

Introduction: Reflections on Han *Fu* Poetry

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The Han Dynasty [206 BCE–220] was undeniably a crucial time period in the development of the cultural thought and governance structures of the Chinese people. The study of the Chinese Classics [*jingxue* 經學] along with the genre of Han literature known as Han *fu* are well-established as the central topics of inquiry of this time period.

While the Classical Studies movement embodies the major school of thought of the Han era, Han *fu* serves as this period's main literary corpus. Within the first twenty years of the twenty first century, the academic community has gathered the research and experience of the previous century's exploration of Han *fu* poetry. In the resulting discussion of Han *fu*'s place in the literary world, a platform for the critical analysis of the unique ideological and artistic aspects of Han *fu* was finally established. The efforts of these recent scholars have created even wider avenues for further research and deeper exploration. In seeking to establish a paradigm of scholarly inquiry, often the best method is not gazing towards the future but rather in reflectively returning to the essential principles in question. Regarding the study of Han *fu* poetry, in recent years scholarly inquiry has dynamically proceeded down a path of vivacious new discovery. Today, we will read a collection of essays which incorporate such robust research methods embodying this spirit of reflection and retrospection.

We begin with a reflection on the genre of Han *fu* poetry as a whole. The essay “The Origin and Formal Characteristics of *Fu* Prefaces” by Ma Lili 馬黎麗 provides a holistic and well-researched synopsis of the Han *fu* genre. Ma's examination of Han *fu* prefaces as a unique literary medium during the Early and Later Han dynasties takes readers deep into the heart of the genre.

Next, we examine the historical context in which Han *fu* poetry emerged. Whether belonging to the “sympathizing with the Qin” [*ai Qin* 哀秦] or “blaming the Qin” [*guo Qin* 過秦] school of literary thought, constructing a framework for Han morality was a frequent object of consideration for Han

political thinkers. As a poet present during both the Early and Later Han dynasties whose works and literary criticism embodied outstanding radical innovation and creativity, Yang Xiong 揚雄 [53 BCE–18] served as an instructive model for later poets. These Han poets who later emerged came to adopt many of his viewpoints when establishing their own moral worldviews. Xu Jie's 許結 article, "A Discussion on the Ethical Worldview Established in Yang Xiong's *fu* Poetry" begins by analyzing Yang's "Sweet Springs Palace [*Ganquan fu* 甘泉賦]" and moves on to "the practice of true *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets" [*shiren zhi fu* 詩人之賦] in general, and is a reflection of Yang Xiong's thoughts on moral construction while producing unique poetic contributions and literary commentary. In this way, Yang Xiong uses his *fu* poetry to explore the Zhou virtues [*Zhoude* 周德] and eventually codify the Han virtues [*Hande* 漢德].

Then we turn to the scholarly environment in which Han *fu* poetry was created. The Han Dynasty's most prolific school of learning was the Classical Studies movement. This school was inextricably related to the political ideology, cultural thought, and even pseudo-Confucian divination [*chenwei sichao* 讖緯思潮] prevalent during both the Early and Later Han dynasties. The article "The Influence of *Chenwei* on Han Dynasty Literature and Literary Theory" by Zhang Fengyi 張峰屹 explores the intimate relationship between Han literary innovation and Confucian divination during the period. As the article explains, the Han Classical School cannot be considered synonymous with Confucianism. In pursuing a deeper understanding of the relationship between Han Classical Studies and Han *fu* poetry, the crux lies in the thorough exploration of how Han *fu* poetry makes use of the Chinese Classics.

As an examination of precisely this point, Wang Sihao's 王思豪 article, "Citation of Han *Fu* in *Shijing* Exegetical Works", looks at the combined reception history of Han *fu* and the *Book of Poetry* [*Shijing* 詩經]. The *Shijing* was a major source of literary inspiration for the authors of Han *fu*, with frequent direct and indirect citations of *Shijing* appearing in the *fu*. This in turn became an important textual resource for those studying the usage and interpretation of the *Shijing* throughout history. Such research helps to understand both the formation of the Han *fu* and also how the *Shijing* was understood by Han dynasty literati.

With their critical attention to detail in seeking to more thoroughly understand Han *fu* poetry as a whole, the contributions of these scholars are pushing the field forward.

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