

## The "Biography of Sima Xiangru" and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian's *Shiji*

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The problem of the authenticity of certain chapters of Sima Qian's (ca. 145–ca. 86 B.C.) *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historian) has long been noted, beginning with the remark in Sima Qian's *Hanshu* 漢書 biography that ten of the one hundred and thirty chapters mentioned in Sima's outline "Taishi gong zixu" 太史公自序 were lost, "having [merely] a listing but no text" (*you lu wu shu* 有錄無書).<sup>1</sup> In analyzing individual chapters, often through a comparison with their *Hanshu* counterparts, scholars have reached opposing conclusions on the *Shiji* text.<sup>2</sup> In the present paper, I put forward what I consider the aggregate evidence

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1. *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987) 62.2724. In his commentary to this passage, Zhang Yan 張晏 (3rd century) gives a list of the ten chapters in question. In his commentary to the *Shiji*, Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (8th century) has further elaborated on this; see *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982) 130.3321–22. Excellent modern accounts of the problem include Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫, "Taishi gong shu wangpian kao" 太史公書亡篇考, in *Yu Jiaxi lunxue ji* 余嘉錫論學集 (Taipei: Wenhai, 1979), 1: 1–108, and Qiu Qionsun 丘瓊蓀, *Lidai yuezhì lǚzhì jiaoshi* 歷代樂志律志校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1964), 1–14.

2. A broad, albeit not in all points successful challenge to the authenticity of seventeen *Shiji* chapters has been mounted by Cui Shi 崔適, *Shiji tanyuan* 史記探源 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993). For doubts on individual chapters, see, e.g., A. F. P. Hulswé, "The Problem of the Authenticity of *Shih-chi* ch. 123, the Memoir on Ta Yüan," *T'oung Pao* 61 (1975): 83–147; Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier: A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssu (280?–208 B.C.)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1938), 91–111; David B. Honey, "The *Han-shu*, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the *Shih-chi*: The Case of the 'Hsiung-nu lieh-zhuan,'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (1999): 67–97; Yves Hervouet, "La valeur relative des textes du *Che ki* et du *Han chou*," in *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à Monsieur Paul Demiéville*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), 55–76; Martin Kern, "A Note on the Authenticity and Ideology of *Shih-chi* 24, 'The Book on Music,'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119 (1999): 673–77. By contrast, others have argued for the authenticity especially of *Shiji* chapter 123, the "Arrayed Traditions of Ferghana" ("Dayuan liezhuan" 大宛列傳); see Lü Zongli, "Problems Concerning the Authenticity of *Shih chi* 123 Reconsidered," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 17 (1995): 51–68; Kazuo Enoki, "On the Relationship between the *Shih-chi* 史記, Bk. 123 and the *Han-shu* 漢書, Bks. 61 and 96," *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 41 (1983): 1–31; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Chinese and Indo-Europeans," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1966: 9–39. Most recently, William H. Nienhauser, Jr. has tried to show that *Shiji* chapter 8, the "Basic Annals of Gaozu" ("Gaozu benji" 高祖本紀) is the earlier text, compared to its *Hanshu* counterpart; see Nienhauser, ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 2: *The Basic Annals of Han China* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2002), "Introduction," xiii–xlviii. Nienhauser attempts to refute "a handful of Western scholars who have attempted to show that portions of the *Shih chi* have been lost and then recopied from the *Han shu*" (xiii) yet does not offer any specific detail to invalidate these scholars' work. Nienhauser seems mainly concerned with the rarely made suggestion that all or most of the *Shiji* had been copied from the *Hanshu*. While such a generalization is indeed dubious, I take exception to the statement that "the burden of proof should always be on those who want to change or exchange the *Shih chi* accounts" (xlviii). Instead of pronouncing blanket—and in this form untenable—rejections of the entire scholarship that challenges the authenticity of certain parts of the *Shiji*, the scholarly *Shiji* translator would rather want to be the first to look for evidence that may put the text he is using in doubt.

that calls the authenticity of *Shiji* chapter 117, the Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 B.C.) biography, into question.

Within the *Shiji*, the Sima Xiangru biography is our only source for information on the literary genre of the *fu* 賦 (rhapsody) at the court of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 B.C.). This is surprising, as according to the later account in the *Hanshu*, the *fu* was the most prestigious, most widely practiced, and most politically charged literary form of the Western Han, reaching its peak during the Emperor Wu period. In the Sima Xiangru biography, *fu* is mentioned once in the compound *cifu* 辭賦,<sup>3</sup> saying that Emperor Jing 景 (r. 157–141 B.C.) was not fond of such compositions, and eight times with respect to Sima Xiangru's works.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the concluding appraisal of Sima Xiangru, introduced by the usual "Taishi gong yue" 太史公曰, refers to Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) discussion of the *fu* as a genre. Obviously, this note cannot come from Sima Qian.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the word *fu* in connection with Sima Xiangru's literary compositions appears once in Sima Qian's "Taishi gong zixu" 太史公自序 in the phrase *daren fushuo* 大人賦說 ("rhapsodic exposition on the Great Man"). Here, the term is used not in the usual form as genre designation but seems to be pointing to the performative nature of Sima Xiangru's composition on the "Great Man."<sup>6</sup> The only other place where the *Shiji* deals with the genre of the *fu* is chapter 84, the joint biographies of Qu Yuan 屈原 (fourth century B.C.) and Jia Yi 賈誼 (ca. 200–168 B.C.).<sup>7</sup> Here, the term *fu* appears four times: once for "Huai sha" 懷沙 (Embracing sand), a poem attributed to Qu Yuan and later anthologized in the *Chu ci* 楚辭 anthology, once in general terms for the works of Song Yu 宋玉, Tang Le 唐勒, and Jing Cuo 景差 (all third century B.C.), purportedly Qu Yuan's immediate late Warring States successors from Chu 楚,<sup>8</sup> once for Jia Yi's "Diao Qu Yuan" 弔屈原 (Lamenting Qu Yuan), and once for Jia's "Funiaio fu" 鸚鵡賦 (*Fu* on the owl).<sup>9</sup>

3. *Ci* and *fu* are often used interchangeably. Their combination as a compound is not uncommon in Han times.

4. *Shiji* 117.2999, 3002, 3043, 3054, 3056.

5. *Shiji* 117.3073. Traditional and modern readers have proposed that either this specific sentence has been added in later times, or that the whole appraisal is a later product; see, e.g., Han Zhaoqi 韓兆琦, *Shiji tonglun* 史記通論 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 523, and Zhu Dongrun 朱東潤, *Shiji kaosuo (wai er zhong)* 史記考索 (外二種) (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 33, both with further references to traditional scholarship.

6. *Shiji* 130.3317. For the composition on the "Great Man," see below.

7. The word *fu* is also mentioned in other meanings ("to present"; "taxation") throughout the *Shiji*. While these meanings are related to that of literary "presentation," the passages where *fu* appears in this way do not refer to literature.

8. All three figures are shadowy; except for some later lore on Song Yu, apparently mostly derived from the *fu* ascribed to him, not much beyond their names is known. The *Chu ci* compiler and commentator Wang Yi 王逸 (d. 158) notes that some people took Jing Cuo as the author of the "Da zhao" 大招 (The great summons), a *Chu ci* anthology piece traditionally ascribed to Qu Yuan. Song Yu is credited by Wang Yi with the "Jiu bian" 九辯 (Nine arguments, or Nine changes) and the "Zhao hun" 招魂 (Summoning the soul); the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Monograph on arts and letters) lists sixteen pieces under his name. The *Wen xuan*, the *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 and some Tang and Song sources identify him as the author of several more *fu*. While we have no evidence to confirm or reject Song Yu's authorship of the *Chu ci* pieces, the authenticity of the *fu* ascribed to him has been under intense debate since Song times. The most recent culmination of this debate is Gao Qiufeng 高秋鳳, *Song Yu zuopin zhenwei kao* 宋玉作品真偽考 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1999), arguing for the authenticity of most of the Song Yu pieces. For references to the relevant earlier scholarship, see Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the Fu of Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.–A.D. 18)* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 125 n. 58. Tang Le, credited in the "Yiwen zhi" with four works, has only recently been related to a particular text, written on bamboo slips, that was excavated in 1972 at Yinqueshan 銀雀山 (Linyi 臨沂, Shandong): a short fragment of a dialogue in which Tang Le and Song Yu discuss chariot driving. A number of studies have been devoted to this fragment; including Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, "Tang Le ji qi yiwen: Chuci xin ziliao" 唐勒及其佚文: 楚辭新資料, *Chūgoku bungaku ronshū* 中國文學

While the *Shiji* identifies as *fu* some works by Qu Yuan and his successors that in other early sources do not carry this designation, it does not mention the *fu* of Mei Sheng 枚乘 (d. 141 B.C.), Zhuang Zhu 莊助 (d. 122 B.C.; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Zhu 嚴助), Kong Zang 孔臧 (ca. 201–123 B.C.), Yuqiu Shouwang 吾丘壽王 (ca. 156–110 B.C.), Zhufu Yan 主父偃 (d. 126 B.C.), Zhu Maichen 朱買臣 (fl. 127 B.C.), Liu An 劉安 (175–122 B.C.), Liu Yan 劉偃 (or 鄼, fl. mid-second century B.C.), Mei Gao 枚皋 (fl. 130–110 B.C.), Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154–93 B.C.), Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–115 B.C.), or Zhuang Ji 莊忌 (ca. 188–105 B.C.; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Ji 嚴忌), all of whom were well-known, prolific contemporaries of Sima Qian. In the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi," Liu An is credited with eighty-two *fu*, Kong Zang with twenty, Liu Yan with nineteen, Yuqiu Shouwang with fifteen, Mei Gao with one hundred and twenty (to which one has to add the "several dozens" censored by the compilers of the imperial catalogue),<sup>10</sup> Zhuang Zhu with thirty-five, and even Sima Qian himself with eight.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Dongfang Shuo is mentioned with twenty *pian* 篇 of writings, not among the *fu* authors but in the eclectic category of *zajia* 雜家.<sup>12</sup> Sima Xiangru is said to have composed twenty-eight *fu*. Most of these men appear in various contexts in the *Shiji*, and some even have biographies included there. We find information about their official careers and canonical learning, or—in the cases of Mei Sheng and Zhuang Ji—see them mentioned as *youshui zhi shi* 游說之士 (wandering persuaders), that is, men of eloquent speech. In no case is any of them praised as a literary talent or author of a certain type of writing.

The two *Shiji* biographies that mention the *fu* differ distinctly in their presentation of the nature of the genre. In the Qu Yuan/Jia Yi chapter, the *fu* appears as a vehicle of personal frustration;<sup>13</sup> in the Sima Xiangru chapter, it serves the purpose of indirect political admonition.<sup>14</sup> The latter corresponds to the terms in which Yang Xiong, the most prominent literary figure of late Western Han times and the Wang Mang 王莽 interregnum (9–23), saw the *fu*. Nothing suggests that Sima Xiangru was driven by any of the intense feelings of

論集 9 (1980): 1–8; Tan Jiajian 譚家健, "Tang Le fu canpian kaoshi ji qita" 唐勒賦殘篇及其他, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 1990.2: 32–37; Tang Zhangping 唐漳平, "Lun Tang Le fu canjian" 論唐勒賦蠹簡, *Wenwu* 1990.4: 48–52; Zhu Bilian 朱碧蓮, *Chuci lungao* 楚辭論稿 (Shanghai: Sanlian, 1993), 210–23; Zhao Kuifu 趙逵夫, *Qu Yuan yu ta de shidai* 屈原與他的時代 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1996), 429–56; Li Cheng, "Tang Le yanjiu" 唐勒研究, *Chuantong wenhua yu xiandaihua* 傳統文化與現代化 1998.2: 48–55; Gao Qiufeng, *Song Yu zuopin zhenwei kao*, 385–401.

9. *Shiji* 84.2486, 2491, 2492, 2503.

10. According to Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) who reproduced an abridged version of the catalogue in the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi," these pieces were "too frivolous to be readable" (*you manxi bu ke du zhe* 尤嫚戲不可讀者); see *Hanshu* 51.2367. The original version of the imperial catalogue was Liu Xiang's 劉向 (79–78 B.C.) "Bie lu" 別錄 (Separate listings). It was condensed into Liu Xin's 劉歆 (d. A.D. 23) "Qi lue" 七略 (Seven epitomes) and in this form received by Ban Gu who further abbreviated it.

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

12. *Hanshu* 30.1741. For possible reasons why Dongfang's writings are not listed among the *fu*, see Nakamura Akihiko 中村昌彦, "Kan shi 'Shifu ryaku' hensan to jifu bungakukan: sono Tōhō Saku hiaseki no riyū o chūshin ni" 漢志詩賦略編纂と辭賦文學觀：その東方朔排斥の理由を中心に, *Chūgoku bungaku ronshū* 14 (1985): 31–51.

13. For Qu Yuan's and Jia Yi's *fu* as expressions of personal frustration, see *Shiji* 84.2482, 2486, 2492, 2496, 2503.

14. Sima Xiangru's purported intention to admonish and satirize is mentioned repeatedly in his biography and is again reiterated in the "Taishi gong zixu"; see *Shiji* 117.3002, 3048, 3053, 130.3317. Parallel accounts may be found in *Hanshu* 57A.2533, 2582, 2589.

personal misfortune and mistreatment that are given as the *raison d'être* of Qu Yuan's and Jia Yi's work. And conversely, while portraying Qu Yuan as a forthright official who in vain tried to influence his ruler, no effort is made to explain how Qu Yuan's and Jia Yi's "frustration *fu*" were designed as works of political criticism.<sup>15</sup> Altogether, the *Shiji* seems to define the "frustration *fu*" (Qu Yuan and Jia Yi) and the *fu* of political admonition (Sima Xiangru) through strong moral and political claims only to fall into complete silence on them beyond the two biographical chapters. Thus, the *Shiji* account on the *fu* is contradictory in at least two respects: first, between the Qu Yuan/Jia Yi and the Sima Xiangru biographies; second, between either one, and both of them, and the silence on the *fu* throughout the rest of the *Shiji*. This is all the more remarkable as Sima Qian can be counted among the politically most critical, personally most frustrated, and stylistically most accomplished authors of his time. These three aspects of his personality are given ample expression in his "Da Ren An Shu" 答任安書 (Letter in response to Ren An) and the "Taishi gong zixu."<sup>16</sup> If the mid-Western Han *fu* had the moral and political significance accorded to it in the two biographies, one wonders why Sima Qian apparently stripped almost all his contemporary *fu* authors, including his eminent teacher Dong Zhongshu, of their angry and critical voices.<sup>17</sup>

Before moving to a close discussion of the Sima Xiangru biography, the substantial problems of textual integrity and authenticity in the combined Qu Yuan/Jia Yi biography may be briefly recounted. In terms of its structure, contents, and authorship, the chapter constitutes a quite dubious part of the *Shiji*. As noted by David Hawkes, "the biography of Qu Yuan reads like a not very successful patchwork of contradictory and in some cases obviously unhistorical sources."<sup>18</sup> These sources include (a) Liu An's "Li sao zhuan" 離騷傳 (Tradition of "Encountering sorrow"),<sup>19</sup> which includes the biography's references to the "Li sao" but no references to other works; (b) a brief rhymed passage of four lines that immediately precedes the account of the composition of the "Li sao";<sup>20</sup> (c) the poem "Yu fu" 漁父 (The fisherman), integrated into the narrative;<sup>21</sup> (d) the poem "Huai sha," explicitly

15. In a somewhat perfunctory manner, this intention is ascribed twice to the "Li sao" 離騷: once in the Qu Yuan biography and once in the "Taishi gong zixu"; see *Shiji* 84.2482, 130.3314.

16. In both texts, Sima Qian provides an entire genealogy of his personal heroes, including Qu Yuan, who wrote their works only when in dire straits, and he explicitly places himself in their tradition; see *Hanshu* 62.2735, *Shiji* 130.3300.

17. Both Dong Zhongshu's "Shi bu yu fu" 士不遇賦 (*Fu* on the gentleman not meeting [his time]) and Sima Qian's "Bei shi bu yu fu" 悲士不遇賦 (*Fu* on grieving over the gentleman not meeting [his time]) only survive in fragments quoted in the seventh-century *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985) 30.541, and the more dubious *Guwen yuan* 古文苑. For an annotated translation of both pieces, see James Robert Hightower, "The *Fu* of T'ao Ch'ien," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17 (1954): 197-203. Another "frustration *fu*" of Sima Qian's own days is "Ai shi ming" 哀時命 (Lamenting the fate of the time), ascribed to Zhuang Ji and preserved in the *Chu ci* anthology. Finally, Dongfang Shuo's "Da ke nan" 答客難 (Responding to a guest's objections) can be regarded as a "frustration *fu*." In the *Shiji* (126.3206-7), however, it is not marked as a literary composition (as it is in *Hanshu* 65.2864-67) but seamlessly integrated into the narrative; see *Shiji* 126.3206-7. For discussions of this piece, see Dominik Declercq, *Writing Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third and Fourth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 21-38; and Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63 (2003): 383-437.

18. Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 52.

19. *Shiji* 84.2482. Liu An's text is quoted in Ban Gu's "Li sao xu" 離騷序, which is preserved in Wang Yi's commentary to the "Li sao"; see Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986) 1.49. See also Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 55-56.

20. *Shiji* 84.2482.

21. *Shiji* 84.2486.

marked as a *fu*;<sup>22</sup> and (e) an unknown source that comprises the bulk of the historical narrative, including the entire account prior to Qu Yuan's banishment.<sup>23</sup> This unknown source, together with sources (a) and (b) that are embedded in it in the *Shiji*, mention the protagonist invariably as Qu Ping 屈平 (twelve times) or simply Ping 平 (once).<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the following narrative on his banishment, most of it being the text of the "Huai sha,"<sup>25</sup> mentions him exclusively as Qu Yuan (seven times), as do the transition to the Jia Yi biography (twice),<sup>26</sup> the historian's judgment ("Taishi gong yue"; twice),<sup>27</sup> and the five other passages in which Qu Yuan/Ping is mentioned throughout the *Shiji*.<sup>28</sup> In sum, "Qu Ping" is associated only with the "Li sao" (mostly in the section coming from Liu An's "Li sao zhuan") and "Qu Yuan" only with the "Huai sha" and, albeit not explicitly, the "Yu fu." The "Yu fu" section is the only substantial part of the "Qu Yuan" narrative; it also is the part of the biography that includes the notion of *fu*.

It is thus apparently that the Qu Yuan/Qu Ping account is not a coherent whole; its poor, basically unedited combination of separate sources with their own idiosyncrasies—and perhaps even concerning two different figures?—largely defies the notion of individual historiographic authorship or style. The biography betrays either some profound textual corruption or the work of a compiler whose literary and historiographic skills seem mediocre at best. Is this compiler Sima Qian? The second half of the Qu Yuan/Jia Yi biography, consisting mostly of Jia Yi's "Diao Qu Yuan" and "Funiao fu," does not help us to answer this question. Its account of the *fu*, however, is completely isolated within the *Shiji*.

The case of the Sima Xiangru biography raises the more fundamental issues with regard to the nature and purpose of the Han *fu*. It also offers far richer resources for philological discussion. To begin with my conclusion: all available evidence suggests that this chapter in the received version of the *Shiji* cannot come from the Emperor Wu period but must be of a much later, perhaps even centuries later, date. As such, it is very possibly based on its counterpart in the *Hanshu*. There are several, and mutually independent, sets of data that in their aggregate discredit the Sima Xiangru biography as a textual anomaly in both form and contents:

First, as noted above, we find a conspicuous contradiction within the *Shiji* itself: is it possible that exclusively with respect to Sima Xiangru's works, Sima Qian defined the literary genre of the *fu* as an attempt toward indirect admonition and satirical criticism while ignoring all other contemporaneous writers and works? If the historian indeed understood the *fu* in the very same way Yang Xiong did later on,<sup>29</sup> investing it with heavy moral and political meaning, how could he completely ignore it except for Sima Xiangru's works which are, in fact, very ambiguous examples of indirect admonition? It is not difficult to hypothesize that Sima Qian may have excluded from his records the inconsequential compositions of court

22. *Shiji* 84.2486–90.

23. For the overall structure, as well as for an annotated translation, of the biography, see Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 52–60.

24. *Shiji* 84.2481–85. This section is capped by an explicit quotation from the *Yi* 易 (*Changes*) and thus clearly demarcated from the following paragraph. For the quotation, see Zhou Yi zhengyi 周易正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* ed.) 5.48b.

25. *Shiji* 84.2485–91.

26. *Shiji* 84.2491.

27. *Shiji* 84.2503.

28. *Shiji* 40.1725, 70.2292, 130.3300, 3309, 3314.

29. For Yang Xiong's highly critical evaluation of the *fu*, see Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, 89–97, and Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *fu*."

panegyrics and entertainment. But why would he assign high political significance to a literary genre and then fail ever to mention it again? No doubt, he knew his contemporaries who in the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi" are listed as prolific *fu* composers. But Sima Qian, a highly self-conscious scholar of texts, literary author, and brilliant stylist, does not say a word about their literary abilities.

Second, the story of how Emperor Wu discovered Sima Xiangru's talent is downright fantastic. According to the *Shiji*, the emperor, after "reading" (*du* 讀, that is, "reading aloud") Sima Xiangru's "*Fu* on Sir Vacuous" ("Zixu fu" 子虛賦) exclaimed about the author, "Alas—should I alone not have lived in the same era with this man!"<sup>30</sup> It is an amusing idea to picture the young emperor, sometime around 137 B.C., sitting in his palace and working through heavy piles of bamboo or wooden slips trying to decipher an extremely difficult work of literature filled with rare expressions and composed by a man he had not even heard of. In all of the *Shiji*, this is the only time we find Emperor Wu reading, and it is the only time *anyone* is reading a piece of literature. If literature was read by the emperor, why only once? And why by nobody else? The single members of the imperial family who in Sima Qian's account is ever mentioned for "being fond of reading books and playing the zither" (*hao du shu gu qin* 好讀書鼓琴) is Liu An.<sup>31</sup> According to the *Shiji*, pre-imperial and early imperial readers include historians (like Sima Qian himself or Confucius, his model), military strategists, and rhetoricians—but neither rulers nor their high officials. The *Shiji* contains forty-nine passages that mention the reading (*du*) of texts. Seventeen of these passages, always in the "Taishi gong yue" remarks, mention Sima Qian himself reading his sources. Of the remaining thirty-two passages, at least eight are later interpolations into the *Shiji*: one refers to the Eastern Han emperor Ming 明 (r. 57–75),<sup>32</sup> four mention high officials who were active only after Sima Qian stopped working on his work,<sup>33</sup> two appear in Chu Shaosun's 褚少孫 (ca. 105–ca. 30 B.C.) account of eloquent wits" (*guji* 滑稽),<sup>34</sup> and one is in the interpolated "Book on Music" ("Yueshu" 樂書), anachronistically mentioning the reading of the *Five Classics* (*wu jing* 五經).<sup>35</sup> Of the remaining twenty-four passages, fifteen concern men of pre-Han times, leaving us with nine figures from the second century B.C. Among these, men possibly concerned with literary, historical, or rhetorical writings are Emperor Wu (reading the "Zixu fu"), Prince Liu An ("reading books and playing the zither"), Sima Xiangru ("fond of reading books"),<sup>36</sup> and Zhu Maichen ("reading the *Spring and Autumn Annals*" [*Chunqui* 春秋]).<sup>37</sup> The other Han word for "reading" is *lan* 覽, an expression meaning "to survey" and often referring to the emperor surveying his realm.

30. *Shiji* 117.3002.

31. See *Shiji* 118.3082.

32. *Shiji* 6.293.

33. *Shiji* 96.2686–88.

34. *Shiji* 126.3203, 3205. Chu Shaosun identifies himself here as the contributor; see *Shiji* 126.3203. Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier*, 110–11, has argued that the whole chapter cannot come from Sima Qian.

35. *Shiji* 24.117. On this last case, which is less self-explanatory than the other seven, see Kern, "A Note on the Authenticity and Ideology of *Shih-chi* 24, 'The Book on Music.'" Incidentally, the interpolated mention of high officials as readers in chapter 96 (see above) as well as the reference to reading the *Five Classics* in the later compiled "Yueshu" testify aptly to important changes in late Western Han and then Eastern Han literary culture; see Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *wen* in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 87 (2001): 43–91.

36. *Shiji* 117.3002.

37. *Shiji* 122.3243. In *Hanshu* 64A.2791, Zhu Maichen is said to have "explained the *Spring and Autumn Annals*" (*shuo Chunqui* 說春秋) and "discussed compositions from Chu" (*yan Chu ci* 言楚詞) in front of the emperor.

In the *Shiji*, only later interpolations by Chu Shaosun employ the term to refer to the reading of a text.<sup>38</sup> It was not used in this way by Sima Qian.

Third, Sima Xiangru's biography is fanciful in the extreme, and there is every reason to doubt that Sima Qian could have written in such a way about his contemporary. Much of the biography centers on Sima Xiangru's romance with Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, the daughter of a wealthy Sichuan merchant. To the dismay of her father, she runs away with the talented have-not Sima Xiangru; later, the two open an ale shop. Yet in the end, her father recognizes the marriage and confers the due part of his resources on the couple, making Sima Xiangru a rich man.<sup>39</sup> No less imaginative is the scene surrounding the poet's death: the emperor, concerned that Sima's writings could get lost, sends an attendant to his house. The imperial emissary arrives too late, finding Sima already dead. Moreover, his wife explains that whenever Sima had written a piece, people came and took it away. The only writing left is an essay on the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 sacrifices, which is thereupon dutifully delivered to the emperor: a solemn command to perform the most hallowed imperial ritual and the apotheosis of both the ruler and his *poeta laureatus*, sanctified by the moment of death. As the *Shiji* informs us in a remark immediately following the essay, "in the fifth year after Sima Xiangru's death, the Son of Heaven initiated the sacrifice to [the earth god] Houtu; in the eighth year, he first offered the ritual to the peak of the center [Mt. Song], performed the *feng* sacrifice at Mt. Tai, and then proceeded to Mt. Liangfu to perform the *shan* sacrifice at Suran." The poet's voice has vanished, but the empire, guided by his charge, finally ascends to its culmination.<sup>40</sup>

Fourth, the biography is one of the rare places throughout the *Shiji* where the character *tan* 談 appears.<sup>41</sup> This is the character writing the personal name of Sima Tan, father of Sima Qian; the son, Sima Qian, following Western Han ritual prescription, made conscious efforts to avoid this graph in his own writing, going so far as changing other people's personal names if they happened also to be *tan* 談. As a result, the character appears only fifteen times in all of the *Shiji*, and in addition twice in the final chapter 130 where it denotes Sima Tan himself. Given that Sima Qian's attention to the taboo can be documented, each of the instances of *tan* in the *Shiji* can be assumed to come from a source postdating Sima Qian's own work.<sup>42</sup>

38. *Shiji* 60.2114–15, 126.3203. Interestingly, Yang Xiong also uses *lan*—apparently in the sense of "to read"—in his criticism of Sima Xiangru's "Daren fu" 大人賦 (*Fu* on the great man), noting that when the text finally "returns to the rectifying message, the reader has already missed it" (*ji nai gui zhi yu zheng, ran lan zhe yi guo yi* 既乃歸之於正, 然覽者已過矣); see *Hanshu* p. 87B.3575. This passage may reflect the overall re-evaluation of the *fu* as primarily a piece of writing, instead of performance; see Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*."

39. In his March 2001 AAS discussant's remarks on my paper on the Han *fu*, Professor Knechtges noted: "I have long felt that the Sima Xiangru biography that we have in the *Shiji* contains far too much of what I would call a Sima Xiangru romance to give it credibility as a work of the Emperor Wu period by Sima Qian. It would have taken a number of generations for such a romance to grow to the dimensions that we now have it. The Zhuo Wenjun story, for example, is an obvious element in this romance. It is quite possible that not only are the texts of Sima Xiangru's writings in the *Shiji* derived from the *Han shu*, but also some of the accounts of Sima Xiangru's life. Thus, the account of Emperor Wu reading the 'Zixu fu' would accord better with what we know about later Han reading practice."

40. For the full account, including the essay on the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, see *Shiji* 117.3063–72. The essay closes with a series of highly classicist ritual hymns.

41. See *Shiji* 117.3064. The character appears in the text of the "Daren fu."

42. For the whole argument, see Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier*, 101–11. The character *tan* occurs on the following pages of the *Shiji*: 39:1682 (twice); 70:2286; 74:2348, 2350; 83:2476, 2479, 87:2563, 117:3064, 126:3197, 3200, 3201, 3205, 127:3219, 3221, 130:3286 (twice, both referring to Sima Tan). Bodde, who wrote before the

Fifth, philological comparison of the different versions of Sima Xiangru's *fu* in *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Wenxuan* shows the *Shiji* version to be the most normalized one in terms of its writing conventions; it is the version farthest removed from however Sima Xiangru's text may have initially been written.<sup>43</sup> Yves Hervouet, after reviewing some eight hundred textual variants that occur between the parallel *Shiji* and *Hanshu* chapters, felt confident to judge about four hundred of them and concluded that in more than seventy percent of these, the *Hanshu* version was superior to its *Shiji* counterpart, that is, closer to what the original form may have been.

In Sima Xiangru's *fu*, the great majority of textual variants concerns rhyming, alliterative, or reduplicative binomes; these usually serve as descriptives but also occur in the names of plants and trees, minerals and stones, or mythological beings. While not all variants are of the same type, they very often are on the level of semantic classifiers that either differ from *Shiji* to *Hanshu* or are present in only one version. Typically, and certainly so in binomes, such variants within the same *xiesheng* 諧聲 ("shared phonophoric") series are merely graphic and not lexical, representing the same sounds and words by different characters.<sup>44</sup> They do not affect the phonetic values of the words in question and are fully interchangeable as loan characters.<sup>45</sup> Comparing the variants between the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* versions of Sima Xiangru's *fu* and summarizing the results statistically, Hervouet determined that in the overwhelming majority of cases, it is the *Shiji* text that adds a semantic classifier to what in the *Hanshu* is a character consisting of just the phonophoric element. Typically, the character in the *Shiji* is in line with the later orthographic standard of the Chinese written tradition, while the *Hanshu* seems to preserve a more ancient, less normalized writing.

In rhyming, reduplicative, and alliterative binomes, we frequently find the *Shiji* adding the same semantic classifier to both characters, rendering a phrase of strong aural value uniform in its visual appearance: binomes descriptive of water are generally written with the "water" classifier, those of mountains with the "mountain," those of minerals and stone with either "stone" or "jade," and those of plants with "grass." This phenomenon has been thoroughly demonstrated by Jian Zongwu, who lists one hundred sixty-five phrases from Sima Xiangru's *fu* in their three received versions from *Hanshu*, *Shiji*, and *Wenxuan*. In no less than ninety-four cases, the *Wenxuan* and *Hanshu* are identical but differ from the *Shiji*, mostly because of routinely added classifiers in the latter. By contrast, in sixteen cases

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advent of modern electronic concordances, found only the *Shiji* passages of chapters 39, 74, 83, 117, and 126; on these, he notes (p. 103): "In examining these five chapters, I have been struck by the fact that every one of them contains features which, quite aside from the occurrence of the word *t'an*, tend to indicate that they, or at least parts of them, are not the work of Ssu-ma Ch'ien."

43. In detailed studies, three different scholars have reached this conclusion independently from one another; see Yves Hervouet, "La valeur relative des textes du *Che ki* et du *Han chou*"; Jian Zongwu 簡宗梧, *Han fu yuanliu yu jiazhi zhi shangque* 漢賦源流與價值之商榷 (Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1980), 45–110; and Kamatani Takeshi 釜谷武志, "Fu ni nankai na ji ga oi no wa naze ka: Zen-Kan ni okeru fu no yomarekata" 賦に漢解な字が多いのはなぜか: 前漢における賦の讀まれかた, *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本中國學會報 48 (1996): 16–30.

44. See Kern, "The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern, forthcoming.

45. On the principles underlying this statement, see William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 90–126, and Bernhard Karlgren, *Loan Characters in Pre-Han Texts* (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1968), 1–9. Further studies of this issue include Boltz, "Manuscripts with Transmitted Counterparts," in *New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to the Reading of Inscriptions and Manuscripts*, ed. Edward L. Shaughnessy (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1997), 253–85; and Kern, "Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1–4 (2002): 143–81.

*Hanshu* and *Shiji* correspond as against the *Wenxuan*; in twenty-four cases, the correspondence is between *Shiji* and *Wenxuan*; and in thirty-one cases, all three texts differ.<sup>46</sup>

On philological principles, there is no question how to interpret this overall difference between the three versions of Sima Xiangru's *fu*: the *Shiji* represents most clearly a retrospective normalization of the written form. This is not to say that the received *Hanshu* version—or, for that matter, the one in the *Wenxuan*—is original. The *Hanshu* commentator Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) takes care to mention both in his preface to the *Hanshu* and again at the beginning of the Sima Xiangru biography that by early Tang times, the characters of the *Hanshu*, and especially those of Sima Xiangru's *fu*, had been "changed to become easier to comprehend" (*gai yi* 改易) by previous editors and commentators. Yan then says that he has tried to restore the original text, changing the characters back into more ancient forms according to certain more reliable sources available to him.<sup>47</sup> Very possibly, one of the earlier scholars responsible for the normalization of Sima Xiangru's texts might have been Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), the renowned lexicographer, scholar, and early commentator of Sima's *fu*.<sup>48</sup> Anyway, it is clear that the *Shiji* versions of these texts do not, as some scholars have assumed, reflect Sima Xiangru's lexicographic interests;<sup>49</sup> they represent a retrospective normalization of the writing, postdating the original poetic composition not only by decades but by centuries.<sup>50</sup> While Yan Shigu's text of the Sima Xiangru biography is a Tang redaction, it is probably closer to what might have been the original than is the version we now have in the *Shiji*.

With respect to graphic variants, there is another set of data disproving the authenticity of the *Shiji* versions of Sima Xiangru's *fu*: the evidence from recently excavated manuscripts, and here in particular the *Odes* quotations in six manuscripts from Guodian 郭店 tomb no. 1 (Jingmen 荊門, Hubei; tomb sealed ca. 300 B.C.), Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb no. 3 (Changsha 長沙, Hunan; tomb sealed 168 B.C.), Shuanggudui 雙古堆 tomb no. 1 (Fuyang 阜陽, Anhui; tomb sealed 165 B.C.), and from texts, apparently contemporaneous with the Guodian find, that were purchased by the Shanghai Museum on the Hong Kong antique market.<sup>51</sup> These texts contain a total of 1,442 characters of *Odes* quotations. Regardless of

46. See Jian Zongwu, *Han fu yuanliu yu jiazhi zhi shangque*, 62–73.

47. See *Hanshu*, *xuli* 敘例, 2, and 57A.2529. For some examples, see Hervouet, "La valeur relative des textes du *Che ki* et du *Han chou*," 72–73. Yan Shigu's statement tallies with the evidence that even Song dynasty scholars knew ancient character forms. In a number of cases, the ancient forms recorded in Guo Zhongshu's 郭忠恕 (d. 977) *Han jian* 汗簡 and Xia Song's 夏竦 (984–1050) *Guwen sisheng yun* 古文四聲韻 match characters in recently excavated manuscripts.

48. Guo Pu's commentary is cited by both Yan Shigu in the *Hanshu* and Li Shan 李善 (d. 689) in the *Wenxuan*. Yan Shigu names four other commentators whom he accuses of having tampered with the writing of Sima Xiangru's *fu*; see *Hanshu* 57A.2529.

49. In addition to his accomplishments as a writer of poetry, Sima Xiangru is also credited with an apparently short character dictionary in one bamboo bundle (*pian* 篇), the *Fan jiang* 凡將 (see *Hanshu* 30.1720–21). While the *Suishu* 隋書 "Jingji zhi" 經籍志 (Monograph on the classics and other writings) no longer lists the *Fan jiang*, it reappears in the bibliographic treatises of both *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 46.1985, and *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua 1986), 57.1447. Not mentioned in later bibliographies, it was probably lost during Song times.

50. Pace Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999), 317, who thinks that in Sima Xiangru's work, "the use of rare characters and their clustering in groups sharing a signfic calls attention to the role of the written character in re-creating the world, and anticipates the theory of characters in the *Shuo wen jie zi*."

51. These texts are the "Wu xing" 五行 (Five conducts) and "Ziyi" 緇衣 (Black robes) from Guodian, the "Wu xing" from Mawangdui, a fragmentary *Odes* anthology from Shuanggudui, and among the Shanghai Museum materials another "Ziyi" as well as a text that the modern editors have labelled "Kongzi shilun" 孔子詩論 (Confucius

whether coming from the late fourth or early second century B.C., they consistently show a ratio of textual variants, compared both to the received text of the *Mao Shi* 毛詩 and to one another, in the range of thirty to forty percent of all characters. Most of these variants occur within the same *xiesheng* series, that is, in the element of the semantic classifiers; not surprisingly, the manuscripts are far less standardized than the received text of the *Odes*. For the first time, these manuscripts give us a clear idea of the remarkable degree to which early versions of the same poetic text differed from one another and from the *textus receptus*.<sup>52</sup> More specifically, the manuscripts from Mawangdui and Shuanggudui allow us to understand the graphic fluidity of poetic texts in Sima Xiangru's own times—and, in every point, the excavated texts confirm the conclusions scholars have reached on the differences among Sima Xiangru's received *fu*.

In addition to the six pre-Han and early Han manuscripts with *Odes* quotations, there also is a bamboo manuscript from Yang Xiong's time that proves relevant to our considerations: the "Shenwu fu" 神鳥賦 (*Fu* on the spirit crow),<sup>53</sup> discovered in Yinwan 尹灣 tomb no. 6 (Lianyungang 連雲港, Jiangsu; tomb sealed ca. 10 B.C.).<sup>54</sup> This densely rhymed, tetrasyllabic text of more than 600 characters not only shows the same measure of graphic fluidity as the *Odes* quotations in early manuscripts. It also in one instance quotes "Qing ying" 青蠅 (Mao 219) where it differs in eight out of fifteen characters from the received Mao recension. At least seven of these eight variants can be explained phonologically, exhibiting the same principle of pervasive graphic (but not lexical) variation between any two versions of the same poetic text that can be demonstrated for the early history of the *Odes*. In sum, we can now tell how thoroughly the received versions of such texts were retrospectively normalized in their writing.<sup>55</sup> On the substantial evidence from recently excavated manuscripts, we can almost certainly rule out that Western Han versions of poetic

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discussion of the *Odes*). The Mawangdui manuscript is on silk, all others on bamboo slips. For the texts, see Jingmen shi bowuguan 荊門市博物館, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998); Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, *Maotai Kanbo hakusho gogyōhen kenkyū* 馬王堆漢墓帛書五行篇研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1993); Hu Pingsheng 胡平生 and Han Ziqiang 韓自強, *Fuyang Han jian Shijing yanjiu* 阜陽漢簡詩經研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988); and Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001).

52. This is particularly true for alliterative, rhyming, or reduplicative binomes which are generally written in numerous and vastly different ways.

53. The text names itself as *fu*; however, the word *fu* is written 傅, not 賦. The words normally represented by the two graphs are nearly homophonous, sharing the same *Odes* rhyme group and having homorganic initials; 傅 is thus most likely a loan character for 賦. Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 has argued that both characters are in fact loan graphs for 布 布 or 阜 阜, meaning "to spread out"; see Qiu, "'Shenwu fu (fu)' chutan" 《神鳥傅(賦)》初探, in *Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun* 尹灣漢墓簡牘綜論, ed. Lianyungang shi bowuguan 連雲港市博物館 and Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo 中國文物研究所 (Beijing: Kexue, 1999), 7. This corresponds to the Han paronomastic glosses on *fu* 賦; see Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, 12–13.

54. For the annotated text and brief discussions of the "Fu on the spirit crow," see Qiu Xigui, "'Shenwu fu (fu)' chutan," 1–7; Wang Zhiping 王志平, "'Shenwu fu (fu)' yu Han dai Shijing xue" 《神鳥傅(賦)》與漢代詩經學, in *Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun*, 8–17; and Wan Guangzhi 萬光治, "Yinwan Han jian 'Shenwu fu' yanjiu" 尹灣漢簡《神鳥賦》研究, in Zhou Xunchu 周勛初 et al., *Cifu wenxue lunji* 辭賦文學論集 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu, 1999), 163–85. For a recent study, see Zhu Xiaohai 朱曉海, "Lun 'Shenwu fu' ji qi xiangguan wenti" 論《神鳥傅》及其相關問題, *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 2001: 456–74.

55. For a study of the *Odes* variants in excavated manuscripts, see Kern, "The *Odes* in Excavated Manuscripts." For the implications such graphic appearance has for the uses of poetry in early China, see Kern, "Early Chinese Poetics in the Light of Recently Excavated Manuscripts," in *Understanding Chinese Poetics: Recarving the Dragons*, ed. Olga Lomová (Prague: Charles University, Karolinum Press, 2003), 27–72.

compositions like Sima Xiangru's *fu* were even remotely similar to the neatly standardized orthography we see in the received *Shiji* (or the *Hanshu* and the *Wenxuan*, for that matter).

The evidence of this later editing of Sima Xiangru's *fu* does not prove that the entire Sima Xiangru biography in the *Shiji* postdates, or is copied from, its *Hanshu* counterpart.<sup>56</sup> However, the *Shiji*'s use of the tabooed character *tan*, the fanciful stories of Sima Xiangru's private life, the dramatic account of the discovery of the essay on the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, the anachronistic mention of the reading emperor, and the overall mismatch of the characterization of the *fu* with the rest of the *Shiji* all suggest that the chapter as a whole postdates Sima Qian's original work by at least a century. Moreover, Derk Bodde, briefly comparing certain syntactic structures in the Sima Xiangru narrative of *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, has shown that the *Shiji* text actually improves on that of the *Hanshu*, often clarifying a matter by some longer, less ambiguous phrasing. As Bodde concludes, "this is exactly what we would expect if we supposed that the *Ch'ien Han Shu* biography was written first, and then copied from there into the *Shih Chi*. It is hardly conceivable that the reverse of such a process could have occurred."<sup>57</sup> Bodde's observation applies to numerous parallels between *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, yet as Nienhauser has recently reminded us, the *Hanshu* altogether appears as the better organized and more logical text, in many instances apparently improving, and thus presumably postdating, its more convoluted counterpart in the *Shiji*.<sup>58</sup> Such different philological conclusions suggest a complicated, multi-layered interaction of *Shiji* and *Hanshu* much beyond Han times; during the five centuries between the compilation of the *Hanshu* and Yan Shigu's commentary, neither text would have remained strictly itself. It is therefore all the easier to understand why Yan Shigu may have tried to restore the original text of his *Hanshu*. Judging from the many earlier *Hanshu* commentaries that have survived only as citations within his own exegetical notes, he did so on the basis of a wealth of older materials available to him, leading at least parts of the *Hanshu*, and especially the Sima Xiangru biography, back to a state that actually preceded the transmitted form of the *Shiji*.<sup>59</sup> While one can easily imagine very complex scenarios of textual interaction that could have led to the versions we now have,<sup>60</sup> they do not interfere with the obvious impression that certain chapters of the received *Shiji* reflect a later recension, compared to their counterparts in the *Hanshu*. However, in the discussion of this problem, we must always refrain from general pronouncements on the *Shiji* vis-à-vis the *Hanshu* as a whole and instead focus on the close analysis of individual chapters.

For the Sima Xiangru biography, I would like to illustrate the point raised by Bodde with one particular prominent and informative case, not noted by him, where we have three versions to compare. This case is the line immediately following the text of the "Fu on the Great Man." It appears in Yang Xiong's *Hanshu* autobiography [a] as well as in the *Hanshu* [b] and *Shiji* [c] versions of the Sima Xiangru biography.<sup>61</sup> In my synopsis of the

56. That is, the orthographically normalized *Hanshu* of early medieval times, before it was changed back into earlier writing conventions by Yan Shigu.

57. Bodde, *China's First Unifier*, 109. For the same conclusion, see also Hervouet, "La valeur relative des textes du *Che ki* et du *Han chou*," 67.

58. Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 2, xiv, xlvi.

59. This is my conclusion from the fact that Yan Shigu, as noted above, remarks upon his efforts in his preface to the *Hanshu* and then again at the beginning of the Sima Xiangru biography.

60. As David B. Honey has argued for another *Shiji* chapter, its shorter *Hanshu* counterpart might preserve a version closer to Sima Qian's original *Shiji* chapter, while the latter was amplified through the course of the later *Shiji* transmission; see his "The *Han-shu*, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the *Shih-chi*, 67-97.

61. For the three passages, see *Hanshu* 87B.3575 and 57B.2600; *Shiji* 117.3063.

three passages, I divide the line into ten units that show textual differences; I also mark the major syntactical break within the line. Following the name [Sima] Xiangru, a string of textual differences can be found throughout the passage. Some of them are perhaps trivial or do not lend themselves to specific conclusions; others are substantial and deserve some discussion:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
[a]	相如	上	大人 賦	欲以風	帝	反	縹縹	有陵雲之志			
[b]	相如	既奏	大人 賦		天子	大說	飄飄	有陵雲 氣		游天地之	閒意
[c]	相如	既奏	大人之頌		天子	大說	飄飄	有凌雲之氣	似	游天地之	閒意

[a] Xiangru submitted the “*Fu* on the great man,” intending it as an indirect admonition. The thearch, on the contrary, felt light and airy, wishing to traverse the clouds.

[b] As soon as Xiangru had presented the “*Fu* on the great man,” the Son of Heaven was greatly delighted. He felt light and airy, inspired to traverse the clouds, leisurely intent on roaming Heaven and Earth.

[c] As soon as Xiangru had presented the “Eulogy on the great man,” the Son of Heaven was greatly delighted. He felt light and airy, inspired to traverse the clouds, as if leisurely intent on roaming Heaven and Earth.

The most basic difference is that versions [b] and [c] seem to refer to an actual performance context. Following directly the text of the “Daren fu,” the lines in the two Sima Xiangru biographies mention that “as soon as Xiangru had presented” (*Xiangru ji zou* 相如既奏) the composition, the emperor was “greatly delighted” (*da yue* 大說[>悦]). By contrast, the Yang Xiong biography, where the passage occurs in Yang’s discussion of the *fu*, soberly notes that Xiangru had “submitted” (*shang* 上) the *fu*, “intending it as an indirect admonition” (*yu yi feng* 欲以風). This results in a difference in syntax. In version [a], the first clause ends with “intending it as an indirect admonition”; the following sentence is only loosely connected by the conjunction *fan* 反 (“on the contrary”). By contrast, the two versions of the Sima Xiangru biography both include the major syntactic break after “greatly delighted.”

Another remarkable textual difference is that [c] has *zhi song* 之頌 for [a] and [b] *fu* 賦, specifying the genre as a “eulogy.” This suggests a certain flexibility in genre terminology that can also be seen elsewhere in early texts.<sup>62</sup> Next, the reduplicative binome *piaopiao* (“light and airy”) appears in its standard form 飄飄 in both Sima Xiangru biographies but is written 縹縹 in the Yang Xiong autobiography. It is easily conceivable why somebody would change 縹縹 (with the “silk” classifier) into 飄飄 (with the “wind” classifier) in order to denote more clearly the notion of floating in the air. There is no logical explanation for the reverse process.

A major difference appears in the second half of the passage where versions [b] and [c] contain an additional clause, most likely as an amplification of the briefer version [a]. Furthermore, in this additional clause, versions [b] and [c] differ also from each other. While

62. See Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*.”

the *Hanshu* passage [b] is somewhat ambiguous and can be parsed and interpreted in different ways, the parallel version [c] in the *Shiji* is perfectly clear through the addition of two characters: first, it expands *ling yun qi* 陵雲氣 into *ling yun zhi qi* 凌雲之氣, rendering the clause parallel to version [a]. Through the addition of the particle *zhi* 之, the syntax is marked as "you 有 . . . *zhi qi* 之氣," and the otherwise possible reading of *yunqi* 雲氣 ("clouds and vapors" or "cloudy vapors") as a compound is eliminated. Second, the *Shiji* version [c] adds the verb/adverb *si* 似 ("to resemble," "apparently") after *qi* 氣 and thereby not only further clarifies the syntax but also divides the text into two parallel clauses: "you *ling yun zhi qi* 有凌雲之氣 . . . you *tiandi zhi xianyi* 游天地之閒意." With both additions, the *Shiji* version [c] shows a clear improvement of the text in terms of grammatical clarity and literary style, informing us, as noted by the Qing commentator Li Ciming 李慈銘 (1829–1894), how the *Hanshu* passage should be parsed.<sup>63</sup> The most plausible explanation for the textual difference between the three versions would follow the philological principle of *brevior lectio potior* ("the shorter reading is to be preferred"), as implied by Bodde and recently also invoked by David B. Honey in his discussion of the *Shiji*.<sup>64</sup> In general, texts tend to become longer and clearer over time, not shorter and more obscure. In addition, it should be noted that several Song and Yuan editions of the *Shiji* write *ling yunqi* 凌雲氣 instead of *ling yun zhi qi* 凌雲之氣, and *yi* 以 instead of *si* 似, indicating an instability of wording among different *Shiji* editions just where they differ from the *Hanshu*.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, beyond the philological plane, the phrase under discussion can also be related to another issue already mentioned, that is, the fanciful and in many instances certainly fictitious nature of the Sima Xiangru biography. The phrasing in versions [b] and [c] raises a difficult problem. The use of the conjunction *ji* 既 ("as soon as") makes it clear that in a spontaneous emotional response to the "presentation" (*zou* 奏) of the *fu*, the emperor was "greatly delighted" and "felt light and airy." This would suggest that he had not simply received a written version of the text—something perhaps implied in the use of *shang* 上 ("to submit") in version [a]—but that he was immediately overwhelmed by the presentation. Evoking such an impulsive and instantaneous response, "presentation" can only mean "performance," which is indeed the other core meaning of *zou* in poetic or musical contexts. Here lies the historiographic problem. Nothing suggests that Sima Xiangru himself—according to his biography a stutterer—ever recited his own works in front of the emperor or any other audience.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the emperor's unpremeditated emotional reaction "as soon as Xiangru had presented" his text is precisely the kind of imaginative and historically problematic lore that must have grown over decades before it came to color so much of the Sima Xiangru biography.

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Conclusions of textual criticism on a two-thousand-year-old work are rarely beyond doubt. For any received text from ancient China, we need to be aware of the fact that its

63. As quoted in Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983) 57B.19a.

64. See Honey, "The *Han-shu*, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the *Shih-chi*," 86–87.

65. As observed by Mizusawa Toshitada 水澤利忠 in his supplement to Takigawa Kametarō's 瀧川龜太郎 *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證; see (the Chinese edition) *Shiji huizhu kaozheng fu jiaobu* 史記會注考證附校補 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), 1916.

66. He is thus to be distinguished from his contemporary Mei Gao who appears as the court poet *par excellence*, accompanying the emperor on numerous occasions and offering impromptu recitations on every possible subject at hand; see Knechtges, "The Emperor and Literature: Emperor Wu of the Han," 57–58.

first printed edition dates from no earlier than Song times, that is, at least a millennium after the original textual composition. Through this enormous span of manuscript culture, probably all our received texts underwent a series of synchronic and diachronic editorial interferences, reconstructions, and collations. As a result, our texts more likely than not are complex artifacts of multiple chronological layers. Thus, while we may be able to identify textual corruption, it is generally not possible to determine the historical moment at which it entered the history of the text. Moreover, as Yan Shigu's remarks on his graphic reconstruction of the *Hanshu* show, texts do not simply degenerate continuously from their pristine beginning; textual histories don't always come in simple, linear fashion. Such a fluid state of affairs where only uncertainty abounds cautions us against quick verdicts in matters of textual authenticity. Judgments based on limited and selective evidence, especially if the evidence consists of only one type of data, can at best take the form of suggestions.

Yet this rationale applies both ways: to insist on the integrity and authenticity of a text on the grounds of nothing but a single traditional assumption is itself unproductive. It becomes blatantly ideological where this single assumption is challenged by an aggregate of multiple and mutually independent sets of data. The Sima Xiangru biography in the *Shiji* is such a case. The combined data laid out above show the Sima Xiangru biography as a textual artifact whose received form may have taken shape over many centuries, that is, well into the Six Dynasties period. I thus suggest the following conclusions that may help us to resolve a string of contradictions both between the *Shiji* and other sources as well as within the text of the *Shiji* itself:

- the biography's discussion of the *fu* is based on Yang Xiong's views that were formulated about a century after Sima Qian stopped his work on the *Shiji*;
- the Zhuo Wenjun romance, Sima Xiangru's deathbed bequest on the imperial *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, and the account on the "Fu on the great man" are the results of a long anecdotal tradition;
- the use of the character *tan* is evidence of later ignorance toward the taboo otherwise observed by Sima Qian;
- the idea of the emperor reading Sima Xiangru's *fu* is informed by the literary culture of only later Western or even Eastern Han times;
- the orthography of Sima Xiangru's *fu* shows pervasive later normalization, most probably dating from Six Dynasties times;
- the syntax of the narrative is evidence of later improvements on a text for which we have an earlier reconstruction in the *Hanshu*;
- the Sima Xiangru biography, and with it also the joint Qu Yuan/Jia Yi biographies, cannot be used as evidence for the nature and purpose of the literary genre of the *fu* in early and mid-Western Han times—a genre otherwise absent in the *Shiji*.