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# The Origin and Formal Characteristics of *Fu* Prefaces

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## Abstract

Prefaces to *fu* compositions originated and developed during the Han Dynasty. Their beginnings can be traced to the Western Han when Sima Qian added brief introductions to Jia Yi's *fu* in the *Shiji*. This marked the creation of the commentator's preface. During the late Western and early Eastern Han, a transitional form of preface – in-between a commentator's and an author's preface – began to appear. Important examples can be found in Yang Xiong's "Autobiography" and Huan Tan's *New Treatise* where the authors commented on *fu* pieces they themselves had composed earlier in life. The use of author's prefaces eventually became popular during the Eastern Han. In addition to instructing the reader on the background of a composition, Han *fu* prefaces possessed a variety of additional functions. They served to clarify the central themes and outline the main contents of a *fu*, display the author's personal viewpoints, emotions, and literary talent and help attract potential readers. This shows an awareness of the reading experience of the recipients on the part of the authors. The basic characteristics of *fu* prefaces as a literary form can be described as richness of content, the use of diverse writing techniques as well as a versatility in literary style. Han *fu* prefaces additionally played a distinct role in the development of the literary genre of *xiaopin wen*.

## Keywords

*fu* literature – *fu* preface – commentator's preface – author's preface

*Fu* prefaces [*fu xu* 賦序] originated, developed, and matured during the Han Dynasty [206 BCE–220].<sup>1</sup> It was not customary for authors from the Western Han [206 BCE–25] to compose prefaces and many of the existing prefaces of *fu* pieces dating to this period were subsequently added by commentators. During the Eastern Han [25–220], *fu* prefaces mostly took the form of author's prefaces [*zi xu* 自序]. Han *fu* prefaces not only fulfilled numerous formal functions, but also possessed a literary aesthetic value. In addition, they proved influential for the development of the literary genre of *xiaopin wen* 小品文 [short, informal writing]. To treat *fu* prefaces as independent objects of study will allow us to describe their origin, outline their formal functions, appraise their aesthetic value, and study their role in the history of prose writing in a more objective manner.

## 1 The Definition and Origin of *Fu* Prefaces

Based on authorship, *fu* prefaces can be separated into two major categories: commentator's prefaces [*ta xu* 他序] and the author's prefaces. The evolution of *fu* prefaces occurred in three stages, the emergence of the commentator's preface, the creation of a transitional form in-between the commentator's and the author's preface, and the development of the author's preface.

Before further analysis, we will first need to answer the relatively complicated question of how to define a *fu* preface. Judging by contemporary literature, academics continue to hold diverging views on what constitutes a *fu* preface. If we compare Ma Jigao's 馬積高 [1925–2001] *Compilation of Cifu of Former Dynasties* [*Lidai cifu zonghui* 歷代辭賦總匯], Fei Zhengang's 費振剛 [1935–2021] *Complete Annotations of Han Fu* [*Quan Han fu jiaozhu* 全漢賦校注], and Gong Kechang's 龔克昌 *Commentary and Annotations on Han Fu* [*Liang Han fu pingzhu* 兩漢賦評注],<sup>2</sup> for instance, it becomes apparent that there is no consensus amongst the authors on which *fu* pieces should be labeled "with preface" [*bing xu* 並序]. The *Commentary and Annotations on Han Fu* mostly labels *fu* with author's prefaces in this manner. Notable exceptions to this rule include Mi Heng's 彌衡 [173–198] "Fu on the Parrot [*Yingwu fu* 鸚鵡賦]" and

1 Commonly used English translations for *fu* 賦 include rhapsody, rhyme prose, prose poem, or poetic exposition.

2 Ma Jigao 馬積高, ed., *Lidai cifu zonghui* 歷代辭賦總匯 [*Compilation of Cifu of Former Dynasties*] (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 2014), vol. 1; Fei Zhengang 費振剛 et al., ed., *Quan Han fu jiaozhu* 全漢賦校注 [*Complete Annotations of Han Fu*] (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005); Gong Kechang 龔克昌 et al., ed., *Liang Han fu pingzhu* 兩漢賦評注 [*Commentary and Annotations on Han Fu*] (Jinan: Shandong daxue chubanshe, 2011).

Zhang Heng's 張衡 [78–139] “Fu on Contemplating the Mystery [*Sixuan fu* 思玄賦]” both of which have commentator’s and not author’s prefaces.<sup>3</sup> The *Compilation of Cifu of Former Dynasties* relies on a similar standard of selection and mostly labels *fu* with author’s prefaces. A number of inconsistencies, however, remain. While Huan Tan’s 桓譚 [ca. 43 BCE–28] “Fu on the Immortals [*Xian fu* 仙賦]” is labeled as containing a preface, comparable *fu* pieces by Yang Xiong 揚雄 [53 BCE–18] are not included in the same category. The *Complete Annotations of Han Fu* employs a wider definition and categorizes all *fu* pieces with a prose introduction as having a preface, irrespective of the question of authorship. The book nevertheless fails to include the preface to Jia Yi’s 賈誼 [200–168 BCE] “Fu on Lamenting Qu Yuan [*Diao Qu Yuan fu* 吊屈原賦]”. The preface that sheds light on the origins of Jia Yi’s *fu* first appeared in the *Han Shu* 漢書 [*History of the Former Han*] from where it was copied and reproduced in the *Wen Xuan* 文選 [*Selections of Refined Literature*]. While the *Complete Annotations of Han Fu* generally follows the example of the *Wen Xuan*, the classification of the “Fu on Lamenting Qu Yuan” constitutes an exception. The book also fails to include the prose introductions to the *fu* pieces that are found in the *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* [*Xijing zaji* 西京雜記]. Another example revealing the lack of consensus on how to categorize *fu* prefaces is the “Fu on the Old Chestnut Tree [*Huli fu* 胡栗賦]” by Cai Yong 蔡邕 [133–192]. While the *Compilation of Cifu of Former Dynasties* and the *Complete Annotations of Han Fu* label the “Fu on the Old Chestnut Tree” as a *fu* “with preface”, the *Commentary and Annotations on Han Fu* fails to do so.<sup>4</sup>

While these inconsistencies are due – in part – to inevitable oversight on part of contemporary editors and commentators, their roots date back much further. When Xiao Tong 蕭統 [501–531] first edited the *Wen Xuan*, he failed to categorize *fu* prefaces in a consistent manner. Instead, he labelled all *fu* pieces with a prose introduction as containing a preface, irrespective of whether the introduction consisted of extracts from historical writings, was subsequently added by a commentator, or composed by the *fu* writer himself.<sup>5</sup> In this vein,

3 If we analyze the first sentence of the preface of Mi Heng’s “Fu on the Parrot” that reads: “At that time Huang Yi 黃射, heir designate to Huang Zu 黃祖, hosted a large gathering”, we can conclude that the preface was not written by the author himself. Mi Heng would not have chosen to address the prefect Huang Zu by his name in writing.

4 The reference works discussed here list Cai Yong’s *fu* under three slightly different Chinese titles. The *Compilation of Cifu of Former Dynasties* uses the title “Fu on the Old Chestnut Tree [*Hu li fu* 胡栗賦]”. The same piece is titled “Fu on Grieving over the old Chestnut Tree [*Shang gu li fu* 傷故栗賦]” in the *Complete Annotations of Han Fu* and “Fu on Grieving over the Chestnut Tree [*Shang hu li fu* 傷胡栗賦]” in the *Commentary and Annotations on Han Fu*.

5 Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wen Xuan* 文選 [*Selections of Refined Literature*], comm. Li Shan 李善 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977).

several of Song Yu's 宋玉 [ca. 298–223 BCE] compositions as well as Fu Yi's 傅毅 [ca. 40–90] “Fu on Dancing [Wu fu 舞賦]” were marked “with preface” in the *Wen Xuan*. Ever since, scholars have argued that Xiao Tong mistakenly categorized parts of the main body of these fu as prefaces, castigating and at times even ridiculing the author for his decision.<sup>6</sup>

Yan Kejun 嚴可均 [1762–1843] seems to have been aware of these issues when compiling the *Complete Prose of Antiquity, the Three Eras, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties* [*Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文] and attempted to label fu with prefaces in a more coherent manner.<sup>7</sup> Despite his efforts, however, a number of inconsistencies can still be discerned. While the book clearly describes Fu Yi's “Fu on Dancing” as a fu “with preface”, it fails to categorize Song Yu's “Fu on the Gaotang Shrine [Gaotang fu 高唐賦]” and “Fu on the Goddess [Shennü fu 神女賦]” in the same manner, despite the obvious structural similarities between those pieces. The book also fails to label Cai Yong's “Fu on Short People [Duanren fu 短人賦]” accordingly, even though the composition clearly contains an author's preface.

This serves to show that scholars have never reached a consensus on how to define and label fu prefaces correctly and coherently. The reasons behind this phenomenon are closely connected to the question how fu prefaces first originated. To clarify their origin will prove beneficial for gaining a more nuanced understanding of the nature of fu prefaces and the search for unified standards of classification. Overall, fu prefaces roughly developed in the following three stages:

The first stage saw the emergence of the commentator's preface during the Western Han, when court historians and anonymous authors added prefaces to existing fu compositions. In Jia Yi's biography in the *Shiji* 史記 [*Records of the Grand Historian*], Sima Qian 司馬遷 [145–90 BCE] added brief prose introductions to the “Fu on Lamenting Qu Yuan” and the “Fu on the Owl [Funiào fu 鵯鳥賦]”, providing additional background information and context for the

6 Su Shi 蘇軾 wrote in his “Letter in Reply to Supervisory Officer Liu Mian [Da Liu Mian ducao shu 答劉沔都曹書]”: “In his ‘Fu on the Gaotang Shrine’ and ‘Fu on the Goddess’, Song Yu briefly states the reasons for his dreams. This section can be compared to the exchange between Sir Vacuous and Lord No-Such in Sima Xiangru's works and should be considered a part of the main body of the fu. Xiao Tong, however, has called it a preface. How is this level of understanding to be distinguished from that of a novice?” See Su Shi 蘇軾, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集 [*Collected Writings of Su Shi*], ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1429.

7 Yan Kejun 嚴可均, ed., *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 [*Complete Prose of Antiquity, the Three Eras, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), vol. 1.

reader. With slight alterations, these introductions were then reproduced in the *Han Shu*. When Xiao Tong eventually edited the *Wen Xuan*, he included the prose introductions from the *Han Shu* and labeled both of Jia Yi's *fu* "with preface". The *Wen Xuan* also recorded an introduction to the "Fu on the Tall Gate Palace [*Changmen fu* 長門賦]" – a legendary account added by an anonymous author – and categorized the *fu* as containing a preface.

The introductory paragraphs by historians, scholars, and anonymous authors were placed before the main text of the *fu* and designed to guide the readers in their understanding of the background and origin of the piece. Even though these types of introductions were only declared "prefaces" once they appeared in the *Wen Xuan*, they possessed both the functions and meaning of *fu* prefaces from the beginning and should therefore be regarded as precursors to the commentator's preface. The following examples will show their influence on the further development of Han *fu* prefaces. Zhang Heng's biography in the *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書 [*Book of the Later Han*], for instance, included the "Fu on Contemplating the Mystery". Imitating the style of the *Shiji* and the *Han Shu*, the authors of the *Hou Han Shu* decided to add a prose introduction to the *fu*, explaining the origins of Zhang Heng's composition to the readers. The introduction was then copied and included as a preface to Zhang Heng's *fu* in the *Complete Prose of Antiquity, the Three Eras, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties*. Another example is the introduction to the "Fu on the Parrot" that sets the background for Mi Heng's famous composition by describing the occasion on which it was composed. Most likely inspired and influenced by the preface to the "Fu on the Tall Gate Palace", Xiao Tong recorded the introduction as a preface to Mi Heng's "Fu on the Parrot" in the *Wen Xuan*. These quasi-commentator's prefaces are similar in nature to an editor's foreword found in many modern publications. The author's prefaces of later generations of *fu* writers were clearly influenced by these early developments. Examples from the Eastern Han include Ma Rong's 馬融 [79–166] "Fu on the Long Flute [*Changdi fu* 長笛賦]" and the "Fu on Recounting a Journey [*Shu xing fu* 述行賦]" by Cai Yong. The prefaces to both pieces preserved the literary style used by historians to outline biographies and describe personal circumstances as well as historical events. The anecdotal nature of the preface to Cao Pi's 曹丕 [187–226] "Fu on Cai Yong's Daughter [*Cai Bojie nü fu* 蔡伯喈女賦]" is in turn reminiscent of the preface to the "Fu on the Tall Gate Palace".

The second stage of development in *fu* prefaces saw the creation of a transitional form in-between the commentator's and the author's preface. Important works belonging to this stage include the explanations on the "Fu on the Sweet Springs Palace [*Ganquan fu* 甘泉賦]", "Fu on the Plume Hunt [*Yulie fu* 羽獵賦]", "Fu on the Tall Poplars Palace [*Changyang fu* 長楊賦]", and "Fu on

Hedong [*Hedong fu* 河東賦] in Yang Xiong's "Autobiography [*Zixu* 自序]" and the discussion on the "Fu on the Immortals" in Huan Tan's *New Treatise* [*Xin lun* 新論]. Ban Gu 班固 [32–92] included the entire text of the "Autobiography" in Yang Xiong's biography in the *Han Shu* and matched the sections explaining the origins of Yang Xiong's writing with the corresponding *fu* pieces. In the *Wen Xuan*, the explanatory sections were then used as prefaces for Yang Xiong's compositions. The author of this article argues that Yang Xiong's explanations should be included in the category of *fu* prefaces. When Yang Xiong wrote the "Autobiography" in his later years, he discussed the reasons that had led him to compose *fu* pieces during his youth. In a wider sense, his explanations fulfilled a function similar to that of an author's preface. It is important to point out, however, that these explanations are not author's prefaces in the strict sense. Yang Xiong regretted parts of his earlier works and he felt the need to justify himself. His main intention, however, was not to explain that he had composed his *fu* on orders by the emperor, but rather to salvage and embellish his earlier writings. Yang Xiong's explanations were only turned into actual prefaces when they were recorded in the *Han Shu* and later in the *Wen Xuan*.

The preface to Huan Tan's "Fu on the Immortals" is written from a first-person point of view and similar in nature to an author's preface. As Li Zhi 力之 has pointed out, however, the preface to the "Fu on the Immortals" was created by commentators who slightly altered the writing found in the *New Treatise*.<sup>8</sup> The author of this article believes that the relevant sections in Huan Tan's *New Treatise* were not originally designed to introduce the "Fu on the Immortals" to potential readers. Instead, the text was only added to Huan Tan's *fu* in the form of a preface after having been altered. The text should therefore not be considered an author's preface. For readers of Yang Xiong's "Autobiography" and Huan Tan's *New Treatise* the paragraphs explaining the origin of the authors' *fu* fulfilled a function similar to that of prefaces. For *fu* writers, they also served as a source of inspiration and guidance for the creation of author's prefaces. The prefaces to several of Yang Xiong's *fu* as well as Huan Tan's "Fu on the Immortals" were therefore created in a similar manner. Commentators selected paragraphs of Yang Xiong's and Huan Tan's own writings and added them to existing *fu* pieces in the form of prefaces. These prefaces are examples of the transitional form in-between the commentator's

8 Li Zhi 力之, "Shi lun Han fu zhi fanwei yu Han fu 'xuwen' zhi zuozhe wenti: Du *Quan Han fu* 試論漢賦之範圍與漢賦'序文'之作者問題 – 讀《全漢賦》 [Discussing the Range of Han Fu and the Question of Authorship for their 'Prefaces': Reading *Complete Collection of Han Fu*]," *Henan shifan daxue xuebao* 河南師範大學學報, no. 1 (1999).



and the author's preface. More broadly, they can also be included in the category of the commentator's preface.

The third stage in the evolution of *fu* prefaces saw the development of the author's preface. During the Eastern Han, *fu* writers made use of prefaces to explain the origin of their compositions and express their intentions. This soon became common practice, and many authors including Feng Yan 馮衍 [ca. 20 BCE–60], Du Du 杜篤 [d. 78], Ban Gu, Wang Yanshou 王延壽 [140–165], Bian Shao 邊韶 [ca. 100–165], Zhao Yi 趙壹 [122–196], Zhao Qi 趙岐 [108–201], Ma Rong 馬融 [79–166], and Cai Yong composed *fu* with author's prefaces. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the process of development described here cannot be neatly separated into three clearly defined and strictly consecutive time periods. During the Eastern Han, for instance, we still find examples of *fu* with commentator's prefaces – such as Zhang Heng's "Fu on Contemplating the Mystery" or Mi Heng's "Fu on the Parrot" – even though the author's preface had already flourished and matured by that time.

After clarifying the three stages of development of *fu* prefaces, we will now examine the principles according to which prefaces were labeled, beginning with the category of the commentator's preface. Wang Qisun 王芑孫 [1755–1817] coined the saying "Western Han *fu* had no prefaces" and argued: "During the Zhou Dynasty *fu* did not yet have prefaces ... neither did they have prefaces during the Western Han.... Five of the seven *fu* dating to the Western Han in the *Wen Xuan* have prefaces: the 'Fu on the Sweet Springs Palace', the 'Fu on the Tall Gate Palace', the 'Fu on the Tall Poplars Palace', the 'Fu on the Plume Hunt', and the 'Fu on the Owl'. While these pieces were labeled as *fu* with prefaces, the prefaces were all added by commentators from later generations. Extracts from historical biographies that provide information on the origin of a *fu* are not real prefaces. The custom of writing *fu* with author's prefaces only developed during the Eastern Han."<sup>9</sup> Wang Qisun believed that only author's prefaces should be considered prefaces and therefore concluded that no *fu* prefaces had yet existed during the Western Han. Wang Qisun's point of view essentially negates the idea of a commentator's preface. Xiao Tong approached the question differently, choosing a more pragmatic approach. All *fu* prefaces found in the *Wen Xuan* – both commentator's prefaces as well as prefaces of the transitional form – fulfilled important functions for the readers, by introducing them to the background and origin of the compositions, by guiding them in their reading and comprehension of the pieces and even by improving their overall reading experience. It is therefore entirely reasonable

9 He Peixiong 何沛雄, ed., *Fu hua liu zhong 賦話六種* [Collection of Six Types of Remarks on Fu] (Hong Kong: Xianggang sanlian shudian, 1982), 16.

to consider them to be proper prefaces. Especially prefaces of the transitional form also played an important role in the emergence of the author's preface. They should therefore be included in the category of *fu* prefaces and loosely classified as belonging to the group of commentator's prefaces. When dealing with prefaces of the transitional form, editors should mark the respective *fu* pieces "with preface" and add an explanation clarifying the source of the preface in question. This principle should also have been applied to the introductory phrases to the *fu* pieces reproduced in the *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital*, even if the authenticity and authorship of the book is still in question.<sup>10</sup>

We will now examine the question whether Song Yu's *fu* and Fu Yi's "Fu on Dancing" should be labelled as *fu* "with preface". As mentioned above, Xiao Tong was criticized for the manner in which he handled the question of prefaces in the *Wen Xuan*. A major point of contention was whether the popular format of a dialogue between host and guest at the beginning of a *fu* should be considered a preface. Su Shi 蘇軾 [1037–1101] and others contradicted Xiao Tong on this point and argued that these types of dialogues were not prefaces but parts of the main text of the *fu*. He Zhuo 何焯 [1661–1722], on the other hand, argued in defense of Xiao Tong: "The introduction and beginning of a *fu* is called preface, the ending is called *luan* 亂. Just like the ears, eyes, hands and feet of the human body, each part has its own name."<sup>11</sup> Wang Qisun and Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 [1738–1801] also provided useful observations on this question. The *Overflowing Words from the Reading of Rhapsodies* [*Dufu zhiyan* 讀賦卮言] states:

10 The *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* contains the following sentence introducing Mei Cheng's 枚乘 [ca. 210–138 BCE] "Fu on the Willow [*Liu fu* 柳賦]": "King Xiao of Liang 梁孝王 visited the Lodge of Cares Forgotten, asking each scholar who accompanied him to compose a *fu*." Before other *fu* pieces composed by scholars of the same group this introduction is omitted. Instead, the *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* merely reproduces the name of the author, the title of the *fu* and the text of the composition itself. We believe that the introduction reproduced above should have been added before each of the *fu* in question, since several *fu* were composed on the same occasion. See Ma Jigao, *Lidai cifu zonghui*, 1:97.

11 Discussing Song Yu's "Fu on the Gaotang Shrine", He Zhuo argues: "Su Shi says: 'Everything before the line *Yu yue wei wei* 玉曰唯唯 [Song Yu answered: yes, yes] belongs to the main text of the *fu*. To call this part a preface is laughable.' Does this mean we should consider the beginning to Sima Xiangru's *fu* with the dialogue between Lord No-Such and the others as part of the main text as well? Su Shi's comments betray his lack of knowledge about the system of *fu* writing in the ancient times." See He Zhuo 何焯, *Yimen dushu ji* 義門讀書記 [*Reading Notes from the Gate of Propriety*], ed. Cui Gaowei 崔高維 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 882.



Fu Yi's "Fu on Dancing" from the Han Dynasty begins with the dialogue between King Xiang and Song Yu during which Song Yu was asked to compose the "Fu on the Gaotang Shrine". Xiao Tong considered this part a preface, which is not accurate. The dialogue was not in fact a historical event, but a fictional account created by the author Song Yu and merely the beginning of the *fu* composition. *Fu* writers from the Han dynasty frequently relied on such methods and the use of dialogues between host and guest originated during this period.<sup>12</sup>

Wang Qisun argued: "It was normal practice for ancient *fu* to begin with a prose introduction. These parts, however, were not prefaces in the real sense of the word."<sup>13</sup> Zhang Xuecheng also believed that a dialogue at the beginning of a *fu* should not be mistaken for a preface.<sup>14</sup> He Zhuo, on the other hand, declared "the beginning of a *fu* is called preface", arguing for a broader definition of the term. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the function of what He Zhuo termed "beginning" was at times markedly different from the function of a typical preface that often clarified the background and origin of a *fu*. A "beginning" as understood by He Zhuo was often fictional and used to create the setting for the entire *fu*. These beginnings were normally an integral part of the *fu* unable to stand on their own. It would therefore be wrong to call them prefaces lightly. It follows that neither Song Yu's *fu* nor Fu Yi's "Fu on Dancing" should be labelled as *fu* compositions "with preface". Liu Weisheng 劉偉生 has also analyzed this question in some detail.<sup>15</sup> Discussing the "Fu on Dancing", the "Fu on the Gaotang Shrine", the "Fu on the Goddess", and the "Fu on Master Dengtu Enamored of Beauty [*Dengtu zi haose fu* 登徒子好色賦]", Liu points to an organic connection between the introduction – everything before the lines with the expression "wei wei" 唯唯 [yes, yes] – and the main exposition. For this kind of introduction, Liu Weisheng suggests the term "internal preface" [*nei xu* 內序]. They are to be distinguished from "external prefaces" [*wai xu* 外序] that possess a greater degree of independence from the main body of the *fu* and mainly introduce the reader to the background and origin of the

12 He Peixiong, *Fu hua liu zhong*, 16.

13 He Peixiong, *Fu hua liu zhong*, 16.

14 Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, ed., *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注 [*Comprehensive Meaning of Literature and History with Annotations*], annot. Ye Ying 葉瑛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 81.

15 Liu Weisheng 劉偉生, "Lidai fuhui fuxu yanjiu" 《歷代賦匯》賦序研究 [Research on *Fu* Prefaces in the *Collection of Fu Through the Dynasties*] (Master Thesis, Hunan University, 2006), 5–9.

composition. Hu Dalei 胡大雷 has also used the idea of internal and external prefaces in his analysis of the prefaces to Yang Xiong's works.<sup>16</sup>

Based on this argument, a number of *fu* compositions have both an external as well as an internal preface. One example is Cao Zhi's 曹植 [192–232] “Fu on the Luo River Goddess [*Luoshen fu* 洛神賦]”. In the external preface, the author describes how he attended court in the third year of the Huangchu 黃初 [220–226] reign. Upon his return and when crossing the Luo River, he felt inspired by Song Yu's dialogue with the king of Chu and decided to compose a *fu*. This is a classic example of an author's preface. In the text that follows, Cao Zhi gives an account of his journey and recounts a fictional conversation between him and his coachman during which he gives a description of the river goddess. This part is a typical example of an internal preface. A preface to the entire *fu* would necessarily possess more independence from the main text. The “Fu on the Luo River Goddess” should undoubtedly be labeled as a *fu* “with preface”. The *Complete Annotations of Fu of the Wei and Jin Dynasties* [*Quan Wei Jin fu jiaozhu* 全魏晉賦校注], however, did not label the *fu* in this manner.<sup>17</sup> Additional inconsistencies are also found in the *Complete Prose of Antiquity, the Three Eras, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties*. While the book labeled the “Fu on Dancing” as a *fu* with preface, it removed the label from Song Yu's *fu* compositions. This led contemporary editors of works such as the *Compilation of Cifu of Former Dynasties*, the *Complete Annotations of Han Fu*, or the *Commentary and Annotations on Han* to follow suit and label the “Fu on Dancing” as a *fu* with preface. Academics, it seems, have to a certain degree neglected the question of *fu* prefaces till today. The author of this article believes that internal prefaces should be considered an organic part of a *fu* composition that lack any real independence from the main text. Internal prefaces should not be considered actual *fu* prefaces and *fu* pieces introduced by them should not be labeled as containing a preface. Only *fu* with commentator's or author's prefaces (external prefaces) should be labelled as *fu* “with preface”.

In summary, scholars have never been able to reach a consensus on the definition of *fu* prefaces due to their complex history and development briefly outlined above. Having clarified the origin of Han *fu* prefaces, the differences

16 Hu Dalei 胡大雷, “Cong *Wen Xuan* de wenti guannian lun *Wen Xuan fu* ‘xu’ 從《文選》的文體觀念論《文選》賦‘序’ [Discussing the Fu ‘Prefaces’ in the *Selections of Refined Literature* based on its Ideas of Literary Form],” *Huizhou xueyuan xuebao* 惠州學院學報, no. 2 (2007).

17 Han Geping 韓格平 et al., ed., *Quan Wei Jin fu jiaozhu* 全魏晉賦校注 [*Complete Annotations of Fu of the Wei and Jin Dynasties*] (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2008).

between commentator's and author's prefaces as well as internal and external prefaces, we can conclude the following: the concept of *fu* prefaces only includes the so-called external prefaces – either in the form of a commentator's or an author's preface. The concept does not, however, include internal prefaces. The term commentator's preface may in turn refer to either of the two forms of *fu* prefaces: first, a preface is written and then added to the *fu* in question by a person other than the author of the *fu* himself; second, the text of the preface is written by the author of the *fu* himself, but the text is only added in the form of a preface to the *fu* in question by a third person. All modern literary compilations should clearly label *fu* compositions with commentator's and author's prefaces as *fu* “with preface”. In the case of a commentator's preface, the editors should then proceed to explain the origin of the preface in more detail. *Fu* compositions with internal prefaces, on the other hand, should not carry the label “with preface”. In the following, this article will continue to focus on Han *fu* with either commentator's or author's prefaces.

## 2 The Development of Basic Formal Functions of *Fu* Prefaces

The standards that are normally used to classify literary forms such as poetry or prose are not directly applicable to prefaces. The term “preface” itself is clearly chosen with reference to its functionality, while the classification of many literary and poetic genres is based on formal characteristics. The formal characteristics of *fu* prefaces, however, are extremely varied and they can take the form of a statement, a discussion, a memory, a performance, or even another *fu*. Prefaces can be written in prose or parallel prose, and be either rhymed or unrhymed. Prefaces can also vary in length and employ a wide range of writing techniques, such as narration, description, expression of emotions, or discussion. The basic formal functions of *fu* prefaces gradually developed in response to their relationship with the main text of the *fu*.

Prefaces are – in contrast to many other literary forms – always dependent on a main text they complement. This characteristic is clearly reflected by the fact that prefaces rarely carry their own titles but are simply referred to as the “preface to” a certain piece of writing. Many prefaces can nevertheless also be studied and read as standalone texts. The relationship between a preface and the main text can therefore be described as both mutually connected as well as relatively independent. The main functions of *fu* prefaces are aptly described in the chapter “Elucidating the *Fu* [*Quan fu* 詮賦]” in the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* [*Wen xin diao long* 文心雕龍], which states: “In the preface, the main themes are proposed, and the fundamental feelings

made articulate.<sup>18</sup> In addition to introducing the readers to the background and origin of the *fu*, prefaces have developed a number of other important functions. The formal functions of Han *fu* prefaces are mostly reflected in the following three ways.

First, prefaces account for the reasons behind a composition, clarify the intent of the author, explain the central theme, or summarize the main contents of the *fu* in question. Yang Xiong, for instance, began to object to the extravagant language of *fu* writing during his later years. The prefaces to his *fu* were therefore designed to clarify and emphasize the author's intentions of remonstrating with his sovereign. In the preface to the "Fu on Hedong", Yang Xiong urges Emperor Cheng 漢成帝 [r. 33–7 BCE] to actively pursue change by suggesting that it would be preferable "to return and make a net than to stand by the river and crave the fish." In the preface to the "Fu on the Plume Hunt", he advises the emperor to reconsider the extravagance of the imperial hunting expeditions. The preface to the "Fu on the Tall Poplars Palace" clearly denounces the hunting season as detrimental to the lives of the local population by pointing out that "during this time, the farmers were unable to harvest their crops."<sup>19</sup> During his youth, Yang Xiong often disguised his criticism behind praise and the extravagant language of his *fu*. The *fu* prefaces were written with the intention of partly undoing what Yang Xiong perceived to be the harmful effects of his style of using "a hundred statements of encouragement for each statement of remonstrance" [*quanbai fengyi* 勸百諷一]. For the readers, the prefaces have the effect of clarifying both the author's intent as well as the central themes of the compositions. Another example is the preface to Yang Xiong's "Fu on Hedong". The preface not only offers a concise description of Emperor Cheng's travels to offer sacrifices to the earth spirits but is also a summary of the main exposition of the *fu*. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Feng Yan's "Fu on Making Clear My Aim and Disquisition on Self" [*Xian zhi fu bing zilun* 顯志賦並自論], in which the part entitled "Disquisition on Self" is in fact a preface to the *fu*. By recalling the achievements of his forefathers and lamenting his own dire circumstances, the author manages to clarify his intentions and outline the composition's main contents in the preface.

Second, prefaces can guide and entice the readers in the following ways: by providing important background information that can help readers reach

18 Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2015), 60–61.

19 Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature: Rhapsodies on Sacrifices, Hunting, Travel, Sightseeing, Palaces and Halls*, trans. David R. Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 2137.

a deeper level of understanding; by using anecdotes and legends to trigger the reader's interest; by choosing a lively style of narration that increases the appeal of the writing; and by providing additional background knowledge that heightens the reader's expectations. Jia Yi's prefaces from the Western Han, for instance, displayed a number of distinctive features reminiscent of the prose style found in historical biographies, especially the use of concise language to describe the experiences of the main characters. This type of *fu* preface contains extracts from classical works and provides background information for the readers that helps guide their understanding of the main exposition. The preface to the "Fu on the Tall Gate Palace", for instance, contains the legend of Empress Chen regaining favor with the emperor through the help of Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 [179–118 BCE] *fu* composition. This legendary account turns what would otherwise be but a variation of the common theme of "palace complaints" [*gong yuan* 宮怨] into a narrative with defined characters and a plot. At the same time, the preface leaves the reader sufficient room for his own imagination and creates anticipation towards the main exposition of the *fu*. The preface to Wang Yanshou's "Fu on a Dream [*Meng fu* 夢賦]" uses fantastical and bizarre matters to create an atmosphere of wonder and attract potential readers. The author describes how he encountered demons in his sleep, how he came into possession of the "demon-cursing writings" [*magui zhi shu* 罵鬼之書] of Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 [ca. 161–93 BCE] and how the recital of *fu* can be used to drive away mystical creatures. In the preface to the "Fu on the Zhanghua Terrace [*Zhanghua tai fu* 章華台賦]", Bian Rang 邊讓 [ca. 150–193] employs an historical lesson to disparage the extravagance of the imperial court of his time. The story of King Ling of Chu and his lifelong passion for luxuries and excess is designed to spark the interest of the readers. Another example is the "Preface to the Fu on the Poplar Joint [*Yangjie fu xu* 楊節賦序]", the preface to a *fu* by Feng Yan, whose main text has since been lost. The preface consists of only a few words but is nevertheless similar to a complete *xiaopin wen*. With its vivid style of narration, the preface allows the reader to experience the author's state of aloofness and his detachment from all worldly matters. In the preface to the "Fu on the Long Flute", Ma Rong describes how he was deeply moved by the lonely and mournful tunes of a flute performance in a guesthouse. In the preface to the "Fu on Saixi [*Sai fu* 賽賦]", Bian Shao humorously declared that only the study of the techniques of the popular boardgames of his time could possibly prevent him from falling asleep during the daytime. For the readers, these types of prefaces create varied and delightful reading experiences. The preface to Wang Yanshou's "Fu on the Hall of Numinous Brilliance in Lu [*Lu lingguang dian fu* 魯靈光殿賦]" describes how the Hall of Numinous Brilliance was constructed during the reign of King Gong of Lu and how the hall "alone

survived intact” [*kuiran du cun* 巋然獨存] in times of unrest and upheaval.<sup>20</sup> This style of writing not only gives the readers additional background knowledge but is ideally suited to arouse interest and create anticipation.

Third, prefaces are less regulated than the main text of a *fu* composition and authors can use them to freely express their own emotions or viewpoints and display their literary abilities. During the Eastern Han, *fu* writers placed great importance on prefaces and they developed into important vehicles for the authors’ self-expression. One example is the preface to Du Du’s 杜篤 “Fu on Discussing the Capital [*Lun du fu* 論都賦]” that the author submitted to the emperor in the form of a petition [*zou* 奏]. The “preface” to the *fu* is written in the form of a dialogue between host and guest and can be considered an internal preface. The actual function of a preface, however, was in this case fulfilled by the “petition” in which the author expressed his political opinion on the proper location of the capital. Another example is the preface to Ban Gu’s “Fu on the Two Capitals [*Liang du fu* 兩都賦]” that took the form of a discussion about *fu* as a literary genre, presenting a systematic analysis of the origin and development of *fu* writing. The preface to Cai Yong’s “Fu on Short People”, on the other hand, was itself written in the form of a *fu* with four-character lines. The originality of this approach certainly serves to display the author’s literary talent. The prefaces discussed above were not primarily designed to elucidate the origin of the *fu* they preceded, but instead to give expression to the author’s personal viewpoints and bear witness to their literary talent.

Many of the formal functions that can be observed in *fu* prefaces from later periods were first displayed in prefaces dating to the Western and Eastern Han. The authors’ attention to the reading experience of the recipients was an expression of the slowly developing self-consciousness in Han literature. To analyze *fu* prefaces from the angle of functionality can better our understanding of the relationship between prefaces and the main exposition in Han *fu*. To analyze *fu* prefaces from the perspective of literary aesthetics will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of their external characteristics during their early stages of development. This approach will also be beneficial for further comparative research on *fu* prefaces from other time periods. For these reasons, the aesthetic characteristics of Han *fu* prefaces are equally deserving of scholarly attention.

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20 Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, 2:263.



### 3 The Literary Aesthetic Characteristics of Han *Fu* Prefaces

Han *fu* prefaces have a distinctly literary nature and they can be appreciated and examined as comparatively independent objects of literary study. The prefaces written by court historians of the Han clearly display the succinct and lively writing techniques favored by historians of that time. The prefaces to Jia Yi's *fu* compositions, for instance, were first extracted from the *Shiji* and the *Han Shu* before being slightly altered for precision and clarity. The preface to the "Fu on the Owl" demonstrates this point. It reads:

Jia Yi served as tutor in Changsha. In his third year there a houlet flew into his house and perched on the corner of his mat. The houlet resembles the owl and is an unlucky bird. Jia Yi had been banished from the court and sent to live in Changsha. Changsha is low-lying and damp, and Jia Yi felt himself afflicted with sorrow and grief. He believed that his life span would not be long, and he thereupon composed a rhapsody to console himself.<sup>21</sup>

In only a few words, the preface relates the author's sudden encounter with the owl and describes Jia Yi's bitter experiences, his unfavorable circumstances as well as his precarious state of mind. Especially the four expressions to "live in banishment" [*zhe ju* 謫居], "low-lying and damp" [*bei shi* 卑濕], "afflicted with sorrow and grief" [*shang dao* 傷悼] and to "console himself" [*zi guang* 自廣] aptly summarize Jia Yi's misfortune of having been dismissed from court and sent into banishment, his poor living conditions, his gloomy mood, as well as his attempts so console himself with a *fu* amidst the hopelessness of the situation. Drawing on the ingenious techniques that historians employed to write biographies, the preface describes the whole scene with clarity, logic, and coherence.

Authors often emphasized the narrative nature and legendary characteristics of Han *fu* prefaces. One example in this regard is the preface to the "Fu on the Tall Gate Palace" whose literary style was similar to that of a *xiao shuo* 小說 [literally "small story"]. After Empress Chen had fallen out of favor with the emperor, she proceeded to spend extravagant amounts of money in order to procure *fu* compositions from gallant young scholars. Due to the *fu* pieces that were written at her request, she was eventually able to reverse her bad fortune. The strong legendary character of the story made it a popular subject for idle chatter and gossip. This is reminiscent of Ban Gu's definition

21 Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, 2:41.

of the term *xiaoshuo*, which he declared: “came from the petty officials of the court. They are fabrications by those who engaged themselves in idle talk in the streets and alleys and by those who heard gossip and rumors on the way.”<sup>22</sup> This type of preface possesses a strong literary attraction and affords the readers sufficient room for association and imagination with regard to the main text of the *fu*. Other pieces that exemplify this development and possess a strong narrative nature are the preface to Cao Pi’s “Fu on Cai Yong’s Daughter” from the Jian’an reign 建安 [196–220], and the preface to Fu Xuan’s 傅玄 [217–278] “Fu on Carriage Horses [*Cheng yuma fu* 乘輿馬賦]” from the Western Jin Dynasty [265–317].

Some of the Han *fu* writers even went on to compose prefaces in the style of a *fu* itself. While this approach betrays, to a certain extent, a clouded awareness of literary forms, it was also unique. Even though most prefaces were written in prose, the stylistic differences between the preface and the main exposition were almost negligible in some *fu* compositions. The preface to the “Fu on the Plume Hunt”, for instance, was clearly literary in nature. Yang Xiong chose magnificent wording and displayed [*puchen* 鋪陳] his extensive knowledge through the use of parallelisms [*paibi* 排比]. The most interesting point to note, however, is that this preface was not only similar to a *fu* in wording, but also in structure. The structure was exceedingly similar to that of a prose style “grand *fu*” [*da fu* 大賦], beginning with lavish descriptions and culminating in excessive praise designed to conceal criticism. This example shows that during the time the grand *fu* flourished it had a visible effect on other literary forms as well. The preface to Cai Yong’s “Fu on Short People”, on the other hand, was written purely in the style of a short *fu* [*xiao fu* 小賦]. The whole text of the preface is written in four-character lines that describe the special features of short people in an ingenious and unique manner. Pu Xian 浦銑 [fl. 1765] commented on this preface with the following sentence: “The preface in the ‘Fu on Short People’ uses four characters per line, a rhyming scheme, and closely resembles a short *fu*.”<sup>23</sup> During Cai Yong’s time in the Eastern Han, author’s prefaces had already become common practice in *fu* writing. But to write a preface in the form of another *fu* clearly shows the author’s desire to strive for originality and the display of literary talent.

22 Ban Gu 班固, *Han Shu* 漢書 [History of the Former Han], annot. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 1745.

23 Pu Xian 浦銑, *Lidai fuhua jiaozheng* 歷代賦話校證 [Annotations and Remarks on Fu over the Dynasties], ed. He Xinwen 何新文 and Lu Chengwen 路成文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 403.

*Fu* prefaces from the Eastern Han are often vivid displays of literary talent, full of force and intense feelings. They were suited to the expression of argument and reasoning as well as narration and human emotions. The “Disquisition on Self” (the preface) that precedes Feng Yan’s “Fu on Making Clear My Aim” runs to more than five hundred characters in length. It contains a discussion of how Feng Yan conducted himself in society, an account of how he met with his own misfortune, a description of the merits and virtues of his forefathers and an expression of his personal ambitions. The preface reveals Feng Yan’s noble and honest moral character and furnishes the reader with the author’s reasons for composing the *fu*. Feng Yan’s preface combines discussion and reasoning with narrative descriptions and the expression of emotion in a single piece of writing. The preface includes ample literary quotations and is exquisitely written, making ample use of descriptions and parallel structures. The fluent style and smooth language further serve to make the piece highly readable. In all, the preface is similar in nature to an independent and structurally complete piece of argumentative prose writing. The following lines are especially moving and reflect the author’s genuine feelings:

I used to possess a profound fondness for devising brilliant stratagems. Amongst my contemporaries, however, my ideas remained unheeded and unemployed. I cannot but let out a deep sigh, inwardly aggrieved with my talents unrecognized. I never succeeded in advancing beyond my own insignificant position and all my high aspirations must forever stay unfulfilled. It only remains for me to take control of my emotions and abandon my pursuits, yet I feel desolate and mournful.<sup>24</sup>

The preface to Du Du’s “Fu on Discussing the Capital” is similar in nature, with a length of more than two hundred characters and ample display of literary talent. The author presents detailed historical accounts of how sovereigns decided on the location of their capital in accordance with the requirements of their time. The historical examples are cleverly employed to strengthen the author’s own argument. The text is written in four-character lines and with a neat form, making substantial use of parallelisms and antitheses [*dui ou* 對偶]. The linguistic characteristics are similar to the argumentative style of the *Strategies of the Warring States* [*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策]. The partly rhyming lines create a feeling of ease and liveliness with the reader. One extract reads:

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24 Ma Jigao, *Lidai cifu zonghui*, 1:207.

Many different methods can be employed towards the goal of safeguarding a country: some have chosen to forsake dangerous territories and occupy plain and easily accessible areas instead; some have chosen to live with the Xiao Mountain in their backs and the Yellow River before them, desirous of annexing the six kingdoms east of the Hangu Pass; some have desired to return to their homelands after attaining riches, unfazed by the danger of being attacked by others; some have marched with their troops from Shu to attack the weak flank of an enemy; some were willing to apply the tactics of a simple soldier and settle on Chang'an as their capital within a day; some were knowledgeable about geography but unwilling to accept advice given by others, deciding on the inhospitable city of Luoyang as their capital instead.<sup>25</sup>

The characters “shu” 術 and “cu” 卒, which each conclude a line, rhyme, and the entire section rendered above consists of parallel structures beginning with the character “huo” 或. The author successfully displays both his literary talent as well as his historical knowledge. The preface to Ban Gu’s “Fu on the Two Capitals” runs to almost five hundred characters. Despite the considerable length, however, less than one hundred characters of the preface are allocated to introduce the reader to the background of the *fu*. The remaining parts consist of a discussion of the origin of *fu* as a literary genre and the history of its development. With elegant and flowing language, the preface is nevertheless well composed and rich in details. The preface to Wang Yanshou’s “Fu on the Hall of Numinous Brilliance in Lu” also discusses reasons for literary production and the meaning of literary works in proper and neat language. One section reads:

Alas! The inspiration of a poet arises from his reaction to things. Thus, when Xi Si 奚斯 lauded Duke Xi 魯僖公 and sang of the Grand Chamber, the duke’s feats and accomplishments were preserved in the lyrics, and his virtuous renown was displayed in the music. Objects are glorified in rhapsodies, and deeds are acclaimed in eulogies. Without rhapsodies, without eulogies, how can one relate anything about such things?<sup>26</sup>

In the preface to Cai Yong’s “Fu on Recounting a Journey”, the author narrates an unsettling story from the reign of the Emperor Huan of Han 漢桓帝

25 守國之執，同歸異術；或棄去阻阨，務處平易；或據山帶河，并吞六國；或富貴思歸，不顧見襲；或掩空擊虛，自蜀漢出；即日車駕，策由一卒；或知而不從，久都堙墮。Ma Jigao, *Lidai cifu zonghui*, 1:214.

26 Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, 2:263–264.

[r. 146–168]. The eunuchs successfully monopolized power at court and many loyal officials met with their untimely ends. The common people were freezing and starving to death in the fields under forced labor. Under these disturbing circumstances, the author was summoned to appear in court, only narrowly making his escape. With this faithful historical account, the author criticizes the ills of his times and expresses his indignation in a style similar to what can be found in the *Shiji*.

During the Eastern Han, there is another type of preface that deserves special attention for it is either partly or entirely written in the style of a *xiaopin wen*. A way of expression similar to that of a *xiaopin wen* can be found in the skillfully written preface to Huan Tan's "Fu on the Immortals" that reads: "I dwelt there, feeling joyful and with lofty aspirations, inscribed a short *fu* on the wall of the gate."<sup>27</sup> Despite the sparse language, the succession of the three verbs "ju" 居, "le" 樂 and "shu" 書 manages to create fluidity in the sentence. The three main points are made in a concise manner, while still giving the reader sufficient room for his own thoughts. The preface to Feng Yan's "Fu on the Poplar Joint" contains the following sentences:

At the foot of Mount Li on the south bank of the Wei River, Feng Yan tended to his crops. He neither extended his condolences to others, nor attempted to make friends amongst those seeking official positions. He only yearned for his lofty dream of detaching himself from all worldly matters. He had no intention of participating in the prevailing customs of his time.<sup>28</sup>

The use of words in this section is carefully thought out and the passage makes use of neatly designed antitheses. This results in the preface accurately conveying its meaning while leaving the reader to ponder the matter further. With the help of only a few words, the passage sketches the image of Feng Yan as a recluse, and he almost appears to be the original version of the "Master Five Willows" [*wuliu xiansheng* 五柳先生] that Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 [365–427] created during the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The preface closely resembles a *xiaopin wen* with a relatively complete structure. Another example is the preface to Ma Rong's "Fu on the Long Flute" that contains the following passage:

<sup>27</sup> 余居此焉，竊有樂高妙之志，即書壁爲小賦。Yan Kejun, *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, 1:535.

<sup>28</sup> Ma Jigao, *Lidai cifu zonghui*, 1:211.

I have had no pressing matters and have been idling away my time alone in Pingyang Settlement in Mei Prefecture. There was a guest staying in the hostel who played on the flute the songs for instrumental accompaniment “Qi chu” and “Jing lie”. I have been away from the capital for over a year and, upon hearing this music, I suddenly felt both sad and happy over it.<sup>29</sup>

The description of the author’s feelings of melancholy upon hearing the sound of the flute creates a mood of serenity and distance that almost seem ineffable. Similarly, the preface to Xiang Ziqi’s 向子期 [227–272] “Fu on Recalling Old Friends [*Si jiu fu* 思舊賦]” describes how the author remembers his friends with melancholy upon hearing the sound of a flute. In both examples, the concise writing is able to express deep feelings, meaning, and emotions. Another example is the preface to Bian Shao’s “Fu on Saixi”, which is similar in form to a lively and humorous *xiaopin wen*. The light, self-ironic and playful style distinguishes the piece from most Han *fu* prefaces. The preface to Zhao Qi’s 趙岐 [108–201] “Fu on Indigo [*Lan fu* 藍賦]”, on the other hand, can be regarded as travel notes in the form of a *xiaopin wen*. The preface reads:

I travelled to Yanshi to seek medical advice and passed through Chenliu 陳留. Here, the locals all plant indigo and rely on the production of dye for their income. The fields of blue flowers stretched as far as the eye can see and it appears no one planted any grains. I sighed on seeing how they abandoned essential grains for the pursuit of profits.<sup>30</sup>

The brief piece combines narration, description, as well as discussion. After narrating his travels and experiences, the author describes the endless fields of blue he encountered, before eventually criticizing the local farmers for planting indigo instead of more essential crops. The preface to Zhao Yi’s “Fu on the Cornered Bird [*Qiongniao fu* 窮鳥賦]” can be regarded as a fable in the form of a *xiaopin wen*. The author uses two historical anecdotes as an analogy to express gratitude towards his friends who had managed to save his life. With its plain language and original form, the preface successfully expresses the author’s deep affection and emotions. This type of *fu* preface is often found in “short lyrical *fu* on things” [*yongwu shuqing xiao fu* 詠物抒情小賦]. Their

29 Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature: Rhapsodies on Natural Phenomena, Birds and Animals, Aspirations and Feelings, Sorrowful Laments, Literature, Music, and Passions*, trans. David R. Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3:259.

30 Ma Jigao, *Lidai cifu zonghui*, 1:360.



themes went beyond what Liu Xie 劉勰 [ca. 465–520] had termed the “*fu* on the themes of capitals, palaces, parks, and hunting, as well as those describing travels and expressing thought”,<sup>31</sup> *Fu* writers ventured to express themselves more freely and describe their subtle feelings and sentiments with more depth.

Narrative prose [*xushi sanwen* 敘事散文] and argumentative prose [*shuoli sanwen* 說理散文] had already matured into successful literary forms prior to the Qin Dynasty [221–206 BCE]. During the Western and Eastern Han, political commentary began to flourish in addition to the established form of narrative prose. It can be said that during the pre-Qin and Han period, prose writing was mostly concerned with major events of the state and society as well as philosophical reflections. The writing was mostly dignified, and even unconventional and beautiful pieces still possessed an imposing manner. The tablet inscriptions [*beiwén* 碑文] and records of travel [*youji* 遊記] that appeared during the late Eastern Han shared the same characteristics. These types of prose writings were often relatively long, with contents of a dignified nature. With the *fu* prefaces of the Eastern Han, on the other hand, a lively, original, and intriguing form of *xiaopin wen* developed.

In conclusion, Han *fu* prefaces – especially during the Eastern Han – were not uniform in nature, but showed a great variety with regard to content, style, and form. During this period, the basic aesthetic characteristics of *fu* prefaces as a literary form were established. In addition to introducing the readers to the background of the composition, *fu* prefaces were also designed to accomplish the following: to express the intentions and emotions of the author, to comment on important matters of state, to criticize the ills of the time and convey feelings of hardship, to make use of analogies for the expression of hidden resentments, to entertain the reader with playful compositions, and even to clarify literary concepts. In terms of style, *fu* prefaces from the Western Han were either written in the prose style of the historians, the style of the *xiaoshuo*, or the prose style of the grand *fu*. During the Eastern Han, *fu* prefaces appeared in the prose style of the short *fu*, the style of political commentary and argumentative writing, and the style of the *xiaopin wen*. With regard to writing techniques, *fu* prefaces made use of narration, description, discussion, argumentation, as well as the expression of emotions. *Fu* prefaces dating to the Eastern Han were often quite emotional, which can be seen as an expression of the resurgence of expressive literature during the late Han more generally.

*Fu* prefaces originated, developed, and matured during the Han Dynasty. During the same time period, the basic formal characteristics of prefaces were established. *Fu* prefaces are an important component of literature and an

31 Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 60.

aspect of the history of prose writing that should not be overlooked. While prefaces are always closely connected to the main body of the *fu*, they possess their own unique functions as well as literary aesthetic value. Outstanding prefaces often complement the main exposition favorably, but – when read on their own – can still be considered a superior piece of writing. The preface to Yu Xin’s 庾信 [513–581] “Fu on Lamenting the South [*Ai Jiangnan fu* 哀江南賦]”, for instance, has been more widely circulated and read than the *fu* itself. Pu Xian commented on the preface of Fu Xian’s 傅咸 [239–294] “Fu on the Comb [*Zhi fu* 櫛賦]” in the following manner: “In the ‘Fu on the Comb’, Fu Xian uses mundane things to explore bigger questions, imbuing them with his profound intentions. This is the highest form a *fu* on things can attain. The author’s main topic already finds expression in the preface. I therefore conclude that the preface cannot be ignored.”<sup>32</sup> At times, the preface is more important for the transmission of the author’s intentions than the main exposition of the *fu*. To treat *fu* prefaces as independent objects of study will allow us to ascertain their real significance and value in a more accurate manner.

*Translated by Anja Bihler*

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<sup>32</sup> Pu Xian, *Lidai fuhua jiaozheng*, 404.

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