

Qu Yuan and the *Chuci*

New Approaches

Edited by

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Contents

Bibliographic Note on Original Publications	VII
List of Figures and Tables	VIII
Contributors	IX
Introduction 1	
<i>Martin Kern and Stephen Owen</i>	
1 Reconstructing Qu Yuan	16
<i>Martin Kern</i>	
2 The Author's Two Bodies: The Death of Qu Yuan and the Birth of <i>Chuci zhangju</i> 楚辭章句	98
<i>Heng Du</i>	
3 Figure and Flight in the <i>Songs of Chu</i>	156
<i>Lucas Rambo Bender</i>	
4 To Leave or Not to Leave: The <i>Chuci</i> 楚辭 (Verses of Chu) as Response to the <i>Shijing</i> 詩經 (Classic of Poetry)	187
<i>Michael Hunter</i>	
5 Reading the "Li sao"	225
<i>Stephen Owen</i>	
6 Reading "Jiu ge"	323
<i>Stephen Owen</i>	
7 Unwinding "Unreeling Yearnings"	405
<i>Paul W. Kroll</i>	
8 On "Far Roaming" Again	434
<i>Paul W. Kroll</i>	
Index	469

Introduction

Martin Kern and Stephen Owen

Chuci 楚辭, or *Lyrics of Chu*, is the second anthology of ancient Chinese poetry, preceded only by the *Shijing* 詩經, or *Classic of Poetry*. Unlike the latter, the *Chuci* never attained the status of a canonical text (*jing* 經) in the Confucian tradition. It thus lacked the cachet of the state-sponsored curriculum of “official studies” (*guanxue* 官學) or “canonical studies” (*jingxue* 經學) that over the two millennia of imperial China generated an enormous amount of traditional commentary around the *Shijing*. Nevertheless, ever since its poetry first became known in the second century BCE, the early core of *Chuci* poetry enjoyed at least as much attention and success as a literary classic. Unlike the *Shijing*, its verses are centered around the legend of a single figure: Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 300 BCE) who in Western Han times (202 BCE–9 CE) initially appears as a high-minded yet ill-treated and banished minister of the preimperial southern state of Chu and then, in short order, also as the autobiographic poet to lament his fate right up to the moment of his suicide. His poetry was cherished for its exceptional force of imagination but even more so for its protagonist’s sincerity and willingness to speak truth to power. From the beginning, it embodied the fraught relationship between an ignorant ruler and his most upright minister, expressed from the perspective of the latter and voiced in verse.

Qu Yuan’s image as China’s first and archetypal heroic poet resonated deeply with Western Han officials at the imperial court—think of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE) or Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE)—who likewise could find themselves under precarious political circumstances and threats of imprisonment, mutilation, and death; and this image has continued to appear in the mirror for many a Chinese intellectual ever since. In the commanding voice of the Qu Yuan persona, readers found much more than just poetry: they vividly recognized their own ideals, aspirations, frustrations, and personal identity.

Starting already in the Western Han, not only commentaries began to appear on the poems attributed to Qu Yuan; there also were successive series of new poetic compositions that either lamented Qu Yuan’s fate or impersonated his voice. Some, though not all, of these compositions entered the *Chuci* collection over the course of the Western and Eastern (25–220) Han periods. They all contributed to a reading of the earliest layers of the anthology as autobiographic, which defined *Chuci* interpretation through the early twentieth century. We are not aware of a single premodern commentary that would question Qu

Yuan's authorship, and with it the autobiographic reading, in particular of the "Li sao" 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow), the most prominent text of the anthology and by far the grandest poem from ancient China. Whether as "Encountering Sorrow" or "Encountering Trouble," "Leaving Sorrow Behind," "Sublimating Sorrow," "Leaving After Sorrow," "Entangled in Sorrow," "Sorrow at Parting," or any other understanding of the title in scholarship ancient and modern (and some four dozen translations into various European languages), if any poem at all is most intimately associated with Qu Yuan, it is the "Li sao."

Yet beginning with the early twentieth century, the intersecting phenomena of the collapse of the imperial order, the search for a redefined cultural tradition that could sustain the emerging Chinese nation-state, and the encounter with methodologies of historical criticism that in Europe had emerged regarding the Western classical tradition, all contributed to the development of a range of new interpretations of Qu Yuan and "his" poetry. On the one hand, scholar-poets such as Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946) and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) discovered Qu Yuan not only as a heroic poet but also as a political hero, a "patriotic poet" (*aiguo shiren* 愛國詩人), and a "poet of the people" (*renmin shiren* 人民詩人). At the same time, scholars like Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962), Zhu Dongrun 朱東潤 (1896–1988), and others questioned the very existence of Qu Yuan as a historical figure, let alone as the author of "his" poetry. From this arose the mid-century debate of the "Qu Yuan Question" (*Qu Yuan wenti* 屈原問題)—no doubt inspired by the "Homeric Question"—that was conducted with great passion and intensity not only among Chinese scholars but also with their Japanese colleagues such as Okamura Shigeru 岡村繁 (1922–2014), Suzuki Shūji 鈴木修次 (1923–1989), Shirakawa Shizuka 白川静 (1910–2006), and others joining the fray. Like the "Homeric Question," the "Qu Yuan Question" had several dimensions and generated a certain scale of positions, in the extremes ranging from the denial of Qu Yuan's historical existence on one end and the maximum claim for his authorship of numerous pieces on the other. When all was said and done, most scholars settled, and still do so today, somewhere in the middle: Qu Yuan the aristocratic minister of preimperial Chu did indeed exist, but perhaps only the "Li sao," or at most the smaller part of the poetry that the Eastern Han editor Wang Yi 王逸 (89–158) had listed under Qu Yuan's name, should be considered his own works.

Beyond the "Qu Yuan Question," a small number of other issues have been prominent in Qu Yuan and *Chuci* scholarship. One concerns the tension between Qu Yuan's politically charged self-commiseration and certain religious practices—often called "shamanistic," as in the readings of Aoki Masaru (1887–1964) and Arthur Waley (1889–1966)—that seem reflected not only in the "Li sao" but even more so in the "Jiu ge" 九歌 (Nine Songs), "Zhao

hun” 招魂 (Summoning the Soul), and “Da zhao” 大招 (Great Summons) poems. The modern *Chuci* translator David Hawkes (1923–2009), for example, describes its poetry as “the cannibalization by a new secular, literary tradition of an earlier religious, oral one.” Some scholars have made the case that the poems—especially the “Jiu ge” and “Zhao hun”—are truly religious incantations, and even polyvocal texts in which we encounter the different roles and voices involved in actual religious ceremonies; others read the respective expressions as allegorical flights of fancy. This discussion extends to a broader one on the nature of *Chuci* poetics in light of the dazzling imagery, confusing shifts of perspectives of speech, and uncertain gender relations in which political ambition, religious enchantment, and erotic desire all appear in constant flow: a sensual feast of words performed but never explained, and only poorly described in our usual vocabulary of metaphor and allegory. And finally, another important branch of *Chuci* scholarship is devoted to the formation of the anthology over the course of Western and Eastern Han times and to its possible lexical roots in the ancient Chu dialect the reconstruction of which, however, remains elusive.

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Over the past century or so, a limited amount of Western scholarship on the *Chuci* has contributed to all these topics and discussions, though its interpretations and insights have rarely moved substantially beyond those already found in the best modern Chinese and Japanese scholarship. This is in part due to the fact that in one way or another, every reading of the *Chuci* poetry is indebted to the enormous tradition of Chinese scholarship over the past two millennia. We have at our disposal large amounts of traditional commentary reprinted in full or distilled into modern compendia and editions, and we can rely on an impressive array of authoritative modern commentaries, glossaries, and collation notes. Yet all of these ultimately derive from the text prepared by Wang Yi in the second century, plus a limited range of other medieval sources in which a number of the poems appear, for example, the sixth-century *Wenxuan* 文選 and its Tang dynasty commentaries.

Remarkably, the numerous recent discoveries of ancient Chinese manuscripts dating from the fourth century BCE through the third century CE have not yet yielded a single example of a text found in the *Chuci* anthology—despite the fact that the majority of literary, philosophical, and historical writings on bamboo and silk derive from tombs in the ancient area of Chu and are written in Chu regional script. The most there is are two separate sequences of four and six graphs in the fragmentary bamboo manuscripts from Shuanggudui

雙古堆 (Fuyang 阜陽, Anhui province) tomb no. 1 (tomb sealed 165 BCE) that would match partial phrases in our anthology. While the visual depictions on the Chu silk manuscript from Zidanku 子彈庫 (Changsha, Hunan province, ca. 300 BCE?), on the spectacular funerary silk banner from the early Han tomb of Lady Dai 軼 at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (also Changsha, ca. 168 BCE), and on Lady Dai's lacquered nesting coffins clearly share in the mythological tradition found in the early layers of the *Chuci* anthology, no textual witness of even a single complete line of its poetry has yet been discovered. Perhaps the poems were not yet as widely known; or perhaps, more likely, and unlike fragments of the *Shijing*, they were not the kind of text that would end up in aristocratic tombs. In short, archaeology has yet to produce clear evidence from the last several centuries BCE that would add to our knowledge and understanding of *Chuci* poetry.

That being said, we know from many ancient manuscripts with quotations from, or even partial versions of, the *Shijing* that preimperial poetic texts differed significantly in their graphs from those in the received version of the text, and that, furthermore, manuscripts in Chu script had to be interpreted and transcribed into the new imperial standard script by Han scholars. We also know of different exegetical traditions of the *Shijing* prior to its imperial canonization, and that these traditions could understand the specific individual words in a poem differently, given the large number of words that were identical or similar in sound. As a result, every writing or transcription of a poem involved interpretation. This is reflected in the practice of later scholars who frequently propose to read a particular graph found in the text as a mere sound-based substitution (*jiajie* 假借) for a different one that was—usually at the scholars' own historical moment in time—the more regular choice to write the word in question. Today, we find this kind of interpretative replacement not only in traditional commentaries but just as much in the explanations that modern editors provide for the understanding of recently discovered manuscripts from antiquity.

In other words, we are not always sure what we are reading; we do know that our *Chuci* text of today, transmitted in Hong Xingzu's 洪興祖 (1090–1155) twelfth-century recension of Wang Yi's anthology, reflects exactly this kind of interpretation, transcription, and replacement of graphs that occurred in Han times and even beyond, as evidenced in voluminous collections of *Chuci* textual variants found in numerous texts of the received tradition. We also know from manuscripts that texts were sometimes arranged differently in their sequence; in fact, *all* ancient Chinese manuscripts that have been discovered over the last fifty years and that have counterparts in the received tradition show a different internal organization from the latter. The case of the *Chuci* would not be

different; consider that the “Nine Songs” are in fact eleven; that the “Jiu bian” 九辯 (Nine Changes) lack internal divisions altogether; that the “Jiu zhang” 九章 (Nine Manifestations) are known under this title only from Liu Xiang 劉向, while Sima Qian, less than a century earlier, appears to have understood “Ai Ying” 哀郢 (Lament about Ying) and “Huai sha” 懷沙 (Embracing Sand) as two separate and otherwise unrelated titles, instead of as parts of a “Jiu zhang” poetic cycle; and that even some of Liu Xiang’s own—that is, late Western Han—“Jiu tan” 九歎 (Nine Laments) circulated under different titles. In short, we do not know when the various poetic series in our *Chuci* anthology took their present form. Whatever analysis we produce today, and whatever interpretation we put to our readers, is based on the text that has survived through traditional Chinese scholarship but whose original form we do not know and will never know. Plausible conjectures about the formation of the anthology in Han times have been offered, but they remain conjectures.

The essays collected in the present volume proceed from this productive uncertainty to advance fresh readings of the sources precisely because the sources are wide open to reconsideration. Our readings are not concerned with the reception history of the text in later imperial times (except where attention to later commentaries is called for), but chiefly with its original formation and early development. They offer new readings of specific poems and advance original hypotheses about the place of Qu Yuan and the *Chuci* in Han intellectual, political, and literary history. They draw on traditional commentary without being confined by it, deploying a range of modern methodologies and insights that were not available to the readers of previous centuries. They are, doubtless, readings of our time and as such reflect recent comparative and interdisciplinary developments and commitments not only in the study of classical Chinese literature and ancient Chinese textuality but across the global humanities. They would not have been possible a generation ago.

To more traditionally inclined readers, the essays presented here might seem somewhat at odds with the great Chinese tradition of *Chuci* scholarship, but that would be a misunderstanding: we stand firmly in the continuity of two millennia of learning. But just as scholars in the Han dynasty first defined the preimperial textual heritage; as Tang scholars consolidated the Han readings; as Song scholars put radical challenges to them; as Qing scholars—in a surprising chronological parallel to European scholars who reevaluated their own tradition—developed scientific methods of philological inquiry that forcefully subverted inherited beliefs; and as early twentieth-century Chinese scholars proposed new paradigms in reading both the *Shijing* and the *Chuci* during China’s transition to a modern nation-state: so do we write from our own moment in time, a moment when the study of ancient Chinese literature

is no longer limited to traditional Chinese approaches but is conducted in lively exchange between Chinese and foreign scholars. If some of the following chapters may appear as challenges to the consensus view of much—but not all—contemporary Chinese scholarship, we hope that these challenges are taken up in constructive ways instead of being reflexively rejected as incomprehensible or alien. These chapters are not any more alien to the current consensus than every new Chinese view since the Song dynasty was alien to what had been the preceding consensus.

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Let us pause here for a moment and reflect on some of the prevailing assumptions inherited from the long and glorious tradition of Chinese scholarship. For example, it is taken for granted that a text was composed by a single author at a fixed point in time, drawing on his singular talent, committed to writing in the final form given by the author, and transmitted in writing more or less exactly from the time of the work's composition to the present. Any textual variation is treated as a problem to be resolved by finding the “correct,” that is, the “original” character. The writing system of the time is assumed to have been comprehensive, with an existing character for every word, and possessing both the capability and preparedness to write any kind of discourse. Yet these assumptions belong to mature print culture and only gradually took shape from late Western Han times onward, when—especially in the hands of the imperial librarian Liu Xiang—authorship and the historical chronology that accompanied authorship became the primary means to organize the preimperial textual legacy and, in fact, intellectual history of early China. It is precisely and only at this time, when individual authorship in the later (and also our own) sense came into view with figures such as Liu Xiang and his younger contemporary Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), that every “original” text needed an author, while everything that followed was merely the work of disciples, epigones, and imitators whose writing could only pale in comparison and by definition was lacking in genuine “authority.” In this model, the early literary history of the *Chuci* at once originated and culminated in its lead author Qu Yuan; the rest is secondary and derivative, and marked by decline and deficiency.

There is nothing “natural” about such assumptions, and to the editors and contributors of the present volume, they are less than persuasive. We all have some background in the study of ancient and medieval cultures elsewhere and find it useful to approach the texts of Chinese antiquity with some of the same questions that have arisen in other places—in fact, the entire point of approaching texts through comparative perspectives, and to defamiliarize what

seems normal and familiar, is to discover and then ask questions about a tradition that did not arise in that tradition itself. We do not deny that assumptions such as those noted above became historically important and central to the later Chinese textual tradition; but we are also intensely alive to the dangers of anachronistically projecting later ideas into earlier times. Qu Yuan—however we imagine him—did not compose “his” poetry under the assumptions of late Western Han ideas, let alone those of subsequent centuries all the way to the present during which the long tradition of *Chuci* scholarship proliferated.

The challenge presented here is fundamental. Rather than texts by an author, we—the present editors—think of the origins of *Chuci* as embedded in a practice. Those who “could do *Chuci*” (*neng wei Chu ci* 能為楚辭), as we read in the first-century *Hanshu* 漢書, had a store of earlier texts, “known” but not memorized in the later sense. They had the skills to reproduce those texts orally, to elaborate on them, and to give their own variations. Naturally, nothing is left of their performances. At the same time, others could compose their own *Chuci* poetry, often impersonating the voice of earlier poems; and some of these new poems, variations on the earlier ones, we still have in the received anthology.

Yet the boundaries between the practices of writing and oral performance are never absolute. From Milman Parry’s (1902–1935) and Albert Bates Lord’s (1912–1991) work we are familiar with the Serbo-Croat bard whose oral performances always differed significantly from one another even when telling the “same” story and even when telling the story a different time himself. All these “versions” of that story could have the same characters and followed roughly the same plot made up of recognizable “moments” or phases. Many memorized and memorable lines the audience would recognize immediately and would eagerly anticipate; and “variants” would be recognized as saying the same thing differently, as they drew on a shared lexicon and rhythmic-syntactical “grammar.” All tellings were thus recognizable realizations of, and contributions to, the common story, yet no two would be exactly the same. One storyteller might have a special fondness and talent for dialogue; another might be good at description; another yet might add a new incident that would become popular and used in future retellings.

It might be tempting to consider some of the textual characteristics especially of the “*Li sao*”—the composite, the formulaic, the repetitive, the nonlinear—as evidence of “oral-formulaic poetry” in the sense of the theory first formulated by Parry and Lord. Was there an oral prehistory to the “*Li sao*” that defined the structure of the text, and that survived the editing by Liu An and others? Was there an oral “*Li sao*” before there was a written one? We do not embrace such a linear teleology; while in their received form, texts like

the “Li sao” and “Jiu ge” may reflect the learning and the aspirations of the literate elite, their constituent elements appear far more diverse in their origins and practices of composition and performance. Unlike in the Parry-Lord scenario of illiterate singers, there is abundant evidence that in early China, literary texts—poetry, stories, anecdotes—existed in parallel both oral and written. Perhaps parts of *Chuci* poetry were known orally long before they became written down, separately or in some assembled form, or perhaps were written down just sporadically and in new and different ways. Some sections could be memorized—not just reconstituted from formulae—some allowed variability, and some invited expansion. Think of the early phases of Occitan poetry, which could have been written down, but was not systemically written down until the fourteenth century. It was “quasi-memorized” with stanzas added and subtracted, lines changed and transposed, and so on. And perhaps certain other parts indeed began in writing, and even bookishly so; yet these parts too were open to being reshaped for the purposes and by the needs of oral performance and thus could flow back into quasi-memorized oral reproduction. These performances might generate new written versions that once again could turn into other memorizations and oral performances of various kinds, parts of which were then further rewritten, further performed, and further combined with other parts of a different textual history. None of these ancient poetic practices and procedures are directly accessible to us, but the complexity, redundancy, variability, and, in fact, considerable disorder that we observe in the early layers of the *Chuci* anthology together suggest that all such practices and procedures were at play both synchronically and diachronically. In short, the ancient Chu poetry as *practice* cannot be captured within the rigid, systematic, and unifying demands of the Parry-Lord theory.

The different retellings of the Qu Yuan story appear to have included what we call “set pieces,” such as catalogues of plants or catalogues of ancient rulers, or the flight through the heavens, all of which could be made short or long, and comprised of familiar verbal patterns and “moments.” We find these set pieces frequently in the *Chuci*, the Western Han *fu* 賦, and even in prose. These are the resources in the teller’s repertoire. In many cases, we cannot say who told the story first; in fact, “the whole story” may not have had a single origin but came together from different tales, tellers of tales, times, and places: the story is not a single thing, created *ex nihilo* all at once, but a collection of pieces. And yet, for later audiences, stories need origins, and this is when the name of the originator emerges and takes on its significance: Homer, Vyāsa, Qu Yuan. A story can give rise to new stories, just as it can absorb elements from other stories. When in Qu Yuan’s biography, we listen to the song of the fisherman, we know this

song also from elsewhere: in the *Mengzi* 孟子, the same song has nothing to do with either a fisherman or Qu Yuan.

Thus, if the figure of the storyteller is our model here, it does not mean it is merely a model of oral—let alone illiterate—performance. The very same patterns of story development appear in writing as well, and no early Chinese audience, listener or reader, was ever bothered by that. Sometimes one particular way in which the story is written down gains authority over others, typically when it is backed by some institution of cultural or political power; but even then—as we realize from the many ways in which the *Shijing* poems appear in early manuscripts—this authority may not yet control or monopolize the text. What generates this particular power is something else: the compilation of the anthology and the composition of commentary. At this moment, the story leaves its original contexts, oral or written, and enters a single new context in which it is not merely read and enjoyed but also studied.

When we look at the *Chuci*, that is, the received anthology that has come down to us from Wang Yi (four centuries after Qu Yuan, historical or imagined) via Hong Xingzu (another ten centuries after Wang Yi), perhaps the first thing we should notice is that every work is attached to a named author. One text attributed to the early second century BCE writer Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–169 BCE) is noted as uncertain; two are contested; but all have named authors. They represent “the works of Qu Yuan and his followers” all the way to Wang Yi himself.

We know that when Liu Xiang during the last decades of the Western Han was entrusted with the task of putting the imperial archive in order, it was deemed to be a mess. When we see bits and pieces tacked on at the beginning and ending of longer texts, or two fuller texts sutured together in the middle, it is quite clear that “putting the archive in order” involved a great deal of reorganizing—and rewriting—material from physically separate bundles of bamboo slips; this is precisely what Liu Xiang tells us in his own words. We also know that of the hundreds of recently discovered manuscripts on bamboo and silk, dating from the fourth century BCE onward, a certain number may carry their titles, typically written on the back of the first or last slip. Yet not a single manuscript carries the name of its author. This is the situation Liu Xiang faced, and attributing authorship to the best of his knowledge or imagination was among the librarian’s most urgent tasks. Providing a text with an author’s name, real or not, not only guides its subsequent interpretation in the sense of Foucault’s “author function” as a category of textual reception, not production; just as importantly, providing a series of texts with a series of different author names creates textual and intellectual history: authors have dates and can be put in chronological sequence in ways texts themselves cannot. In the *Chuci*

anthology of texts “of the same kind,” we thus start with Qu Yuan, then reach the utterly elusive Song Yu 宋玉 and Jing Cuo 景差, then continue to Jia Yi and Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (fl. 130–120 BCE) and Zhuang Ji 莊忌 (a.k.a. Yan Ji 嚴忌, fl. ca. 150 BCE), and so forth. Whatever “Qu Yuan” was as a person or poet, what matters here is his charismatic name, with a string of real and imagined “followers” attached. This was the librarian’s bibliographical glue that held a group of strikingly diverse works together as a recognizable genre. The most basic rule of a library is that *every* work requires a place in a taxonomy of categories where it can be stored and retrieved; the most basic rule of an anthology is that *every* work that is included should be connected, and newly contextualized, with the others around it. Of the Qu Yuan story, some texts thus made it into the *Chuci* anthology; others, not only in prose but also in poetry, were left outside of it.



It is always stimulating to recognize the same phenomena in different cultures and to be encouraged to think about each such culture in light of all the others. Our goal is not merely to contribute to the long tradition of *Chuci* interpretation by introducing or employing methods and ideas that did not originate in that tradition. We also hope to introduce this ancient poetry once again to a global readership in new and original ways, more than one hundred and seventy years after August Pfizmaier (1808–1887) published the first translation of the “Li sao” in a European language (1851). Pfizmaier’s German translation was followed by translations into French (Marquis d’Hervey de Saint-Denys, 1870), English (E.H. Parker, 1879; James Legge, 1895), Italian (Nino de Sanctis, 1900), and again French (Sung-Nien Hsü, 1932); but it was the Peranakan physician Lim Boon Keng 林文慶 (1869–1957), born in Singapore and later serving as the second president of Xiamen University (1921–1937), who in a new English translation (1935) gave us a Qu Yuan and “his” poetry that resonated with contemporaneous Chinese, Japanese, as well as European readings. In particular Lim’s reading of the “Li sao” was fundamentally centered on the historical Qu Yuan: as his reconstructed biography explained the text, the text in turn was testament to Qu Yuan’s fate of suffering and, ultimately, suicide.

The present volume is the first in any European language that assembles a diverse series of studies on the *Chuci*, with particular attention to the formation and early history of the anthology as a whole as well as to the specific structure and close interpretation of some of its individual poems as reflections of that history. The essays included here transcend the traditional perspective on Qu Yuan and the *Chuci* by returning in different ways to the poetry

itself in its ancient literary and historical context. We do not advance claims to recover “the original meaning” of any particular poem; but we all, in different ways, are deeply committed to the ancient sources—above all to the poetry itself and the early textual tradition that has helped to shape them.

The present collection goes back to the academic year 2017–2018. During that year, Paul Kroll at the University of Colorado, Stephen Owen at Harvard, and Martin Kern at Princeton each taught a graduate seminar on the *Chuci* at their respective institutions. In May 2018, Michael Hunter and Lucas Bender hosted Kroll, Owen, and Kern together with certain of their students for a *Chuci* workshop at Yale where everyone—students and professors—presented their work. Soon thereafter, Bender, Hunter, and Heng Du all published their workshop contributions in eminent academic journals: *Early China* (2019), *Asia Major* (2019), and *T'oung Pao* (2019). Meanwhile, Owen and Kern had already talked about a co-authored *Chuci* volume for some years, and finally the time seemed right; yet instead of publishing just our own work, we decided to invite also the essays by Kroll, Hunter, Bender, and Du, to provide a snapshot in time of contemporary studies on the ancient anthology. The two essays by Owen as well as Kroll's “Unwinding ‘Unreeling Yearnings’” are original publications; those by Hunter, Bender, and Du are slightly revised versions of their published journal articles; and the chapter by Kern combines parts of a recently published article (*Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture*, 2022) with new material. Finally, we took the opportunity to request to also publish a slightly adjusted version of Kroll's classic article “On ‘Far Roaming’” (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1996) as a most appropriate companion piece to his new essay on “Chou si” 抽思, a proposal to which Kroll eventually agreed. While over the past quarter of a century, there have been a handful of other worthy *Chuci* studies published in English, to include all of them is not feasible here. Instead, we decided to focus on the contributors to our 2018 workshop; hopefully there will be similar publication opportunities in the future that could complement the present one.

As the present volume presents a series of new approaches to the study of the *Chuci* anthology, the diversity of research methodologies, interpretations, and translations included here is programmatic. As editors, we have no desire to harmonize the different essays in this respect or to impose our own ways on the work of our contributors. Some of the readings and arguments advanced in the following chapters chime well with those of some other chapters; some of them go off in different directions and reveal not merely different understandings but also different approaches. This diversity and occasional incommensurability is not a bug but a feature: a text of such richness, complexity, and internal contradictions as we encounter with the *Chuci* cannot possibly

be forced under any particular approach or reductionist consensus. If anything, this volume showcases and celebrates the many possibilities in which the ancient poetry can be approached and read. Despite Wang Yi's strenuous interpretative efforts—so strenuous indeed that not a few prominent later commentators felt free to leave them behind—there is no unity among the many different pieces in the *Chuci* anthology, and neither can there be unity in their interpretation. What matters are not forced claims for “truth” and “proof” but carefully developed arguments for plausible and probable readings based on the early sources as we have them. Not everyone will agree with every reading, nor would there be any need for that.

The authors of the essays that were previously published in journals have been encouraged to update or edit their texts for the present volume. Most of the changes are fairly minor and more technical in nature; a few are more substantial. In addition, we agreed on a minimal set of technical and formatting conventions in order to facilitate a more coherent reading experience.

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The present collection of eight essays represents several distinct approaches to the *Chuci*. Owen and Kroll both translate and analyze specific poems in full: Owen the “Li sao” and the eleven songs of the “Jiu ge,” Kroll the “Chou si” poem from the “Jiu zhang” 九章 section and the stand-alone Daoist poem “Yuan you” 遠遊 (Far Roaming). Kern scrutinizes the early formation of the Qu Yuan tradition as well as of the principal poems associated with that figure, while Du examines the structure and logic of the earliest transmitted version of the *Chuci* anthology, Wang Yi's *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句. Both Bender and Hunter address core issues in the underlying poetics of the *Chuci*: Bender unfolds what he calls “figural shifts” in the poems' distinct uses of imagery, while Hunter reads the *Chuci* not as an independent southern poetic tradition but as a poetic response to the earlier *Shijing* 詩經, the venerated “northern” *Classic of Poetry*. Together, the eight essays in this volume address fundamental questions regarding the origins and early development of the *Chuci* from its mythological inception in the preimperial state of Chu to its emergence and evolution in the second and first centuries BCE, and from there through its final compilation as an anthology in the second century of the common era.

Martin Kern's essay “Reconstructing Qu Yuan” sets out with a sweeping reinterpretation of the Qu Yuan story where he describes the Qu Yuan persona as the poetic subject of the “Li sao” and other poems, into which were inscribed the shifting aspirations but also traumata of Han dynasty imperial scholars. Through detailed philological analysis, Kern analyzes the “Li sao” as

a composite, authorless artifact that participates in a larger Qu Yuan discourse distributed across multiple texts in both prose and poetry. As such, the “Li sao” appears not as the origin but as the sum total of several strands of early Qu Yuan lore and poetic registers that otherwise sedimented separately in poems such as those of “Jiu ge” and “Jiu zhang.” Tracing the intertextual relationships within the early layers of the *Chuci* anthology, Kern finally locates the full formulation of the Qu Yuan persona and its distinct voice in Liu Xiang’s “Jiu tan” nearly two full centuries after the first emergence of Qu Yuan’s name in the works of early Western Han writers.

In “The Author’s Two Bodies: The Death of Qu Yuan and the Birth of the *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句,” Heng Du proposes a generalizable framework for conceptualizing the notion of the “author.” With Qu Yuan as a case study, she demonstrates how the construction of the author, both historical and putative, contributes to the finalization—rather than the creation—of texts, transforming open and evolving textual traditions into closed and stabilized entities. The creation of the author thus stands at the threshold between textual production and reception, often serving as an indispensable condition for the latter. By applying this approach to the study of the *Chuci zhangju*, Du offers a new definition of the textual strata within this compilation. To this end, she expands her earlier discussion of chapters 6 (“Bu ju” 卜居) and 7 (“Yufu” 漁父) to lay out two alternative Han period narratives of Qu Yuan’s life, one that locates the composition of “Li sao” within a pre-exile courtly context, the other that views it as the consequence of Qu Yuan’s exile.

Lucas Rambo Bender’s “Figure and Flight in the *Songs of Chu*” discusses a previously unnoticed figural technique found in several poems and series in the *Chuci*, whereby images that appear first in one sense reappear later on with a strikingly different meaning. In some of these poems and series, the effect may be merely coincidental, the result of poets or performers working with limited repertoires of tropes that therefore need to be used in multiple ways. Yet elsewhere—in particular in the two Western Han poetic series of the “Qi jian” 七諫 (here described as a “textual community of alienated voices”) and of Liu Xiang’s “Jiu tan”—the poetic technique of figural shifts becomes regular and purposeful and contributes to the metatextual reflection upon the poems’ own use of figures and images. Examining the poems that employ this technique of figural shift, Bender moves beyond existing debates on imagery and metaphor in Chinese poetry and begins to redraw the contours of an early history of literary theorization in China.

Michael Hunter’s chapter “To Leave or Not to Leave: The *Chuci* 楚辭 (Verses of Chu) as Response to the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry)” challenges the consensus view of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Odes) and *Chuci* 楚辭 (Verses of

Chu) as the products of two distinct literary cultures, one northern and one southern. Instead, proceeding from a detailed analysis of a series of specific phrases and ideas in both anthologies, Hunter argues that the *Chuci* poetry developed in direct response to that of the *Shijing*. In this reading, the foremost poem in the *Chuci* anthology, the “Li sao” 離騷, emerges as a metadiscursive journey through various *Shijing* archetypes, the goal of which is to authorize its hero to say farewell to his ruler and homeland—a possibility consistently denied in *Shijing* poetics. Finally, after exploring the relationship between the oppositional poetics of the “Li sao” and the rest of the *Chuci*, the essay offers some reflections on the limitations of the north–south model for explaining the origins and early development of early Chinese literature.

In the first of his two essays in this volume, Stephen Owen in “Reading the ‘Li sao’” proposes that the “Li sao” is a layered text that grew and changed over time through performance and reperformance, increasingly being accommodated to the legend of Qu Yuan. Eventually one version was stabilized in the written version of Liu An’s court at Huainan; this version was then presented to Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 BCE) and the imperial court at Chang’an, where it was deposited in the imperial library. Owen then goes through the poem in detail, showing its internal structure, recurring patterns and sequences of expression, and the places that retain traces of grafting newer material. In Owen’s reading, the “Li sao” known to the Chinese literary tradition was only one of many possible iterations, all of which would be recognized, by their basic structure and shared elements, as “the Li sao.” With his detailed analysis, Owen also provides a new, fully annotated translation of the poem that draws on a broad range of modern and premodern commentary.

In “Reading ‘Jiu ge,’” his second contribution to the present volume, Owen begins by proposing a counterfactual strategy, considering how one would understand the text if it were archeologically recovered as an unattributed manuscript from the late Western Han when, in its traditional reception history, the poetic series first appeared as attributed to Qu Yuan. Following an older argument with new evidence, Owen suggests that everything points back to the second century BCE: first, in the creation of a new imperial system of sacrificial rituals to local deities, performed by shamankas from different regions, under the founding emperor Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202–195 BCE); and second, finally, under Emperor Wu in the form of a full-fledged suite of ritual hymns that was now arranged according to the hierarchy of a spirit pantheon headed by Taiyi 太一 (the “Supreme One” or “Grand Unity”). This analysis is then followed by an annotated translation and discussion of each of the “Nine Songs.”

Paul W. Kroll’s chapter “Unwinding ‘Unreeling Yearnings’” opens the poem called “Chou si” 抽思 to close critical examination. Fourth in the traditional

sequence of the “Jiu zhang,” this poem has certain elements not only unique among the “Jiu zhang”—a series of poems otherwise clearly related, lexically and narratively, to each other and to the “Li sao”—but also unlike any other poem in the *Chuci*. Structurally it resolves into two well-balanced halves that strongly suggest “Chou si” as we have it today is a stitching together of what were originally two distinct poems. After a brief consideration of ways of approaching premodern texts and the suggestive polysemy of the poem’s title, and setting aside the obviously unsustainable ascription of authorship to Qu Yuan, Kroll presents a new translation of the work, followed by a detailed analysis at the levels of stanza, line, and word, revealing many previously unnoticed features, as well as reviewing and remarking on many of the commentaries of scholars from centuries past.

Our series of eight essays is concluded by Kroll’s second essay, first published in 1996 and today considered a classic of sinological scholarship, “On ‘Far Roaming.’” Traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan, the poem called “Yuan you” 遠遊, or “Far Roaming,” has long been recognized by most scholars as a kind of Daoist version of or response to the “Li sao,” composed by an anonymous Han-dynasty author, or authors. Kroll’s article on this poem, here presented in a slightly revised form, remains one of the few successful and thorough studies in English devoted to an individual *Chuci* poem other than the “Li sao.” In its first part, we find an introductory essay that considers various matters of interpretation, at appropriate moments going well beyond the specific limits of *Chuci* studies and offering befitting references to other poetic traditions. The translation and extensive notes that follow point especially toward “Far Roaming’s” indebtedness to *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Laozi* 老子 and, furthermore, to its own influence later on some of the particular imagery and practices of medieval Daoism.

Such is the scope of the present volume that continues a tradition of two millennia of *Chuci* scholarship with newly original perspectives. Our different approaches and methodologies are united in at least four ways. They are grounded in rigorous scholarship that never departs from close attention to the poetry itself. They challenge some of the most enduring and cherished views of this second beginning—after the *Classic of Poetry*—of Chinese poetry, in particular with respect to China’s first and archetypal poet-hero, Qu Yuan. They celebrate anew the sheer beauty and richness of the *Chuci* in all its diverse voices and expressions. And finally, every essay, each in its own distinct way, shows what we gain when thinking about the *Chuci* not merely in the context of Chinese literature but as one of the great poetic compositions of the ancient world, now globally conceived.