

A Discussion on the Ethical Worldview Established in Yang Xiong's *Fu* Poetry

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Abstract

Yang Xiong lived through the collapse of the Former Han and emergence of the Later Han dynasty. His *fu* poetry creations and their critiques reflect significant shifts in thinking and new ideas, a very prominent one of which is the establishment of a particular ethical perspective. Yang Xiong's callbacks to the virtues of the Zhou dynasty exhibited in his *fu* poetry were used to establish his concept of “virtues of the Han”. This is reflected most conspicuously in his “Sweet Springs Palace” and his “Tall Poplars Lodge”. These demonstrate the formation of his standard for literary criticism called *lize* 麗則 – poetry consistent with Confucian morals – which highlights and elevates *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets rather than rhetoricians. The system of ethical thought established by Yang Xiong appears to have been based on his ideas on the Confucian Classics and discussions of *fu* poetry. This system became a source of imitation and guidance amongst the other great “*fu* masters” such as Ban Gu and Zhang Heng of the Eastern Han. Yang Xiong's views went on to become a major focus of *fu* poetry studies and the *fu* style as a post-Wei and Jin legacy. Yang Xiong's original work in establishing his *fu* poetry's ethical system still has insights to yield to us.

Keywords

Yang Xiong – Han Dynasty literature – Han *fu* – Chinese classical literature

Yang Xiong 揚雄 [53 BCE–18] was a major *fu* 賦 poet of the Han Dynasty [206 BCE–220] whose works were inspired by figures such as Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 [179–118 BCE] and who himself later went on to inspire such other *fu*

poetry luminaries as Ban Gu 班固 [32–92] and Zhang Heng 張衡 [78–139]. As a *fu* poet who experienced the interregnum between the Former Han [206 BCE–25] and the Later Han [25–220], and who is classified as one of the Four Great *fu* Poets, he still holds major significance for us today as representing an important turning point in Han dynasty literature and important shifts in thinking. One will find, upon reviewing Yang Xiong's compositions and criticisms, that he endeavored to establish a philosophy of "Han virtues" [*Hande* 漢德] with his *fu* poetry that sought to reduce the negative influence of Qin Dynasty-associated morality and customs [*Qinqi* 秦氣] in favor of Chu-associated poetry and customs [*Chufeng* 楚風], which contained frequent references to "Zhou virtues" [*Zhoude* 周德].

The idea of Zhou virtues first appears in the "Kings Who Have Wished to Resign the Throne [*Rangwang* 讓王]" chapter in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 where Zhuangzi writes: "Today's world is plunged into chaos, and the rule of virtue of the Zhou dynasty has faded away, being not found commonly today."¹ In the "Jidong Ji 季冬紀" chapter of *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋] Lü writes: "King Wu of Zhou ascended to the throne and watched over the virtuous rule of the Zhou dynasty", whereas "the world is full of chaos today, and the virtuous rule of the Zhou Dynasty has faded away."² We find further in the "Biography of Prince Yuan of Chu [*Chu yuanwang zhuan* 楚元王傳]" chapter of the *History of the Han Dynasty* [*Hanshu* 漢書] from Ban Gu that "The virtuous rule of the Zhou Dynasty has faded away, and luxurious living is instead esteemed. King Xuan of Zhou was a sage-king and led the Zhou dynasty into prosperity."³ We also find in Liu Xiang's 劉向 [77–6 BCE] *Garden of Eloquence* [*Shuo yuan* 說苑]: "Confucius said: 'If the virtuous rule of the Shang had not died out, then the virtuous rule of the Zhou would not have risen up. If the virtuous rule of the Zhou had not died out, then the *Spring and Autumn Annals* would not have been written.'"⁴ From this we may observe the way in which "Zhou virtues" came to signify prosperity or failure during the Qin [221–206 BCE] and Han in the minds of many.

As regards Yang Xiong's conception of Han virtues, we see our first glimpse of this in Sima Xiangru's "Refuting the Elders of Shu [*Nan Shu fulao* 難蜀父老]":

- 1 Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解 [*The Collection of Zhuangzi*], coll. Shen Xiaohuan 沈嘯寰 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 259.
- 2 Xu Weiyu 許維通, *Lüshi chunqiu jishi* 呂氏春秋集釋 [*Collected Annotations of Spring and Autumn by Lü*], comp. Liang Yunhua 梁運華 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 267–268.
- 3 Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 [*History of the Han Dynasty*], annot. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 1955.
- 4 Liu Xiang 劉向, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證 [*The Collated Garden of Stories*], coll. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 31.

“How great it was, Han Dynasty’s rule of virtue”,⁵ and later we find Ban Biao’s 班彪 [3–54] interpretation of Han virtues in his “Treatise on the Mandate of Kings [Wangming lun 王命論]”, which heavily influenced the *History of the Han Dynasty*: “The virtuous rule of the Han Dynasty today is so great that even the far-off tribes of the Xiongnu stand in obedience”,⁶ and “The mighty flourishing of the Han Dynasty’s virtuous rule is due to the Emperor Wen of Han’s personal implementation of a spirit of self-discipline and frugality”.⁷ Wang Chong’s 王充 [27–97] elevation of the brilliance of the Han Dynasty in his “Necessity of Praise [Xu song 須頌]” chapter of the *Discourses Weighed in the Balance* [Lun heng 論衡] reflects a dominant trend of thought at the time. During this time, we find a section of praise from Yang Xiong’s “Filial Piety Perfected [Xiao zhi 孝至]” chapter of the *Model Sayings* [Fa yan 法言]: “The virtuous rule of the Han Dynasty may be said to have inspired much remembrance and fondness in the minds of the people”,⁸ which is a particularly literary description, and thoroughly reflects his *fu* poetry perspective, from which we may glean much.

1 How Is the “Sweet Springs Palace” Deeply Wonderful?

Over the centuries scholars have written much about the Han dynasty *fu* and how it was a medium for extoling the virtues of the Han. One of the most well-known commentaries was Liu Xie’s 劉勰 [465–532] description of Yang Xiong’s “Sweet Springs Palace [Ganquan fu 甘泉賦]” as having a “shenwei” 深瑋 style, which we can approximate as “deeply wonderful”.⁹

Much of the past commentarial work was focused on Ban Gu’s and Zhang Heng’s *fu* poetry, particularly their poetry on the Eastern Capital. As Ban Gu declared that he was “exploring the origins of the Han dynasty’s virtuous rule”¹⁰ in his “Eastern Metropolises [Dong jing fu 東京賦]”. This idea was followed up by Ming dynasty [1368–1644] scholar Sun Cong 孫琮 [1636–1705] in

5 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian], comm. Pei Yin 裴駟, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 3053.

6 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3029.

7 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3175.

8 Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶, *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 [Commentaries on the Model Sayings], coll. Chen Zhongfu 陳仲夫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 546.

9 Liu Xie 劉勰, *Zengding wenxin diaolong jiaozhu* 增訂文心雕校注 [A Revised Edition of Commentaries on the Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons], annot. Huang Shulin 黃叔琳 and Li Xiang 李詳, comp. Yang Mingzhao 楊明照 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 95.

10 Fan Ye 範曄, *Hou hanshu* 後漢書 [History of the Later Han], annot. Li Xian 李賢 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 40.1369.

his commentaries on the “Two Capitals [*Liang du fu* 兩都賦]”: “The ‘Western Capital [*Xi du fu* 西都賦]’ starts with a discussion of the supreme beauty of Chang’an terrain, then follows it with a description of the magnificence of the mighty works of industry achieved by the Western Han in the area, and finally discusses hunting activities. The ‘Eastern Capital [*Dong du fu* 東都賦]’ entirely omits this content, and focuses its discussion on the establishment of ‘peace and prosperity under heaven’ enjoyed in the reign of the Jianwu and Yongping periods. It goes on to praise the literary, political, and military accomplishments of the time, and states that their ability to continue and recreate such former glories have enabled them even to surpass that vaunted state described in the ‘Western Capital.’”¹¹ Qing scholar He Zhuo 何焯 [1661–1722] remarks, when assessing the “Eastern Metropolises”, that “[its] description is grounded in the system of propriety of the Zhou dynasty era just as the description of the “Western Metropolises [*Xi jing fu* 西京賦]” is grounded in the politics and governance of the Qin dynasty era, and hence the author interprets the Zhou dynasty system as the main root or source of [the success or prosperity of] Luoyang (the capital) of the Eastern Han.”¹² The Han citizens are in some ways a successor of the Zhou in the sense of a continued transmission of their ethical system. If we compare Yang Xiong’s “Filial Piety Perfected” and the descriptions within his *fu* poetry with the praises lavished on Han virtues which appear in Ban Gu’s and Zheng Heng’s *fu* poetics on the capital city, then we may see the development of these ideas:

The virtuous rule of the Han Dynasty was something much longed for and much loved, and also rarely seen in the world. The brilliance, majestic virtuous rule of the Han inspired obedience even in the distant Xiongnu barbarians, which is greatest of all. It was mighty in military prowess, able to conquer the surrounding kingdoms, but this is secondary.

漢德其可謂允懷矣，世鮮焉。芒芒聖德，遠人咸慕，上也；武義璜璜，兵征四方，次也。¹³

The borders of the current Han Dynasty stretched to the Great ocean on the left side, to Qusou on the right, to Panyu in front and to Taotu behind. Their achievements included the establishment of a Du Wei

11 Yu Guanghua 于光華, ed., *Chongding wenxuan jiping* 重訂文選集評 [Revised Commentary on Selections of Refined Literature] (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2012), 183.

12 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 211.

13 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 546–548.

in the southeast [Defender of Eastern Territories], a *Guan hou* [fort] in the northwest, upholding laws through severe punishment, the use of poetry and books, propriety and music to cultivate morals amongst the people such that the populace went to great effort and time to study Confucian mores and thinking.

今大漠左東海，右渠搜，前番禺，後陶塗。東南一尉，西北一候，徽以糾墨，制以質鈇，散以禮樂，風以《詩》《書》，曠以歲月，結以倚廬。¹⁴

Hence the *kylin* of the Jiuzhen area, the precious horse of the Dayuan area, the rhinoceros of the Huangzhi area, and rare birds of the Tiaozi area crossed the Kunlun Mountains and the great seas, and generally there was found strange birds and beasts from every far-off place headed across thousands of *li* miles in order to come and offer their respectful tribute [in recognition of the Han Dynasty's excellence].

乃有九真之麟，大宛之馬，黃支之犀，條支之鳥，踰崑崙，越巨海，殊方異類，至于三萬裏。¹⁵

This general spirit of ethics and morality was gifted to All-Under-Heaven, and virtuous, benevolent government reached even as far as the barren, far off places, that is, reaching as far as Dingling to the north, Yuechang to the south, Daqin to the west, and Lelang to the east.

惠風廣被，澤洎幽荒。北變丁令，南諧越裳，西包大秦，東過樂浪。¹⁶

Yang Xiong drew upon the same set of historical descriptions in his writing and *fu* poetry, and later Ban Gu and Zhang Heng clearly attempted to imitate Yang's poetry in some respects. Relevant also is Yang Xiong's *fu* poetry critiques that imply the establishment of an ethical system, which may still appear

14 Yang Xiong 揚雄, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu* 揚雄集校注 [An Annotated Collection of Yang Xiong], annot. Zhang Zhenze 張震澤 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 182.

15 Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wenxuan* 文選 [Selections of Refined Literature], annot. Li Shan 李善 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 24.

16 Zhang Heng 張衡, *Zhang Heng shiwen ji jiaozhu* 張衡詩文集校注 [An Annotated Collection of Zhang Heng Poems], annot. Zhang Zhenze 張震澤 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 152.

somewhat mysterious or opaque perhaps due to the so-called “deep wonderfulness” characteristic of his *fu* poetry.

Liu Xie assesses the “ten great *fu* poets” of the Qin and Han dynasties in his “Quan Fu 詮賦” chapter of the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* [*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍]. In addition to discussing the meaning of other famous authors’ works, he states that “Yang Xiong’s ‘Sweet Springs Palace’ has a deeply wonderful style.” Although his assessment of “Sweet Springs Palace” with the term “deeply wonderful” may seem a little abstract, it does in fact encompass Yang Xiong’s style of *fu* poetry. To this point, we find in Liu Xie a panoramic perspective on such matters with this general comment on Yang Xiong’s compositions: “Yang Xiong’s ‘Counter to the Lament [*Fan Lisao* 反離騷]’ is full of deep significance and poetic simplicity, and hence the style of the piece is filled with intensity”; “Yang Xiong’s letter of reply to Liu Xin 劉歆 has a depth of thought and winding, turning sentiments”; “Yang Xiong’s work has a great depth of style with tremendous subtlety, and hence his system of thought is somewhat opaque to the reader – his purpose is hidden within”; “The style of Yang Xiong’s work has an ‘ethereality’ and distance about them, and possesses extraordinarily beautiful turns of phrase that plumb the depths of ingenuity, and hence his pieces are endowed with rich logic and reason as well as extraordinary expression”; “Yang Xiong described himself thus: ‘In my heart I enjoy compositions of deep significance, vast and expansive and yet beautifully composed’”.¹⁷ When we turn to the interpretation of the “deep wonderfulness” of Yang Xiong’s *fu* poetry, perhaps from a more linguistic perspective, we find the following description: “Those such as Sima Xiangru, Yang Xiong, and others established their prose with such beauty and ability due to their perfect clarity in their use of characters”,¹⁸ and hence were particularly skilled at the correct application of “rarely seen characters”, which endows their *fu* poetry with this ornate quality. From a more cultured perspective, the view is also expressed that Yang Xiong possesses “an intellectual personality, and hence in his essays he ‘often exhibits curiosity, competitiveness, depth, and breadth of knowledge’”.¹⁹ We also find discussions of Yang Xiong that attempt to bring together his linguistic skills, sense of cultivation, and thought such as

17 Liu Xie, *Zengding wenxin diaolong jiaozhu*, 95, 168, 342, 376, 571, 589.

18 Liu Shipai 劉師培, *Lunwen zaji* 論文雜記 [*Miscellaneous Notes on Essays*], annot. Shu Wu 舒蕪 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 108.

19 Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Lianghan sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史 [*A History of Thought in the Two Han Dynasties*] (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1985), 465.

Liu Yongji's 劉永濟 [1887–1966] interpretation of “deeply wonderful”, where he states:

Indeed, Yang Xiong once mocked Sima Xiangru's *fu* poetry for using an excessive amount of direct admonishments and rarely using satire. Thus Yang centered his composition “Sweet Springs Palace” mainly around satire and subtle criticism. Yang Xiong possessed a considerable familiarity with unusual Chinese characters, and reportedly enjoyed taking much time to still his mind and truly reflect on his compositions. Thus, we find the first half of the “Sweet Springs Palace” contains a reflection on the palatial quarters, and the latter half a description of the ritualistic ceremony. Both reflect, in their choice of characters, a “deep” but “beautiful” approach, and are thus described as having a “deeply wonderful” style.²⁰

子雲嘗譏相如之賦“勸百而諷一”，故其賦《甘泉》，以諷諫為主；又多識奇字，喜沉思，故其文前半敘甘泉宮室，後半寫郊祀典禮，鑄詞用字，皆淵深而奇偉，故曰“構深瑋之風”。

From a theoretical perspective, to criticize Sima Xiangru's *fu* poetry as “using an excessive amount of direct admonishments and rarely using satire” and yet to anchor one's own *fu* poetry around satire and criticism, reveal something of the intrinsic significance of this “deeply wonderful” style. In our estimation, looking at Sima Xiangru's “complex breadth” and Yang Xiong's “deeply wonderful” *fu* poetry, if we can describe the former as still possessing much of the literary style of the great rhetoricians of the Warring States period [475–221 BCE], then the latter seems more evocative of the deep thoughtfulness characteristic of the Confucian scholars during the Han Dynasty. When we come to the composition of the “Sweet Springs Palace” and its proper categorization, we find it is the only example of *fu* poetic pieces pertaining to the annual sacrificial ceremonies held by the emperor [*jiaosi* 郊祀] recorded within the *Selections of Refined Literature* [*Wenxuan* 文選] and that it and the “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifice [*Jiaosi ge* 郊祀歌]” of the time were considered literary creations for a new era. In terms of the literary significance of these works, a composition centered around a *jiaosi* at Ganquan would of course be referring to Emperor Cheng of Han's 漢成帝 [r. 33–7 BCE] *jiaosi* ceremony at Ganquan Palace seeking an heir.²¹ The establishment of such *jiaosi* ceremonies at Ganquan in worship of

20 Liu Yongji 劉永濟, *Wenxin diaolong jiaoshi* 文心雕龍校釋 [*Commentaries on the Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 28.

21 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 1259.

the Taiyi 泰一 divinity could also be traced back to Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 [r. 141–87 BCE]. Emperor Cheng was responsible for the further crafting of Emperor Wu's storied exploits. The pleas for an heir are genuine, the imitations less so, and in that space between the genuine and the exaggerated lies a reflection on the magnificence of the Emperor Wu's successes and the weaknesses of the Emperor Cheng's accomplishments. When we observe Han dynasty politics, from Emperor Wu of Han to Emperor Cheng of Han, and evaluate the history of the Han dynasty through its *fu* poetry traditions, from Sima Xiangru to Yang Xiong, we find a gradual "expansion of concern" from Han dynasty virtues to "Han dynasty tradition" [*Hantong* 漢統]. Thus, we find another layer reflecting an anxious awareness of "respecting tradition" versus the compositions of the Sima Xiangru's era as we explore the establishment of the ethics latent within the "Sweet Springs Palace".

This sort of anxiety first appears in the increasingly less flexible meaning and use of the term *feng* 諷 or *fengjian* 諷諫 [to criticize those in authority] in *fu* poetry, which seems to have caused Yang Xiong's *fu* poetry to turn more towards the direction of a sort of self-aware criticism, and its occasional murky presentation in the "Sweet Springs Palace" undoubtedly strengthens the depth of thought exhibited in the work. Yang Xiong was far more direct in his satire. The "Biography of Yang Xiong [*Yang Xiong zhuan* 揚雄傳]" of the *History of the Han Dynasty* draws on Yang Xiong's four *fu* poems, stating:

The emperor performed a priestly ceremony at Ganquan and Fenyin to ask for a successor to carry on his legacy under Heaven in the first month of the year. [Yang Xiong] accompanied the emperor to Ganquan Palace and, upon returning, presented the "Sweet Springs Palace" to the emperor as an example of criticism ... In the third month when the emperor was about to offer worship to Houtu, he led his great ministers across the Yellow River to congregate in Fenyin. After the ceremony was completed ... [Yang Xiong] presented the "He dong fu" in the manner of a criticism to the emperor ... In the twelfth month, during the hunting activities, Yang Xiong participated in the emperor's retinue ... Yang Xiong took this opportunity to present the "Jiao lie fu" in the manner of a criticism ... In the second year, when the emperor was planning to present a large number of wondrous birds and beasts to show his might to the barbarians ... [Yang Xiong] composed the "Tall Poplars Lodge [*Chang yang fu* 長楊賦]" to offer a criticism to the emperor.

上方郊祠甘泉泰畤、汾陰后土，以求繼嗣，召雄待詔承明之庭。正月，從上甘泉，還奏《甘泉賦》以風。……其三月，將祭後土，上乃

帥群臣橫大河，湊汾陰。既祭.....還，上《河東賦》以勸。.....其十二月羽獵，雄從。.....聊因《校獵賦》以風。.....明年，上將大誇胡人以多禽獸。.....上《長楊賦》。²²

The author, Ban Gu, on the one hand considers that “the eloquence of [Yang Xiong’s] turn of phrase is not more magnificent than that presented by Sima Xiangru,”²³ which it imitates in some manner, while on the other hand he appears to oppose Sima Xiangru’s attitude of wanting to present a criticism, but instead exhibiting flattery as shown in his “Rhapsody on the Great Man [*Da ren fu* 大人賦]” and his non-serious or game-like “to play beautifully only at the end of a piece.”²⁴ And so Yang Xiong appears to have emphasized the value of “critical satire” in his works as a reflection upon and correction of Sima Xiangru.

As we turn our eyes to the “Ganquan,” we may find it to be a work in scope equivalent to Sima Xiangru’s “Rhapsody on the Great Man” and, furthermore, very stylistically creative and diverse as remarked upon by Sun Kuang 孫鑣 [1543–1613]: “The overall swathe of it appears to be in imitation of the “Rhapsody on the Great Man”, but it is only ostensibly similar in terms of the use of flowery language. The thinking behind the two pieces are rather different, which is what we might refer to by the expression of ‘to be thoroughly remade or reborn,’”²⁵ The “thinking” here refers to Yang’s creative ideas, which go deeper than flowery language, with Yang Xiong’s critical satire forming the heart of the piece. Critical satire may again be subdivided into direct criticism [*zhijian* 直諫] and implied satire [*yinfeng* 隱諷]. The admonishment used in “Sweet Springs Palace” offered to the emperor as well as the ethics [*de* 德] established in the closing phrase “the brilliant clouds soar above as rain enriches the earth; virtuous rule is the principle of ten thousand generations,”²⁶ both signify the main creative point of the author, and also double as phrases reflecting Yang’s direct criticism style. In regard to the more indirect criticism often seen in *fu* poetry, we may refer to Yang’s references to the grandeur of the Han Emperor Cheng’s soldiers on the way to battle, the magnificence of the Ganquan Palace, the height of the alter of the Taiyi divinity, the brilliant array of marvelous creatures within the palace, and the grandness of imperial sacrificial ceremonies. On the surface these are praising the scale and grandeur

22 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3522–3557.

23 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 87.3583.

24 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 57.2609.

25 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 314.

26 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 57.3533.

of imperial activities, but under the surface they are criticisms of waste and extravagance. We may look for an example of both in the following *fu* poetry extracts from Yang:

One ascends the cloud-like high pavilion which seems to track naturally along high mountains, almost intertwined. The pavilions which tower above the ground radiate shades of red, green, and jade. The Ganquan Palace is like a jade castle or towering citadel. One feels as if one is climbing a high mountain over a great abyss of the earth below, which is fearsome to look upon.

乘雲閣而上下兮，紛蒙籠以攄成。曳紅采之流離兮，颺翠氣之冤延。
襲琤室與傾宮兮，若登高妙遠、肅虔臨淵。²⁷

These heights draw in rosy clear clouds and allow one to imbibe drops of dew upon celestial tree branches ... one thinks of going to the Queen Mother of the West to congratulate her on her long life, and avoid disturbing the troublesome goddesses Yu Nü and Fu Fei.

喻清雲之流瑕兮，飲若木之露英。.....想西王母欣然而上壽兮，屏玉女而卻宓妃。²⁸

The former section describes the scenic vistas around the high pavilion, whereas the latter describes the period of fasting before the ceremony and a journey through the imagination, which provides the reader with the impressions of a magnificent atmosphere and an aura of free movement. Combined with the ornate language, this effectively masks the more critical meaning underneath the surface of the *fu* poem, and furnishes an example of Yang Xiong's habit of wanting to present satirical criticism but in fact presenting a much softer and less critical persuasion.

Yang Xiong's habit of implied satire in the "Sweet Springs Palace" is a particularly classic example of the way in which *fu* poets drew upon the Classics [*Jing* 經] as they made reference to history in their practice of satire and criticism. The aforementioned passages afford us a good example of the utilization of Classics such as the *Book of Songs* [*Shijing* 詩經] and the subtext within to carry out *feng*, a kind of criticism or satire: the jade castle and towering citadel refer to King Jie of Xia 夏桀 and King Zhou of Shang 商紂 [c. 1075–1046 BCE]. The

²⁷ Yang Xiong, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 56.

²⁸ Yang Xiong, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 62.

second passage alludes to the mythological story of the “Queen Mother of the West” in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhaijing* 山海經], and as Li Shan 李善 [630–689] later states:

What is being said here is that the poet has reached the outermost Western limits [of the land], and recalls the Queen Mother of the West and her blessings of long life, and the reader should then be reminded that lust is the kind of activity that ruins good morals and conduct, and hence the reader should wish to avoid the Yu Nü and Fu Fei goddesses. The “Sweet Springs Palace” also borrows upon such a construction to give a very subtle form of gentle admonishment.²⁹

Later commentary has been quite diverse in its views due to the obliqueness of the language employed given the practice of “presenting the very subtle form of gentle admonishment” [*weijian* 微諫] applied here. If we want to look at Yang Xiong’s ethical thought established after combining these two sections, then we may find Fang Bohai 方伯海 to be the clearest commentator on the subject:

The first half uses a reference to a jade castle and towering citadel as a metaphor (for the Ganquan Palace), by which we can forecast that the Taiyi divinity will not descend upon this part of the Earth; the latter half uses language around “avoiding the Yu Nü and Fu Fei goddesses” to carry out satire and criticism, by which we can observe that the Taiyi may not take enjoyment in the emperor’s ritual contribution either. If we were to review the emperor’s conduct in an ethical sense, we might observe the author’s meaning to be something like: he [the emperor] seeks an heir to succeed him, but he is merely engaging in this activity of worship rather than focusing more on the just and virtuous rule of the country, and so the ceremony is merely a waste of everyone’s time. This is the main thrust of the “Sweet Springs Palace”.³⁰

Both the desire for luxury [*she* 奢] and lust [*se* 色] are used as examples of ethically destructive conduct which puts the country on a path to destruction. If we combine our reflections here with what we know of Emperor Cheng’s favoring of his concubine Zhao Jieyu 赵婕妤 [d. 1 BCE], as well as the rather wasteful exercise of putting on this ceremony to seek an heir, we may surmise

29 Xiao Tong, *Wenxuan*, 114.

30 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 312.

that these two sections are the main gist of the “Sweet Springs Palace”. We may view the warning against ostentatious luxury and lust reflected in the “Sweet Springs Palace” to be two branches of the ethical worldview established by the author.

This brings us back to the question of the establishment of the “Han virtues morality system” and the conservation of Han tradition described above. If Han Dynasty morality referred to by Sima Xiangru in his “Refuting the Elders of Shu” represented a kind of pleasant moral tidings [*deyin* 德音] and somewhat superficial expression of comfort from the Son of Heaven to the border residents, then the language in relation to Han tradition and Han virtues after the Emperor Xuan 漢宣帝 [r. 74–49 BCE] and Emperor Yuan 漢元帝 [r. 49–33 BCE] points in a much more specialized direction, most conspicuously to the habit of allowing interventions into the affairs of government by the empress’s relatives. Arrows were also launched at the current dynasty by the use of history to present criticism. Han dynasty virtues had been established with the formation of Han dynasty traditions which had been set down, as described by Mei Fu 梅福 [fl. 16 BCE], by Emperor Gaozu 漢高祖 [r. 202–195 BCE], Emperor Wen 漢文帝 [r. 180–157 BCE], and Emperor Wu. They also form a part of Yang Xiong’s description in another work of his titled “Tall Poplars Lodge”. His innovative style here is in his conception of Han tradition being inherited mostly from Zhou dynasty tradition [*Zhoutong* 周統]. Thus, Zhou dynasty virtues become a source of inspiration for Han virtues, and appear to have since become a major part of many *fu* poets’ conceptions of the “Greater Han being [in many ways] a successor to the Zhou”.

2 A Discussions of “Tall Poplars Lodge”

Yang Xiong appears to have composed his four *fu* poems in imitation of Sima Xiangru. One of these, the “Tall Poplars Lodge”, says something to the effect of “These things are quite absurd”, leading many historical thinkers to believe the “Two Capitals” of Ban Gu is actually providing a commentary on current affairs through *fu* poetry. For example, during the Western Jin dynasty [265–317], Liu Kui 劉逵 [fl. 299] states that: “The reasoned discussion in Ban Gu’s the ‘Two Capitals’ transcends mere flowery language”,³¹ and that both *fu* poems were

31 Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jin shu* 晉書 [*Book of Jin*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 2376.

in actuality “composed in imitation of the ‘Tall Poplars Lodge’”.³² Zhu Yao 祝堯 [fl. 1318] discussed the *fu* poetry style exhibited in the “Tall Poplars Lodge” in the fourth volume of his *On Ancient Fu Styles* [*Gufu bianti* 古賦辯體], remarking that “Yang Xiong’s *fu* poetry in these verses is of a pure literary *fu* structure from beginning to end, which is rarely seen. Later writers from the Tang and Song Dynasties would tend to compose their *fu* poetry in a looser prose style. Could they not, in this endeavor, have begun here from Yang Xiong himself?”³³ Yang Xiong’s works received plenty of commentary throughout the centuries, of which perhaps He Zhuo 何焯 [1661–1722] has been the most exhaustive. He wrote: “The order of the ‘Plume Hunt [*Yu lie fu* 羽獵賦]’ is that it begins with a commentary, but the main body of the text is a description of events; the order of the ‘Tall Poplars Lodge’ is that it starts with a description of events, but the main body of the text is a commentary”;³⁴ “The words of the guest [*keqing* 客卿] are a frontal and direct commentary; the words of the master [*zhuren* 主人] are a subtle, latent commentary [*weici* 微辭]. Frontal, direct commentary has a way of offending people, whereas indirect, subtle commentary finds itself relatively more acceptable to its hearers ... This is exactly where the ‘Tall Poplars Lodge’ shines in its offering of persuasive criticism to higher authority”.³⁵ Other writers have offered different points of view, for example in stating that: “The ‘Plume Hunt’ does not possess much in the way of criticism of authority amid all of its cozying up to authority whereas the ‘Tall Poplars Lodge’ is entirely swept up in cozying up to authority.”³⁶ In comparing these views, one positive and one negative, we might find that the cause of the disagreement lies precisely in the extreme subtlety of what is meant by being “good” at remonstrating with authority. When we turn to the evaluation of the criticism exhibited in the “Tall Poplars Lodge”, we find its core innovation to be Han virtues based on or established by Zhou virtues. We can also turn to the main gist of the commentary offered in the “Tall Poplars Lodge”:

32 Yu Zukun 余祖坤, ed., *Lidai wenhua xubian* 歷代文話續編 [*Sequel Compilation of Literature of Former Dynasties*] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2013), 658.

33 Zhu Yao 祝堯, “Gufu bianti 古賦辯體 [On Ancient Fu Styles],” in *Fuhua guangju* 賦話廣聚 [*A Wide Ranging Discussion on Fu*], ed. Wang Guan 王冠 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2006), 2:215.

34 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 357.

35 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 358.

36 Hong Ruogao 洪若皋, “Chang yang fu 長楊賦 [Tall Poplars Lodge],” vol. 2 of *Liang Zhaoming wenxuan yue cai* 梁昭明文選越裁 [*Commentaries on Zhaoming’s selection of refined Literature*], in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu jibu* 四庫全書存目叢書: 集部 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 287:749.

Zimo the guest asks master Hanlin: “It is said that the sage emperors nurtured the people, and allowed All-Under-Heaven to experience the joys of virtuous rule, in which (the fruits of) justice and beneficence were widely distributed to the four seas”. ... Master Hanlin then responds: “Under the rule of the powerful and violent Qin Dynasty ... the people had no respite from torment. The Heavens watched over Emperor Gaozu ... and heard the people’s cries, acting to save the people from their miseries ... and then we came to the Emperor Wen of Han ... he hated extravagant luxury and hence would remain far from it ... He hated to hear decadent sounds, and thus the North Star became correct in its alignments and the heavenly Taijie became firmly consistent (the weather was clear and there was peace under heaven). Whereas later on there was the chaos provoked by the Xiongnu barbarians, and disasters under heaven ... which provoked Emperor Wu of Han to anger ... he restored peace to the nation and forever eliminated the threat of disasters and war from the border.”³⁷

“The current dynasty observes pure ethics, follows the right way, and promotes ethical ideas ... Scholars who do not follow the kingly path are mocked even by the woodcutter ... and hence the land enjoys good harvests, and a well-disciplined army of many soldiers ... (The emperor) then became afraid that his posterity would be too absorbed in such matters and would consider such matters to be major affairs of state ... actually (what the emperor did) was a glorious merit in service of Emperor Gaozu and the legal systems of the Emperor Wen and Emperor Wu in restoring the original purposes of field hunting from the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors; he allowed the farmers to be continually engaged in their agricultural work, and for women not to unduly leave their weaving but rather to promptly get married ... a general air of harmony and happiness sprang up ... How could it be said that the rulers sought only to pass the time in travelling and hunting, riding as they pleased around the people’s carefully ploughed fields, walking in forests of fruit trees, and showing off the vast hauls they had acquired from the hunt!”

子墨客卿問於翰林主人曰：“蓋聞聖主之養民也，仁霑而恩洽.....窮覽極觀.....擾于農民.....娛樂之游.....乾豆之事。”.....主人曰：“昔有彊秦.....羣黎爲之不康。“於是上帝眷顧高祖.....展民之所誅，振民之所乏。.....逮至聖文.....惡麗靡而不近.....憎聞鄭衛幼眇之聲，是以玉衡正而太階平也。其後熏鬻作虐.....於是聖武勃怒.....使海內澹然，永亡邊城之災，金革之患。

37 Yang Xiong, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 117–124.

“今朝廷純仁（成帝），遵道顯義……士有不談王道者，則樵夫笑之。……迺時以有年出兵，整輿竦戎，振師五秭。……又恐後世迷於一時之事，常以此取國家之大務，淫荒田獵……亦所以奉太宗之烈，遵文武之度，複三王之田，反五帝之虞；使農不輟耰，工不下機，婚姻以時……帥與之同苦樂。……豈徒欲淫覽浮觀，馳騁粳稻之地，周流梨栗之林，蹂踐芻蕘，誇詡眾庶，盛狄獫之收，多麋鹿之獲哉！”³⁸

If we begin with the discussion proper with the guest, and then proceed to the more subtle commentary by the master, we find two passages reflecting on the punishments of the tyrannical Qin [221–206 BCE]: first, we find there is an “elevation of the government by Emperor Gaozu, Emperor Wen and Emperor Wu”, which furnishes us with a view of Han virtues, and then we get a description of the current dynasty’s “governance by observation of [such] principles”.³⁹ Two points may be well worth discussing as we turn to the “subtle commentary” offered herein: the first is in what Han virtues were modeled after, and the answer is that they were modeled after Zhou virtues. Moreover, this aligns well with the Han *fu* poets’ habit of determining the main gist of a *fu* poem based on the Confucian Classics. Although the praises mentioned by the “Tall Poplars Lodge” about the “heavenly virtues” [*tiande* 天德], “virtue of frugality” [*jian de* 儉德], and “meritorious virtue” [*gongde* 功德] of Emperors Gaozu, Wen, and Wu must be related to the “arguments on the system of emperors’ temples” from and following the days of Emperors Yuan and Cheng of Han,⁴⁰ the description is also similar to Kuang Heng’s 匡衡 [fl. 36 BCE] supplications to Emperor Gaozu, Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (Emperor Wen of Han), and Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (Emperor Wu of Han) on account of his illness.⁴¹ On the other hand, as a piece of *fu* poetic literature, Yang Xiong’s creative work here is again attempting to imitate the meaning in the Zhou Classics such as the *Book of Songs* and *Book of Documents* [*Shang shu* 尚書]. As stated in the “Great Is the God Di [*Huangyi* 皇矣]” chapter of “Greater Odes of the Kingdom [*Da ya* 大雅]” of the *Book of Songs*: “Heaven protected the sage monarchs, and the Quanrong 犬戎 were defeated and forced to flee for their lives. Heaven established this monarch as the ‘Son of Heaven’, who was tasked with the Mandate of Heaven, and enjoyed much stability and prosperity in national affairs ... Heaven established

38 Yang Xiong, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 128–129.

39 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 359.

40 Jiang Xiaoguang 蔣曉光 and Xu Jie 許結, “Yuan Cheng miao yi yu ‘Chang yang fu’ de jiegou ji yingxiang 元成廟議與‘長楊賦’的結構及影響 [Structure and Influence of the Yuan Cheng Temple Debates and ‘Chang Yang Fu’],” *Zhejiang daxue xuebao* 浙江大學學報, no. 6 (2011).

41 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3121.

the Zhou Kingdom, which began with Taibo 太伯 and King Ji 王季. King Ji had great love for his friends and great concern for his brothers, and he enabled the Zhou Kingdom to achieve prosperity and joy ... King Wen of Zhou later succeeded to the kingship, and he was a ruler of unmatched morals. He received the Blessing of Heaven, which would also continue to posterity.”⁴² As recorded in the “Annals of the Zhou [*Zhou benji* 周本紀]” chapter of *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記], the era of the sage kings was from two generations from Houji 后稷 to Duke Liu 公劉, and the eight generations to King Tai 太王 (Ji Dan 姬亶), and then from King Tai to King Ji, and then to King Wen of Zhou 周文王 [r. 1106–1056 BCE]. This perspective illuminates Yang Xiong’s perspective in the “Tall Poplars Lodge” toward the ethics of these three generations of Han Emperors. To be specific, Yang Xiong is writing with reference to the era of the sage kings of the Zhou Dynasty [1046–256 BCE], and Yang Xiong is also undertaking a transformation in this piece from a method of lifting sections from other classical works commonly used by Han Dynasty *fu* poets drawing upon the *Shi* to a literary model in imitation of the Classics. If we line this up with the way in which the “Against Luxurious Ease [*Wu yi* 無逸]” chapter of *Book of Documents* has been composed, we find this point to be even more conspicuous. The “Against Luxurious Ease” records a warning in relation to King Cheng of Zhou’s 周成王 [r. 1043–1021 BCE] succession to the rulership:

The Duke of Zhou says: “Ay! I have heard that the monarchs from King Zhongzong of Yin in the past ... to Gaozong ... and to Zujia ... the monarchs from Gaozong onwards have been born with a hedonistic mindset. They are [practically] born with a hedonistic mindset. They follow a hedonistic mindset, they do not understand the difficulties of planting crops and reaping harvests; they do not understand the suffering of the common people, only how to absorb themselves in indulgence.”

The Duke of Zhou says: “Ay! Only we, King Tai and King Ji, of the Zhou Kingdom can exercise great caution. King Wen of Zhou strictly followed the endeavors of King Tai and King Ji, and paid careful attention to the farmers agricultural production ... He did not dare to be overly involved in such hedonistic pursuits.”⁴³

42 Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shisanjia yi ji shu* 詩三家義集疏 [Collected Commentary on the Meaning of the Three Versions of the Book of Odes], ed. Wu Ge 吳格 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 852–855.

43 Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, *Shangshu jingwen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏 [Notes on the Old Text and New Text Versions of the Book of Documents], coll. Chen Kang 陳抗 and Sheng Dongling 盛東鈴 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 440–41.

The above section contains several instances of negative or accusatory language. For example, the “Three Shang Rulers” [*Yin san zong* 殷三宗] and “Three Kings of Zhou” [*Zhou san wang* 周三王] are established as classic paradigms of ethical conduct, which Yang Xiong’s “Tall Poplars Lodge” is obviously imitating in its description of the “Three Emperors of Han” [*Han san di* 漢三帝]. This makes for the establishment of a kind of system of “Han virtues.” Prior to Yang Xiong, this kind of imitative writing had appeared frequently in other texts from the Western Han era, for example, in the congratulations offered by Wuqiu Shouwang 吾丘壽王 to Emperor Wu of Han. Wuqiu Shouwang writes:

I have heard that the virtuous governance of the Zhou Dynasty began with Houji, and continued to accumulate in the time of Duke Liu; it was made more magnificent in the time of King Tai and further perfected in the time of King Wen of Zhou and King Wu of Zhou. As was obvious in the time of the Duke of Zhou, the virtuous governance of the Zhou Dynasty is illuminated to All-Under-Heaven, and is informed by Heaven ... we, Gaozu of Han, carry on the great work of the Zhou Dynasty as ethical luminaries of equal measure, bestowing beneficence unto All-Under-Heaven and establishing virtuous government such that All-Under-Heaven is at peace and harmony. As we come to you, Your Majesty, you have revitalized Emperor Gaozu’s fundamental work, being even more glorious and successful in meritorious achievements and virtuous actions.⁴⁴

We find here an idea that the “Han” has succeeded the “Zhou”, and that these “imitating” descriptions or writings concerning Zhou-era “sage kings” are essentially the same in containing symbolic reference to the “Han Dynasty Emperors”. In the same way, the previously cited Mei Fu is very similar in his style of *fu* poetry to Yang Xiong in his description of “Han virtues” which he discusses in relation to Wang Zhang’s 王章 [d. 24 BCE] passing. It is not, however, a “literary work”, but entirely a “memorial to the throne” [*zoushu* 奏疏]. Hence, to draw upon or imitate something like the “Against Luxurious Ease” in a literary style of *fu* poetry to promote an ethical viewpoint can be described as one of Yang Xiong’s creative legacies. The exhortations in the “Against Luxurious Ease” pointing the reader to emulate the “ethics” of the First Kings would be easily regarded as the positive example cited in the text, the negative being that “successive kings from hence onward should not indulge in traveling, hedonism, or hunting in the field”.⁴⁵ Hence, the use of “King Cheng” of Zhou

44 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 2798.

45 Sun Xingyan, *Shangshu jingwen zhushu*, 442.

also implies the object of Yang Xiong's "discrete (or wonderfully subtle)" praise is the Emperor Cheng of Han himself. Thus, we find the "*feng*" of this *fu* poet actually buried somewhere in between these two examples.

Hence, our second point would be that the "*feng*" characteristic of Yang Xiong's "wonderfully subtle commentary", must be in his method of establishing an ethical system by juxtaposition of "negative" and exaltation of the "positive" in his compositions, which marks Yang Xiong as rather distinct from other authors. As we look at the language used in the "Against Luxurious Ease", we find the key phrase to be "[the importance of] knowing the difficulty of sowing, cultivating, and harvesting crops".⁴⁶ This is the warning or admonition here in the "Against Luxurious Ease". When we turn to the "Tall Poplars Lodge", we find praise for the ethics of the "Three Han Emperors", the key to which is their "frugal virtue", that is, the *fu* poem contains great praise for Emperor Wen of Han's frugal restraint and wise governance with the phrase "he hated extravagant luxury and hence would remain far from it". As recorded in the "Biography of Yi Feng [Yi Feng zhuan 翼奉傳]" chapter of the *History of the Han Dynasty*, Yi Feng 翼奉 [fl. 49 BCE] remarked when presenting to Emperor Yuan of Han that the "source of the Han Dynasty's flourishing rule by virtuous governance is in Emperor Wen of Han's exercise of restraint and frugality, which saved much effort on the part of the people. At that time, such great palaces as the Ganquan, Jianzhang, and the many palace pavilions in the Shanglin Yuan 上林苑 had not been built",⁴⁷ and it was a common consensus held on the part of the scholars of the day that doing so would have been a waste of resources. If we turn then to the creative motivations and targets of the *fengjian* in the "Tall Poplars Lodge" for a comparison, there is something similar in the descriptions in the preface to the *fu* with "the emperor was planning to present a large number of wondrous birds and beasts to show his might to the barbarians" and the "farmers had no way of collecting their crops in good time".⁴⁸ It fits with the exhortations in the "Against Luxurious Ease" against excess and wantonness and the encouragement around "knowing the difficulty of sowing, cultivating, and harvesting crops". With this in mind, if we then turn again to the first reference to "the pure ethics" of the current dynasty in the poem, we find it is not only a construction of a new "system of virtue" [*rende* 仁德] in the author's mind tracing its antecedents back to the "heavenly virtues", "frugal virtue", and "meritorious virtue" of the "Three Han Emperors", we also find a "veiled

46 Sun Xingyan, *Shangshu jingwen zhushu*, 434.

47 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3175.

48 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3557.

criticism” [*fengyu* 諷喻] of today’s ruling emperor in light of the “virtue” painted and implicit view on such “excesses”.

We can look to another description offered by Yang Xiong in his hunting themed-poem “Plume Hunt” for further validation of his “subtle” and very “*feng*-like” meaning. Yang Shen 楊慎 [1488–1559] once assessed Yang Xiong’s work, “Plume Hunt”, thus:

It achieves a profound subtlety in the art of offering criticism to superiors during the Warring States period; the main gist of Sima Xiangru’s “Into the Forest [*Shang lin fu* 上林賦]” has been grasped and indeed fully mastered by Yang Xiong. It is easy for the reader to find himself powerfully convinced and moved by Yang Xiong’s poetry due to his forceful elucidation and understanding of the luminaries of the Warring States period and the masterful stroke of this most talented poet’s pen ... (Yang Xiong) has set down many new paradigms for the creative works possible to *fu* poets⁴⁹

which highlights Yang Xiong’s talent for, the critical significance of his subtle criticism of authority. In actual fact, Yang Xiong had claimed in his “Plume Hunt” that he was following Emperor Cheng of Han’s imperial retinue on their hunting trip and, presupposing “[one] does not want to infringe upon or steal from the lands and fields of the common people”,⁵⁰ he then looks back on the meaning and significance of the hunting expeditions mounted by the various Sons of Heaven throughout history, the critical significance of which is obvious, particularly in comparison between King Wen of Zhou and Emperor Wu of Han:

The people considered the hunting grounds (or gardens) of King Wen of Zhou to be rather small at around 100 *li* in diameter, whereas the people considered the grounds of King Xuan of Qi, which was 40 *li* in diameter, to be too large; the reason for this is that King Wen of Zhou used his gardens to provide for the people, whereas King Xuan of Qi established his gardens through forceful acquisition. Emperor Wu of Han undertook new land clearing of the forest on a large scale ... Here he was able to enjoy such luxurious pleasures to his heart’s content ... This forms an unpleasant contrast with the hunting habits of Emperor Yao, Emperor Shun, Tang of Shang, and King Wen.

49 Yu Guanghua, *Chongding wenxuan jiping*, 354.

50 Yang Xiong, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 83.

文王囿百里，民以爲尚小，齊宣王囿四十裏，民以爲大；裕民之與奪民也。武帝廣開上林.....周袤數百里。.....游觀侈靡，窮妙極麗。.....非堯、舜、成湯、文王三驅之意也。⁵¹

Yang draws upon the hunting habits of Emperor Wu of Han to form a subtle criticism of Emperor Cheng of Han's hunting habits with the objective of condemning an "idle attitude". Thus, he does not criticize the hunting undertaken itself, but in fact uses it as an example of the other Emperor's brilliance and moral conduct as he discusses its meritorious functions with regard to providing for religious ceremonies, entertaining guests, and providing for everyday food needs. It is respectful of "ancient habits of propriety" [*guli* 古禮], but finds criticism as to luxurious indulgence. The virtue of frugality is also a frequent component of later *fu* poetry centered around hunting themes as shown by, e.g. Ban Gu's "Eastern Capital" where he writes: "Orders should be strict in three of four parts, but allow for some tolerance in one part";⁵² and Zhang Heng's "Eastern Metropolises" where he writes: "Systems of propriety should be tolerant in one of four parts"⁵³ as well as Li Bai's 李白 [701–762] "Great Hunt Preface" [*Da lie fu xu* 大獵賦序] where he writes: "[That] is not a virtuous ethic as it is tolerant in one part of four".⁵⁴ This picture continues to build as we turn again to the criticism offered by Yang Xiong in his "Tall Poplars Lodge" towards the current ruler's "excessive indulgence in travel and riding as he pleased around the people's carefully ploughed fields" after assessing the historical fact of Yang Xiong's other criticisms in the "Plume Hunt", e.g. "Emperor Wu of Han undertook new land clearing of the forest on a large scale", as well as what the Tang scholar Hu Ceng 胡曾 [b. 839] wrote of the "Tall Poplars Lodge" in the "Lodge for Shooting Bears [*She xiong guan* 射熊館]" that: "Emperor Cheng of Han was outrageous in his actions, unaware of the anxieties of the common people, and used his large-scale hunting exercises as a means of showing the glory of his rulership, but which in actual fact frustrated his farmers' efforts. Emperor Cheng of Han would presumably not have been considering the difficulty of Emperor Gaozu's pioneering works when Yang Xiong (probably

51 Yang Xiong, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 83–84.

52 Ban Gu 班固, "Dong du fu 東都賦 [The Eastern Capital]," in *Lidai fu pingzhu, Handai juan* 歷代賦評注：漢代卷 [*Commentary of Fu Poetry over the Ages: Han Dynasty Volume*], ed. Zhao Kuifu 趙逵夫 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2010), 529.

53 Ban Gu, "Dong du fu," 668.

54 Li Bai 李白, "Da lie fu 大獵賦 [Great Hunt Preface]," in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [*The Complete Literature of Tang*], ed. Dong Gao 董誥 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 347:3521.

rather matter-of-factly) presented his “Tall Poplars Lodge.”⁵⁵ “Fu of the Snake Cutting Sword [*Zhanshe jian fu* 斬蛇劍賦]” by Xu Yin 徐寅 [fl. 904] notes:

The creeping poison of the ostentatious indulgence of the Qin Dynasty seeped down to posterity like a great long snake. The frugal virtuous rule of the Han Dynasty came at it like a celestial sword. Indeed, such ostentatious luxury must be replaced by frugality and thrift just like the great serpent is beheaded by this celestial sword.

秦毒之奢，變作長蛇，漢德之儉，化為神劍，奢以儉陷，蛇以劍斬。⁵⁶

The “ethical” ideas established in Yang Xiong’s “wonderfully subtle commentary” were again exhibited in later creative works by other authors who carried these thoughts forward, particularly in the idea that the virtue of frugality and the rule of propriety [*lizhi* 禮治] were key principles inherited from the “virtues of the Zhou” and which could proclaim and elevate the greatness of “Han virtues”.

3 Yang Xiong’s Ideas around “the True *Fu* Poet’s Practice of True *Fu* Poetry”

The ethical ideas established in Yang’s *fu* poetry were reflected in his commentaries on *fu* poetry, the most classic example of which would be his promotion and praise of the idea of “the practice of true *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets” [*shiren zhi fu* 詩人之賦]. When we look at assessments of *fu* poetry offered by contemporaries of the Han Dynasty, particularly with regard to Yang Xiong himself, he had not only plenty to say on his own experiences of writing *fu* poetry, but also quite a lot in terms of assessing *fu* poetry itself. We also find a number of references where he discusses *fu* poetry in the “My Sir [*Wu zi* 吾子]” chapter of the *Model Sayings*, discussing concepts such as *fengjian* and *lize* 麗則 [poetry consistent with Confucian morals] which would be very relevant to the *fu* poets of later years. If we are, however, to try to find the absolute core of his critiques,

55 Peng Dingqiu 彭定求, ed., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 [*The Complete Tang Poems*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), 647-7436.

56 Chen Yuanlong 陳元龍, ed., “Lidai fu hui 歷代賦匯 [Compilation of Fu of Former Dynasties],” in *Jingyin wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 1420.846.

we find that it remains with the ethical system established and implied within his idea of the *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets.

Han scholars discussing the idea of the *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets may have discussed the way in which “*fu* poets do not sing [their verses], but only read them aloud” or the “flowing streams of ancient poems [that come down to us]”, but we find on review that all of the content in the *Records of the Grand Historian* and the *History of the Han Dynasty* related to “poets” [*shiren* 詩人] to be the specific references made in 300 compositions in the *Book of Songs*.⁵⁷ Yang Xiong often compared *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets with the *fu* used by Confucian scholars, that is, making a pointed reference to the significance of the Confucians’ (most notably Confucius’) use of the *Book of Songs*. Much of the writings from the poets in the Han Dynasty era make significant reference to the meanings in the Classics to adopt some sort of broader meaning, whereas Yang Xiong differentiated “the *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets”, using *lize* as an essential point of demarcation, which is of original theoretical value. We can turn first to the original text of the “My Sir” for a further elucidation of this point:

The *fu* poetry of the poets is decorated with beautiful turns of phrase, and thus endowed with norms; the *fu* poetry of the poet-rhetorician is decorated with beautiful turns of phrase, and thus rendered excessive. If Confucius’ disciples used *fu* poetry as an educational means or format, then we might say that Jia Yi could have entered into the Grand Hallway, and Sima Xiangru could have entered into the Inner Sanctum. But did the Confucians indeed not engage in *fu* poetry?

詩人之賦麗以則，辭人之賦麗以淫。如孔氏之門用賦也，則賈誼升堂，相如入室矣。如其不用何？⁵⁸

The phrase “[then] Jia Yi could have entered into the Grand Hallway, and Sima Xiangru could have entered into the Inner Sanctum” is different from the criticism offered in the “Treatise on Arts and Letters [*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志]” chapter of the *History of the Han Dynasty* toward the *fu* poetry by Sima Xiangru and the like, that is, toward “essays full of flowery language which are excessively ostentatious and flow with large and vast meanings, which lose the essential

57 Chen Yunzhu 陳韻竹, *Lun fu zhi yuanqi* 論賦之緣起 [On the Origins of Fu Poetry] (Taipei: Taiwan wenjin chubanshe, 2015), 225–233.

58 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 49–51.

significance and importance of criticism of higher authority”,⁵⁹ which actually does reflect an affirmation of the important “function” of the *fengjian* in Jia Yi 賈誼 [200–168 BCE] and Sima Xiangru’s poetry as discussed by Sima Qian 司馬遷 [145–90 BCE] by implication. Another useful reference is provided in the discussion in the “My Sir” which is quite reminiscent of the *lize* proper to the *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets.

Someone asks: “Does the ruler elevate fine, ostentatious language?” The response comes: “What the ruler elevates is content ... content and fine language that complements the other is near to the heights of the Classics.”

或問：“君子尚辭乎？”曰：“君子事之爲尚。.....事、辭稱則經。⁶⁰

And hence the core of his critique becomes a sort of “compromise” around the principles of *lize*, opposition to chaotic yardsticks by which one evaluates such works [*fadu* 法度], and an admiration for the ethics of the ancient sages. Hence, the Song Dynasty [960–1279] scholar Zhao Dingchen 趙鼎臣 [fl. 1101] integrates Confucius and Yang Xiong when he describes *fu* poetry thus:

Confucius said: “It is difficult for plain speech to avoid appearing rather crude in comparison to artful language, but then again it is difficult for artful language to better plain speaking in the avoidance of pointless contentiousness.” Yang Xiong also said: “Content above form becomes abrupt, form before content becomes empty and ostentatious.” It is clear that *fu* poetry, as a literary style, was a continued legacy of ancient Chinese poetry. The source of its inspiration was to be found in external objects and external matters ... it gave descriptions in line with events while actually being closer to books of history ... *fu* poetry which “finds its feet” amid the system of virtuous propriety may be considered “true” *fu* poetry of a “true” *fu* poet.⁶¹

If we turn to Yang Xiong’s own interpretation of “the *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets”, we find that it may not be entirely consistent with this sentiment. Nonetheless, it is easy to see the way in which *lize* went on to accompany the *fu* poets’ ideas

59 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 1756.

60 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 60.

61 Zhao Dingchen 趙鼎臣, “Ye du fu xu 鄴都賦序 [Preface to Fu of the Capital at Ye],” vol. 1 of “Zhuyin jishi ji 竹隱畸士集 [Selected Writings from Zhao Dingchen],” in *Jingyin wenyuange siku quanshu*, 1124:115.

of what “the *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets” meant and which became a traditional system of critique in *fu* poetry. If we look, for example, at the way in which ancient *fu* poetry was used in the imperial examination system of the Yuan Dynasty [1206–1368], or as noted by Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 [1296–1370] in his preface to the *Sayings and Wisdom from Venerable Exemplars* [*Lize yiyin* 麗則遺音]: “Yang Xiong said: ‘The *fu* poetry of the poets is decorated with beautiful turns of phrase, and thus endowed with norms; the *fu* poetry of the poet-rhetorician is decorated with beautiful turns of phrase, and thus rendered excessive.’ Thus we consider Yang to have possessed a strong understanding of the *fu* poetry of the ancients.”⁶²

However, the derivation of meaning must be based on *ci* 詞, that is, the precise words or language used, as illustrated by the following explanation of the word *li* 麗 offered in the *Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters* [*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字]: “*Li* has the meaning of ‘travel’. It is the habit of deer that deer must travel when food is scarce,”⁶³ and as noted by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 [1735–1815]: “The pairing of two is *li*, as the *Book of Changes* [*Zhou yi* 周易] states: ‘*Li*, of what is bright and what is catching. The sun and the moon accompany the heavens, and the crops and vegetation accompany the land’, this is the meaning of *li*.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, the meaning of *li* is extended in the creative works and interpretations of the Han Dynasty poets from *liang* 兩 [two, coupling or pairing] to *meihao* 美好 [beautiful or wonderful] as seen in the “Da Yu 達鬱” chapter of *Master Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals* which records: “Gong is beautiful” [公姣且麗], with Gao You 高誘 [fl. 205] noting that “*jiao* and *li* both refer to the state or quality of being beautiful.”⁶⁵ *Ze* 則 [norms] refers to *faze* 法則 [laws] on a fundamental level as evidenced from Chinese bronze inscriptions, but it can also be interpreted as “guidelines”, “rules”, “codes” and so on. Yang Xiong’s advocacy of “*fu* poetry by true *fu* poets” was founded on his thoughts around the meaning of the Classics, and did not heavily emphasize discussions around forms of *fu* poetry. The potential sameness and interchangeability of the meaning of *dian* 典 [code, or classic] and *li* 麗 [beauty] is referenced by Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 [1753–1818] in his notes on the “Many Regions [*Duo fang* 多方]” chapter of *Book of Documents* where, on further elucidating the roles of the “Assistant Ministers of the Laws and Regulations [*Xiao Sikou* 小司寇]” chapter of *Rites of Zhou* [*Zhou li* 周禮] and

62 Yang Weizhen 楊維禎, “Lize yiyin 麗則遺音 [Sayings and Wisdom from Venerable Exemplars],” in *Jingyin wenyuange siku quanshu*, 1222.146.

63 Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 [*Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 471.

64 Duan Yucai, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 471.

65 Xu Weiyu, *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*, 566.

the “Penal Law of Marquis Lü [*Lü xing* 呂刑]”, he states: “*Li* has to do with punishment”.⁶⁶ Yang Yunru 楊筠如 [1903–1946] offers a further interpretation of this point in his *Collation of the Book of Documents* [*Shangshu hegu* 尚書核詁]:

Zheng Xuan remarks in the “*Lü xing*” regarding the nature of *li* that: “[It regards] processing and handling.” The interpretation of *li* here offered might refer to legal rules, or to *xinglü* criminal law and punishment, but neither mean “processing and handling”. In fact, “*li*” always refers to criminal law and punishment. The connotation here is very similar to the terms “*xinglü*” [criminal discipline], “*xingfa*” [criminal punishment] in English ... as stated in the chapter of “Biography of Dongfang Shuo [*Dongfang Shuo zhuan* 東方朔傳]” of the *History of the Han Dynasty*: “The reign of Emperor Wen of Han was distinguished by ‘*li*’ of virtue and an exactness of *renyi* [benevolence].” The juxtaposition of “*li*” and “*zhun*” [to permit, to be exact, in accordance with] refers to law or legal norms.⁶⁷

The fact that the *Book of Documents* and *Rites of Zhou* use *li* to define *xing* 刑 (having to do with punishment or criminal justice) can provide an explanation of Yang Xiong’s conjoined use of the term *lize*. That is, both *li* and *dian* can be interpreted interchangeably as “*dianze* 典則”, whereas the *li* in the term *liyin* 麗淫 may be interpreted as “wonderful”, referring to exceeding *faze* or *dianze* due to ostentatious language, or may also be interpreted as *xing* where the character *yin* 淫 denotes a transcendence of norms due to ostentatious language. Although this is merely conjecture, it does fit very well with the aforementioned interpretations when we look at the way in which Yang Xiong imitated the *Book of Songs* and *Book of Documents* in his *fu* poetry in order to highlight ethics and sought to establish “ethics as a norm” in order to praise and elevate the frugal virtues of Emperor Xiaowen. From these compositions, the idea in Yang Xiong’s “Sweet Springs Palace” that “virtuous rule is the principle of ten thousand generations”, and his idea in the “Plume Hunt” that “norms are truly that which is sacred”,⁶⁸ can we find that this appears to signify his advocacy “for imitating King Wen of Zhou as an ideal model”⁶⁹ as reflected in the “Wen Wang 文王” chapter of “Greater Odes of the Kingdom”, and hence his theoretical advocacy of the practice of true *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets as a conceptual

66 Sun Xingyan, *Shangshu jingwen zhushu*, 461.

67 Yang Yunru 楊筠如, *Shangshu hegu* 尚書核詁 [*Collation of the Book of Documents*] (Xi’an: Shaanxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1959), 256.

68 Yang Xiong 揚雄, “Yu lie fu 羽獵賦 [The Plume Hunt],” in *Lidai fu pingzhu*, 268.

69 Wang Anshi 王安石, *Shiyi gouchen* 詩義鉤沉 [*Exploration into the Deeper Meaning of the Odes*], coll. Qiu Hansheng 邱漢生 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 225.

system promoting good ethics on the basis of the Confucian Classics and in following the *dianze* (codes). The concepts of *de* and *xing* and the concepts of *sheng* 生 [life] and *ke* 克 [counter-action] are also reflected in Yang Xiong's *fu* poetry. For example, we find an imitation of the "Against Luxurious Ease" chapter of *Book of Documents* in the "Tall Poplars Lodge", where there is a process of thought whereby "*de*" applies to the governance of the "Three Kings of Zhou" and *xing* to the chaos of King Zhou of Shang, whereby Yang establishes "Han virtues" in his descriptions of the violent Qin being punished and in support of our imitation of Zhou virtues. Similarly, Yang Xiong also states in his "Zhong Li 重黎" chapter of the *Model Sayings* that: "In the Ancients we had several dynasties, the Xiong, Gaoyang, Gaoxin, Tang, and Yu, all of which possessed conspicuous virtue, and so Heaven protected them ... This was also the will of the people, and the good fortunes of their kingdoms endured for a great length of time. However, kingdoms such as the Qin and Chu oppressed their people and others. Even those of their own household thought of overturning such a country, let alone the people!"⁷⁰ The logic may be that it is easier to simply describe the Qin and Chu as having lost their "*de*" directly rather than the failure of the kingdoms as having originated in their offences committed against Heaven. Yang Xiong also points out as a result of his adherence to this "*de*" system of moral teaching in the "Filial Piety Perfected" that: "The Xiongnu barbarians were always the miserable source of wartime chaos previously in the days of Emperor Gaozu, Emperor Wen of Han and Emperor Wu of Han. The reason why today they are willing to bend their heads in service, and are willing to do work for the Han Dynasty in the north, is because the *zongmiao sheji* 宗廟社稷 [temple shrines] protect the Han Dynasty".⁷¹ This is the same kind of thinking behind his admonishments against the barbarians to Emperor Ai of Han 漢哀帝 [r. 7–1 BCE], and his opposition to the imperial minister's granting the barbarians very dignified treatment along with his advocacy for generosity toward the people and empathetic ethics.

The "establishment" or "raising up" of the Classics is itself a kind of corrective work, and Yang Xiong's establishment of the practice of true *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets is also a reflection on and criticism of the *fu* poetry of his time. This would include his own experience of *fu* poetry from imitating Sima Xiangru in his Four Great *fu* Poets to his later attitude of dislike of *fu* poetry [*hui fu* 悔賦]. We have some relevant text on this point recorded in the "My Sir":

70 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 362.

71 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 551.

Someone asks: “Did you like composing *fu* poetry in your younger days, sir?” Yang Xiong responds: “I did. It was just fun with words in the days of my youth.” He then continues after a brief pause: “I did not engage in *fu* poetry again upon becoming an adult.”

Someone then asks: “Can *fu* poetry be used to criticize those in authority?” Yang Xiong replied: “Absolutely! Criticizing those in authority is of course a good thing, but I am concerned that *fu* compositions will be unable to avoid flattering their counterparts, and hence cannot play the proper role or function of criticizing those in authority.”

The *Jianke Lun* states: “Studying the mastery of the sword helps people to love and protect their own bodies.” Yang Xiong asks: “Can the Bi An (the mythical creatures painted on the entrances to prisons) enable people to understand ethics and propriety?”

或問：“吾子少而好賦。”曰：“然。童子雕蟲篆刻。”俄而，曰：“壯夫不爲也。”

或曰：“賦可以諷乎？”曰：“諷乎！諷則已，不已，吾恐不免于勸也。”

《劍客論》曰：“劍可以愛身。”曰：“狴犴使人多禮乎？”⁷²

Li Gui 李軌 makes a note on this point in regard to Yang Xiong’s apparent “regret for his own *fu* poetry”, writing: “Sima Xiangru composed the ‘Rhapsody on the Great Man’ which gave Emperor Wu of Han a feeling of being swept up into the clouds as a celestial upon reading it”. “Mastery of the sword can help us to protect and nourish our own bodies, and *fu* poetry can be used to offer moral persuasion to try to convince others to do the right thing.”⁷³ See the “Yang Xiong zhuan” of the *History of the Han Dynasty* for a further discussion on Li’s perspective on Sima Xiangru’s language in the “Rhapsody on the Great Man”:

Yang Xiong was of the view that the “original purpose” of *fu* poetry, the literary form, should be to criticize authority and urge people to do better, and yet he also understood that he must pave the way to this purpose with analogies and the most ornate, impressive, and flowery language and terms possible crafting his compositions in a grand artistic style. The ultimate effect of this was to impress the author with the thought that there is “nothing grander or more impressive than the content so described” before bringing the reader back to the main point, by which time the

72 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 45.

73 Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu*, 45.

reader has already been drawn in by the honest language and colorfulness of expression, and is already enchanted by the beautiful scene that he has witnessed. In former times, Emperor Wu took pleasure in supplicating the celestials, and Sima Xiangru contributed his “Rhapsody on the Great Man” with the actual intent of presenting a criticism to the emperor. What actually happened is that the emperor was instead inspired by a feeling of “soaring to the clouds like a celestial” by his words. From this point of view, it is very apparent that the desire of *fu* poets to present a criticism to authority is not always, or even likely, to be successful.⁷⁴

We may also refer to the “Biography of Sima Xiangru [*Sima Xiangru zhuan* 司馬相如傳]” of the *History of the Han Dynasty* for another view on the ability for *fu* poetry to be used to remonstrate with people:

Although Sima Xiangru’s *fu* poetry may have been rather too ostentatious in its form and perhaps too exaggerated in its content, it nonetheless has the objective of guiding people towards a frugal mode of conduct. So what is the essential difference between this and the criticism of authority exhibited in the *Book of Songs*? Yang Xiong was of the view that extremely ostentatious *fu* poetry contains too much in the way of “polite urging to do the right thing” and too little in the way of direct criticism. It might be perhaps compared to a musician who plays beautifully only at the end of a piece.⁷⁵

Yang Xiong’s critique that *fu* poetry might intend to criticize authority, but will not be successful and that it “plays beautifully only at the end of a piece”, is obviously a pointed reference to the “Rhapsody on the Great Man’s” “grand artistic style” and ostentatious language and exaggerated content, but it is by no means a criticism of the whole of *fu* poetry itself. So we perhaps ought to look at Yang Xiong as still substantively supporting the *lize* perspective on the proper role of the practice of true *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets.

The “deep wonderfulness” of the “Sweet Springs Palace” and the idea of the practice of true *fu* poetry by true *fu* poets as discussed in the “Tall Poplars Lodge” paint a picture of the moral views established in Yang Xiong’s perspective on *fu* poetry from his creative compositions to his criticisms. We may well describe the ideas of the *zun* 尊 [admire] (ethics) and *jin* 禁 [prohibition] (*yin* or wantonness) within Yang Xiong’s *fu* compositions as having been formed

74 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 3575.

75 Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 2609.

with “Classical” sentiments in mind, and which, to some degree, created a greater template of *fu* poetry extending from Yang Xiong himself of the Late Western Han to Ban Gu and Zhang Heng of the Eastern Han and onwards. Later scholars would, in their discussions of *fu* poetry, emphasize “the paradigm set by *Li Sao* and Han *fu* poetry”, and although the *zun* and *jin* exhibited by such Han Dynasty thinking already possessed something of the awareness of “ancient *fu* poetry” [*gufu* 古賦], the *de* perspective on virtuous governance which remained intrinsic within the system ended up becoming a kind of “shared memory” that it seems no *fu* poets could forget. It appears that Yang Xiong’s initial efforts in embarking on a *fu* poetry according to his *lize* system may have become deeply embedded within this tradition, in which it was also shown to be an enduring and creative force.

Translated by William Green

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