CHAPTER 4
Creating a Book and Performing It:
The “Yao liu” Chapter of the Huainanzi as a Western Han Fu
Martin Kern*

The Cultural Context of the Huainanzi

In 139 BCE, Liu An 莊安, king of Huainan 淮南 (r. 139?–123 BCE), visited the imperial court at Chang’an for a statutory audience with Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 BCE).1 Liu An was a grandson of the Han dynasty founding emperor Liu Bang 刘邦 (r. 202–195 BCE) and the uncle of Emperor Wu, who at the time was eighteen years old and had been appointed emperor just two years before. During his visit, Liu An presented the emperor with a lengthy text that in Ban Gu 貞固 (32–ca. 92 CE)’s Hsuanhuo 漢書 biography is called “inner writings” (neihua 內書) and that the catalog of the late Western Han imperial library, as preserved in the Hsuanhuo Monograph on Arts and Writings (Yiwen zhi 御文志), lists as “inner [Writings] of Huainan” (Huainainzi 淮南子). From Han times onward, this text has generally been accepted as the Huainainzi 淮南子, the Western Han book transmitted in twenty-one chapters. Both Hsuanhuo passages attribute the authorship of the text directly to Liu An, although most modern scholars regard Liu An as the patron of the text, the individual chapters of which were probably composed by some of the ‘several thousand’ scholars who were retained in residence at his court in Shoushan 頫山, the last capital of the ancient state of Chu in modern Anhui.*

In recent years, the Huainainzi, a central work of early Chinese intellectual history, has finally begun to receive the attention it deserves in Western scholarship. After decades of occasional scholarly articles and scattered translations of individual chapters, Charles Le Blanc and Rémi Mathieu published their French translation of the entire text in 2006, capturing a substantial tradition in francophone scholarship. Now, a complete English translation, by John S. Major and collaborators, has been published (2018).* In conjunction with this effort, a panel, “Rhetorical Strategies in the Huainainzi,” was organized at the ninth meeting of the American Oriental Society in March 2006, here, Major argued that the text is not only a summum of contemporaneous philosophical

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2 As opposed to “numerous outer writings” (waihu waisheng 外書甚果) and eight scrolls of “middle writing” (zhonghua 中書), see Ban Gu, Hsuanhuo 漢書 (History of the Han), 27 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1957), 52–54.

3 Ban Gu, Hsuanhuo 30.12a. The text goes on to list “outer [Writings] of Huainan” (Huaianainzi 淮南子) in thirty-three bundles.


thought but also a repertoire of Western Han literary forms used in political and philosophical persuasion. The text, Major noted, is unusual in its attempt to be not just philosophical—in the way many early Chinese texts are—but persuasive; it has an occasion, a message, and a purpose. Despite Major’s stylistic observations, the Huainanzi remains primarily discussed in terms of intellectual history while only limited attention is given to its language and rhetorical force. My own thoughts about Liu An and the work compiled under his patronage wander in a different direction. As a student of classical literature, I am thinking of the court at Shouchun as one of the centers of early Western Han literary culture. To begin with, Liu An’s court produced a large and wide-ranging body of prose and poetic writings encompassing diverse fields of knowledge and philosophical thought. More specifically, the Huaihu Monograph on Arts and Writings credits Liu An with fewer than eighty-two “poetic expositions” (hu 服) and his retainers with another forty-four; by comparison, the retrospectively most celebrated hu author of Liu An’s time, Sima Xiangru 司马相如 (179–137 BCE), has twenty-nine pieces listed under his name. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Eastern Han criticism of the Western Han hu that began with Yang

10 John S. Major, “Rhetorics and Argumentation in Huainanzi 19, Cultivating Effort,” paper presented at the 26th meeting of the American Oriental Society, Chicago, March 14–17, 2006. At the same meeting, Judson R. Murray spoke about the final chapter of the Huainanzi, “Yao li” 耘理, or “An Overview of the Essentials.” The conference presentations by Major and Murray sparked my interest in the “Overview” and led me to embark on the present study, the first version of which was presented at the Harvard conference on the Huainanzi held in May 2008. In turn, it is gratifying to see that my principal thesis—that is, that “An Overview of the Essentials” was composed as a fu 服 and used to present the Huainanzi to the imperial court—was adopted immediately by Major and his collaborators for their 2009 translation volume.

11 Charles Le Blanc, Huai-nan tzu. Philosophical Syntheses in Early Han Thought: The Idea of Benevolence (Kun-yong), with a Translation and Analysis of Chapter Six (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985), 41–52, provides an annotated list of the known writings by Liu An and his retainers. In addition, Harold Roth has argued that the Zhuangzi was likely compiled at Liu An’s court; see Roth, “Who Compiled the Chuang Tzu?” in Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham, ed. Henry Rosemont Jr. (Lakeville, CT: Open Court Press, 1997), 79–216. Liu Xiaogang, by contrast, dates the Zhuangzi to the Warring States; see his Chuangting the Zhuangzi Chapters, trans. William E. Sewell (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994). Liu’s argument has been severely challenged by Esther Klein, “Were There ‘Three Chapters’ in the Warring States? A New Investigation of Evidence about the Zhuangzi?” Tongpao 96 (2000): 259–279.


13 Ban Gu, Han shu 53.2440.

14 Ban Gu, Han shu 53.2445.

15 Ban Gu, Han shu 45.2045.

16 David Holkham, The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 33–34. Le Blanc, Huai-nan tzu, 7–6, notes that both the poetic style of the Huainanzi and the theme of self-cultivation (which Le Blanc understands as Daoist but which, as self-cultivation, cuts across the boundaries between Daoist and Confucian thinking) find close counterparts and relations in the Chu and the “shamanistic traditions of Chu.” He also traces the “close affinity on many essential points between Huai-nan tzu and Chuang Tzu” back to their “common indebtedness to the transcendental spirit of the poets of Chu.”

court at Shouchun was one of the three great southern literary centers of his time where the fu—and with it the rhetoric of both political persuasion and moral self-cultivation—flourished before it was introduced to the imperial court of Emperor Wu.

In short, and far beyond the poetic context sketched here, it is clear that the Huainanzi, while being the largest Western Han text of its time (before Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 [ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE] Shiji 史記, that is), was only one of many intellectual enterprises that considered the Huainanzi itself encompasses many diverse areas of learning. Both linguistically and philosophically—think not only of the numerous rhymed passages but also of the themes of political persuasion and moral self-cultivation just mentioned—good parts of the text are in fact closely aligned with some of the issues that occupied the composers of the southern fu. Other sections reflect contemporary explorations in fields of knowledge such as astrology, astronomy, or geography alongside deliberations on military matters, rhetorical techniques of persuasion, or affairs of ritual and customs. While the individual chapters must reflect the work of different groups of scholars learned in different traditions of knowledge, it is the Huainanzi that presents their sum total as an integrated whole. Moreover, the very multiplicity and versatility not only of learning but also of verbal expression ranked high among the prized accomplishments of court culture at Shouchun.

While the different chapters of the Huainanzi employ a wide range of styles, including purely technical writing and factual accounts in, for example, the chapters on astrology (“Tian wen” 天文), geography (“Di xing” 地形) and the calendar (“Shi zhi” 时制), countless passages are composed in the southern poetic idiom of the time that can be observed not only in the Western Han fu but also in Emperor Wu’s “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices” (“Jiao xi ge” 教习歌). In the Huainanzi, this idiom is not external embellishment to the expression of philosophical thought; judgment from the fu and some of the recently excavated manuscripts, it is integral to southern philosophical thinking in Liu Xiz’s time. Yet despite the fact that the Huainanzi’s poetic language has

18 The numerous correspondences between these poems and the Huainanzi are noted in Martin Kern, “Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsgehege: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Six Dynastien (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1997), 244–293.

19 See, e.g., Le Han, Han-mu lun 7–8; Xu Puqian, Liang Han xinwen shi, 177–78. In addition, translations of individual chapters sometimes note many of the rhymes.

20 Luo Changqiu 洛章秋 and Zhao Zhumu 赵祖牧, Han Hui ji minshuhua yu zhuanjue yuyan 漢惠帝民歌唱詞及其頌美 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1996), 246–394.

21 “Pros” may be too strong a word here in denoting the mere absence of rhyme and meter.


23 As Zeb Reif, “The Beginning of Liubou Poetry: Four Poems from Fifth-Century BCE China,” Tsing Hsu 96 (1999): 79–134, has shown, Western Han liubou verse can be regarded not as direct imitation but as “actualisation” and translation of earlier Shijing verse. One characteristic of liubou rhyme verse is its overall tighter, more substantial, and more narrative diction. The same can be said of the Western Han sacrificial hymns from both Guozi’s 樂府 (5.249–505 BCE) time and, later, Emperor Wu’s era; see Kern, Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsgehege. For the “Fu on the Owl” that Jia Yi composed as an erotic in Changsha in 175 BCE, see Jin Qian, Shiji (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 84,4297–4301 and Ban Gu, Han shu, 24:12327–30. Gong Congkang, Studies on the Han Fu (New Haven: CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 93–103.


Stimuil" (Qi fu'七發), Stina Xiangru's "Exeuntion Hunt of the Son of Heaven" (Tianzi youfu' 天子遊賦), and the "Great Summoning" (Dazhou 大招) in the Chi ci anthology26—extol the process of self-cultivation that has been identified in the Huaianzou as well as in recently excavated manuscripts from the south, most prominently in the "Five Modes of Conduct" texts from Guoqian and Mowanghui.27 In short, while the Huaianzou is the only large text that has survived from the court of Liu An, its seeming singularity and isolation are but an illusion.

"An Overview of the Essentials"

The final chapter of the Huaianzou, "An Overview of the Essentials" (Yao li'e 優略), reviews and puts into perspective the contents of the previous twenty chapters, and my guiding questions are: what is the point of this chapter, and what is its literary form? As indicated by the title of the present essay, I conclude that the chapter should be properly understood as a Western Han fu, that is, a composition that was skillfully recited (song 詠) at the imperial court of Emperor Wu when the Huaianzou was submitted in 139 BCE.27 It is therefore composed with all the features of euphony and mnemonic devices that make the text both performable and memorable.

Taking the "Overview" as a fu is an argument, not about oral composition or transmission, but about the fact that the text was composed in a way that lent itself to oral performance. I have no doubt that the text was from the start composed in writing, yet I also believe that the large bundle (or rather bundles) of bamboo slips on which the first twenty chapters were written was not just handed over to the imperial librarians. Instead, I assume that the text was formally presented to the young and presumably impressionable Emperor Wu as the most comprehensive and profound guide to performative ritual, and that this presentation was not a silent act but a splendid verbal performance that matched the significance of both the text and the occasion. No other text of this kind is known from the period, and certainly no other text that advances

26 See my discussion in Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics".
28 Another account of an oral presentation (zai ke) of a fu at Emperor Wu's court right around 139 BCE is that of Stina Xiangru's "Daxun fu" 大訓, in the San Qin xuan 三秦圖an analysis, see Kern, "The Biography of Stina Xiangru."

31 See Zhaodong yi wuwen (作廕音文) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), and the similar studies in recent years by Zhaodong yi wuwen (作廕音文) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), and Zhaodong yi wuwen (作廕音文) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012), both mentioned in note 21.
33 The only attempt so far at a systematic account of rhyme in the Zhaodong is David McCune, "Stratifying Zhaodong: Rhyme and Other Quantitative Evidence" (Taipei: Institute
compositions—many of them written, but some are also purely oral—basic features of the fu in Western Han times included the irregular alternation of rhymed and unrhymed passages, meter, a certain length, and an overall emphasis on euphony (e.g., by use of alliterative, rhyming, and reduplicative binomials) for the purpose of verbal presentation (ou jie). However, this does not mean that every poetically refined passage in early Chinese literature should be considered a fu. To qualify (as far as one can tell from the early sources), a text would require a topic, it had to be a self-contained, stand-alone treatment of this topic, and it would aim to present its topic in extenso. This desire for comprehensiveness would then sometimes—though not invariably—lead to a certain self-referential grandeur of expression and the extensive use of catalog; striking examples are the compositions by Mei Sheng and Sima Xiangru. These features are, if in less extreme form, on display in the “Overview.”

In addition, the “Overview” is characterized by what I consider one of the essential traits of the Western Han fu, namely, the mimetic representation of its own subject on the level of linguistic performance. If the Hanunian is, as claimed in the “Overview,” contains the philosophical totality of the universe, observing the images of Heaven and Earth (觀天地之象) and penetrating all matters from antiquity to present (追古今之事), then the “Overview” itself contains the linguistic totality that gives expression to the philosophical one. In other words, the spectacle and totality of language are performed to embody the spectacle and totality of philosophical thought that in turn embody the totality of the cosmos and political sphere. Strictly speaking, one could call the “Overview” Liu An’s “Fu on Presenting the Hanunian”; it celebrates not only the contents of the twenty chapters but also its own accomplished literary form and, with it, the cultural accomplishments of Liu An and his court. This form is not trivial embellishment but shows its patron as a master of textual learning and expression at precisely the time when the young emperor summoned the great fu composers—including Mei Sheng and Sima Xiangru—from the three southern centers of literary and cultural splendor.
(Wu, Liang, Huinan) to the imperial court. One cannot decide whether or not Liu An himself was the actual and single author of the "Overview"; in the following, I will simply speak of "the authors." The question, however, may be beside the point. What counts is not actual authorship but the textual voice—in this case, Liu An's voice, which speaks to the young emperor with both scholarly authority and generational seniority. It is in this sense that the "Overview" and indeed the entire Huainanzi, are Liu An's work.

Considering that the "Overview" does not offer new ideas that were not already part of the twenty chapters, its principal function must have been two-fold: to establish the entire text as a single work (as opposed to twenty mutually independent essays) and to introduce it as such to a new audience. Its complex literary form—oscillating between prose and poetry and largely patterned by rhythm, meter, rhyme, syntactic parallelism, and the use of euphonic binomnes—embodies the versatile diction of the twenty chapters, and anyone at Emperor Wu's court versed in the poetic idiom of the fu must have recognized the text as an example of superior verbal artistry. Beyond this, however, the purpose of the "Overview" to establish a complete text with a defined order of chapters cannot be overstated. While the later tradition is accustomed to think of early Chinese texts in terms of "books" containing numerous "chapters," all historical evidence suggests that this was not how texts circulated in the early Western Han. Instead, as recent manuscript finds are informing us, writings of expository prose were independent, self-contained essays that only later were compiled into books of multiple chapters—most likely when Liu Xiang 利xb (79–8 BCE), following Emperor Cheng's 成帝 (73–7 BCE) edict in 26 BCE, ordered and arranged all available writings for the imperial library. Thus, an independent essay like "Black Robes" ("Zhi" 至), which has been found among the Guodian and Shangshang Museum bamboo-sha collections dating from ca. 300 BCE, only later became part of the Records of Ritual (Li 禮) records. Moreover, a few late Warring States and early Han manuscripts bear titles, and none bears the name of an author—a phenomenon that Yu Jiaxi 余嘉锡 (1884–1955) has noted also for most early works in the received tradition.

It is against this background that we must appreciate the principal intent expressed in the "Overview," namely, to create a unified work of mutually independent essays that otherwise may have circulated separately but as such would not have amounted to what the "Overview" claims the Huainanzi to be: a single comprehensive blueprint for good rulership encompassing the totality of knowledge from a wide range of disciplines. It was the "Overview" that established the integrity and explicitly defined inner order of the Huainanzi. In this, the Huainanzi came to resemble, to some extent, the diverse collection of essays in the Liezi chunqiu 周氏春秋 from exactly one hundred years earlier, which likewise, as a unified whole, was designed to present "a philosophy for the unification of the world, a philosophy for empire." Indeed, the Liezi chunqiu was characterized by Sima Qian in "encompassing from antiquity to the present the affairs of the myriad kinds of things between Heaven and Earth" 儒天地萬物古今之事, a phrase that echoes nearly verbatim how the "Overview" describes the Huainanzi. Both texts are granted identical claims as to their nature and purpose, and they are listed next to each other as 'syncretic' (tujiaz 多家) writings in the Han shu 象書 "Monograph on Arts and Writings." What radically distinguishes the Huainanzi from the Liezi chunqiu, however, is its language: while the earlier text continues the classical idiom of Zhou expository prose, the later one emphatically embraces the modern, and distinctly southern, idiom of its own time, giving programmatic expression to the cultural ideology and confidence of Liu An and his court. Furthermore, it is the use of this poetic idiom that connects the "Overview" to the Western Han culture of court rituals within which the Huainanzi was then formally presented.

The overall structure of the "Overview" is as follows. A brief introduction is followed by the plain listing of the chapter titles; thereafter, each chapter is discussed, some briefly, others more extensively. The two longest discussions are on the first and the last chapter (with 93 characters for the last chapter, "The Exalted Lineage" ("Tai zu" 太祖)) and a "Mountain of Persuasions" ("Shui shan" 謀山) and a "Forest of Persuasions" ("Shui lin" 謀林)


40 Yu Jiaxi, Guo shuo tongyi, 97–96.


42 Sima Qian, Shiji 57.2517; see also the discussion in Knoblock and Riegel, Annals of Lü Boudi, 96–97.

43 Ban Gu, Han shu 象書 30.2701.

44 As another difference between the two books one might note that although the Liezi chunqiu has a postface as well, it does not advance any such claims as one finds in the Huainanzi "Overview."
Structure and Meaning in “An Overview of the Essentials”

My first example is the listing of chapter titles that follows the first several lines—which are already rhymed and show several distinct rhetorical patterns—at the beginning of the text. This catalog of titles, introduced by the formula “Thus, we have composed [the following] twenty chapters”, is more than a simple list; it is a rhymed litany, with each chapter title being preceded by the word “there is” (有) in the following representation, I note not only the rhymes on the even-numbered lines (as well as the rhymes of lines 19–20) as identified by Luo Changqiao and Zhou Zunyi but also—marked by indentation—what I consider additional rhymes on some of the odd-numbered lines. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>章</th>
<th>有</th>
<th>(Rhyme 1)</th>
<th>有</th>
<th>郎</th>
<th>(Rhyme 1)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>有源道</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 2)</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>有道真</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 3)</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>有玄文</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 4)</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>有仁形</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 5)</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>有時則</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 6)</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>有簡信</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 7)</td>
<td>有</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>有精神</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 8)</td>
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<td>8.</td>
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<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 9)</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>有圭制</td>
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<td>(Rhyme 10)</td>
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<td>10.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>有統信</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>有合信</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>有德論</td>
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<td>(Rhyme 14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>有德言</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 15)</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>有德言</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
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<td>(Rhyme 17)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(Rhyme 18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
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<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>有德言</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 20)</td>
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<td>(Rhyme 20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>有德言</td>
<td>有</td>
<td>(Rhyme 21)</td>
<td>有</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I will also use the same format of indentation for additional rhymes in all passages below.

In the present essay, I limit my phonological analysis to the fairly straightforward matter of rhyme, using the traditional rhyme categories employed by Luo Changqiao and Zhou Zunyi. In this, especially where irregular rhyming patterns are involved, I may be overemphasizing some “combined rhymes” on the one hand, the traditional focus on end rhyme as the single noteworthy emphatic feature of early texts—in distinction to, for example, the tonal patterns in later poetry—may seriously underestimate the full range...
 Altogether, the passage has four rhyme sequences: (1) the shen 聲 sequence; (2) the zheng 逞 sequence; (3) the yuan 元 sequence; and (4) the hou 侯 sequence. Both the shen-ouden and the hou-wu rhyme categories are frequent "combined rhymes" (合韻) in Western Han times. In addition, it is important to leave behind any preconceived notion of which lines may be part of the rhyme scheme. While Liao Changgei and Zhou Zamo operated from the assumption that only the even-numbered lines should be included in the rhyme pattern, Western Han texts provide ample evidence of additional rhymes on the odd-numbered lines. Western Han authors—and perhaps especially those from the south—did not write according to the kinds of preconceptions and constraints known from later regulated verse; instead, they used rhyme considerably more freely, as can be seen in lines 3, 7, and 19 of the chapter list. The examples of rhymed passages below will reveal the same phenomenon even more clearly.

Without doubt, the overall regularity of the rhyme pattern was consciously composed, with the chapter titles deliberately chosen and arranged—or to go even a step further, which I think we must: the chapter titles themselves were created in order to rhyme in this particular sequence. Even more, it appears that the chapters were divided the way they are in order to form an even-numbered group. This is strongly suggested by the fact that the topic of rhetorical "persuasion" (shui 水) is split into two chapters whose fundamental identity is suggested in the "Overviews," where they are treated as one.

But what exactly is accomplished by the rhymed chapter list? First, in its orderly sequence, the list encompasses the complete Huainanzi in a nutshell, of their auditory properties. (One could, for example, think of patterns of vowels and consonants within individual lines as well as between them.) I strongly suspect that a complete phonological analysis of the language of the Huainanzi, involving a phonetic transcription of the entire text, would be revealing; unfortunately, this has never been done and is well beyond my own expertise. As for the rhyme pattern, I am not at all sure where the mere "assessor" ends and a "combined rhyme" begins; actually, for a period as early as the Western Han I doubt the validity of such distinctions to begin with. However, in identifying possible "combined rhymes" I am barely not overestimating the euphemistic nature of the text under discussion. To the contrary, for every additional rhymed poem proposed here, there will be other auditory features neglected by the sole focus on rhyme. My limited analyses presented here suffice, however, to show that the "Overview" is a highly patterned euphemistic artifact.

47 See the tables in Liao Changgei and Zhou Zamo, Han Wei/Fish mackerel fish yu/lemon yinggis, the numerous examples noted in Kern, Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsbücher.

48 The discussions of individual chapters show a variety of poetic forms. Consider, for example, the passage on the chapter "Heavenly Patterns" ("Tian wen" 天文):

天文者，所以
非陰陽之氣，
理日月之光，
雷閶震之時，
列星辰之行，
知逆順之變，
論是理之議，
邪時遷之應，
法五行之常，
使人
有以明天承，
而不亂其常也。 陽部

"Heavenly Patterns" provides the means by which to harmonize the qì of yin and yang, give regular pattern to the radiances of the sun and moon, delimit the seasons of opening (spring-summer) and closing (fall-winter), sequence the movements of the stars and planets, know the changes of [their] retrograde and prograde motion, avoid the misfortunes [resulting from violations] of prohibitions and taboos, comply with the correspondences to the seasonal cycles, and take your model from the constancy of the spirits of the five directions.

[All this] will enable you to
possess the means to gaze upward to Heaven and carry out your
compliance,
and not to bring disorder to the constancies [of Heaven].

The passage reveals a completely regular syntactic pattern: following the title,
the main text is introduced by the formula miy" (the means by which),
followed by eight lines of extreme regularity. The pattern is "Verb–Compound
Noun–Noun–Noun," with the first three characters following the typical fast-paced
trisyllabic line (θum-θumum) as seen in contemporaneous southern song,
notably the "Nine Songs" (Jia ge) from the Cha Chi anthology. The section
concludes with the statement that this chapter "will enable you to possess the
means to gaze upward to Heaven and carry out your compliance, and not to
bring disorder to the constancies [of Heaven]." This form of closing statement,
specifying the benefits to be gained from the chapter and urging the reader to
accept the guidance given in it, concludes each of the chapter descriptions.

Luo Changqi and Zhou Zunm identify the regular yang rhymes on the
even lines, including the final line of the closing formula; yet, in addition,
the sheng 種 rhyme in line 7 can be combined with the yang rhymes, while the
shī 聖 and shì 聖 rhymes in lines 1 and 3 can form a "combined rhyme" of their
own, adding further to the overall euphonic qualities of the passage.

The summary of the chapter "Seasonal Rules" (Shì zé 時則) is composed in a
rather different poetic form, namely, the classic trisyllabic meter associated
with the Shi Jing but now actualized in Han language. While the summary
is longer than the one for "Heavenly Patterns," its introductory and closing for-
mal elements serve similarly as framing devices. Unlike the summary for "Heavenly
Patterns," the one for "Seasonal Rules" does not show syntactic parallelism, but its
use of rhyme is even more intense:

時則者，所以
上因天時，
下合地利，
謂五行，
合要人則，
形十二節，
以為法式，

之部
職部
職部
職部
職部
職部

[50] Here and in the following, compare the translations by Sarah A. Queen and Judson
Murray in Meyer et al., "Heavenly Patterns"; I have often accepted their formulations.

[51] As discussed by Ruth, "Beginning of Literary Poetry."
the same time, when taken together, an expression of stylistic versatility. This principle of variation within order can be observed throughout the twenty chapter summaries.

One of the most intensely patterned passages in the "Overview" is the section where the authors move from chapter to chapter of the Huainanzi to argue that they had purposefully developed their thematic sequence in order to let the reader comprehend how the various precepts are interconnected in an unbroken linear chain. Composed in complex parallel style and alluding to the central concepts of each chapter, this key section of the "Overview" argues forcefully for the unity of the entire text. Moreover, the passage relates the logic and effects of the Huainanzi's composition in terms of agency ('we') and audience ('you'), both only implied but clearly discernible. Addressing the emperor in direct speech, the passage invokes the complete series of chapters in their sequential order, albeit in most cases not by their titles but by alternative phrases, very likely in order to maintain the rhyme pattern:

故

道而不明終始，
則不知所依。
言終始而不明天地四時，
則不知所窮。
言天地四時而不明天道所為，
則不知所為。

然則道而不明人神之氣，
則不知養生之機。

其人情而不言天聖之德，
則不知五行之差。

言道而不言君事，
則不知大小之宜。

言君事而不為稱喻，
則不知動靜之宜。

言稱喻而不言俗變，
則不知合同大指。

言俗變而不言往事，
則不知道之萌。

然則道而不明世曲，
則無以糅焉。

然則道而不明詰言，
則無以從容。

Therefore,

Had we discussed the Way without illuminating ends and beginnings,
then you would not know what to imitate and adhere to.
Had we discussed ends and beginnings without illuminating
Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons,
then you would not know the taboos to avoid.
Had we discussed Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons without
invoking examples and drawing on categories,
then you would not know the subtleties of the essential [qi vital force].
Had we discussed the utmost essence without tracing to its
source the spirit-like vital force of human beings,
then you would not know the mechanism by which to nourish your
vitality.
Had we traced to their source the genuine dispositions of
human beings without discussing the virtuous power of the
great sage,
then you would not know the [human] shortcomings in the five
modes of conduct/Five Phases.
Had we discussed the Way of the [ancient Five] Thearachs
without discussing the affairs of the ruler,
then you would not know how to distinguish the small from the great.
Had we discussed the affairs of the ruler without providing
pronouncements and illustrations,
then you would not know the appropriate times for action or
quietude.
Had we discussed pronouncements and Illustrations without
discussing changes in customs,
then you would not know how to coordinate and unify their great
tenets.
Now—had we discussed changes in customs without discussing past events, then you would not know how to act in correspondence with the Way and its Potency. If you knew the Way and its Potency without knowing the perversions of the age, then you would lack the means to match yourself with the myriad aspects of the world. If you knew the "Discourses on the Boundless" without knowing "Sayings Explained," then you would lack the means to take your ease. If you fully comprehended the documents and writings without knowing the tenets of military affairs, then you would lack the means to respond to [enemy] troops. Now—if you knew grand overviews without knowing analogies and illustrations, then you would lack the means to draw upon in order to clarify affairs. If you knew the Public Way without knowing interpersonal relations, then you would lack the means to respond to disaster and good fortune. If you knew interpersonal relations without knowing "Cultivating Effort," then you would lack the means to inspire scholars to exert their utmost strength.

An analysis of the rhymes of this passage shows far greater complexity than suggested by Lao Changpei and Zhou Zumo, who once again recognize only the rhymes on the even lines. The first rhyme sequence runs through the first sixteen lines, with either a shi 希 or a ge 歌 rhyme on the even-numbered lines (shi and ge can be combined in Western Han texts). The second rhyme sequence, starting with the ninth rhyme, is a combined sheng 廣-yang 獅-dong 重 sequence; after this, the rhyme returns to another combined shi 希-"shi之-"shi 翻 sequence that can be connected to the initial shi 希—ge 歌 one.

54 "Discourses on the Boundless" (Yun lun 言論) and "Sayings Explained" (Quan yeu 論言) are the titles of chapters 13 and 14 of the Huainan chu, as translated by Majou et al.
53 "Cultivating Effort" (Shi wei 侍衛) is the title of chapter 12 of the Huainan chu, as translated by Majou et al.

If we also include the rhymes on the odd-numbered lines, it appears that in the first and third rhyme sequences, nearly all lines are part of the rhyme system, including several yu 鱼 rhymes.

However, the rhymes are only one aspect of the overall patterning of this sequence. Equally important, the passage is composed as a mantra-like litany of repeated words and parallel phrases that lend themselves to easy memorization and recitation. If we consider both the interlocking repetitions and the density of rhyme, what dominates this entire section is not what it says; it is the overall order of how to speak. In this modular order, each word is assigned its proper place exactly as each phenomenon of the natural and social spheres has its place both in the universe and in the text of the Huainan chu, which is the verbal replica of that universe. Altogether, the core message of this section—namely, that the entire Huainan chu is tightly unified and cannot be broken apart into isolated essays—is mimetically represented in a pattern of linguistic artistry that likewise precludes any gaps or discontinuities.

For a final example of the performative diction of the "Overview," one could look at the poetic eulogy that follows shortly after the discussion just mentioned. Here, the text takes on the genuine form of the short southern song (ge 歌) that in Western Han times was closely associated with the lyrics from Chu in general and with the poetry of members of the imperial house in particular:

誠通乎二十篇之論，真部 (Rhyme 1)
驚凡得要，
以
遇九野，
怪十門，
外天地，
挺山川，
其於
道通一世之間，
元部 (Rhyme 1)
亦儒者之，
若然者，

54 For the Western Han poems included in Shi ji and Han shu, most of them attributed to members of the imperial family, see Kern, "The Poetry of Han Historiography" 23–65. See also Ke Mashingshing, "Han shi shi shi zhi shi de shi he han shi chuan de" (Ancient and modern history in the Shi and Han poetry) Zong hua shi yuehe. 2007:4–10.
If you fully comprehend the discussions of the twenty chapters, observe the general traits and obtain the essentials, so that you traverse the nine regions of the wilderness, pass through the ten gates, move beyond Heaven and Earth, extend beyond mountains and streams—and thereupon roam freely within the space of the whole world, administer and regulate the forms of the myriad kinds of things—this will be a sublime excursion indeed!

And once it is like this, you will clasp sun and moon without being burned, give luster to the myriad kinds of things without being diminished, How gracefull! How pure!—This is sufficient to read! How far-reaching! How grand! How vast!—allowing you to roam about!

The passage can be understood either as a poem in two halves or as two separate poems. In each unit, two distinct rhymes are used that, however, are so closely related that they could also be considered combined rhymes (when the student of Chi in the first, xiao you in the second). Each unit begins with an introductory phrase and contains one long, perfectly symmetrical couplet (at the end of unit 1 and the beginning of unit 2). While the first half of the text includes four standard trisyllabic lines of the kind found in Emperor Wu's sacrificial hymns and elsewhere, the second half ends with one long exclamation, punctuated by the breathing syllable xi—another form familiar from southern poems of the time. As a whole, this poetic eulogy combines intensely poetic diction with the rhetoric of a grandiloquent imperial vision known from contemporaneous fn such as Sima Xiangru’s “Excursion Hunt of the Son of Heaven” or “Far Roaming” (“Yuan you” in the Chuci anthology. As such, the poem resonated with Emperor Wu’s political and cultural ambitions alike, celebrating imperial might as well as the cultural splendor of the Liu imperial house.

The Performance of the “Overview” and the Composition of the Huainanzi

All received editions of the Huainanzi treat the “Overview” as its final chapter (chapter 21). Yet while our earliest source, the Han Shu—in the biography of Liu An and in the “Monograph on Arts and Writings”—speaks of a text in twenty-one chapters, the “Overview” itself consistently, no less than thrice, refers to the “twenty chapters” of the work. First, the list of chapters cited above begins with the words 著著二十篇 (“Thus, [we] composed the twenty chapters of . . .”). Second, around the middle of the “Overview” it is remarked:

故
著著二十篇，
則
天地之理究矣，
人間之事悉矣，
帝王者之備矣。

Therefore, we composed a collection of writings in twenty chapters so that the inner structures of Heaven and Earth are penetrated, human affairs are revealed in their connections, and the Way of the Thearchs and Kings [of old] is completely laid out.

Third, as also cited above, the summary encourages the reader to “fully comprehend the discussions of the twenty chapters.” From this evidence, but also from the fact that the “Overview” displays the quintessential characteristics of the Western Han fu, I conclude that the “Overview” was initially external to the text of the Huainanzi proper, and that its literary form suggests that it was
performed before Emperor Wu when "the book of the Liu clan" was presented to him in 139 BCE. While the twenty chapters provide comprehensive instructions on how to maintain the cosmic and political order, the presentation of the "Overview" was an act of political and moral persuasion intended to urge its hearer to follow the precepts compiled at the court of Huai-nan. Moreover, in addition to being composed for a specific, indeed single, oral performance of persuasive speech, it is likely that its written version was simultaneously intended to accompany the twenty chapters of the Huainan school in order to be perpetually available as a guide for future readers. It is in this form that it has been preserved from earliest times onward, for two millennia of ruling emperors, ministers, and scholars alike. It is also in this form that it has guarded the stability and internal order of the Huainan school as a book.

Looking at the "Overview" from this perspective also suggests a specific date for it. In the Introduction to their translation of the Huainan school, John Major and his collaborators present a well-reasoned argument that the Huainan school—being the very large text that it is—was not initially written for Emperor Wu but was instead a work gradually created during the preceding reign of Emperor Jing (i.e., 137–141 BCE), and possibly even for that ruler. From my analysis presented here, I conclude that at least the "Overview" cannot have been meant for Emperor Jing. As Shi Ji and Han Shu inform us, Emperor Jing profoundly disliked the elaborate poetic compositions (kui 諸, an alternative term for ju) that were en vogue at the southern courts of Wu, Liang, and Huainan.55 As the "Overview" directly addresses its reader or hearer, and as this recipient can only be the emperor, it must have been composed for Emperor Wu, who was known for his fondness for the ju; directed at Emperor Jing, it would most likely have been counterproductive.

It is possible to argue, as Major et al. do in the Introduction to their translation,56 that the "Overview" was composed significantly later than the twenty chapters proper. The problem with this hypothesis is that the "Overview" appears to be, rather, not merely an afterthought to the twenty chapters but—considering especially the rhymed list of chapter titles—the very prism through which these chapters were organized and unified to begin with. Moreover, the "Overview" is explicit about the nature of the Huainan school: it is a book of advice for a universal ruler. If not addressed directly to the emperor but created merely to represent Liu An's own design for universal rulership, the work would have been considered presumptuous at best, and revealing the

55 Sima Qian, Shi ji 21: 20999; Ban Gu, Han shu 57.3, 1239.
56 Major et al., Huainan school, 22–24.

king's dangerous ambitions at worst. In the form we know the text, it needed an emperor as its audience.

For several reasons, this emperor was unlikely to have been Emperor Jing. First, not only the "Overview" but the Huainan school as a whole frequently employs the artful language of the southern ju. This would suggest that during the reign of Emperor Jing, the twenty chapters would not have been greeted enthusiastically at the imperial court. Second, whereas Emperor Wu came to the throne at age sixteen and was given the text just two years later, early in both his life and his reign, Emperor Jing, born in 288 BCE, had ruled the Han Empire since 157 BCE. Because Liu An's previous statutory visit to the imperial court took place in 146 BCE,57 the Huainan school must have been composed after that date; yet nearly twenty years into his reign, Emperor Jing hardly needed a new blueprint for how to govern the empire, much less one written by his cousin, a southern king of his own generation. For these reasons, I would submit that the Huainan school as a whole, and not merely its "Overview," was composed right after 145 BCE when the new emperor, Wu, ascended to the throne—a young man of the next generation with an obvious need for senior advice who, unlike his father, was receptive to the southern literary fashion of his time. Quite likely, after Liu An's own ambitions to become emperor had been thwarted,58 he might have conceived of the Huainan school as the tool to enable him to lay claim to a new stature as the imperial court's spiritus recto—perhaps even not far from the role of regent in the vein of the Duke of Zhou.

This is not to argue that the entirety of the Huainan school was hastily written from scratch. As the twenty chapters represent widely diverging fields of knowledge as well as distinct stylistic choices, they were most likely composed by different groups of men learned in different scholarly traditions. The chapters' diverse writings did not come into being overnight, nor were they composed for a single purpose; much of their knowledge must have been in existence—and written down in one form or another—by 145 BCE, before being compiled into the twenty chapters of the Huainan school. It is only this unifying compilation, and not the original authorship of disparate texts representing different traditions of learning, that created the comprehensive message of the Huainan school as a whole, and it is only the "Overview" that, in a final rhetorical gesture, unified the chapters (complete with their rhyming titles) as a single work of defined scope and fixed internal order.

58 See Van Deusen, The Huainan school and Liu An's claim to moral authority.
Thus, I suggest, it was the occasion of 139 BCE that generated the text as we know it, and it was the literary fashion of the time, enthusiastically received by a young ruler, that shaped its representation—the "Overview"—in both its written form and as a court performance. The resulting Hsüan-nan-tzu was the first "big book" of Han times, and its overall composition for, and presentation at, the imperial court of Emperor Wu must be seen as a forceful intervention into the politics and culture at the imperial court. Its textual unification of wide-ranging, diverse, and in fact mutually unrelated essays was the most magnificent summation of sage advice for a young and ambitious emperor who found himself ruling over an only recently unified, and still highly precarious, empire. Thus, without the occasion of Liu An's court visit in 139 BCE, the Hsüan-nan-tzu as a single, unified, and monumental book may never have come into existence, and as individual essays, none of its chapters may have survived.

PART TWO

Knowledge and Rhetoric