhongguo cifu fazhan shi*, p. 123. Likewise, Ou Tianfa has recently emphasized the oral, performative nature of the *fu*; see his "Fu zhi mingshi kaolun: Fu zhi feng bi xing yi shuo," in Zhou Xunchu et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji*, p. 17.

[90] Waley, *The Temple and Other Poems* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923), pp. 43–44.

actually functioned as word-magic.[91] Following his seminal statement, several scholars have expanded the discussion of word magic and incantation in early and medieval China, and especially in the *fu*.[92] Certain literary texts have been read as actual incantations, for example, to cure a ruler from his illness or to "call back" his departed soul. The "Da zhao" 大招 (Great summons) and "Zhao hun" 招魂 (Summoning the soul) from the *Chu ci* anthology as well as Mei Sheng's "Qi fa"—pieces closely related to the Han *fu*—are often understood this way; another example are the "Jiu ge" 九歌 (Nine songs) from the *Chu ci*. However, I am not convinced by Waley's distinction between rhetoric and "sensuous intoxication." The occult arts, even if they may have played a role in the formation of *fu* language, had moved largely into the background already by early Western Han times, making space for what may be called the poetic and rhetorical representation of incantatory language, accommodating a range of diverse expressions that included political rhetoric,

[91] Waley, *The Temple and Other Poems*, p. 17: "In its purely magical form [the *fu*] is derived from the hymns by the recitation of which the priests of Ch'u compelled the gods to descend from Heaven and manifest themselves to their worshippers. Of this nature are the *Nine Hymns* of Ch'ü Yüan, which are *fu* in miniature. In its second form it is an incantation addressed to an earthly god, the King, whom the poet (not by argument nor even by rhetoric, but by a purely sensuous intoxication of rhythm and language) entices to a particular act of worship. . . . Again, by the same exploitation of word-magic, the poet sought to influence the decisions of his sovereign in purely secular affairs."

[92] See Hans H. Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 186–211; Donald Harper, "Wang Yen-shou's Nightmare Poem," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987): 239–83; Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45 (1985): 459–98; Harper, "A Note on Medieval Nightmare Magic in Ancient and Medieval China," *T'ang Studies* 6 (1988): 69–76; David Hawkes, "The Quest of the Goddess," in *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres*, ed. Cyril Birch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 42–68; Hawkes, *The Songs of the South* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 95–101, *passim*. Harper, building on Hawkes' and Frankel's arguments in his analysis of Wang Yanshou's 王延壽 (fl. mid-second century A.D.) "*Fu* on a dream" ("Meng fu" 夢賦), has argued the case much more strongly than the earlier scholars he is quoting. He suggests that the anthology title *Chu ci* should perhaps be translated as "Chu Spells," and that a *fu* on the imperial hunting park—one thinks of Sima Xiangru—was a "verbal talisman." See Harper, "Wang Yen-shou's Nightmare Poem," pp. 277–82. By contrast, Guo Weisen suggests—to my mind, convincingly—that the "Meng fu" is a literary representation of a dream and perhaps was even intended as a piece of political admonition; see his "Wang Yanshou ji qi 'Meng fu'" 王延壽及其《夢賦》, in Zhou Xunchu et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji*, pp. 196–212.

complaints of neglected scholars, imperial panegyric, and entertainment. Mei Gao, the son of the "Qi fa" author Mei Sheng and according to our accounts the most prolific of all authors at Emperor Wu's court, certainly was not a magician, nor were Dongfang Shuo, Sima Xiangru, or Wang Bao, to name just a few of the major Western Han literary figures whose texts we still have. But all of them were men remarkably capable of crafting and manipulating the language of their time, confident and self-conscious in their poetic rhetoric.

For Western Han times, the transformation of what originally may have begun as religious word magic into representations of such magic and oratory can be observed in the very structures of the literary pieces at hand. Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu" is developed from a dialogue between "Sir Vacuous," "Master Improbable," and "Lord No-such," purposefully exhibiting the staged nature of their discussion. Similarly, Mei Sheng's "Qi fa," structured as a dialogue between a prince from the old state of Chu and a "guest" (*ke* 客) from Wu 吳, begins with a lengthy exchange about the prince's mental and physical disorder caused by overindulgence in luxury and pleasure. The initial dialogue ends with the guest's proposal that the illness cannot be cured by medical practice but can only be "persuaded away" (*shui qu* 說去) with "essential words and marvelous doctrines" (*yaoyan miaodao* 要言妙道). As the prince agrees, the guest presents his "seven stimuli" or "arousals" (*fa* 發): the first five, devoted to the worldly pleasures of princely life, give lavish accounts of a music performance, a banquet, a chariot race, a scenic excursion, and a hunt. Their grand epideictic style ascends to its aesthetic peak in the sixth stimulus, a dazzling description of a tidal bore. Here, in a most extravagant display of verbal expression, the guest's speech culminates in nothing less than the performative verbalization of the magnificent spectacle of the bore. For some eighty lines, most of them tetrasyllabic, the text races along in a furious cascade of descriptive hendiadys and turbulent sound, bursting with rhyming, alliterative, and reduplicative binomes, as in the following passage:

> Revolving and rushing, a glistening halo,
> front and rear conjoined and connected.

Lofty and lofty, lifted and lifted,
roiling and roiling, raging and raging,
pressing and pressing, climbing and climbing,
a layered fortress of multiplied strength,
doubled and diverse like the lines of troops.
Rumbling and roaring, booming and crashing,
pushing and turning, surging and rolling—
truly, it cannot be withstood![93]

純馳浩蜺，前後駱驛。顒顒卬卬，焞焞瀼瀼，莘莘將將。壁壘重堅，沓雜似軍行。訇隱匈磕，軋盤涌裔，原不可當。

While in the description of the tidal bore, the verbal virtuosity of the various "stimuli" (*fa* 發) reaches it climax, it still fails to raise the prince from his sickbed. Only the final and briefest of the seven stimuli miraculously revitalizes the patient. Here, the breathless and swirling phrases abruptly end in what seems like a complete standstill: gone are the binomes, the tetrasyllabic rhythm, the hendiadys, indeed the entire descriptive mode, replaced by a measured and sober proposal:

The guest said, "Now I shall present to your Excellency the masters of methods and arts, possessed of talent and sagacity, thinkers like Zhuang Zhou, Wei Mou, Yang Zhu, Mo Di, Bian Juan, and Zhan He. Let us have them discourse on the essential and the subtle of all under heaven, giving order to the right and the false. With Confucius and Laozi surveying what is presented, and with Mencius holding the bamboo tally and counting, not one of ten thousand cases will go amiss. These indeed are the important words and marvelous doctrines of all under heaven. I wonder whether your Excellency might like to hear them?" Thereupon, the prince leaned upon his table, rose, and said, "My mind has become clear as if I had already completely heard the words of the sages and disputers." Profusely, his perspiration issued forth, and all of a sudden, his illness was gone.[94]

Quite likely, Mei Sheng may have been aware of the use of words for healing purposes, but his "Qi fa" does not constitute such use of language. It mimetically, yet by its literary setting also transparently, *represents* word magic in the form of a literary artifact. This

[93] *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 34.15a. For a study and full translation of the "Qi fa," see David R. Knechtges and Jerry Swanson, "Seven Stimuli for the Prince: The *Ch'i-Fa* of Mei Ch'eng," *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970–71): 99–116.

[94] *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 34.17a–b.

is exactly what Wang Yi suggests for the "Nine songs," claiming that Qu Yuan had composed these songs after witnessing religious folk rituals in the south, watching their dances and listening to their "vulgar and shallow" (*bilou* 鄙陋) lyrics. According to Wang, Qu Yuan then created the "Nine songs"—apparently imitating the ritual hymns he had observed—not only to honor the spirits but also to give expression to his personal troubles.[95] Reading the "Qi fa" along these lines, I find it difficult to imagine that it was ever used to cure anybody, or toward any other incantatory ends; instead, its primary purpose must have been the rhetorical combination of aesthetic delight and moral illustration. The same can be said regarding a passage from Wang Bao's *Hanshu* biography that is widely cited as evidence for the incantatory effects of the *fu* in healing.[96] Here, the text informs us that when the imperial crown prince suffered from some unspecific physical and mental disorder, the emperor ordered Wang Bao and others to "amuse and accompany" (*yushi* 虞侍)[97] the prince and entertain him with recitations of "marvelous writings" (*qi wen* 奇文) and their own compositions. Some time later, after the prince had recovered from his malaise, he ordered "the palace beauties and their assistants from the rear palaces" (*hougong guiren zuoyou* 後宮貴人左右) to recite Wang Bao's compositions for him. One might read this passage as an example of "the use of well-chosen words to cure an illness";[98] yet the text speaks of entertainment, a fine activity to raise the spirits of an ailing patient, but not necessarily an instance of incantation.

[95] See Hong Xingzu, *Chu ci buzhu* 2.55. I do not concur with David Hawkes's judgment that Wang Yi's "treatment of the Nine Songs' as allegory led him into many absurdities and has long been discredited" (Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, p. 96). Not only does Wang Yi's note fit squarely into Han literary exegesis of both the *Odes* and the Han *fu*; I am also not sure that those modern scholars who find it easy to ridicule the efforts of Han commentators always appreciate the subtlety of their hermeneutics. One does not need to follow Wang Yi's commentary in its historical details in order to find the emphasis on rhetoric more sophisticated than the modern insistence on "word magic."

[96] See *Hanshu* 64B.2829.

[97] The phrase *yushi* occurs in one other *Hanshu* passage (p. 98.4015), and there again with the crown prince as the direct object. On that passage, Yan Shigu gives the paronomastic gloss *yu* 娛 for *yu* 虞, reinforcing the meaning "to amuse."

[98] Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady*, p. 203. Frankel mistranslates *guiren zuoyou* as "courtiers and attendants." *Hougong* designates the quarters of the imperial harem; see the description in Ban Gu's "Liang du fu," *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 1.13a–14b; Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, pp. 123–25.

For a better understanding of the Western Han *fu*, the complex issue of early Chinese rhetoric must be explored more deeply.[99] Since the time of Warring States' "wandering persuaders" (*youshi* 游士, *youshui* 游説, *youtan zhi shi* 游談之士, etc.), a tangible sensuality and enchanting beauty of the verbal pattern had always been a forceful element of rhetoric, which was therefore often viewed as deceptive and regarded with disdain. The *Lunyu* passages (15/11; 17/18) where Confucius equates the dangers arising from glib rhetoricians with those resulting from the notorious "melodies of Zheng" (*Zheng sheng* 鄭聲) illustrate the point. Here, in opposition to the solemn "old music" (*gu yue* 古樂), the "melodies from Zheng" (like elsewhere their quasi-synonyms of "melodies from Zheng and Wei" [*Zheng Wei zhi sheng* 鄭衛之聲], "new melodies" [*xinsheng* 新聲], "licentious melodies" [*yinsheng* 淫聲], or "melodies from a perishing state" [*wangguo zhi sheng* 亡國之聲]) are noted for their intricate and stimulating melodic patterns that stir up excessive behavior among those who listen, and thus lead to social chaos.[100]

As exemplified in the *Lunyu*, the early Chinese tradition was deeply suspicious of rhetoric. Embellished and persuasive speech was seen as a powerful tool in the manipulation of rulers and thus as largely responsible for the political chaos of Warring States times. Han texts emphatically juxtapose the "cleverly crafted" (*qiao* 巧) with the "trustworthy" (*xin* 信); moreover, they identify in particular the southern rhetorical tradition of Chu, to which the Han *fu* is intimately related, as an exemplary case.[101] All such discussions, beginning with the *Lunyu*, fully recognize, if only implicitly, what makes exciting music, mixed colors like purple (*Lunyu* 17/18), and verbal artistry so compelling and dangerous: their superior ability to provide aesthetic pleasure and arouse strong emotion as well as their

[99] As Knechtges and Swanson, "Seven Stimuli for the Prince: The *Ch'i-Fa* of Mei Ch'eng," pp. 103, have noted, Waley "is really confusing rhetoric and magic."

[100] See Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), pp. 33–35; Jean-Pierre Diény, *Aux origines de la poésie classique en Chine: Étude sur la poésie lyrique à l'époque des Han* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 17–40.

[101] See, e.g., *Shiji* 129.3268, *Hanshu* 28B.1668. Yet also note the final paragraph 81 of the *Laozi* 老子 with its well-known dictum "trustworthy words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not trustworthy" (*xin yan bu mei, mei yan bu xin* 信言不美, 美言不信).

potential to distract and manipulate. The art of speech—and, by extension, of literary composition—was, at best, morally indifferent or ambiguous; according to Yang Xiong, even when assumedly used for a good cause, it could easily fail by eclipsing its own message.

The conflation of rhetoric and poetry, in the Chinese tradition exemplified in the Han *fu*,[102] is a given in the early Western poetic tradition, where "persuasiveness involved reasoning, giving pleasure, and—most important—inducing emotional responses."[103] Horace's lasting line from the *Ars poetica* (The art of poetry) that "poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life,"[104] reminds us of what is missing in Yang Xiong's discussion of the *fu*: while insisting on "benefiting," Yang has little to say about "pleasing." Indeed, the strong reaction against both persuasive rhetoric and vivacious music seems to deny the very notion of rich aesthetic display and the pleasures it provides. Yet nothing testifies better to the pervasive enjoyment of such pleasures than the classicist reaction against it. The rejection of rhetoric is brilliantly expressed in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States) itself, the greatest repertoire of early manipulative speech, compiled in late Western Han times by Liu Xiang. Here, in an almost certainly fictitious account, the famous persuader Su Qin tries to move King Hui 惠 of Qin (r. 337–311 B.C.) to take military action against the anti-Qin alliance. Toward this end, he traces the decay of political power to a lack of military prowess and to the emergence of excessive rhetoric. To

[102] The most substantial study of the rhetorical tradition and its influence on the *fu* is Nakajima Chiaki 中島千秋, *Fu no seiritsu to tenkai* 賦の成立と展開 (Matsuyama: Sekiyō Shoten, 1963), pp. 95–279, 291–307. Likewise, Knechtges, "Yang Shyong, The *Fuh*, and Hann Rhetoric" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1968), pp. 164–87, 239–51, *passim*, discusses extensively the Han *fu* and its Warring States precursors as part of a pervasive rhetorical tradition. Hellmut Wilhelm, "The Scholar's Frustration," makes the same point, if only in brevity. A case study of the rhetorical nature of the Han *fu* is given by Knechtges and Swanson, "Seven Stimuli for the Prince."

[103] D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. xv.

[104] *Aut prodesse volunt et delectare poetae aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae*; Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetic*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclouth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 479. Note that the *Ars poetica*, like Lu Ji's "*Fu* on literature," is itself a long poem.

make this point, the master rhetorician Su Qin, in a marvelous self-referential turn, pulls out all the stops to overwhelm the king with the full force of oratory, delivering a rushing, hendiadys-laden tri- and tetrasyllabic harangue with rhyme changes after every couplet:

> As soon as rules and statutes were complete,
> the people mostly assumed crafty manners.
> When writings and documents became dense and murky,
> the common people lived in hardship.
> Those above and below resented each other,
> the folk had nothing to be at ease.
> The more shining the words and brilliant the reasoning,
> the more weapons and shields arose.
> Despite eloquent words and sumptuous adornment
> battles and attacks did not cease.
> Profusely they recited refined phrases,
> yet all under heaven remained in disorder.
> Tongues withered, ears became deaf,
> yet one did not see achievement or merit.
> . . .
> Today, the succeeding rulers
> are ignorant about the supreme way.
> They all are:
> muddled in their teachings,
> chaotic in their rule,
> confused by words,
> mystified by speech,
> deluged by disputation,
> drowned by phrases.[105]

科條既備，民多僞態。書策稠濁，百姓不足。上下相愁，民無所聊。
明言章理，兵甲愈起。辯言偉服，戰攻不息。繁稱文辭，天下不治。
舌弊耳聲，不見成功。[. . .] 今之嗣主，忽於至道。皆：惛於教，
亂於治，迷於言，惑於語，沈於辯，溺於亂。

Such display of verbal embellishment does not use language to convey a propositional message; it rather eclipses the message by presenting itself as a verbal artifact, a tangible reality of its own that becomes part of the actual world rather than being a mere description of that world. Su Qin's language creates and becomes the very reality it purports to describe. To briefly return to the issue of magic and incantation discussed above, such self-referential and reality-generating use of language is typical of the performative speech employed in early Chinese ritual culture, ranging from Shang and Zhou oracle bone and bronze inscriptions to the *Odes*, and from Warring States strategists' religious spells and incantations to imperial stele inscriptions and sacrificial hymns.[106] However, it is at the same time also typical of poetic language, which only partly overlaps with that of religious expression. The principles of performative and self-referential speech transcend any singular purpose or context. From Warring States times onwards, at the latest, the perhaps originally religious significance of such speech continued to exist parallel to, and separate from, its other functions—political persuasion, aesthetic pleasure, moral illustration. Sharing certain qualities of performative speech, expressions of the religious and the moral as well as the entertaining and the political are all related, but the difference between a genuine incantation and its literary representation (as in "Qi fa") or between an actual debate and its transformation into a textual performance (as in "Da ke nan") is one that separates the immediacy of political and religious action from self-conscious aesthetic creation. The literary performance is still a performance, yet in terms of linguistic pragmatics, it operates on a fundamentally different level. It is only by the shift toward representation that the theory and the practice of literature begin, that aesthetic form is pursued as an end in itself, and that poetic ambiguity is no longer avoided but constructed.

[105] Zhu Zugeng 諸祖耿, *Zhanguo ce jizhu huikao* 戰國策集注彙考 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1985), pp. 118–19; see also Knechtges, "Yang Shyong, The *Fuh*, and Hann Rhetoric," pp. 182–84.

RHETORIC AND MORALISM

The greatest difficulty in evaluating the *fu* ever since Yang Xiong has been its perceived conflicting messages, and hence moral

[106] See Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang*, pp. 140–47; Kern, "*Shi Jing* Songs as Performance Texts: A Case Study of 'Chu Ci' (Thorny Caltrup)," *Early China* 25 (2000): 58–66.

ambiguity, expressed within some of its pre-eminent Western Han examples. At the center of the problem lies a particular rhetorical structure shared by Mei Sheng's "Qi fa" and Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu": first, the expository conversation at the outset of the composition leads into a mimetic and performative representation of delight. Here, the spectacle described becomes transposed into the spectacle of verbal virtuosity, that is, of description itself—the self-representation of an artistic language that both describes and creates aesthetic pleasure, doubling the sensual, tangible wonders of the world on the linguistic level. This section, the core and by far largest part of the composition, then abruptly breaks off and is followed by a turn toward moralism, expressed in a diction of chosen simplicity. In order to fully comprehend the *fu*, we need to understand the nature of this transition: the shift from the mimetic representation of spectacle and pleasure to the moral reflection upon, and ultimately leading away from, this spectacle and pleasure. As shown above for the "Qi fa," the text in its final section leaves behind both its powerful description of pleasure and the sensualistic language in which this pleasure is recreated as a purely aesthetic one. In the "Tianzi youlie fu," the hunting emperor, after completing a carnage of truly cosmic dimensions, indulges in the delights of music (including the notorious "melodies from Zheng and Wei") and is consumed by the pleasures of erotic desire, roused by female dancers of almost transcendent beauty—only to suddenly fall into reflection:

> Thereupon, in the midst of drinking and the rapture of music, the Son of Heaven becomes dazed and contemplative, as if having lost something. He says, "Alas! This is too extravagant! I spend my leisure time with [the sensual pleasures of] watching and listening, waste the days with nothing to do! In accordance with [the cosmic cycles of] the Way of Heaven, I slaughter and slay, and from time to time take rest and repose at the present place. I am afraid that later generations become dissolute and dissipated; if they proceed on this path, they will not turn back. This is not how to create a beginning and hand down a tradition to continuing successors."[107]

[107] *Liu chen zhu Wenxuan* 8.17a. The final sentence is a reference to *Mengzi* 1B.14; see *Mengzi zhushu* 2B.17a. For a full translation of the "Tianzi youlie fu," divided into "Zixu fu" and "Shanglin fu," see Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 53–113.

Thereupon the emperor ends the feast and gives a solemn speech in which he extols the virtues of good rulership, restraint, and selfless care for the folk. The narrative continues by describing the model ruler according to his image in the classical texts: roaming the world of the hallowed canons, submitting himself to modesty and morality, and even in hunting never imposing himself on his subordinates or the natural world. In the final return to the dialogical frame of "Tianzi youlie fu," the gentlemen representing the states of Qi and Chu, Master Improbably and Sir Vacuous, show deep remorse over the excesses of their states and bow to Lord Nosuch, the imperial spokesman.

The endings of "Qi fa" and "Tianzi youlie fu" have been interpreted in different ways. For Mei Sheng's work, Burton Watson believes that the "perfunctoriness of the last section and the alacrity with which the prince responds seem to suggest that at this point the poet was anxious only to make his bow to didactic convention as quickly as possible and be done with the piece."[108] But why did Mei Sheng compose his piece in the first place? And how could the ruler to whom the "Qi fa" was presented—either the prince of Wu 吳 or the prince of Liang 梁, at whose courts Mei Sheng lived as a learned retainer—honor such a blatantly ritual exercise? Yang Xiong was convinced that the message in Sima Xiangru's *fu* was one of admonition, which is also how the final part of the "Tianzi youlie fu" is commented upon in Sima Xiangru's *Shiji* and *Hanshu* biographies.[109] Yet in his general criticism of the genre Yang also held that when the *fu*, "lastly, returns to the rectifying message, the reader has already missed it" (*ji nai gui zhi yu zheng, ran lanzhe yi guo yi* 既乃歸之於正，然覽者已過矣).[110] In other words, the emperor—the

[108] Watson, *Early Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 268.

[109] The introduction to the "Tianzi youlie fu" notes that in its final paragraph, the piece "returns to [the depiction of] modesty and frugality as a means of admonition"; and perhaps—but not necessarily—on an ironical note, the text continues by saying that "the Son of Heaven was greatly delighted" about Sima's presentation; see *Shiji* 117.3002, *Hanshu* 57A.2533.

[110] *Hanshu* p. 87B.3575. The word *lanzhe* 覽者 ("reader") is probably of some significance here. The normal Qin and Western Han meaning of *lan* 覽 is "to survey," usually from some—in the literal as well as in the metaphorical sense of the word—elevated position. As such, it appears, for example, several times in the Qin imperial stele inscriptions (*Shiji* 6.243, 250, 261). It also is often paired with *guan* 觀 ("to look at, to observe"). Sima Qian does not

addressee proper of the *fu*—had his senses already hopelessly confused by the preceding excesses of description when arriving at the final section of the text.[111] Gong Kechang has seen the "Tianzi youlie fu" not only as a call for imperial moderation but also as an attack on the extravagancies of the imperial princes (*wang* 王). According to this reading, Sima Xiangru "hoped to strike a further blow against the kings and reduce their power. He also hoped to raise the status of the emperor and solidify the ruler of the central court."[112] Indeed, the contemporary policies Sima Xiangru touches upon especially in the final portion of his *fu* are exactly those that the young Emperor Wu wished to implement.[113] It is thus clear that the "Tianzi youlie fu" cannot be read as criticism or admonition of the emperor; it is "a panegyric to the Han dynasty and its ruler," with its monitory message being secondary to the "lavish and flattering portrayal of the institution and person of the emperor."[114] Yet at the same time, the political advice Sima Xiangru is offering here does not provide the master key to the interpretation of his *fu* as a whole. There obviously were less strenuous, less ambiguous, and thus more effective ways available to support the emperor in his own desires. Moreover, a purely political interpretation would fail to take into account the aesthetic spectacle created in the "Tianzi youlie fu"—a spectacle that carries its own values and meaning.

use *lan* in the sense of "to read" that only in later times becomes the dominant meaning of the term. By contrast, already Chu Shaosun, in his additions to the *Shiji*, occasionally uses *lan* as "to read" (*Shiji* 60.2114–15, 126.3203), and we can assume that this usage was known to Yang Xiong. Thus, Yang's use of *lanzhe* here may well reflect his understanding of the *fu* as a genre of texts to be read—for example, by the emperor—instead of to be listened to in the performative setting of an oral recitation. Such a view would tally exactly with Yang's new understanding of Dongfang Shuo's "Da ke nan."

[111] Note that before arriving at this judgment, Yang Xiong had modelled his own "Yulie fu" 羽獵賦 (*Fu* on the plume hunt) on the "Tianzi youlie fu," inscribing his purpose of indirect admonition right into the prefatory section.

[112] Gong Kechang, *Studies on the Han Fu*, p. 142. To some extent, this reading is prefigured in the remarks that follow the "Tianzi youlie fu" in *Shiji* 117.3043, and *Hanshu* 57A.2575.

[113] A similar, albeit later case may be made for the last of Sima Xiangru's compositions, his essay on the he *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 sacrifices, which prefigured the reform of the imperial state sacrifices beginning in 114 B.C.; for the essay and its account, see *Shiji* 117.3063–72. During the initial years of his reign, the youthful Emperor Wu was probably restrained by his grandmother, Empress Dowager Dou 竇 (d. 135 B.C.), from pursuing his own political prioritities.

[114] Knechtges, "The Emperor and Literature," p. 57.

I do not believe either piece can be successfully—that is, consistently—analyzed without taking the overwhelming element of self-referential verbal artistry into account, and with it the effects of entertainment and pleasure. If our sources do not mislead us, these effects are what much of the Western Han *fu* was all about, and expertise in literary performance was valued enough to become explicitly recognized at the imperial court.[115] According to the *Hanshu*, Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 74–49 B.C.) felt compelled to defend the verbal presentations (*cifu* 辭賦) of his day, insisting that they shared the meaning of the ancient *Odes*, that they included elements of virtue and moral suasion, and that, finally, they were far better than board games and the performances of the jesters.[116] The points of reference are clear: here the ancient *Odes*, there the contemporaneous ways of entertainment.

But entertainment is not "mere entertainment." The step from religious incantation and political persuasion to the literary representation of these performances is short. Western Han poetic rhetoric, by means of its dialogical settings, explicitly acknowledges a heritage of powerful speech that puts both gods and rulers under its spell. At the same time, through its self-conscious attention to aesthetic patterning, this delightful rhetoric also assumes a celebrative and eulogizing mode. While Sima Xiangru's rich creations differ recognizably from the ancient *Odes*, the self-referential principle of displaying their own aesthetic art and artificiality as an accomplishment *per se* is prefigured in Zhou notions of textual composition. A good example is the *Liji* 禮記 account on the inscription of tripods, where the inscription is characterized as reflecting both the feats of the ancestors eulogized and the ability of the inscription donor who appropriately displays his virtue by praising his forebears.[117] Without doubt, the "Tianzi youlie fu" is largely a piece of political panegyric, eulogizing the emperor and his hunting park,

[115] In the *Hanshu* (64A.2791, 64B.2821), this is noted for "literary presentations from Chu" (*Chu ci* 楚辭/楚詞), a term not to be confused with the title of Wang Yi's later anthology. *Ci* is here probably used synonymously with *fu*, denoting not merely words or phrases but also their performative nature.

[116] *Hanshu* 64B.2829.

[117] See *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* ed.) 49.378c–379a; on self-reference, see also above.

which is a representation of the cosmos.[118] Yet through its sheer endless catalogues and overwhelming sound patterns, the rhetorical grammar of the *fu* produces not so much a specific propositional meaning but a dazzling array of sensual impressions. The fundamental principle of the "Tianzi youlie fu" is mimetic, recreating the triumph and beauty of imperial culture on a linguistic level. Much like the earlier ritual hymns and inscriptions of Zhou China, it constitutes, performs, and represents the very cultural splendor it is meant to celebrate. Sima Xiangru's sumptuous descriptions of imperial splendor are lavish aesthetic structures in their own right and as such an integral part of the cultural glory they extol. The conflation of the terms *fu* and *song* (eulogy) in Western Han times confirms this point: to say that Sima Xiangru's *fu* are eulogies borders on tautology.

Han authors are aware of this rhetorical principle. When Ban Gu describes the Han capitals Chang'an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽, contrasting the excessive luxury of the former with the restrained order of the latter, he shifts his literary style from the ornate and hyperbolic (for Chang'an) to the classical and simple (for Luoyang).[119] I suggest the same for the final parts of Mei Sheng's "Qi fa" and Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu": as their preceding descriptions mimetically represent the cultural splendor of the court—princely in Mei Sheng's case, imperial in Sima Xiangru's—so do the closing parts of both pieces, in a dramatic aesthetic shift, not merely express but perform the ideals of reason and restraint. Indeed, the same pattern can already be observed in the "Da zhao," a piece where religious expression is married to the aesthetics of persuasion, and that is probably directly ancestral to the Western Han *fu*.[120] In all three pieces, the rare words and euphonic binomes end; having exhausted the spectacles of the world together with the linguistic means of their description, Mei Sheng, Sima Xiangru, and the unknown author of the "Da zhao," in a final chord of solemnity and sovereignty, turn their rulers and themselves into model classicists. In each case,

[118] Lothar Ledderose, "The Earthly Paradise: Religious Elements in Chinese Landscape Art," in *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 165–83, has shown that Emperor Wu's microcosmic park is to be understood within a long politico-religious tradition of replicating the universe.

[119] This has been noted by Gong Kechang, *Studies on the Han Fu*, pp. 264–65.

[120] See Hong Xingzu, *Chu ci buzhu* 10.216–26.

the author still celebrates his ruler, and he celebrates his own literary versatility.

Yet how are the two so distinctly different parts of a single composition related? Is the audience prepared to follow the author in his sharp about-face? No, says Yang Xiong: by that time, the well-meaning author has long lost his audience, the ruler, to aesthetic indulgence and self-indulgence, to the powers of pleasure. To fully appreciate what Yang is reacting against, it is necessary to take into account that in late Warring States and Western Han times, some discourse existed according to which pieces that describe worldly pleasure in delightful language are indeed composed to offer not only delight but—through the reception of such delight—moral guidance. The best evidence for this hermeneutic approach has come to light in two excavated manuscripts that both show an early interpretation of "Guan ju" 關雎, the first song of the *guofeng* 國風 (Airs of the states) section in the received version of the *Odes*. This interpretation differs radically from both the *Mao Shi* 毛詩 reading transmitted in Zheng Xuan's *Mao Shi zhuan jian* and the reconstructed Western Han *san jia* 三家 exegetical lines.[121] In the "Wu xing" silk manuscript from Mawangdui, the song is interpreted as expressing the urgent sexual desire of a male persona. However, the text concludes that the song ultimately "illustrates" (*yu* 諭) how the "minor desire" (*xiao hao* 小好) for sex is controlled and overcome by the "major desire" (*da hao* 大好) for appropriate social behavior.[122] The same reading is now also attested in another manuscript that presumably dates from the late fourth or early third century B.C., namely, the so-called "Kongzi shilun" fragments in the possession of the Shanghai Museum.[123] In this text, "Guan ju" is again said to "use sex to illustrate ritual" (*yi se yu yu li* 以色喻於禮) and that its turn toward ritual leads to "transformation" (*gai* 改).[124] Similar

[121] For the four traditionally known Han interpretations of "Guan ju," see Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shi san jia yi jishu* 詩三家義集疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987) 1.4–16; Riegel, "Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary," pp. 155–59.

[122] See Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, *Maōtai Kanbo hakusho gogyōhen kenkyū* 馬王堆漢墓帛書五行篇研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1993), pp. 533–45. Riegel, "Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary," pp. 176–77, gives an English translation of the passage.

[123] The title "Kongzi shilun," given by the modern Chinese editors, is problematic as the identification of the word "Kongzi" (Confucius) in the manuscript remains dubious.

[124] See Ma Chengyuan, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu*, vol. 1, pp. 139–44. "Guan ju" is discussed on slips 11, 12, and 14 of the manuscript.

judgments of the *guofeng* in general can be found in both *Xunzi*[125] and Liu An's "Li sao zhuan,"[126] which all can be traced back to *Lunyu*: 3/20: "Guan ju [expresses] pleasure but does not lead to licentiousness, [expresses] sorrow but does not harm" (*Guan ju le er bu yin, ai er bu shang* 關雎樂而不淫, 哀而不傷). According to the Lu Shi 魯詩 reading, which was adopted by Sima Qian,[127] the song is about erotic desire as something that "cuts into one's nature and shortens one's years" (*hao se fa xing duan nian* 好色伐性短年).[128] These references to the *guofeng* (and "Guan ju" as their prime example) suggest an early hermeneutic approach to poetry that over the course of the Han dynasty, and especially with the canonization of the *Mao Shi*, was completely eclipsed and all but excised from the early textual tradition. The silk manuscripts from Mawangdui and the bamboo slips obtained by the Shanghai Museum finally prove that this interpretation was well-established and wide-spread, and that it can be documented for at least two centuries, that is, from the late fourth to the late second century B.C.[129] This is the period during which the poetic presentations that we have come to refer to as *fu* developed to full maturity. Accordingly, the hermeneutics of "Guan ju" during this period help us not only to question Yang Xiong's position on the *fu* but indeed to revisit the genesis and early development of the genre itself. What does "using sex to illustrate ritual" mean? I suggest that with this question, we are finally getting to the heart of Western Han aesthetics that seemed so problematic to Yang Xiong.

The early "Guan ju" and *guofeng* interpretations show an intricate hermeneutical approach far more interesting than the narrow political and historicizing exegesis that by late Western Han times began to replace it and that also became central to Yang Xiong. *Xunzi*, Liu An, and the manuscript authors are united in an interpretation that comprises two steps: first, they acknowledge the sentiments of pleasure and desire in "Guan ju" and other *guofeng* songs. Second, they claim that while the songs express and provide delight, they ultimate guide their audience toward ritual propriety, that is, the mastery and control of these sentiments.[130] In other words, this interpretation separates the texts' literal meaning from their perlocutionary effects on their audience.[131] At stake is not the intrinsic meaning of a *guofeng* song but the effects the song generates in those who take pleasure in it. Thus, "Guan ju" may express urgent desire, but it does not provoke licentiousness.[132] What counts is not what the text says, but how an intelligent and perceptive listener is influenced by its performance.[133]

There is another reason to consider the *guofeng* more for the feelings they induce in their audience than for the meaning of their textual surface. While the early singers and reciters of the *Odes* were certainly not ignorant of the words they uttered, they did not limit their attention just to these. On the contrary, the early accounts inform us repeatedly about the importance of the *Odes* as musical performances, and nothing suggests that the above-quoted "Guan ju" judgment in the *Lunyu* should refer just to the lyrics. Steven Van Zoeren is probably right in stating that this passage is indeed more

[125] See Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (*Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 ed., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986) 19.336.

[126] *Shiji* 84.2482. Liu An's text is also quoted—and identified—in Ban Gu's "Li sao xu" 離騷序, which is preserved in Wang Yi's commentary to the "Li sao"; see Hong Xingzu, *Chu ci buzhu* 1.49.

[127] See *Shiji* 14.509.

[128] Wang Xianqian, *Shi san jia yi jishu* 1.4. See also Mark Laurent Asselin, "The Lu-School Reading of 'Guanju' as Preserved in an Eastern Han *Fu*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117 (1997): 427–43.

[129] For their full account and discussion, see Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts," in *Recarving the Dragon: Understanding Chinese Poetics*, ed. Olga Lomová (Prague: Charles University—The Karolinum Press), *forthcoming* 2003.

[130] For the tension between desire and morality, as it is reflected in the *Odes* and discussed in early philosophical texts, see O Man-jong 吳萬鐘, *Cong shi dao jing: Lun Mao Shi jieshi di yuanyuan ji qi tese* 從詩到經：論毛詩解釋的淵源及其特色 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001), pp. 61–87.

[131] While in late Eastern Han times, this exegetical strategy was largely eclipsed by the *Mao Shi* recension, it reappeared in the *Odes* interpretation of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and other Song dynasty scholars; see Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts"; Wong Siu-kit 黃兆傑 and Lee Kar-shui 李家樹, "Poems of Depravity: A Twelfth Century Dispute on the Moral Character of the *Book of Songs*," *T'oung Pao* 75 (1989): 209–25.

[132] As noted by Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, p. 112, "the central problematic of Chinese hermeneutics was not how to understand the text but how to be affected by it."

[133] Thus, the most notorious "Zheng feng" song, "Qiang Zhongzi" 將仲子 (Mao 76), could be used on a diplomatic occasion to achieve the release of a prisoner. For the song, see *Mao Shi zhengyi* 4–2.69a–b; for its use in *Zuo zhuan*, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993), p. 1117 [Xiang 26].

focused on "Guan ju" as a musical performance. The appearance of the "Kongzi shilun," which is deeply concerned with the performative aspects of the *Odes*, has provided us with another important piece of evidence.[134] Even for the mid-first century B.C., we learn that some of Wang Bao's compositions were ordered to be "practiced and sung according to the melody of 'Lu ming'" (*yi Lu ming zhi sheng xi er ge zhi* 依鹿鳴之聲習而歌之), the well-known piece from the *Odes*.[135] Likewise, the way how the "Great preface" to the *Odes* is developed out of the earlier discourse on music still reflects the centrality of performance in the ancient Chinese aesthetic discourse.[136] When Yang Xiong rejects the *fu* as excessively embellished, he is reacting against a language that was originally composed for its performative force but that for Yang, who undoubtedly sees himself more as a reader of, rather than listener to, such texts, now stands in the way of the moral message. To his mind, the idea that the experience of aesthetic pleasure ultimately guides toward a behavior of ritual propriety, is no longer acceptable.

I suggest that the notion of "using sex to illustrate ritual," obviously a widely known stock formula in the third and second centuries B.C., should be extended to the *fu*, especially as the word *se* 色 ("sex") possesses a much broader semantic range, encompassing sensual attraction, desire, and pleasure in general, including what was perceived as legitimate and appropriate pleasure. In this less specific sense, "Da zhao," "Qi fa," and "Tianzi youlie fu," with their sudden final shifts from lavish sensuality to restraint and morality, are the very embodiment and self-referential performance of "using sex to illustrate ritual." On the intrinsic, literary level of the text, the ruler, after having been exposed to the most extravagant pleasures—and only then!—turns around and emerges, in a complete transformation, as the sage king of ritual propriety and kindness. Here, the true sense of the *fu* rests in its performative nature: after the presentation has eulogized and fully exhausted the cultural

[134] For the full discussion, see Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, pp. 28–51. In relation to *Odes* quotations in early manuscripts, the topic is further discussed in Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts."

[135] Mao 161. See *Hanshu* 64B.2821.

[136] See, e.g., Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, pp. 17–115; Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), pp. 37–56.

splendor of the realm, and has staged this very splendor by its own verbal virtuosity, it not merely describes but performs and constitutes the transformation of its audience, the ruler. Thus, the final passage of the "Tianzi youlie fu" is not admonition or indirect criticism in any simple, straightforward sense. As the emperor within the text of the *fu* is transformed into a sage, so is the very same emperor to whom this text is presented and who is confronted with his poetic double. The rhetoric of performance embraces the imperial presence in ideal, and entirely panegyrical, terms.

As Bi Wanchen 畢萬忱 has argued, the six highly sensualistic "stimuli" or "arousals" in the "Qi fa" that describe marvelous pleasures are not suggesting further indulgence in the prince's indecorous excesses but, on the contrary, offer an exhaustive account of pleasures that are indeed befitting a ruler as long as he is able to enjoy them within the limits of self-restraint.[137] The same point can be made for the enticements described in "Da zhao" and "Zhao hun." In this argument for appropriate and morally sanctioned pleasure, the opposition between eulogy and admonition is largely neutralized. Mei Sheng and Sima Xiangru still instruct their rulers in the way of morality, but their indirect admonition is couched in panegyric terms. The aesthetic pleasures of their compositions, just as the *guofeng* according to their characterization in *Xunzi*, "satisfy the desires but do not transgress the correct stopping point" (*ying qi yu er bu qian qi zhi* 盈其欲不愆其止).[138] *Xunzi* is also in more general terms the pre-eminent philosophical text to propose a balanced interaction between the fulfillment of desire and the observance of ritual propriety. Its three chapters on ritual ("Lilun" 禮論), music ("Yuelun" 樂論), and "Human nature is bad" ("Xing e" 性惡)[139]

[137] Bi Wanchen, "Shilun Mei Sheng de 'Qi fa'" 試論枚乘的《七發》, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 1990.5: 32–34.

[138] Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie*, 19.336.

[139] Chapters 19, 20, and 23 in the traditional arrangement of the text in 32 *pian* 篇 (Chapters 13, 14, and part of Chapter 17 in Wang Xianqian's *Xunzi jijie*). The *Xunzi* does not seem to have attracted much scholarly attention before its first known commentary by Yang Liang 楊倞 (9th century); in Song times, moreover, the work was finally excluded from the orthodox Confucian canon because of its position that human nature is bad. However, the excavated manuscripts from Guodian and Mawangdui, as well as the bamboo slips now in the possession of the Shanghai Museum, amply suggest that the system of thought espoused in *Xunzi* enjoyed (wide-spread?) acceptance in the third and second centuries B.C.; see Paul Rakita Goldin, "Xunzi in the Light of the Guodian Manuscripts," *Early China* 25 (2000): 113–46.

together expound the most consistent philosophical theory of human nature, ritual propriety, and aesthetic display in early China. According to this theory, the undeniable human desire for pleasure needs to, and can, be controlled and moderated through the nourishment and transformative force of ritual propriety. Even more, because the desire for pleasure—a fundamental and undeniable aspect of human existence—brings with it the danger of moral and social dissolution, it also generates the quest for good order, which is then implemented through rules of propriety, that is, "ritual."[140] And finally, aesthetic display, in particular the elaborate display appropriate for the ruler, where the enjoyment of pleasure is fully embedded in ritual practice, is the means to nourish (*yang* 養) and cultivate the senses of sight and sound, taste and smell.[141] In this context, the performance of a literary text—be it "Guan ju," "Da zhao," a Han *fu*, or indeed the entire repertoire of the *Odes*[142]—is guided by ritual norms and thus offers both delight and instruction. Thus, while the *ya* 雅 (especially *daya* 大雅) and the *song* 頌 of the *Odes* embody and display the ritual order already attained, the *guofeng*, and foremost among them "Guan ju," possess the transformative force to guide their audience toward this order.[143] According

[140] For this last point, see Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie* 13.231, 17.294.

[141] Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie* 13.231–32. On various occasions, *Xunzi* describes elaborate yet appropriate sensual display and pleasure as an emblem of good rulership; see, e.g., *Xunzi jijie* 6.116–17, 121, 7.137, 141.

[142] The most famous example of the latter is the delightful performance Prince Ji Zha 季札 of Wu 吳 was treated to during his visit to Lu 魯 in 544 B.C. (Xiang 29). Upon each set of songs and dances, the prince exclaims "How beautiful!," apparently referring to both the way the ancient songs express their moral lesson and how this lesson is then fully displayed in the performance; see Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, pp. 1161–65, and David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 86–95. As noted by Schaberg, p. 93, such performances "offer immediate aesthetic pleasures (they are beautiful) but refer necessarily, as if through the very language of appreciation, to precedents of harmonious political order."

[143] I remain reluctant to propose what might seem the obvious, that is, to combine this reading of the *Odes* with the distinction between *zhengya* 正雅 and *zhengfeng* 正風 on the one hand, and *bianya* 變雅 and *bianfeng* 變風 on the other, that is given in the "Great Preface" to the *Odes*. According to the "Great Preface," after the "correct" (*zheng* 正) ritual order was lost, and with it the composition of "correct" *ya* and *song*, the *bianya* and *bianfeng* arose. Beginning with Zheng Xuan, traditional Chinese scholars have advanced various explanations of these terms without ever fully clarifying the meaning of *bian* 變. To my mind, it is quite possible that the "Great Preface" here draws on the early discourse on the *guofeng* as "transformative" texts, and that *bian* should be read parallel to *gai* in the "Kongzi shilun" manuscript. However, more evidence will be needed in order to come to any conclusion on this point.

to the Mawangdui "Wu xing" manuscript, "Guan ju" illustrates that even at the time of most urgent sexual desire, one would not wish to overstep the boundaries of ritual propriety.

CONCLUSION

Toward the end of the Western Han, Yang Xiong and Liu Xin no longer uphold the faith that third and second century B.C. texts reveal about the fusion of pleasure and morality. Instead, they regard the *fu* as doomed to fail in its intention and therefore morally ambiguous. The difference in argument signals a broad and profound shift in the aesthetics and cultural ideology of early China. The late Western Han rejection of the *fu* becomes comprehensible in the context of an emerging classicism that extends across the entire culture of imperial display, from court-sponsored literature to the grand sacrifices of the state. This classicism is forged explicitly against the generous splendor of the Emperor Wu reign, the remnants of which were still surrounding Yang Xiong and his own sovereign. The portrayal of Emperor Wu as a ruler indulging in frivolous ritual and blinded by literary ornament is by no means unique to the discussion of Sima Xiangru's compositions; it is part and parcel of the criticism of the whole imperial ritual system, its lavish expenses, dazzling display, exciting music, and a set of hymnic compositions that in contents and diction are very close to the "Nine songs" on the one hand, and to Sima Xiangru's *fu* on the other.[144] In this overall context, Yang Xiong ranks among the most prominent advocates for restraint and modesty in matters of ritual performance, and for an overall orientation toward the classical culture of pre-imperial times against which the Emperor Wu period is portrayed as an era of moral and cultural degeneration.[145] In short, the practice and criticism of the *fu* from Sima Xiangru to Yang Xiong

[144] See Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, pp. 174–303; Hawkes, "The Quest of the Goddess."

[145] Yang Xiong expresses his desire for imperial modesty and restraint in the preface to his "Yulie fu"; see *Hanshu* 87A.3534–35, and *Liu chen zhu Wen xuan* 8.20a–22a, translated in Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 2, pp. 115–17.

developed closely along the lines of Western Han cultural history in general.[146] How neatly the various issues of ritual and literature were interrelated in the minds of late Western/early Eastern Han thinkers becomes clear by an interesting historiographic detail: in the *Hanshu*, Sima Xiangru—who had died in 117 B.C.—is noted twice among the authors of Emperor Wu's state sacrificial hymns, the "Songs for the suburban sacrifices" ("Jiaosi ge" 郊祀歌)[147] that according to all evidence were composed only from 113 B.C. onwards.[148] Specifically, the text in the *Hanshu* "Monograph on Ritual and Music" ("Li yue zhi" 禮樂志) mentions these ritual pieces composed by "Sima Xiangru and some dozen others" (*Sima Xiangru deng shu shi ren* 司馬相如等數十人) as "poems and *fu*" (*shifu* 詩賦) that were then set to music.[149] While their attribution to Sima Xiangru is most likely a mistake, it is not a completely unreasonably one. In many of their passages, the "Jiaosi ge" closely resemble the style of Sima Xiangru's *fu*. The following are the final three stanzas from the very first of the twenty sacrificial hymns; reminiscent especially of the extravagant descriptions in "Da zhao,"[150] they delight both spirits and humans with a vivacious display of sensual pleasure:

> Flocks of beauties form their lines,
> relaxing in rare and voluptuous patterns;
> with faces resembling rush blossoms—[151]
> uncounted are those of sought-after grace.
>
> Dressed in resplendent patterns,
> entwined in misty gauze,
> drawing satin and batiste,
> dangling pearls and nephrite.

[146] See Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon."

[147] See *Hanshu* 22.1045, 93.3725.

[148] See Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, pp. 59–61, 179–85.

[149] *Hanshu* 22.1045.

[150] See Hong Xingzu, *Chu ci buzhu* 10.221–23.

[151] This may refer to the *Odes* song "Chu qi dongmen" 出其東門 (Mao 93), a song from the "Zheng feng" section. Here, the line is *you nü ru tu* 有女如荼 ("there are girls like rush [blossoms]"), to which Zheng Xuan glosses *tu* 荼 (rush) as "something light that flies around without constancy" (*wu zhi qing zhe, fei xing wu chang* 物之輕者, 飛行無常); see *Mao Shi zhengyi* 4–4.78a. Later, this gloss has been used to interpret the image of female beauty in this *Ode* as an expression of licentiousness.

> Embraced by a propitious night,
> angelica and thoroughwort send off their fragrance.
> Insouciant, lissome and carefree—
> we offer auspicious cups.[152]
>
> 眾嫮並, 綽奇麗, 顏如荼, 兆逐靡。被華文, 廁霧縠, 曳阿錫, 佩珠玉。
> 俠嘉夜, 芘蘭芳。澹容與, 獻嘉觴。

Lines like these, dramatic and intense, pervade the state sacrificial music of Emperor Wu that retrospectively, some time between ca. 32 and 7 B.C., became disparaged as "melodies of Zheng."[153] Its descriptive passages, for example, of female attraction, are indistinguishable from their counterparts in Sima Xiangru's works and allowed both Yang Xiong and Ban Gu to explicitly relate the *fu* to the purportedly licentious melodies of Emperor Wu's court.[154] From the short passage just quoted, no less than three descriptive binomes—*wuhu* 霧縠 ("misty gauze"), *exi* 阿錫 ("satin and batiste"), and *rongyu* 容與 ("lissome and carefree")—also appear in Sima Xiangru's "Tianzi youlie fu." Kuang Heng 匡衡 (chancellor 36–30 B.C.), perhaps the most influential classicist of the time, in 32 B.C. proposed abolishing the elaborate altars at which the "Jiaosi ge" were performed and also submitted corrections to two of their texts.[155] Such initiatives grant us authentic insights into the ideological agenda and intellectual atmosphere of late Western Han classicism. At the same time, they inform us that Emperor Wu's legacy of ritual and literature was still present and alive in Yang Xiong's time—Yang's criticism of the earlier *fu* was not a distanced and

[152] *Hanshu* 22.1052; see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, pp. 187–98. The twenty "Jiaosi ge" of Emperor Wu's reign include a whole string of such celebrative and cheerful pieces; see songs #7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, and 19 (*Hanshu* 22.1057–58, 1061–63, 1066–67, 1069–70; Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, pp. 210–23, 241–58, 263–71, 280–84).

[153] See *Hanshu* 22.1071. The passage reflects the late Western Han criticism but must date before 7 B.C., as it mentions the "Office of Music" (*yuefu* 樂府) that was abolished in that year.

[154] See *Shiji* 117.3073, *Hanshu* 57B.2609.

[155] For Kuang Heng's memorial on abolishing especially the Taiyi 太一 altar at the sacrificial center of Ganquan 甘泉, see *Hanshu* 25B.1256; an annotated translation and brief analysis is given in Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon," pp. 63–66. For Kuang's suggestions of textual changes for the "Jiaosi ge," see *Hanshu* 22.1057–58; Kern, ibid., pp. 71–72. A useful account of Kuang Heng's ritual reforms is included in Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 B.C. to A.D. 9*, pp. 154–92.

uninterested act but an emphatic contribution to the political debates of the day. The target was, with the *fu* as well as with the imperial ritual system, the entire display and performance culture of the Western Han that had been designed during the reign of Emperor Wu. Where the authors of the "Jiaosi ge," in a bold self-assertive gesture, had identified their compositions as "these new tones" (*ci xin yin* 茲新音),[156] a late Western Han classicist like Kuang Heng would note that the multiple ornamental details of Emperor Wu's altar to the cosmic deity Taiyi 太一 "cannot find their models in antiquity" (*bu neng de qi xiang yu gu* 不能得其象於古).[157] In the same vein, Yang Xiong distinguished the venerable *fu* of the ancient *Odes* authors from those of Emperor Wu's epideictic poets—only to conclude that the latter produced but petty displays of literary embroidery.

By conclusion, Yang Xiong's criticism of the *fu* was closely related to the institutionalized classification of texts in the imperial catalogue, conceptualized and compiled by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. Earlier, *fu* could refer to the full range of poetic compositions that were presented as court performances. Yang Xiong's emphasis on genre identity points to a literary culture that has reached a certain degree of maturity in institutional and aesthetic terms: the notion of genre is based on the distinction between different genres and their genuine forms and functions. At the same time, this gradually emerging idea of literary genres is related to an increasing emphasis on the written (versus the performed and memorized) word, a significant proliferation, collection, collation, and institutionalized classification of written texts, the production of the imperial library catalogue, the fixation of the traditional canon and its exegetical traditions, the development of the imperial bureaucracy, and the formation of a new and relatively coherent class of learned scholars who had come to see themselves as literary authors.[158] Prior to these developments, Western Han poetic aesthetics comprise the central elements of pre-imperial political rhetoric and religious incantation,

[156] In the eighth hymn of the "Jiaosi ge"; see *Hanshu* 22.1057–58; Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, pp. 216–23.

[157] *Hanshu* 25B.1256; Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon," p. 63.

[158] For these points, see Kern, "Ritual, Text, and The Formation of the Canon," and Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts."

transforming both into literary representations. These representations are decidedly self-referential in nature as they draw attention not merely to their topics but also to their own poetic virtuosity; as such, they actually perform and constitute what they describe. This performance is court-based and centered on the ruler: before Emperor Wu's reign at some princely courts, after 141 B.C. primarily at the imperial court of Chang'an. While authors and performers of the *fu* are recognized for their art, this art itself does not gain them official status beyond the ranks of court entertainers.

In Western Han times, the grand epideictic *fu* is primarily celebrative and eulogistic, with its strong elements of entertainment also in the service of moral illustration. It is not, however, an expression of political criticism and admonition in the narrow sense that Yang Xiong and later writers—including the author(s) of Sima Xiangru's *Shiji* biography—assign to it, based on their own literary practice.[159] In its epideictic splendor, the grand *fu* represents the powerful and self-assertive aesthetics of ritual and literary culture during the Emperor Wu era. This culture of performance, display, and pleasure is based on the aesthetics of rhetoric as both embellishment and persuasive force. It operates on the assumption that the description, performance, evocation, and enjoyment of pleasure ultimately leads to moral insight and transformation. This aesthetic principle governs the epideictic *fu* as well as the contemporaneous interpretations of the *Odes*.

As a performance genre, the Western Han *fu* was not meant to be read but to be listened to. A host of passages in both *Shiji* and *Hanshu* mention the recitation of all kinds of texts, including the works of the traditional canon. Throughout Western Han times, the culture of oral recitation defined the presentation and reception of texts.[160] Especially for poetic texts, but not restricted to them, excavated as well as transmitted texts from late Warring States and Western Han times offer abundant evidence for the low degree of

[159] The historical change from Sima Xiangru to Yang Xiong is also apparent from the fact that none of Sima's compositions was imperially commissioned, while all of Yang's indeed were. This testifies to the increasing institutionalization of the genre, and it further cautions us to anachronistically conflate the nature and function of the two authors' works.

[160] Even Yang Xiong's inscriptions were recited to Emperor Cheng; see Qian Yi 錢繹, *Fangyan jianshu* 方言箋疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1984) 13.53a.

orthographic standardization during these periods. We know, for example, that the versions we have of Sima Xiangru's *fu* have come down to us in a highly normalized graphic appearance that clearly postdates, perhaps by centuries, even Eastern Han times.[161] Any argument on a particular character—as opposed to a word—in these pieces, or on the overall appearance of the *fu* as written text during the reign of Emperor Wu, is fundamentally flawed and irrelevant. We do not fully understand the role of writing in the early development of the *fu*; it may have been largely restricted to the functions of archival preservation and perhaps of mnemonic device to the reciters. Therefore, while it is clear that by the time the imperial library catalogue was compiled, a great number of *fu* compositions were available in written form and as such categorized and entered into the bibliographic record, it is probably only toward the very end of the Western Han—for example, with Yang Xiong—that the act of reading a *fu* began to become a regular way of its reception. In Yang's own time, the organization of the imperial library and the compilation of its catalogue must have strongly contributed to this new trend. Indeed, the imperial desire for textual order was less a matter of descriptive stock-taking than of imposing a prescriptive system of organization onto a vast and extremely varied array of textual material.

In sum, the *fu* was both less and more than what its traditional accounts from late Western Han times onward suggest: it was not a defined genre, it was not an important vehicle of direct political intervention, and its authors were not regarded as influential political advisors. At the same time, it was the most pervasive literary phenomenon of Western Han court culture, appearing in numerous different forms and fusing entertainment, panegyrics, and admonition. As the evidence from recently excavated manuscripts now shows us, its aesthetics developed not in isolation but within an existing hermeneutical discourse. Thus, as early interpretations of the *Odes*, which had remained unavailable for more than two millennia, now help us to better understand the principles of literary

[161] I have dealt with this issue on several occasions; see Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts"; "The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern, *forthcoming*; and "The 'Biography of Sima Xiangru' and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian's *Shiji*."

thought that guided the Han *fu*, a new appreciation of the *fu* pertains in turn to firmly situating the archaeological evidence of *Odes*—especially *guofeng*—exegesis within the dominant literary and rhetorical currents of the third and second centuries B.C. Both the Mao exegesis of the *Odes* and Yang Xiong's interpretation of the *fu* have guided the hermeneutic tradition away from its late Warring States and early imperial precursors. Yet modern scholarship in the spirit of May Fourth has equally failed to appreciate the complexity of literary thought and practice prior to its ideological reduction and control by imperial scholars serving the needs of the imperial state. Matching the evidence from the *fu* with that from recently excavated manuscripts, one senses that the early history of Chinese poetry and rhetoric is not yet fully explored, and that further study will need to transcend both traditional and May Fourth approaches to early song—in general terms and with respect to the individual text.