

## THE POETRY OF HAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Looking for early Chinese poetry outside the venerated *Classic of Songs* (*Shi jing* 詩經) and the southern anthology of the *Songs of Chu* (*Chu ci* 楚辭), we are accustomed to turn to the major medieval and later anthologies: first the *Wen xuan* 文選 and the *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠, both dating from the first half of the sixth century, next Guo Maoqian's 郭茂倩 *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 from the early twentieth century.\* The status of these texts rests partly in the fact that they have absorbed and eclipsed earlier—and now long lost—anthologies, and that they are thus our main gate into the world of early and early medieval Chinese song.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these collections, there is a host of poetry anthologies postdating the *Yuefu shiji*; moreover, we find extensive quotations of songs in the classified collectanea (*leishu* 類書), the earliest extant examples of

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<sup>1</sup> In the present paper, I am using the terms “poetry” and “song” to some extent synonymously: every poem discussed here was in fact a song. This poetry needs to be distinguished—to the extent it can be done—from the usually more expansive poetic form of the *fu* 賦 which Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. AD 23) has defined with the words “to recite without singing is called *fu*” (*bu ge er song wei zhi fu* 不歌而誦謂之賦). See *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 30.1755. I will return below to the problem of genre boundaries between the short song (*ge* 歌) and the *fu* 賦.

which date from the early seventh century. However, a look at the most complete collection of pre-Tang poetry, Lu Qinli's 遠欽立 compilation,<sup>2</sup> shows us that a substantial number of these songs were first transmitted as embedded in historiographic narrative. Here, I mean neither a particular historian's attempt to assemble and preserve poetry in the format of the self-contained catalogue, as Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) did with the large collection of songs in the "Yue shu" 樂書 (Book on music) of the *Song shu* 宋書, nor the often encountered phenomenon of someone's biography containing a selection of this person's literary works. I am instead referring to a phenomenon that distinguishes early Chinese historiography from its ancient Greek and Roman counterparts: the seamless inclusion of song in historiographic narrative as an integral element of that narrative, where the composition and/or performance of a song is embedded in a specific narrative context and ascribed to a historical actor, and where song and narrative explain and intensify one another.

While in the format of the anthology, it is left to the (usually later) commentary to furnish the purported context of a song, and thus a particular hermeneutical approach to it, historiography presents the song as speaking to us directly from its own context. Where literary collections preserve each song in isolation from its specific origins, historiography preserves it as a purportedly authentic voice from the past itself. Tied to particular moments of the past, this poetry encapsulates the essence of a dramatic historical moment and in turn is preserved in the remembrance of this moment.<sup>3</sup> The present

<sup>2</sup> *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> While many of these songs were not anthologized outside of historiography, they still attained quasi-canonical status as they remained present—often more so than certain pieces preserved in literary anthologies—along with the famous anecdotes in which they appear. Moreover, the great works of early historiography that preserve these anecdotes and songs were, next to the works of the traditional canon (*jing* 經), at the core of traditional learning. Thus, I slightly deviate from David Schaberg's fine essay, "Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China," *HJAS* 59.2 (1999): 305-61, where non-anthologized songs appear as "non-canonical." Otherwise, I emphatically agree with Schaberg's work which in many aspects has set the stage for the present study. For another valuable study on the inclusion of song in historiographic narrative, this time concerning Chang

paper is an attempt to consider the relation between poetry and historiography in the early imperial period, that is, in the historiography that relates the events of the Western Han. Preserved mostly in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 86 BC) *Shi ji* 史記 and Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92) *Han shu* 漢書, this historiography is the closest we get to the history of the Western Han, even though both works seem to include narratives shaped through anecdotal traditions that in their final versions may extend into Ban Gu's own times.<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of the developing bureaucratic state with its institutions that both required and fostered the circulation of the written text,<sup>5</sup> and in a literary culture that in Han times was largely defined by the often expansive form of the *fu* 賦, the poetic mode of the shorter song, invariably understood as a performance genre, enjoyed a steady presence on various layers of social and textual practice. In the narratives of early historiography, songs often appear as markers of significant moments and are frequently related to strong claims of truth, emotion, morality, and authenticity. This applies to the elaborately orchestrated imperial sacrificial hymns, to the extemporized lyrics of a hero or lover in the moment of physical or emotional devastation, and to anonymous ditties foretelling political

Qu's 常璩 (ca. 291-ca. 361) *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志, see J. Michael Farmer, "A Person of the State Composed a Poem: Poetry of Praise and Blame in the *Huayang guo zhi*" (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> I hold this to be true not only for the *Han shu* but also for the *Shi ji*. However, the issue of the authenticity of certain *Shi ji* narratives and their relation to their *Han shu* counterparts is controversial; for a list of recent contributions, pro and con, see Kern, "The 'Biography of Sima Xiangru' and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian's *Shi ji*," *JAOS* 123.2 (2003): 303 n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> I have written on this development on several occasions; see Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *Wen* in Early China," *TP* 87.1-3 (2001): 43-91; Feature Article on Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, *China Review International* 7.2 (2000): 336-76; "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, 2003), 27-72; "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*," *HJAS* 63.2 (2003): 383-437; "Chutu wenxian yu wenhua jiyi: *Shi jing* zaoqi lishi yanjiu" 出土文獻與文化記憶：詩經早期歷史研究, *Zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學 25 (2004, forthcoming).

calamity or lamenting the hardships of the common people. In no few passages of Han historiography, when events turn dramatic, words begin to rhyme.

The fact that songs were acceptable and plausible in such a historiographic function points to the actual presence of a broader song culture not only at the imperial court but also beyond. To get an idea about this presence in Western Han times, the first source to consult is the section on *fu* and *geshi* 歌詩 (song lyrics) in the *Han shu* “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 (Monograph on arts and letters) where, in addition to 1005 *fu*, also 316 song lyrics are listed.<sup>6</sup> The list is neither complete nor impartial. It begins with an entry “Gaozu geshi er pian” 高祖歌詩二篇 that commentators believe refers to two songs by Liu Bang 劉邦 (Han Gaozu 漢高祖, reigned as emperor 202-195 BC) preserved in *Shi ji* and *Han shu*;<sup>7</sup> next come two cycles of fourteen and five sacrificial hymns that together are likely to refer to Emperor Wu’s 武 (r. 141-87 BC) repertoire of state sacrificial hymns, the “Jiaosi ge” 郊祀歌 (Songs for the sacrifices at the suburban altars),<sup>8</sup> and thirty-five songs related to military expeditions,

<sup>6</sup> HS 30.1753-55. See also Gu Shi 顧實, *Han shu Yiwen zhi jiangshu* 漢書藝文志講疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1987), 184-9. The *Han shu* itself gives the total of the songs listed as 314; in fact, there are two more. The authoritative Western work on Han poetry is still 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). Anne Birrell’s book *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China* (rev., Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), even in its revised form that takes into account much of criticism the original publication had received, is too flawed to be a reliable guide.

<sup>7</sup> *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 8.389, 55.2047, HS 1B.74, 40.2036.

<sup>8</sup> For the “Jiaosi ge,” see HS 22.1052-70; for a translation and study, see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 174-303. In the “Yiwen zhi,” the fourteen pieces are called “Miscellaneous song lyrics for [the sacrifices to] Taiyi at the Palace of Longevity in Ganquan” (Taiyi za Ganquan shougong geshi 泰一雜甘泉壽宮歌詩), and the other five songs are listed as “Song lyrics for the ancestral temple” (Zongmiao geshi 宗廟歌詩). For the assumption that together they are the nineteen “Jiaosi ge,” see Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Han shu buzhu* 漢書補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 30.56b. Gu Shi, *Han shu Yiwen zhi jiangshu*, believes that the five

imperial inspection tours and pleasure excursions together with some songs attributed to members of the imperial court. The military and excursion songs are suspected to match to some extent the eighteen Nao ge 饒歌 (Songs for nao-bells) that are first preserved, albeit in severely corrupted form, in the “Book on music” of Shen Yue’s *Song shu* from the early sixth century.<sup>9</sup> A Western Han date of these songs, however, is not supported by any particular evidence. The other titles of the “Yiwen zhi” section on short songs are even more obscure. Most, if not all, of these songs are lost. The few cases where scholars have related an early collective title from the “Yiwen zhi” to some songs that are only transmitted in much later collections remain speculative.

One must keep in mind that the listings in the “Yiwen zhi” represent, albeit in abridged form, the catalogue of the late Western Han imperial library, initially compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BC) and titled “Bie lu” 別錄 (Separate listings), that followed an imperial decree of 26 BC to collect and bring into order the writings from all over the empire.<sup>10</sup> After Liu Xin had condensed the “Bie lu” into the “Qi lue” 七略 (Seven epitomes), Ban Gu further abbreviated the catalogue when adopting it for his *Han shu*. That this last surviving version of the Western Han imperial catalogue was

hymns presented in the ancestral temple are the first five of the nineteen “Jiaosi ge,” the hymns directed toward the guardian spirits of the five directions, including the center (p. 184). Substantial evidence speaks against this suggestion. The five hymns presented in the ancestral temple are most likely those pieces from the “Jiaosi ge” that celebrate the appearance of auspicious omens, that is, the hymns numbered 10, 12, 13, 17, and 18 in *Han shu* chapter 22; for the full argument, see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 174-5.

<sup>9</sup> See *Song shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 22.640-4; *Yuefu shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 16.223-32; Lu Qinli, 1: 155-62. For an excellent discussion, see Lu Kanru 陸侃如 and Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君, *Zhongguo shishi* 中國詩史 (Jinan: Shandong Daxue, 1996), 162-70. See also Suzuki Shūji 鈴木修次, *Kan Gi shi no kenkyū* 漢魏詩の研究 (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1967), 123-51; Zhang Yongxin 張永鑫, *Han yuefu yanjiu* 漢樂府研究 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1992), 167-72; Xiao Difei 蕭滌非, *Han Wei Liuchao yuefu wenxueshi* 漢魏六朝樂府文學史 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 47-59.

<sup>10</sup> HS 10.310 and 30.1701.

selective appears from a range of recently excavated manuscripts that find no counterpart in the “Yiwen zhi” listings. Moreover, there is evidence of deliberate censorship already in the *Han shu* itself.<sup>11</sup> I suspect that the songs listed in the “Yiwen zhi” were mostly, or perhaps even exclusively, those performed by the Office of Music (*yuefu* 樂府), an imperial institution that by the time it was abolished in 7 BC included no less than 829 musicians to provide the music for the state sacrifices and to practice the tunes from various regional traditions.<sup>12</sup>

It is therefore not surprising to find—in addition to Emperor Wu’s nineteen state sacrificial hymns of the “Jiaosi ge” and Emperor Gaozu’s seventeen ancestral hymns of the “Anshi fangzhong ge” 安世房中歌 (Songs of a pacified age for the inner chamber)<sup>13</sup>—a total of seventy-two songs and proverbs, or fragments of them, purportedly dating from Western Han times and already being included in Western and Eastern Han sources, mostly *Shi ji* and *Han shu*.<sup>14</sup> Not all of them may come from the Western Han; yet even where their actual date of composition might fall near to that of the composition of the *Han shu*, they still belonged to the lore of early imperial times and are thus more reliable than the pieces that are only preserved in the *Song shu* and subsequent sources (which include much later, and again extensive, elaborations on that lore). Some—or many—of the songs preserved only in later works may come from an early period, and perhaps even from the Western Han. But the evidence for such

<sup>11</sup> In *HS* 51.2367, Ban Gu notes that in addition to the one hundred and twenty *fu* that the “Yiwen zhi” lists for Mei Gao 枚叟 (fl. 130-110 BC), there were “several dozen” more pieces “too frivolous to be readable” (*you manxi bu ke du zhe* 尤嫚戲不可讀者).

<sup>12</sup> See *HS* 22.1072-4. For the history of the Office of Music, see Zhang Yongxin, *Han yuefu yanjiu*, 45-81; Anne M. Birrell, “Mythmaking and Yüeh-fu: Popular Songs and Ballads of Early Imperial China,” *JAOS* 109.2 (1989): 223-35; Masuda Kiyohide 増田清秀, *Gafu no rekishiteki kenkyû* 樂府の歴史的研究 (Tokyo: Sôbunsha, 1975), 16-31; Suzuki Shûji, *Kan Gi shi no kenkyû*, 90-115; and Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 193-210.

<sup>13</sup> *HS* 22.1046-51. For a translation and study of the “Anshi fangzhong ge,” see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 100-73.

<sup>14</sup> See Lu Qinli, 1: 87-143.

an assumption is thin at best, and usually not existing at all. Rarely does one find even a tentative suggestion at a song’s original circumstances. This is not to imply that there were no songs during the Western Han beyond those recorded in our earliest sources. But the uncounted pieces that must have existed at that time do not need to be those that the later tradition has retrospectively assigned to the Han.

In more specific terms, it remains difficult to locate the rise of pentasyllabic verse prior to late Western or early Eastern Han times. The only two pentasyllabic songs that purportedly come from the second century BC and are preserved in an Eastern Han source are: (a) the piece Li Yannian 李延年 (ca. 140-87 BC) is said to have composed about his sister, Emperor Wu’s favorite consort Li 李; and (b) the piece attributed to Emperor Gaozu’s consort, Lady Qi 戚夫人. Li Yannian’s song is famous for the striking image in the second couplet:

北方有佳人  
絕世而獨立  
一顧傾人城  
再顧傾人國  
寧不知傾城與傾國

佳人難再得

In the north, there is a beauty;  
Unique in her own era, she stands alone.  
With one glance, she topples a city;  
with a second glance, she topples a state.  
How could we not know her toppling the city  
and toppling the state?

Yet such a beauty will be hard to find again.<sup>15</sup>

The song is part of the historical romance surrounding the emperor and his lover. Together with the romance, it likely developed only over the decades following Emperor Wu’s reign, ultimately postdating the emperor’s life—and Li Yannian’s—by generations. The final version of the romance, and perhaps also the final version of the song, might be closer in time to Ban Gu’s composition of the *Han shu* than to the late second century BC.

Lady Qi was a secondary wife of the late founding emperor, Liu Bang. Their son, Liu Ruyi 劉如意, became enfeoffed as the Prince of Zhao 趙王, and Lady Qi hoped—ultimately in vain (see below)—to finally have him installed as heir apparent. After Liu Bang’s death, Empress Dowager Lü (d. 188 BC), Liu Bang’s main wife and mother of the new emperor, immediately incarcerated Lady Qi, cut off her

<sup>15</sup> *HS* 97A.3951. For textual variants of the song in numerous later sources, see Lu Qinli, 1: 102.

hair, tied her neck, put her in prisoner's clothes, and ordered her to pound grain. While pounding, Lady Qi sang the following song:

子為王	The son is a prince,
母為虜	the mother is a slave.
終日春薄莫	All day I pound, to the fall of the night,
常與死為伍	and frequently make company with the dead.
相隔三千里	We are separated by three thousand <i>li</i> —
當誰使告女	whom can I ask to let you know! <sup>16</sup>

The song, consisting of two trisyllabic and four pentasyllabic lines, is said to have triggered the fury of the Empress Dowager who then executed Liu Ruyi and inflicted horrible physical mutilation on Lady Qi. However, the dramatized narrative, graphically depicting the ruthless Empress Dowager as one of most extreme evildoers of all of Chinese history, makes one wonder about the authenticity of certain details of the anecdote as well as of the song. As with the romance of Emperor Wu and Lady Li, we may be reading a narrative that only gradually developed in the historical imagination of subsequent generations, and a song that at some point was put into Lady Li's mouth.

In its reference to making company with the dead, the song attributed to Lady Qi is of a certain prophetic character. In turn, the execution of her son and her own dismemberment are retrospectively reported also in the context of an ominous encounter that the Empress Dowager had with a blue dog (*cang gou* 倉狗)<sup>17</sup> scratching her armpit and then suddenly disappearing. By divination it was determined that the strange creature had been Liu Ruyi's ghost; soon thereafter, the Empress Dowager developed a painful disease at her armpit and died.<sup>18</sup> The event, related in the *Han shu* monograph on omens ("Wu xing zhi" 五行志 [Monograph on the Five Phases])

<sup>16</sup> HS 97A.3937; Lu Qinli, 1: 91.

<sup>17</sup> While the idea of a "blue" dog is certainly strange, and while *cang* can refer to other colors like gray or silver, this strangeness may just be intended, given that the event is understood as a natural anomaly. In Western Han omen records, the appearance of strangely colored animals is part of the repertoire of portents; see for example, the appearance of red geese with five-colored feathers around their necks as celebrated in a state sacrificial hymn of 94/93 BC (HS 22.1069).

<sup>18</sup> HS 27B-A.1397.

shows the circumstances surrounding Lady Qi and her son as part of a larger cosmological framework used to explain historical events. Much of the "Wu xing zhi" was retrospectively constructed, assigning—from a *post factum* perspective—ominous appearances to specific historical developments.<sup>19</sup> Poetry as omen, or coded prophecy, also informs two of the only four other songs preserved in Han sources and attributed to the Western Han that are completely or to a substantial extent pentasyllabic. Three of the four pieces are attributed to the times of Emperors Yuan 元 (r. 48-33 BC) and Cheng 成 (r. 33-7 BC), that is, a time much later than that of Li Yannian and Lady Qi; the fourth one is included in the *Shi ji* but only as part of an addition by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 (ca. 105-ca. 30 BC).<sup>20</sup> A typical anonymous omen song, said to have been circulating among the populace during the reign of Emperor Cheng, can be

<sup>19</sup> I have dealt with this particular characteristic of the "Wu xing zhi" elsewhere; see Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141-87 BC)," *Chūgoku shigaku* 中國史學 10 (2000): 1-31. Earlier studies on Western Han omen interpretation include Wolfram Eberhard, "Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation in der Hanzeit," *Baessler-Archiv* 16: 1-100 [rpt. in Wolfram Eberhard: *Sternkunde und Weltbild im alten China: Gesammelte Aufsätze von Wolfram Eberhard* (Taipei: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Center, 1970)]; Homer H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han*, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938-55), 3: 546-59 [see also the records of solar eclipses, appended to the individual chapters]; Hans Bielenstein, "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 127-43; and Wolfram Eberhard, "The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China," in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 33-70 [German version "Die politische Funktion der Astronomie und der Astronomen in der Han-Zeit," in *Sternkunde und Weltbild im alten China*, 249-74]. These studies, valuable as they are otherwise, did not pay sufficient attention to the fact that the "Wu xing zhi" is an ideological document composed of different chronological layers, and that some of its judgments were intended to reverse earlier interpretations of particular events. In this sense, the "Wu xing zhi" reflects not only a diachronic range of Western Han discussions but also their continuation into Eastern Han times when the chapter was finally organized as part of the *Han shu*.

<sup>20</sup> HS 27B-A.1395, 1396, 90.3674; SJ 126.3209.

found in the pentasyllabic lines that foretell the fall of the Western Han:

邪徑敗良田	Irregular paths destroy the good field,
讒口亂善人	slandorous mouths bring disorder among fine men.
桂樹華不實	The cinnamon tree blossoms without bearing fruit,
黃鸝巢其顛	a yellow sparrow nests in its top.
故為人所羨	In the past it was the envy of men,
今為人所憐	today it is what men pity. <sup>21</sup>

The *Han shu*, explicitly assuming a post-Western Han perspective, decodes the text along the color symbolism of Five Phases cosmology: because the cinnamon tree bears red blossoms, it is a symbol of the Han ruling house; that it bears no fruit refers to its being without an heir; because Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9-23) would later declare yellow the color of his rule, he is symbolized in the song by the yellow sparrow. Thus, the ruling house has become “what men pity.”

Another anonymous pentasyllabic song, also dated into the final years of Emperor Cheng’s reign, expresses collective grief over the large-scale execution of several hundred criminals and other unruly persons whom the “oppressive official” (*kuli* 酷吏) Yin Shang 尹賞<sup>22</sup> had buried alive in order to quell widespread crime in Chang’an at a time when the emperor reportedly neglected his governmental duties. Only a hundred days after the execution were the families allowed to dig out their dead and bury them properly. Crying and sobbing, the relatives walked through the streets of Chang’an:

安所求子死	Where shall we search for our sons’ corpses?
桓東少年場	East of the memorial column, the field of young men.
生時諒不謹	When alive, they truly were not cautious;
枯骨後何葬	their withered bones—so late, how can we bury them? <sup>23</sup>

Nothing signals the historiographer’s ambivalence toward “oppressive officials” better than this song. Unlike the embedding narrative, it

<sup>21</sup> HS 17B-A.1396. Lu Qinli, 1: 126.

<sup>22</sup> *Kuli* is the designation for oppressive officials who received a collective biography in *Han shu* chapter 90. For his ability to enact draconic measures, Yin Shang was successively appointed to several regions where crime had become rampant. For his biography, see HS 90.3673-5.

<sup>23</sup> HS 90.3674; Lu Qinli, 1: 123.

shows the reader that even though most of Yin Shang’s victims might have been criminals—a fact even acknowledged in the song itself—they also belonged to the common people of the imperial city and had relatives, especially parents, to lament their horrible fate that even denied them a proper burial. The historian leaves no doubt where to lay the blame: the situation in Chang’an had gotten out of control because “the emperor was idle in attending to his government, and his prized consort was arrogant and unrestrained” (*shang dai yu zheng, guiqi jiaoci* 上怠於政，貴戚驕恣).<sup>24</sup> The song, expressing the pain of the common people, ultimately is part of the historian’s condemnation of the rule of Emperor Cheng who together with his consort indulged in frivolous behavior.

The *Han shu* not only contains numerous verses attributed to the common folk, it also furnishes the account on how they were gathered at court (and hence available to the historian). A key passage invariably quoted as evidence for the collection of folk songs is the account that the *Han shu* “Liyue zhi” 禮樂志 (Monograph on ritual and music) provides for the Office of Music. It is possible that here, the relevant phrase *caishi yesong* 采詩夜誦 (“[the emperor had the office] select songs for nocturnal recitation”) refers narrowly to the selection of songs for the imperial ritual but not to the general gathering of songs from the populace.<sup>25</sup> However, other *Han shu* passages claim the collection of folk songs in less ambiguous language. The “Yiwen zhi” speaks of an ancient “office of collecting songs” (*cai shi zhi guan* 采詩之官) through which “the (Zhou) king observed the local customs, learned about achievements and failures, and [thus was able to] examine and rectify himself” (*wangzhe suoyi guan fengsu, zhi deshi, zi kaozheng ye* 王者所以觀風俗，知得失，自考正也).<sup>26</sup> The same chapter also mentions the Office of Music as “selecting” or “collecting” (*cai* 采 can mean either one) “songs and ditties” (*geyao* 歌謠);<sup>27</sup> here, the reference to

<sup>24</sup> HS 90.3673.

<sup>25</sup> HS 22.1045. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581-645) is the most influential commentator understanding the passage as referring to the gathering of folk songs by the government. It is to be noted that this passage—just as other parts of the “Liyue zhi”—has serious textual problems; see below.

<sup>26</sup> HS 30.1708.

<sup>27</sup> HS 30.1756.

“ditties” clearly suggests songs of folk origin. Finally, expanding on the earlier *yueling* 月令 (Monthly ordinances) schemes, a passage in the *Han shu* “Shihuo zhi” 食貨志 (Monograph on food and goods) notes that in the first month of spring, the emperor sent out messengers with wooden clappers (*muduo* 木鐸) who strolled the roads and collected songs. These airs were then presented to the music master who arranged them according to the musical standard pitches in order to make them audible to the Son of Heaven; therefore, the ruler knew the realm without leaving the door.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> HS 24A.1123. Here, Yan Shigu identifies the collected songs as those expressing the resentment of the populace and its criticism of the ruler. It should be noted that although the “Shihuo zhi” pattern of “in the first month of spring...” (*mengchun zhi yue* 孟春之月) is based on the earlier “Monthly ordinances” that appear in a variety of sources (primarily *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and *Li ji* 禮記, and in fragments also discernable in *Zuo zhuan*, *Zhou li* 周禮 and elsewhere), the collection of songs is not mentioned in any of these calendaric contexts. Moreover, the early texts unanimously show the kingly messenger with the wooden clapper not as a collector of opinions emerging from the population, but, on the contrary, as a representative of the ruler, elucidating the laws and issuing (often seasonal) warnings and prohibitions to the people; see *Zhou li zhushu* 周禮注疏 [Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 十三經注疏附校勘記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987)], 3.17a, 3.19c, 11.75b, 11.76c, 35.236c, 36.247c; *Li ji zhengyi* 禮記正義 [Ruan Yuan, *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji*], 10.85a, 15.134a, 31.262a.

The only text possibly predating Eastern Han times that can be related to the collection of popular songs is the *Li ji* chapter “Wang zhi” 王制 (Kingly regulations; see *Li ji zhengyi* 11.100b) saying that in the second month of spring, the ruler “commands the Great Music Master to display the songs in order to [let the king] observe the customs of the folk” (*ming dashi chen shi yi guan minfeng* 命大師陳詩以觀民風). Here, the reference to collecting songs from the people is only implicit. Moreover, it is not clear how to date the “Wang zhi” chapter. *Shi ji* 28.1382 notes that Emperor Wen (r. 180-157 BC) had ordered the court erudites to “select from the six classics and compose kingly regulations, and to discuss the affairs of the tours of inspection and the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices” (*ci liujing zhong zuo wangzhi, mouyi xunshou fengshan shi* 刺六經中作王制, 謀選巡狩封禪事). However, the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices are not touched upon in the *Li ji*, “Wang zhi” chapter, and it is not clear that *wang zhi* in this passage actually refers to a specific text—not to mention the specific chapter of the *Li ji*—and not to “kingly

Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200), writing a century after the *Han shu* compilation, expresses a similar idea with regard to the ancient *Odes* (*Shi* 詩).<sup>29</sup> The Zhou and Western Han collection of folk songs thus appears to have been generally assumed by Eastern Han scholars.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, a century later Du Yu 杜預 (222-284), commenting on a *Zuo zhuan* quote from the (lost) “Documents of Xia” (“Xia shu” 夏書), argues that the kingly messengers (*qiuren* 遣人) with wooden clappers were gathering songs and ditties among the populace.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the “Liyue zhi” and “Yiwen zhi” accounts of the Office of Music contain strong regional elements, mentioning in

regulations” in general. In other words, the usual dating of the “Wang zhi” chapter into the reign of Emperor Wen, which rests exclusively on this passage, is at best tentative; the chapter may well be an Eastern Han compilation out of a larger body of earlier and newly composed materials. In short, no text that can be safely dated before the Eastern Han contains the notion of collecting poetry among the common people.

<sup>29</sup> See *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji*), “Shipu xu” 詩譜序, 3. Here, Zheng Xuan’s otherwise lost statement is quoted in the early Tang “correct meaning” (*zhengyi* 正義) commentary to the *Mao shi*.

<sup>30</sup> Recent scholarship has occasionally challenged the *Han shu* assertions on the Western Han Office of Music’s collecting folk songs: see Yao Daye 姚大業, *Han yuefu xiaolun* 漢樂府小論 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1984), 1-11; Zhang Yongxin, *Han yuefu yanjiu*, 57-64; Anne Birrell, “Mythmaking and Yüeh-fu: Popular Songs and Ballads of Early Imperial China.” The case against the collecting of folk songs may well be valid (if still only speculative); it fails, however, to appreciate the importance of these clearly idealizing passages not so much for the goal of getting the historical facts right but for lending credit and legitimacy to the inclusion of poetry in the historiographic narrative. This does not make Ban Gu a forger. It is, of course, easy to imagine how a corpus of songs was transmitted to the *Han Shu* compiler together with an idealizing account of their proper function, use, and collection.

<sup>31</sup> The “Xia shu” passage is only included in the *Shang shu* 尚書 chapter “Yin zheng” 胤征 (*Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 7.45c [Ruan Yuan, *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* ed.]), one of the inauthentic “ancient text” (*guwen* 古文) chapters; the respective passage may be based on the quote in *Zuo zhuan*; for the latter, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993), 1017-8 [Xiang 14].

general terms tunes from the regions of Zhao 趙, Dai 代, Qin 秦, and Chu 楚 that appeared at the imperial court through the agency of the *yuefu*. It can be assumed that most of them were understood as rather recent—Qin and Western Han—compositions, with their assumed folk character doubtlessly implied. Other *Han shu* passages further confirm the presence of such regional and perhaps even foreign songs and tunes in Chang'an court culture during the mid-Western Han, that is, especially under Emperor Wu<sup>32</sup> who—in a dubious passage marred with textual problems—is credited with having “established” (*li* 立) the Office of Music.<sup>33</sup> In its *Han shu*

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent discussion of the literary culture at the Emperor Wu court, see David R. 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), 51-76.

<sup>33</sup> *HS* 22.1045. A passage in *HS* 22.1043 mentions the office already for the year 194/193 BC; it also is mentioned as early as in Jia Yi's 賈誼 (200-168 BC) *Xinshu* 新書 4.4b (*Sbck* 四部叢刊 ed.). Furthermore, the *Han shu* gives two different dates for the “establishment” of the Office of Music under Emperor Wu, 114 BC and 111 BC; see *HS* 22.1045, 25A.1232 (the latter with a parallel also in *SJ* 12.472 and 28.1396). In addition, archaeological evidence shows that an Office of Music is already mentioned on a Qin dynasty bell as well as on a set of eight goudiao 鈎鑼 bells, dating from 129 BC, that come from the tomb of the prince of Nanyue 南越, the so-called Nanyue Emperor Wen 文. See Yuan Zhongyi 袁仲一, “Qin dai jinwen, taowen zakao san ze” 秦代金文陶文雜考三則, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 1982.4: 92-6; Guangzhou shi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 廣州市文物管理委員會, *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo* 中國社會科學院考古研究所, and Guangdong sheng bowuguan 廣東省博物館, *Xi Han Nanyue wang mu* 西漢南越王墓 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1991), 1: 40-5, 2: plates 14.1-4. The *Shi ji* “Yueshu” 樂書 (Book on music) also notes the existence of the Office of Music under Emperors Hui 惠 (r. 195-188 BC), Wen 文 (r. 180-157 BC), and Jing 景 (r. 157-141 BC). While the received “Book on music” postdates Sima Qian's original *Shi ji*, it may still come from late Western or early Eastern Han times. See Kern, “A Note on the Authenticity and Ideology of *Shih-chi* 24, ‘The Book on Music,’” *JAOS* 119.4 (1999): 673-7.

As for Emperor Wu “establishing” the Office of Music, it is not clear how to approach the *Han shu* passage in question. Either the text is corrupt, or it is written not by same author who noted the existence of the Office of Music already for

representation, however, the song culture of the Western Han was deeply embedded in music, which was the concern proper of the Office of Music. This is particularly true for the hymns and dances of the imperial sacrifices but indeed goes beyond these.<sup>34</sup> The “Yiwen zhi” contains two listings that seem to refer to melodies in addition to the lyrics of certain groups of regional songs: the entry for seven “Henan Zhou geshi” 河南周歌詩 (Zhou song lyrics from south of the [Yellow] River) is accompanied by one for seven “Henan Zhou ge shengquzhe” 河南周歌聲曲折 (Musical notations [?] for Zhou songs from south of the [Yellow] River); a similar entry is added to seventy-five “Zhou yao geshi” 周謠歌詩 (Ditties and song lyrics from the Zhou).<sup>35</sup> In both entries, the meaning of the term *shengquzhe* 聲曲折 is not entirely clear. Yet as the “Yiwen zhi” is the record of written documents, the term most likely refers to some kind of musical notation.<sup>36</sup>

194/193 BC, or *li* does not mean—as for example Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 467-522) in his *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 [Zhan Ying 詹鍈, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1989), 7.235] understood it—*shi li* 始立 (“initially established”) but should better be taken as “reinstated,” “reorganized,” or “established in a new function.” Another problem of the passage in *HS* 22.1045 is that it credits Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 BC) with the composition of songs and *fu* for the Office of Music. However, Sima had died several years before the office assumed its new functions and cannot have contributed to its hymns (the dates of which are, incidentally, often confused in the “Liyue zhi” and contradicted by other accounts in the *Han shu*). See Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 59-60, 174-85, 299-300. Interestingly, and inexplicably, Sima Xiangru's authorship is also mentioned in *HS* 93.3725; on the other hand, the parallel passage in *SJ* 125.3195 does not include Sima.

<sup>34</sup> In accordance with Zhou ritual traditions, dance was a central element in the imperial sacrifices. See *HS* 22.1043-4. These dances were partly inherited from Zhou and Qin times, and they continued to be emulated in subsequent dynasties when they also became lyrics assigned to them. For the full account on the dances of Han and Six Dynasties times, see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 53-95.

<sup>35</sup> *HS* 30.1755.

<sup>36</sup> For the same conclusion, see Wang Xianqian, *Han shu buzhu* 30.58a and Gu Shi, *Han shu Yiwen zhi jiangshu*, 188. The only other trace of musical notations accompanying early Chinese poetry has been tentatively identified in



The emphasis on the musical performance of songs is also evident from the dominant regional song style at the Western Han imperial court, that in Han historiography is called either *Chu ge* 楚歌 (Chu songs) or *Chu sheng* 楚聲 (Chu melodies). Neither term is known from pre-Han sources, and its prominence in Western Han times can be related to the southern origin of the Liu 劉 imperial family. A strong southern influence on Western Han imperial literary culture manifests itself especially in the main poetic genre of the Han, the *fu*,<sup>37</sup> as well as in Emperor Wu's "Jiaosi ge" and some of his own compositions. In addition, *Shi ji* and *Han shu* offer three explicit references to "Chu songs" or "Chu melodies." First, in 202 BC, in his fateful night at Gaixia 垓下 (southeast of modern Lingbi 靈璧 county, Anhui), Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 BC) realized that his camp was encircled by Liu Bang's troops because he heard "Chu songs" from all sides.<sup>38</sup> Second, Emperor Gaozu's "Fangzhong yue" 房中樂 (Music for the inner [sacrificial] chamber)—the music for the ancestral sacrifice—is said to have been composed of "Chu melodies" to honor the southern origins of the imperial house.<sup>39</sup> (Indeed, certain traces of southern poetic diction and imagery can be found in some of the "Anshi fangzhong ge" that date from between 202 and 195 BC and in the *Han shu* are related to the "Fangzhong yue."<sup>40</sup> However, these hymns are also close to the classicist Qin

the transmitted form of the "Nao ge." Referring to their often garbled syntax, Shen Yue has speculated that their received text of his time—which may or may not be identical with our received text—was the result of a scribal conflation of the characters writing the lyrics proper with the accompanying, perhaps smaller, characters containing musical information. Shen Yue is quoted in *Yuefu shiji* 19.285; for the consideration on the "Nao ge," see *Yuefu shiji* 16.228. One of the characters that probably belonged to the musical notation is *liang* 梁 which seems to have been used—among several early songs—in a musicological sense in text eight of the "Jiaosi ge." See *HS* 22.1058; Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 217, 223.

<sup>37</sup> All historical accounts of the Western Han *fu* emphasize the roots of this genre in the southern literary culture that since Han times has been represented in the anthology of the *Chu ci* 楚辭, and partly also in southern rhetoric.

<sup>38</sup> *SJ* 7.333, 8.379; *HS* 1B.50, 31.1817.

<sup>39</sup> *HS* 22.1043.

<sup>40</sup> See Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 169-73.

imperial stele inscriptions, erected between 219 and 210 BC, that had been recited before being carved into stone.)<sup>41</sup> Third, in 195 BC, Han Gaozu addressed his consort, Lady Qi, who had hoped her son Liu Ruyi to become the heir: "Perform a Chu dance for me, and I will sing you a Chu song"—which he then actually did. In his song, traditionally referred to as "Song on the Swan" ("Honghu ge" 鴻鵠歌), the emperor declared that the established heir apparent enjoyed the strong support of high court officials and thus could not be removed:

鴻鵠高飛  
一舉千里  
羽翼以就  
橫絕四海  
橫絕四海  
又可奈何  
雖有矰繳  
尚安所施

The swan flies high,  
rising once, it traverses a thousand *li*.  
Its feathered wings in perfection,<sup>42</sup>  
it passes straight across the four seas.  
It passes straight across the four seas,  
and what can be done!  
Although one has arrows with cords,  
still, how can they be used!<sup>43</sup>

The emperor's song of eight tetrasyllabic lines is the only specific text called "Chu song" in early sources. Yet nothing in its simple, almost colloquial diction suggests any relation to the southern-style poetry known from the *Chu ci* anthology, the *fu*, or the "Jiaosi ge."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), and *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 108-9, 153-9, 164-8. Altogether, the seventeen "Anshi fangzhong ge" are too diverse in their form and diction to be consistently related to the southern literary tradition. Despite some scattered elements of literary features that have parallels in the *Chu ci* anthology, most of texts are firmly rooted in the traditional diction and vocabulary of the ancient *Odes* and Zhou bronze inscriptions.

<sup>42</sup> The bird supported by his wings is a common image of a ruler supported by his ministers. Here, it refers to the crown prince Liu Ying 劉盈, the later Emperor Hui 惠 (r. 195-188 BC), and his strong supporters at court who stopped the emperor when he was willing to replace Liu Ying by Liu Ruyi.

<sup>43</sup> *SJ* 55.2047, *HS* 40.2036. I am translating the song after its *Han shu* version. For the textual variants in *Shi ji* and in later sources, see Lu Qinli, 1: 88.

<sup>44</sup> This has caused commentators some trouble. Zheng Wen 鄭文, *Han shi xuanjian* 漢詩選箋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), for example, believes that there originally was the particle *xi* 兮 after the uneven lines, but that it was deleted

Moreover, its tetrasyllabic meter does not point to a particular musical form distinct from the classical tradition; the same is true for some other Western Han pieces related to the imperial house.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while the terms “Chu dance,” “Chu song,” and “Chu melodies” obviously refer to literary and musical performances, and while the ability to perform literary compositions from Chu (or in Chu style) was considered unusual at the Western Han court,<sup>46</sup> the historiographic account does not provide sufficient evidence to determine what exactly distinguished these poetic and musical performances as being in Chu style. However, pieces like Emperor Gaozu’s “Honghu ge” and the mostly tetrasyllabic hymns of the “Anshi fangzhong ge” notwithstanding, the majority of Western Han songs attributed to members of the Liu family and other prominent early Han figures display certain metric features that not only depart from the classical tetrasyllabic form but also show parallels to the “Jiu ge” 九歌 and other *Chu ci* pieces. The songs were composed in trisyllabic meter or in an alternation of tetra- and trisyllabic lines, and they could often—but did not need to—include the particle *xi* 兮.

Looking for Western Han poetry that in one way or another differed from the classical *Odes* meter, and that can be tentatively related to a southern literary tradition, one finds that beyond the hymns of the imperial sacrifices and other pieces of official representation,<sup>47</sup> most of these songs are attributed to tragic moments of

by the historian (p. 97). Certain much later sources, beginning with Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772-846) *Liutie* 六帖, do include the particle. This has led later commentators to propose that their version is the more original one, going back to Lu Jia’s 陸賈 (ca. 228-ca. 140 BC) lost *Chu Han chungiu* 楚漢春秋 and thus even predating Sima Qian’s *Shi ji*. See Lu Qinli, 1: 88. However, as can be demonstrated by a sufficient number of other examples, Chu songs did not invariably include this particle.

<sup>45</sup> Another example of a simple, tetrasyllabic song comes from Liu Zhang 劉章 (Marquis of Zhuxu 朱虛 and later Prince of Chengyang 城陽, d. 176 BC). See *SJ* 52.2001, *HS* 38.1992.

<sup>46</sup> *HS* 64A.2791, 64B.2821. The *Han shu* here refers to *Chu ci* 楚辭 / 楚詞, a term not to be confused with the title of Wang Yi’s 王逸 (d. AD 158) later anthology.

<sup>47</sup> These include the “Jiaosi ge,” some of the “Anshi fangzhong ge,” Emperor Wu’s two “Huzi ge” 瓠子歌 (Songs at Huzi) on the occasion of the dike repairs at the Yellow River of 109 BC (*SJ* 29.1413; *HS* 29.1682-3; Lu Qinli, 1: 93-4), and

despair and destruction. Here, the historiographic function of song becomes particularly visible. When Xiang Yu, surrounded by Liu Bang’s troops at Gaixia, realized that his end was near, he accepted his fate by extemporizing a song to his favorite consort Yu 虞:

力拔山兮氣蓋世	My force plucked up mountains, my spirit covered the world;
時不利兮騅不逝	but the times do not favor me, and my piebald runs no more.
騅不逝兮可奈何	My piebald runs no more, what can I do?
虞兮虞兮奈若何	Ah Yu, ah Yu, what will become of you? <sup>48</sup>

When Han Gaozu in 195 BC, close to the end of his life, returned for a final visit to his ancestral village in Pei 沛, his song—later anthologized as the “Dafeng ge” 大風歌 (Song on the great wind)—encapsulated the worries of a founding emperor who is ready to leave the world and meditates how his empire may be held together in the future:

大風起兮雲飛揚	A great wind rises, clouds soar upward.
威加海兮歸故鄉	My might extends within the seas, and I return to my hometown.
安得猛士兮守四方	How will I find fierce warriors to guard the four quarters? <sup>49</sup>

Liu You 劉友, the Prince You of Zhao 趙幽王 (d. 181 BC), had been coerced into taking a lady from the Lü clan as his wife while he was actually favoring other palace women; thereupon, he was slandered by the clan. Finally summoned from his principedom of Zhao and incarcerated in Chang’an, and just before being starved to death, he lamented his fate and expressed his regret about not having committed suicide:

the two songs on “Heavenly horses” (*tianma* 天馬; *SJ* 24.1178), that—like their longer counterparts among the “Jiaosi ge” (*HS* 22.1060-1)—may date perhaps from 113 and 101 BC. For the latter, see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 229, 236.

<sup>48</sup> *SJ* 7.333; *HS* 31.1817; Lu Qinli, 1: 89.

<sup>49</sup> *SJ* 8.389; *HS* 1B.74; Lu Qinli, 1: 87.

諸呂用事兮  
劉氏微  
迫脅王侯兮  
疆授我妃  
我妃既妒兮  
誣我以惡  
讒女亂國兮  
上曾不寤兮  
我無忠臣兮  
何故棄國  
自快中野兮  
蒼天與直  
于嗟不可悔兮  
寧早自賊  
為王餓死兮  
誰者憐之  
呂氏絕理兮  
託天報仇

The various Lü [clan members] control  
the affairs,  
the Liu house is withering.<sup>50</sup>  
They coerce princes and nobles,  
forced upon me my consort.  
My consort was just envious,  
she slurred me out of hatred.  
Slandrous women brought disorder to the state,  
yet the one above<sup>51</sup> remained unaware.  
I was without loyal subjects,  
but did not understand to abandon my state.<sup>52</sup>  
I should have ended my own life in the wilderness,  
standing upright toward azure Heaven.  
Alas! It cannot be regretted;  
I had better destroyed myself early.  
Being a prince and starving to death,  
who might pity this!  
As the Lü clan has cut off reason,  
I entrust Heaven with my revenge!<sup>53</sup>

The poetic exchange between Liu Dan 劉旦 (Prince of Yan 燕王, d. 80 BC) and Lady Huarong 華容夫人 took place under no less dramatic circumstances, namely, at a banquet shortly before the prince's suicide because of his failed plot to remove Emperor Zhao 昭 (r. 87-74 BC) and install himself in his place. The first song is by the prince, the second by his consort. According to Yan Shigu, the prince's song is a vision of the city after his death:

<sup>50</sup> The "various Lü" refers to the various members of the Empress Dowager's clan who controlled the court; the Liu house is the imperial house.

<sup>51</sup> Namely, the Empress Dowager.

<sup>52</sup> The line is unclear and is parsed in different ways by traditional commentators. See Wang Xianqian, *Han shu buzhu* 38.2b. In one reading, the line ends with *he gu* 何故 ("why"), with *qi guo* 棄國 ("abandon my state") belonging to the next line. This seems to have been the reading also of Yan Shigu who paraphrased the following two lines as "I regret that I did not earlier abandon my state and decided to kill myself in the wilderness." See *HS* 38.1989.

<sup>53</sup> *SJ* 9.403-4; *HS* 38.1989. With the exception of line six, my translation follows the *HS* version of the text. For variants, see Lu Qinli, 1: 92. In line six, I accept the *SJ* variant *jue* 決 for its *HS* counterpart *kuai* 快.

歸空城兮  
狗不吠雞不鳴  
橫術何廣廣兮  
固知國中之無人  
髮紛紛兮真渠  
骨籍籍兮亡居  
  
母求死子兮  
妻求死夫  
裴回兩渠間兮  
君子獨安居

I return to the empty city—  
the dogs do not bark, the chicken do not cry.  
The crossing streets how desolate, desolate—<sup>54</sup>  
one surely knows the capital is without people.  
My hair is tousled, tousled; blocked up is the canal.<sup>55</sup>  
Bones are criss-crossed, criss-crossed; no place  
to rest.  
A mother is looking for her dead son,  
a wife is looking for her dead husband.  
I will pace back and forth between the two canals;  
you, my noble man, alone will rest peacefully.<sup>56</sup>

Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BC), the unfortunate Commandant of Cavalry who had surrendered to the Xiongnu 匈奴 in 99 BC, failed to persuade his friend Su Wu 蘇武, another captive, to abandon the Han and defect to the Xiongnu. The two parted when Su Wu was finally, after many years, released to return to Chang'an. The emotional moment of separation led Li Ling to burst into song:

徑萬里兮度沙幕  
為君將兮奮匈奴  
路窮決兮矢刃摧  
  
士眾滅兮名已隳  
  
老母已死  
雖欲報恩將安歸

I have crossed ten thousand *li*, traversed the desert;  
I gave you support, battled the Xiongnu.  
The road was exhausted, arrows and blades were  
destroyed;  
Officers and troops extinguished, my name already  
wiped out.  
My old mother is already dead—  
although I wish to repay her kindness, where could I  
return?<sup>57</sup>

The gruesome Liu Qu 劉去 (Prince of Guangchuan 廣川王, d. 71 BC) was, by account of the *Han shu*, a monstrous sadist driven by

<sup>54</sup> I follow the Qing commentators, especially Wang Niansun 王念孫 (1744-1832), who read *guang* 廣 as *kuang* 曠. See Wang Xianqian, *Han shu buzhu* 63.13a.

<sup>55</sup> I am not sure I understand this line. According to Yan Shigu, the canal refers to a waterway within the palace compound, connecting ponds at the site of the banquet hall. Traditional commentators have refrained from explaining the meaning of this image.

<sup>56</sup> *HS* 63.2757; Lu Qinli, 1: 108-9.

<sup>57</sup> *HS* 54.2466; Lu Qinli, 1: 109. The emperor had Li Ling's family, including his mother, wiped out after his defection to the Xiongnu.

sexual jealousy who together with his consort and later queen Yangcheng Zhaoxin 陽成昭信 in the end had tortured and killed no less than sixteen persons (among them fourteen of his consorts). His brief biography includes two of his songs. With the first, he accused his consort Tao Wangqing 陶望卿 of infidelity before torturing her; she finally escaped only to drown herself in a well. The villain's song, performed at a banquet, ominously announces the fate ready to befall his consort:

背尊章嫖以忽	You turned your back on your honorable standards, fluttering in negligence. <sup>58</sup>
謀屈奇起自絕	Devising the crooked and the strange, you gave rise to your own extinction.
行周流自生患	Moving freely around, you created worries for yourself.
諒非望今誰怨	Trust is not what you cared for—today, against whom do you harbor resentment? <sup>59</sup>

The *Han shu* account portrays Liu Qu as an extremely cruel man, yet also as a weak person controlled by Yangcheng Zhaoxin. On her proposal, all his other consorts were locked into their quarters and allowed to emerge from them only for banquets. Pitying the ladies, Liu Qu composed a song. He ordered Yangcheng Zhaoxin to accompany him by rhythmic drumming as to instruct the harem ladies on how to perform the piece:

愁莫愁居無聊	Of sadness, nothing more sad than to dwell with nothing to rely upon.
心重結意不舒	Your hearts are tied up in manifold ways, your minds are not at ease.
內菲鬱憂哀積	With melancholy nurtured inside, sorrows and grief pile up.
上不見天生何益	Above, you do not see the sky—what gain is there in living?
日崔隤時不再	Your days are wasted, your time will not come twice.
願棄軀死無悔	If you are willing to abandon your bodies, in death you will be without regret. <sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> According to Yan Shigu, *zun zhang* 尊章 (“honored standard”) refers to a woman's parents-in-law.

<sup>59</sup> *HS* 53.2429; Lu Qinli, 1: 110.

It is only with this song and its immediate introduction that the prince appears as more than a grisly killer in pursuit of sexual excess. Pitying his consorts, he seems able to feel their pain and frustration. This gesture of humaneness is offered in response, and in contrast, to the merciless and cold-blooded terror exerted by Yangcheng Zhaoxin, showing the prince both as capable of human feeling and as unable to restrain his principal wife. Only from this constellation does Liu Qu—who earlier in his life had been educated in the classics and had mastered the *Yi* 易 (*Changes*), *Lun yu* 論語 (*Analects*), and *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of filial piety*)<sup>61</sup>—emerge as a more complex character with inner conflicts, fully self-conscious of the enormous gap that had opened between the moral demands on an imperial prince and the horrors he actually inflicted on others. It is the song, in other words, that epitomizes him as a genuinely tragic figure whose failures are, ultimately, failures of the imperial house. Following Liu Qu's two songs, the historiographic narrative offers further elaboration on his excesses; from here, the reader trained to read the signs is prepared for the inevitable outcome—the prince's demotion and final suicide, together with his wife's public execution.<sup>62</sup>

Another example of probably southern verse placed in dramatic circumstances is the song performed by Liu Xu 劉胥 (Prince of Guangling 廣陵王, d. 54 BC) at a banquet, immediately after which he hanged himself. Parallel to certain other situations where the historian included a song of despair, Liu Xu's suicide is tied to a failed attempt toward imperial succession. In his case, he had repeatedly employed the female medium (*nüwu* 女巫) Li Nüxu 李女須 to utter imprecations first against Emperor Zhao and later against Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 74-48 BC), hoping to bring about their death (and retrospectively crediting the medium with the death of Emperor Zhao). When after some period of interruption, he again had the medium curse Emperor Xuan, a string of strange omens is

<sup>60</sup> *HS* 53.2431; Lu Qinli, 1: 110.

<sup>61</sup> *HS* 53.2428. In this context, he also is noted for being fond of elegant phrasing (*wenci* 文辭), the various techniques of prognostication, medicine, divination, etc. (*fangji* 方技), board-games (*boyi* 博奕), and musical entertainment (*changyou* 倡優).

<sup>62</sup> *HS* 53.2432.

reported to have appeared at Liu Xu's palace: a jujube tree was growing more than ten stems, all of them deep red, while their leaves were pure white; water in a pond turned red, killing all the fish; in broad daylight, rats performed a dance in the courtyard of the princely wife—in Han historiography, all sure signs of imminent disaster. When a few months later his imprecations against Emperor Xuan were discovered, the prince was terrified and poisoned the female medium together with more than twenty palace ladies to silence them. Facing the prospect of imperial punishment, he held a farewell banquet during which his relatives played the zither and performed dances and songs. Finally, the prince himself began to sing:

欲久生兮無終	Forever I wished to live, without reaching the end,
長不樂兮安窮	yet for long unhappy, when will [my fate] be exhausted!
奉天期兮不得須臾	Having received my span allotted by Heaven, I do not have another instant.
千里馬兮駐待路	The thousand- <i>li</i> steed—it rests at the station, prepares for the road.
黃泉下兮幽深	At Yellow Springs below, darkness is deep.
人生要死	Man is born and will die—
何為苦心	why be of a bitter heart!
何用為樂心所喜	What shall one use for pleasure—just what the heart enjoys!
出入無悵為樂亟	My comings and goings are without joy, pleasure is brief.
蒿里召郭門閤	From artemisia village comes the call, at the city gate the inspection. <sup>63</sup>
死不得取代	In death I get none to replace me.
庸身自逝	By myself I depart. <sup>64</sup>

Like other early singers, Liu Xu showed determination and proleptic

<sup>63</sup> Yan Shigu glosses *haoli* 蒿里 (“artemisia village”) as “the village of the dead” (*sirenli* 死人里). Located near Mt. Tai (see *SJ* 28.1402), it was regarded as the place where the dead move into the netherworld; see also the anonymous song “Hao li” in Lu Qinli, 1: 257.

<sup>64</sup> *HS* 63.2762; Lu Qinli, 1: 111. In the final couplet, I follow the parsing and interpretation suggested by Wang Niansun (as quoted in Wang Xianqian, *Han shu buzhu* 63.16b).

insight: following the banquet at which he announced his death, he hanged himself; thereafter, his sons were reduced to commoner status and his princedom was abolished. The expression of prophecy in verse is also strongly present with the figure of Xifu Gong 息夫躬 (d. 1 BC) who, while awaiting imperial appointment, expressed his fears about meeting an untimely and violent death. His text is not called a “song” (*ge* 歌) in the *Han shu* but a “poetic composition” (*ci* 辭) in the phrase “he made a composition on ending one’s fate” (*zhu jueming ci* 著絕命辭)<sup>65</sup>—an expression that seems to bring the piece closer to the *fu* 賦.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, the piece was later anthologized under the title “Jueming ci” 絕命辭 (Composition on ending one’s fate).

<sup>66</sup> In Western Han times, the words *ci* and *fu* were largely interchangeable and also combined in the binome *cifu*. For the latter, see *SJ* 117.2999; *HS* 57A.2529, 64B.2829. For example, Qu Yuan’s 屈原 works are called *fu* in his *Shi ji* biography (*SJ* 84.2486, 2491) but *ci* in Sima Qian’s “Taishi gong zixu” 太史公自序 (*SJ* 130.3314). The difference between *fu* and *ge* 歌 seems somewhat easier to grasp, if only in terms of different modes of performance. I would indeed argue that throughout Western Han times, no clear-cut concept of genre existed to distinguish poetic texts according to difference in literary form. The only distinction offered at all—“to recite without singing (*ge*) is called *fu*”—refers to the presence or absence of “singing”; accordingly, when a Han source mentions a composition as *ge*, it only implies that it was sung but does not elaborate on any formal characteristics of the literary text itself. On the other hand, songs—and especially songs extemporized in a dramatic historical moment, like those cited in the present paper—tended to be (a) relatively short and (b) relatively simple in their diction, in particular when compared to the elaborate works of the “grand *fu*” (*da fu* 大賦) by Sima Xiangru and others that could easily run through hundreds of lines and were filled with rare expressions and complex sound patterns. Thus, while there certainly was a gray area where *ge* and *fu* overlapped in their poetic structure, the two types can be formally distinguished when choosing examples where their respective characteristics are more pronounced. It is therefore not difficult to see how they were retrospectively—if somewhat anachronistically—defined as separate literary genres.

Yet it should also be noted that the designation *ge* was in Han times extended to songs like the “Jiu ge” or Emperor Wu’s imperial hymns of the “Jiaosi ge” that in their diction are much closer to Sima Xiangru’s *fu* than to any of the extemporized songs included in *Shi ji* and *Han shu*. In any case, Xifu Gong’s text

玄雲泱鬱兮  
將安歸兮  
鷹隼橫厲兮  
鸞鶴徘徊兮  
縵若浮森兮  
動則機兮  
棘棧棧兮  
曷可棲兮  
發忠忘身兮  
自繞罔兮  
冤頸折翼兮  
庸得往兮

涕泣流兮萑蘭  
心結惛兮傷肝  
虹蜺曜兮日微  
孽杳冥兮未開  
痛入天兮鳴諱  
冤際絕兮誰語  
仰天光兮自列

招上帝兮我察  
秋風為我唸  
浮雲為我陰  
嗟若是兮欲何留  
撫神龍兮攬其須  
游曠迴兮反亡期  
雄失據兮世我思

Dark clouds in profusion,  
where are they returning?  
Eagles and hawks in rapid horizontal flight,  
while the simurgh wavers and dithers.  
Corded arrows dashing like strong winds,  
in one movement, they shoot forth.  
Thick-standing jujube trees lush, so lush—  
where can [a simurgh] rest on their top?  
Giving forth my loyalty, I neglected myself;  
I entangled myself in a net!  
My neck bent, my wings folded,  
how can I wander away!

Tears stream down, criss-crossing my face like gauze;  
My heart is confused, my guts hurt.  
Rainbows sparkle, the sun is bleared;  
A light of evil obscurity, not breaking yet.  
My pain penetrates into Heaven, I shout out loud;  
with my grief at its utmost limits, whom can I tell?  
Raising my head toward Heaven's shine, I display  
myself;

I call on God on High, I reveal my persona.  
The autumn wind is my chant,  
the floating clouds are my shade.  
Alas! In straits like these, why still stay on?  
I strike the spirit dragon, holding on to its beard;  
Roaming in vast circuits, I miss the time of return.  
Only when you, the mighty one, lose your support,  
the world will long for me.<sup>67</sup>

Following the song, the biography continues for one more sentence of eight Chinese words: "Several years later, he died—just as according to his composition" (*hou shu nian nai si ru qi wen* 後數年乃死如其文). It is the song that carries the narrative.

remains somewhat in between, as is also reflected by its inclusion in certain traditional and modern collections of poetry (e.g., by Lu Qinli) that otherwise exclude the *fu*. On the other hand, it is introduced by the word *zhu* 著 ("to compose," suggesting a prepared literary composition), and it is not placed in a particular historical moment to which it could be seen as a spontaneous response.

<sup>67</sup> HS 45.2187-8; Lu Qinli, 1: 116.

Finally, there is a song in contemporaneous meter attributed to Liu Xijun 劉細君, the daughter of the Prince of Jiangdu 江都, who during the *yuanfeng* 元封 period (110-105 BC) was sent as a bride to the leader of the Central Asian state of Wusun and is thus also known as the Wusun Princess 烏孫公主. According to the *Han shu*, the Wusun leader was already old, and he and his young Chinese wife did not understand each other's tongue; moreover, the princess saw him only once a year at a banquet. Her bitter complaint combines two topoi familiar from early poetry and historiography: the lament of the lonely wife and the distress of dwelling in non-Chinese regions with their own, from a Han perspective incomparably less civilized, customs.

Yet Liu Xijun's song is more. It represents a voice of political dissent purportedly speaking directly out of its own historical context, that is, from the period of Emperor Wu's policy of broad military expansion that culminated in repeated large-scale campaigns deep into Central Asia.<sup>68</sup> Beginning soon after his reign and fully extending into Ban Gu's *Han shu*, strong criticism of this policy was voiced in court discussions, condemning Emperor Wu's campaigns for the hardships they inflicted upon on the common people as well as for the instability they created within the empire proper. It is in this context that Liu Xijun's song becomes meaningful: the misery that was retrospectively associated with Emperor Wu's expansion policy is given its most authentic and melancholic expression in the voice of a young and innocent female member of the Han imperial family whose life was wasted, for dubious political interests, in non-Chinese lands:

吾家嫁我今天一方

遠託異國兮烏孫王

穹廬為室兮旃為牆  
以肉為食兮酪為漿

My family married me off to the other end of  
Heaven;

far away they gave me to a foreign land, to the  
King of Wusun.

A domed hut is my chamber, felt are the walls.  
I take flesh as my food, sour milk as my drink.

<sup>68</sup> For a survey of these campaigns, see Michael Loewe, "The Campaigns of Han Wu-ti," in *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, ed. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 67-122.

居常土思兮心內傷 Dwelling here, I always long for my soil—  
my heart is wounded.  
願為黃鵠兮歸故鄉 I wish I were a yellow swan, returning to my  
old homestead.<sup>69</sup>

First embedded in historiography, this song soon became part of the poetic canon, being included in a series of later anthologies and quoted in most of the major *leishu* 類書.<sup>70</sup> As the other pieces traditionally perceived as “Chu songs,” Liu Xijun’s verses are surrounded by an oppressing aura of melancholy and agony, if not indeed calamity and havoc. In Han times, this mode of expression was closely associated with the various poems, long and short, that from the second century BC onward were successively anthologized until finally coming together within the framework of the received *Chu ci* anthology.<sup>71</sup> Modelled on the early master texts “Li sao” 離騷 and “Jiu ge,” a large part of the anthology is comprised of Han compositions that more often than not strike a profoundly melancholic note. To a Western Han audience, the above-cited songs were not difficult to locate within this tradition.

The hermeneutic model underlying the use of song in Han historiography, however, is not limited to any regional tradition. It reflects widespread notions of sincerity, authentic emotion, and morality that formed the core of early musical and literary thought and that has found its full expression in the “Yuelun” 樂論 (On music) chapter of *Xunzi* 荀子, in the “Yueji” 樂記 (Records on music) chapter of the *Liji* (together with its parallel version in the *Shi ji* “Book on music”), and in the Daxu 大序 (Great Preface) to the received Mao 毛 version of the *Odes*. The ideological core of this discourse—that is, “poetry expresses intention” (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志),<sup>72</sup> and music and song are authentic responses of the human mind and heart evoked by external circumstances—emphasizes a morally

<sup>69</sup> HS 96B.3903; Lu Qinli, 1: 111-2.

<sup>70</sup> See the multiplicity of sources—even if by no means forming a complete account—noted in Lu Qinli, 1: 112.

<sup>71</sup> For the theme of melancholy in the “Jiu ge,” see, e.g., David Hawkes, “The Quest of the Goddess,” *Asia Major* n.s., 13 (1967): 71-94.

<sup>72</sup> *Li ji zhengyi* 38.308c; *Mao shi zhengyi* 1/1.1c; *Shang shu zhengyi* 3.19c; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* [Xiang 27] 38.295b; Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (*Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 ed.) 4.84.

uncorrupted state of mind on the side of the composer-performer together with an uncorrupting influence on the side of his utterance. It also reflects a historically-minded view of poetic composition and performance where songs appear as “history told in verse.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, as yet another expression of this idea, early historiography presents virtually all of its embedded songs as arising from specific situations. From the historical narratives surrounding these songs it is clear that poetry was not understood as an arbitrary artistic exercise. On the contrary, a song that comes into being as a “natural” emotional response to particular historical circumstances, and that absorbs the composer-performer in his or her physical and mental totality, is built on a cosmological truth claim.<sup>74</sup> From this perspective, a song outside of history is not just meaningless but a paradox: why is it there? Where does it come from? Thus, history contained songs, and songs contained their history, sometimes even replacing the narrative proper, as, for example, in the case of Qu Yuan’s “Yu fu” 漁父 (The fisherman) or with Liu Xu’s song quoted above.<sup>75</sup> The conclusion for how to approach poetry was obvious: as historiography preserved poetry, so did poetry preserve and transmit historical knowledge.

In the early Chinese tradition of literary thought, this hermeneutical approach to poetry is most closely identified with the Mao 毛 and Zheng Xuan exegesis of the *Odes* that received imperial recognition and promotion first under Emperor Ping 平 (r. 1 BC-AD 6). By the end of the Eastern Han, mostly under the influence of

<sup>73</sup> Jeffrey Riegel, “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary,” *HJAS* 57 (1997), 171. Riegel made his statement with respect to the early hermeneutical approach to the *Odes*.

<sup>74</sup> For further discussion, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 147-93; Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 17-115; Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), 19-56. I call early Chinese musical and literary thought cosmological because it places the act of poetic (and musical) composition within the conceptual framework of “stimulus and response” (*ganying* 感應) that was used to explain the workings of the entire cosmos.

<sup>75</sup> *SJ* 84.2486.

Zheng Xuan's *Mao Shi zhuan jian* 毛詩傳箋, it had all but eclipsed the competing interpretations of the *Odes*, including those of the "three lineages" (*sanjia* 三家) that had been favored at the Western Han imperial court prior to Emperor Ping. As we know from recently excavated manuscripts, this historicizing interpretation was not the only approach to early poetry, and probably not even the dominant one during the third and second centuries BC.<sup>76</sup> Yet it is also clear that to some extent, albeit only implicitly, this interpretation was prefigured already in pre-imperial times, that is, with the practice of embedding poetry in historiography. Since the narratives of *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語, and possibly already since the time of the written and oral sources these narratives were based upon, the tradition knew of numerous anecdotes in which songs were quoted to convey moral judgment, political advice, and prophetic insight.<sup>77</sup> This historiography not simply privileged the

<sup>76</sup> This has become clear mainly from two texts: the "Wu xing" 五行 manuscript from Mawangdui 馬王堆 (168 BC or before) and the so-called "Kongzi shilun" 孔子詩論 manuscript (ca. 300 BC) now in the possession of the Shanghai Museum. For reference editions, see Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, *Maotai Kanbo hakusho gogyôhen kenkyû* 馬王堆漢墓帛書五行篇研究 (Tokyo: Kyûko Shoin, 1993); and Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), 13-41, 121-68. For a study of the Mawangdui "Wu xing" reading of poetry, see Riegel, "Eros, Introversion, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary"; for a discussion of the manuscript interpretations in relation to the early cultural history of the *Odes* as well as to the Western Han *fu*, see Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts" and "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*."

<sup>77</sup> The major difference between the quotation of song in *Zuo zhuan* and *Guoyu* on the one hand, and Han historiographic works on the other, is that the earlier texts do not refer to the composition of new songs but to the recitation of pieces or stanzas from the pre-existing *Odes*. This difference reflects two profoundly divergent views of song composition and performance. The ancient *Odes* were a corpus of anonymous texts that as a whole embodied the commonly shared cultural memory. Their meaning was twofold: on the general level of the corpus, they served as a storehouse of cultural and natural knowledge, and their mastery was *de rigueur* for members of the cultured elite. See, e.g., *Analec*s 13/5, 16/13, 17/9, 17/10. Against this background, the specific meaning of an

historical interpretation over all other con-temporaneously available approaches to poetry; it indeed constituted the rationale for this interpretation. It is therefore perhaps not by accident that the Mao recension gained imperial recognition in the same breath with the *Zuo zhuan*. As the historical interpretation of the *Odes* developed alongside the practice of embedding poetry in Eastern Zhou historiography—realized most prominently in the *Zuo zhuan*—the joint canonization of the two works under Emperor Ping was only plausible. From both texts, the reader was systematically educated to understand the profoundly historical nature of a song. With works like *Zuo zhuan*, *Guoyu*, *Shi ji*, and *Han shu*, no reading was able to overrule the rationale for a song, and thus its meaning, that was explicitly furnished by its own historiographic context. As a result, historiographic narrative provided a model for poetic exegesis compelling enough to extend beyond historiography itself, that is, for songs transmitted in separation from their original historical contexts: trying to restore these lost contexts—and meanings—must have seemed the most natural exegetical approach, and the most noble task, to Mao, Zheng Xuan, and the other early interpreters of the *Odes*, just as well as to Han readers of the *Songs of Chu*. By their definition of poetry, songs came out of history, and so they sang about history.

As noted above, the core of the historical interpretation of poetry

individual song was determined by its performance within, and application to, a given historical situation. The individual songs as such did not carry particular authorial intent and identity; their meaning rested in the intent and identity of their performer.

By contrast, the performers of songs in Han historiography are also identified as their authors. Here, the historical situation generates not only poetic performance but also poetic composition; it actually generates the very figure of the poetic author. (At the same time, this fundamental shift in literary culture extended to a new view of the *Odes*—the Mao exegesis—that assigned individual authorship to the anonymous ancient songs. With a few exceptions [see note 104 below], this phenomenon was virtually unknown in pre-imperial times.) Yet despite the difference between pre-imperial *Odes* performance-cum-interpretation and Han song composition-cum-performance, both stand on the common ground of early poetic thought that anchors poetic meaning in specific historical circumstances.



is both cosmological and social: on the one hand, the composition and performance of song emerges as an immediate response to external circumstances; on the other hand, it passes through personal emotions in a particular social setting. According to the "Great Preface" to the *Odes*—and already to the earlier theory of music—the human body is fully involved in the cosmological side of the event:

The affections are moved within and take on form in speech. If speaking them out is not sufficient, one sighs them. If sighing them is not sufficient, one draws them out by singing. If drawing them out by singing is not sufficient, unconsciously the hands dance them, and the feet tap them.<sup>78</sup>

情動於中而形於言。言之不足，故嗟嘆之。嗟嘆之不足，故永歌之。永歌之不足，不知手之舞之，足之蹈之也。

Accordingly, in Western Han historiography dance often accompanies the act of singing. When Emperor Gaozu in 195 BC—apparently "deep in his cups"<sup>79</sup>—reached for a zither and extemporized his "Dafeng ge," he not only ordered the boys at the banquet to join him but also himself rose up to dance, overwhelmed by feelings of pain and melancholy.<sup>80</sup> Other Western Han singers as well are said to have "risen to dance" (*qiwu* 起舞) when offering their songs: the military commander Li Ling danced when lamenting in song his fate of staying with the Xiongnu;<sup>81</sup> Lady Huarong rose to dance when responding with her own song to Liu Dan;<sup>82</sup> Liu Xu sang and danced before his suicide;<sup>83</sup> Li Yannian rose to dance when singing about the beauty of his sister, Lady Li, making Emperor Wu sigh in amazement and desire;<sup>84</sup> and Liu Zhang danced and sang at a banquet with Empress Dowager Lü before beheading a drunk participant with his sword.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Mao Shi zhengyi* 1/1.2a; cf. *Li ji zhengyi* 37.299c, 39.317c, 38.308c.

<sup>79</sup> Knechtges, "The Emperor and Literature," 63.

<sup>80</sup> *SJ* 8.389; *HS* 1B.74.

<sup>81</sup> *HS* 54.2466.

<sup>82</sup> *HS* 63.2757.

<sup>83</sup> *HS* 63.2762.

<sup>84</sup> *HS* 97A.3951.

<sup>85</sup> *SJ* 52.2001; *HS* 38.1992.

There is a fundamental difference between these climactic moments and the carefully prepared and choreographed performances of song and dance on official occasions, for example, during the imperial rituals. In the latter, the composers of melodies were not identical with those who submitted the lyrics; and both were again different from the actual singers and dancers. At the same time, these composers, poets, and performers were in most cases anonymous professionals who were kept at the imperial court in order to furnish the state rituals with the appropriate, measured, and controlled means of literary and musical expression. The dramatic moments described above differed in every respect from this scenario. First, dancer, singer, composer, and poet were one and the same person, and the acts of composing, singing, and dancing were all unified aspects of a single act. Second, this person was not anonymous. Third, dance and song were not prepared in advance but presented spontaneously. Fourth, they were not controlled. Thus, the imperially commissioned ritual performances were representations of the imperial state; the extemporized performances of individual heroes were outbursts of authentic emotion. Xiang Yu at Gaixia, Liu Bang at Pei, and Li Ling among the Xiongnu—each of them close to death—all let their "tears flow down in many strings" (*qi shu hang xia* 泣數行下) after performing their songs and dances.<sup>86</sup> In return, dance and melancholic song inspired deeply felt responses: more often than not, the audience, together with the hero—e.g., Xiang Yu—would immediately and collectively break down in tears.<sup>87</sup> In Han historiography, already Confucius first sang and then cried,<sup>88</sup> as did the famous Qin assassin Jing Ke 荊軻 (d. 227 BC) whose

<sup>86</sup> *SJ* 7.333, 8.389; *HS* 1B.74, 31.1817, 54.2466.

<sup>87</sup> See *SJ* 7.333, 38.1621, 55.2047; *HS* 31.1817, 40.2036, 63.2757, 63.2762.

Note that for Xiang Yu, *Shi ji* and *Han Shu* say that his consort Yu "joined" (he 和) him, perhaps by responding with her song lyrics, but the pentasyllabic song attributed to her is not preserved in Han sources. Its earliest source may be Zhang Shoujie's 張守節 (*fl.* 725-835) *zhengyi* 正義 commentary to the *Shi ji* (see *SJ* 7.334), quoting the (lost) *Chu Han chungqiu* attributed to Lu Jia. However, it is questionable to which extent the *Chu Han chungqiu* that was available in the Tang may have been Lu Jia's text. See Wang Xianqian, *Han shu buzhu* 30.17b-18a.

<sup>88</sup> *SJ* 47.1944.

audience also cried in response.<sup>89</sup> Such performances by individual heroes, ephemeral moments of truth and authenticity, reveal their deep emotional origin and thereby evoke emotion. Not only does the distinction between composer and performer disappear; according to the historiographic record, the emotional distance separating composer-performer and audience collapses as well. In the framework of historiographic rhetoric, these are monumental moments of catharsis. History reaches its culmination points, and narrative historiography reaches its limits: the proper words are now the words of song, floating on tears.

Finally, another line of barriers falls with the “framing anecdotes”<sup>90</sup> from which all these songs and dances are known to us: the barriers between poetry and narrative, between poet and historiographer, and between the reader of historiography and the audience of a song and dance performance. As David Schaberg has noted in his discussion of Eastern Zhou songs, and in particular of those purportedly arising from physical and emotional distress, “while it is not inconceivable that certain of the songs... were in fact sung by sufferers themselves under the circumstances recounted in anecdotal frames, the evidence suggests that most of the songs were later attributions, the result of an active and creative historical interest in episodes of worthiness slighted or abused.”<sup>91</sup> It is indeed in some cases dubious how the lyrics uttered in a hero’s final moment could have been faithfully recorded for posterity. The Qu Yuan biography in *Shi ji* informs us that the hero first composed (*zuo* 作) the “Huai sha zhi fu” 懷沙之賦 (*Fu* on embracing sand) and then immediately embraced a stone and drowned himself in the Miluo 汨羅 River.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, the Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊 biography in *Shi ji* recounts that immediately after composing their final song, the two men died from starvation.<sup>93</sup> It seems clear that from such scenarios no song could have survived; but was the song invented later to enhance the narrative, or was a narrative constructed around an

<sup>89</sup> *SJ* 86.2528, 2534, 2537.

<sup>90</sup> This is the term David Schaberg has introduced in “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China.”

<sup>91</sup> Schaberg, “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” 356.

<sup>92</sup> *SJ* 84.2486-90.

<sup>93</sup> *SJ* 61.2123.

existing song? This question may be answered differently in different cases;<sup>94</sup> however, either alternative would show the historical narrative as an artifact constructed from heterogeneous sources.

As the songs and dances of Han historiography reflect the cosmology of contemporaneous literary and musical thought, they transpose this system of thought onto the historical narrative itself. It is unlikely that historians like Sima Qian or Ban Gu themselves composed the songs of their historical heroes; we are better advised to accept the well-documented fact that the historians compiled their narratives, sometimes in a cut-and-paste fashion, from a broad range of sources that included historical documents alongside with traditional lore written and oral, poetry and prose. This heterogeneous collection of information had to be integrated into a narrative that was, to the mind of the historian and his imagined audience, coherent, meaningful, and memorable. The historian, working decades and centuries after the events he related to posterity,<sup>95</sup> was not a recorder of facts but an author of narrative. He did not invent his facts, but he had to select what was to be transmitted, and he had to find the literary form into which to organize his selection. In this situation, the cosmology of early Chinese literary thought came naturally to authors like Sima Qian and Ban Gu—authors intimately familiar with the poetic tradition and also noted for their own poetic compositions in the form of the *fu*. By including song and dance into their narratives, they did not manipulate the facts or simply added some poetic adornment to their otherwise sober record. On the contrary, on a number of occasions they chose those utterances of historical memory—the lyrics and movements of a hero at the

<sup>94</sup> In two somewhat similar cases, it is the song that most likely preceded the narrative. See Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*.” Likewise, Schaberg has concluded that “in the anecdote collections of the Han dynasty and before, the construction of frame anecdotes was the rule for song; this activity was a form of historical scholarship that amounted to a contemporary cultural obsession. One strong reason for the survival of songs, and for their transmission from generation to generation, was the pleasure of matching them with the crises of remembered personal and public histories” (Schaberg, “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” 357-8).

<sup>95</sup> The exception being Sima Qian whose narrative extends into his own lifetime.

climactic moment of distress and devastation—that were prized for their truth and authenticity. But the historians also did not just report the performances of song and dance. They used song and dance as rhetorical functions of historiography, representing their historical actors' emotions in the way they imagined these actors to have expressed themselves. Turning the hero into a poet, the historian, at certain moments encapsulating the essence of his narrative in song, turned himself into a poet-historian. Thus, ultimately, something of the archaic—or in Han times perhaps merely projected—figure of the historian as a singer of songs was present at the core of Han historiographic narrative.<sup>96</sup> The inclusion of song in narrative confirmed the dictum that “poetry expresses intention, and song makes words last long” (*shi yan zhi, ge yong yan* 詩言志, 歌永言).<sup>97</sup> In the context of Han historiography, this promise of memory extended to the narrative. Not only did historiography preserve the songs of early historical figures; in later historical imagination, the memory of the songs also helped to keep the narratives present.

The promise of memory was to some extent based on the assumption, ancient and modern, that “poetic formation serves primarily the mnemotechnical purpose of putting identity-securing knowledge into a durable form.”<sup>98</sup> In early China, this function can be identified in the commemorative practice par excellence, the ancestral sacrifice with its ritual hymns and bronze inscriptions, many of them rhymed. In these ritual texts, just as in Eastern Zhou and Han historiography, song can be seen as the distillate of history, persevering the core of an extended narrative in an intensified, formalized, and linguistically restricted code that not merely preserves the past but, first and foremost, defines it.<sup>99</sup> Ritual hymns

<sup>96</sup> For the historians as singers, see the “Great Preface” to the *Odes* in *Mao Shi zhengyi* 1/1.3c.

<sup>97</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi* 3.19c. The pun of *yong* 永 (“to make last long”) with *yong* 詠 (“to chant”) is clearly intended, as recognized by the pseudo-Kong Anguo 孔安國 commentary to the *Shang shu*.

<sup>98</sup> Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997), 56.

<sup>99</sup> I adopt the notion of the “restricted code” of ritual language from Maurice Bloch, “Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation: Is Religion an Extreme Form of Traditional Authority?,” *European Journal of Sociology* 15.1

and bronze inscriptions do not contain an expansive, amorphous, and ambiguous mass of historical knowledge; they tightly limit and control what is to be remembered and how it is to be remembered.<sup>100</sup> The same mechanism is at work in early historiography where songs, in general, are not used to contribute factual knowledge (the few cases where they constitute the narrative itself show a conscious choice by the historian who could have presented this knowledge in narrative form). By means of their ritualized expression the songs narrow, not widen, what is to be remembered. Indeed, there is one case where the historiographic and ritual uses of song coalesce: as reported in both *Shi ji* and *Han shu*, Liu Bang's “Dafeng ge,” originally composed and performed by the soon-to-die founding emperor himself, was subsequently performed in his ancestral temple from 195 to 141 BC.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps other songs were preserved in this fashion as well; on the other hand, even the mere retelling of a hero's story, likely including the performance of his songs, is itself a service of commemoration not fundamentally different from that of the ancestral sacrifice.

Conveying the essence of a historical moment, and of the composer-performer's personality at that moment, the weight of truth and authenticity carried by the early songs was not restricted by the plausibility of their embedding narrative. In fact, a narrative that may seem utterly implausible to modern readers was obviously considered meaningful and coherent to the Han historians and the audience they were writing for. The question is not whether or not Qu Yuan actually composed—and sang?—“Huai sha” in the final moment of his life. If the song, as the historian found it among his sources, was acceptable as a genuine expression of Qu Yuan's sentiment, it most appropriately was to be assigned to the culminating point of his fate, sanctified by the imminent death. In this logic, the plausibility of narrative detail is not at stake. It is the song itself that is plausible, and that requires only some loose narrative to be built

(1974): 55-81.

<sup>100</sup> For further elaboration, see Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang*, 148-54, and “*Shi jing* Songs as Performance Texts: A Case Study of ‘Chu ci’ (‘Thorny Caltrop’),” *Early China* 25 (2000): 66-76.

<sup>101</sup> *HS* 22.1045; *SJ* 24.1177.

around it.<sup>102</sup> The song epitomizes the dramatic nature of a moment of crisis, but it does not explain the narrative. It may well be the other way around: at least in some instances, the narrative guides the reader toward the song, providing little more than some sparse historical context that includes the identification of the composer-performer together with the circumstances of the composition and performance.

This may explain some of the more schematic, predictable aspects of the representation of song performance in historiography. Singers not only routinely cry and dance; in most cases, they also do so in a particular setting—that of the banquet. By the time the Han historians compiled their great narratives, this was a firmly established tradition. Already in *Zuo zhuan*, as David Schaberg has shown, it is the banquet that exemplifies the ritualized social order of early China, and it is the performance of songs that defined the core of the banquet.<sup>103</sup> However, as noted above, there is an important difference between the earlier scenes, in *Zuo zhuan* and elsewhere, and those of *Shi'ji* and *Han shu*. While at Eastern Zhou banquets, usually songs from an existing poetic canon—that of the *Odes*—were performed, expressing not only in coded form some political message but also reinforcing the shared cultural ground, Han singers are presented as literary authors in the true sense. Their words are no longer primarily concerned with the shared body of cultural memory, ritual propriety, and moral codes; they do not talk diplomacy. Now, the singers lament their personal fate, and they use song to create a particular identity for—and also prospective memory of—themselves. While staying within the traditional setting of the banquet, where the social norms of morality and ritual propriety are performed and sustained, singers now self-consciously unveil the collapse of these norms. They display the disaster that has befallen them and announce their decision to submit themselves to an act of

<sup>102</sup> Schaberg, "Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China," 357-8.

<sup>103</sup> Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 234-43. As Schaberg notes, "as a moment of synaesthetic and social fusion, the banquet is the most revealing image of the narrative concordance that brings the disparate elements of a story together and sets them off as a unit distinct from surrounding material" (p. 243).

ultimate and irrevocable violence, usually suicide. Before extinguishing themselves, they create the songs through which their fate will be known and their name remembered.

Thus, the songs attributed to particular historical figures reflect a notion of poetic authorship that, while not entirely absent in earlier times,<sup>104</sup> achieved a new status in Han times, mainly through the writings of Sima Qian, the preeminent Western Han historian. Sima Qian not only provides the historical narratives that portray, among others, Confucius and Qu Yuan as literary authors; through his "Letter in Response to Ren An" ("Bao Ren An shu" 報任安書)<sup>105</sup> as well as his autobiography in the final chapter of the *Shi ji*, he also defines himself as a literary author, and he further defines the phenomenon of literary, historical, and philosophical authorship as the result of profound distress. In the same sense, the *Han shu* "Yiwen zhi" describes personal suffering as the origin of the *fu*.<sup>106</sup> In other words, the historians that include in their narratives dramatic accounts of heroes who burst into song in moments of devastation and catharsis provide the rationale for these scenes elsewhere, fully subscribing to, and further developing, early imperial ideas about authorship and the production of poetry.

It is not difficult to see that most of the songs in these narratives are related to the single topic that interested the early historians most: the manipulation and abuse of power within the imperial house in conjunction with the struggles surrounding imperial succession. Moreover, especially for Sima Qian, the abuse of power had a profoundly personal dimension; if we are to believe his autobiography and the "Letter in Response to Ren An," his work on the *Shi ji* began and ended out of suffering from imperial power abuse. The *alpha* of Sima Qian as a historian is his father's death from grief over being denied access to the most solemn imperial ritual of the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 sacrifices; the *omega*, his own castration, depriving himself of descendants, that he chose over suicide in order to complete his history and secure his posthumous

<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., the list of eminent historical figures as authors of the *Odes* in Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 345 n. 54.

<sup>105</sup> *Liu chen zhu Wen xuan* 六臣注文選 (Sbck ed.) 41.9b-27a.

<sup>106</sup> *HS* 30.1756. See also Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*."

name.<sup>107</sup>

It will have escaped neither Sima Qian nor his readers, including Ban Gu, how much the innocent princes and consorts suffering at the hands of the Empress Dowager, or Liu Qu's consorts falsely accused of infidelity, resembled Sima Qian himself, whose punishment resulted from wrongful charges of disloyalty to the emperor. In a fundamental sense, the songs and tears of upright and yet devastated members of the imperial court were his own.<sup>108</sup> Not to the same, but certainly to some extent, something similar can be said about Ban Gu who was first thrown into prison for privately compiling his history, and who later died in prison, implicated in charges of disloyalty that were brought against General Dou Xian 竇憲 (d. 92) in whose service he was at the time.<sup>109</sup>

As the presentation of songs attributed to eminent—and eminently suffering—historical figures emphasizes the interaction of personality and history, and indeed condenses the essence of both history and personality into song, there is another large group of songs in Han historiography that are not at all individual but, on the contrary, anonymous and thus of some kind of generic, universal authorship. These songs can be ominous foretellings of political disaster (for example, the song that in Emperor Cheng's reign predicted the rise of Wang Mang) as well as comments on historical events and

<sup>107</sup> Sima's concern with leaving a name is also expressed in the poem, "Bei shi bu yu fu" 悲士不遇賦 (*Fu* on Grieving over the gentleman not meeting [his time]) attributed to him. The text has survived only in fragments and appears first in the seventh century *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985), 30.541. For an annotated translation, see James Robert Hightower, "The *Fu* of T'ao Ch'ien," *HJAS* 17.1 (1954): 197-200.

<sup>108</sup> Here, I wish to echo again David Schaberg's work on *Zuo zhuan*: "the historiographers ... could not have failed to recognize what they had in common with the men whose deeds they were commemorating" (*A Patterned Past*, 257).

<sup>109</sup> Ban Gu's case is more complicated, as he also for some time was one of the most eminent (though rarely promoted—another cause of his frustration) scholars and writers of the first century. 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 Hulsewfu on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Wilt L. Idema and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 118-39.

figures (the song by the people of Chang'an who bemoaned their executed relatives). More than any other subgenre of song, the omen songs, by fitting the course of events all too neatly, reveal the constructed and rhetorical nature of the inclusion of song into historical narrative. As these examples show, the cosmological model used to explain the composition of poetry as an immediate response did not need to be centered on the known individual; its purported validity for any individual elevated it to a universal norm. Thus, the "Records on Music" and the "Great Preface" include another passage that explicitly extends the "natural" emotional appearance of song to the common people who sing about the hardships of their times:

The tones of a well-governed era are at ease and lead to joy; its rulership is harmonious. The tones of an era in turmoil are bitter and lead to anger; its rulership is perverse. The tones of a perishing state are lamenting and lead to longing; its people are in difficulty.<sup>110</sup>

治世之音安以樂，其政和。亂世之音怨以怒，其政乖。亡國之音哀以思，其民困。

In this vision, the cosmological model of poetic composition applied equally well to the songs of the unnamed; anonymous or from the lips of tragic heroes, all such singing shared the same cosmological truth claim. Thus, in Han historiography, the "authors" of anonymous songs can be identified as a local group like "the common people of Chang'an" ("Chang'an baixing" 長安百姓, often simply as "Chang'an" 長安),<sup>111</sup> or songs can be attributed to a particular imperial reign (and thus speaking about this reign).<sup>112</sup> Other songs were related to a certain region or sung by "all under Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下),<sup>113</sup> "the common people" (*baixing* 百姓),<sup>114</sup> "the villagers" (*luli* 閭里),<sup>115</sup> "the folk" (*min* 民),<sup>116</sup> or "the rustics"

<sup>110</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 1/1.2b; *Li ji zhengyi* 37.299c.

<sup>111</sup> *HS* 77.3248, 78.3290, 87B.3584, 90.3674, 92.3707, 93.3730, 99A.4086.

<sup>112</sup> *HS* 27B-A.1396.

<sup>113</sup> *SJ* 49.1983; *HS* 94A.3755.

<sup>114</sup> *SJ* 54.2031; *HS* 39.2021, 98.4024.

<sup>115</sup> *HS* 92.3707.

<sup>116</sup> *SJ* 118.3080; *HS* 44.2144, 79.3305, 93.3727; *Qian Han ji* 前漢記 (*Sbck*

(*su* 俗).<sup>117</sup> In addition, yet another set of anonymous songs were the “children’s ditties” (*tongyao* 童謠, *erge* 兒歌).<sup>118</sup> The standard designations of these songs are *ge* 歌, *yao* 謠 (“ditties”), or *geyao*. In numerous other cases, short couplets, usually rhymed, are referred to as proverbs or “(folk) sayings” (*yu* 語, *yan* 諺, *yanyu* 諺語, *suyu* 俗語, *biyu* 鄙語, *liyu* 里語, *liyan* 里諺) that circulated among the populace.<sup>119</sup> Such anonymous songs and sayings could have entered the historical lore even more easily than the usually more elaborate songs attributed to particular figures. Unsurprisingly, many of the anonymous pieces put in the mouth of the common people appear only in post-Han sources.<sup>120</sup>

By conclusion, whether narratives were framed around songs attributed to historical heroes, or whether they were retrospectively enriched by ominous or judgmental ditties and sayings, Han song culture cannot be discussed in separation from Han historiographic culture. Too many of the songs are embedded in rather schematic accounts to have us believe that in the majority of cases, song and historical event had been married to each other from the beginning. There is an ordering, authorial hand in assigning anonymous songs to inauspicious political developments, in making moments of personal despair and destruction culminate in songs, and in having “tears flow down in many strings” on occasions where song becomes the ultimate medium to express despair and affliction. Yet this historiography of literary craft was deemed plausible for a reason: no doubt, a pervasive song culture existed in the world outside of historiography where it extended far beyond the exemplary characters and moments of crisis the historians were concerned with. It embraced the state sacrificial hymns, the activities of the Office of Music, the influx of new, and often regional, poetic and musical styles, and the circulation of song in the streets of the capital and elsewhere. For the historiographic function of song and proverbial saying to be acceptable and effective, song and saying must have been a familiar and

quasi-natural mode of expression in actual Han life. I suspect that this sentiment prompted literati in later periods to attribute a large number of songs to the Han period. To the literary tradition, these songs made sense as songs from the Han.

As oral song was woven into historiography, so was written historiography related to a culture of song. Much traditional lore that found its final expression in the work of the historian may have come to him in orally transmitted anecdotes that were not simply told and retold, but—and here especially with their embedded songs—performed and re-performed. Stories may have developed around songs; songs may have been added to stories; in either case, the use of song as mnemonic device will have played its role. We are separated from this culture of song not only by two millennia but also by a textual tradition over the course of which the written word has increasingly presented itself as the dominant one. But the monumental Chinese tradition of written historiography that seems to stand like a wall between us and the singing of the ancients is, in fact, a wall with a small window.

ed.) 15.1b, 2a.

<sup>117</sup> *HS* 72.3077.

<sup>118</sup> *SJ* 107.2847; *HS* 27B-A.1395, 52.2384, 84.3440.

<sup>119</sup> See the large number of such sayings collected in Lu Qinli, 1:128-43.

<sup>120</sup> See Lu Qinli, *ibid.*