The “Biography of Sima Xiangru” and the Question of the Fu in Sima Qian’s Shiji

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

I wish to thank David R. Knechtges, from whom I have learned what I know about the Han Fu, for his very substantial comments that have led to the final version of this paper. I am also grateful for the many good suggestions I have received from my colleague, Andrew H. Plaks. The present essay was completed during my sabbatical year (2002) as a member, supported by a Mellon Fellowship for Assistant Professors, in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.


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

Within the Shiji, the Sima Xiangru biography is our only source for information on the literary genre of the fu赋 (rhapsody) at the court of Emperor Wu武 (r. 141–87 B.C.). This is surprising, as according to the later account in the Hanshu, the fu was the most prestigious, most widely practiced, and most politically charged literary form of the Western Han, reaching its peak during the Emperor Wu period. In the Sima Xiangru biography, fu is mentioned once in the compound cuifu辞赋, saying that Emperor Jing景 (r. 157–141 B.C.) was not fond of such compositions, and eight times with respect to Sima Xiangru’s works. In addition, the concluding appraisal of Sima Xiangru, introduced by the usual “Taishi gong yuee”太史公曰, refers to Yang Xiong’s 翁雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) discussion of the fu as a genre. Obviously, this note cannot come from Sima Xiangru’s literary compositions appears once in Sima Qian’s “Taishi gong xizuo” in the phrase daren fushuo大人的赋说 (“rhapsodic exposition on the Great Man”). Here, the term is used not in the usual form as genre designation but seems to be pointing to the performative nature of Sima Xiangru’s composition on the “Great Man.” The only other place where the Shiji deals with the genre of the fu is chapter 84, the joint biographies of Qu Yuan屈原 (fourth century B.C.) and Jia Yi賈誼 (ca. 200–168 B.C.).

Here, the term fu appears four times: once for “Huai sha”懷沙 (Embracing sand), a poem attributed to Qu Yuan and later anthologized in the Chu ci楚辞 anthology, once in general terms for the works of Song Yu宋玉, Tang Le唐勒, and Jing Cuo景差 (all third century B.C.), purportedly Qu Yuan’s immediate late Warring States successors from Chu楚, once for Jia Yi’s “Diao Qu Yuan”弔屈原 (Lamenting Qu Yuan), and once for Jia’s “Funiao fu”鴟鳴賦 (Fu on the owl).

3. Ci and fu are often used interchangeably. Their combination as a compound is not uncommon in Han times.
5. Shiji 117.3073. Traditional and modern readers have proposed that either this specific sentence has been added in later times, or that the whole appraisal is a later product; see, e.g., Han Zhaoqi韓兆琦, Shiji tonglan史記通論 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 523, and Zhu Dongrun朱東運, Shiji kaozhuan (wai er sheng)史記考證 (外二種) (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 35, both with further references to traditional scholarship.
6. Shiji 130.3317. For the composition on the “Great Man,” see below.
7. The word fu is also mentioned in other meanings (“to present”, “taxation”) throughout the Shiji. While these meanings are related to that of literary “presentation,” the passages in which fu appears in this way do not refer to literature.
8. All three figures are shadowy; except for some later lore on Song Yu, apparently mostly derived from the fu ascribed to him, not much beyond their names is known. The Chu ci compiler and commentator Wang Yi王逸 (d. 158) notes that some people took Jing Cuo as the author of the “Da zhou”大招 (The great summons), a Chu ci anthology piece traditionally ascribed to Qu Yuan. Song Yu is credited by Wang Yi with the “Ju bian”九辯 (Nine arguments, or Nine charges) and the “Zhao hun”招魂 (Summoning the soul); the Hanshu漢書 “Yiwen zhi”藝文志 (Monograph on arts and letters) lists sixteen pieces under his name. The Wen xuan文選, the Xijing zaji西京雜記 and some Tang and Song sources identify him as the author of several more fu. While we have no evidence to confirm or reject Song Yu’s authorship of the Chu ci pieces, the authenticity of the fu ascribed to him has been under intense debate since Song times. The most recent culmination of this debate is Gao Qifeng高啟鳳, Song Yu zuopin zhenwei kao宋玉作品真偽考 (Taipeh: Wenjin, 1999), arguing for the authenticity of most of the Song Yu pieces. For references to the relevant earlier scholarship, see Kuechges, The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the Fu of Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 123 n. 58. Tang Le, credited in the “Yiwen zhi” with four works, has only recently been related to a particular text, written on bamboo slips, that was excavated in 1972 at Yinqiaowan銀雀山 (Linyi 临沂, Shandong): a short fragment of a dialogue in which Tang Le and Song Yu discuss chariot driving. A number of studies have been devoted to this fragment, including Rao Zengyi 饒宗頤, “Tang Le ji yi yiwen: Chuci xin ziliao”楚辭新資料, Chūgōoku bungaku ronsō 翻訳文學
While the *Shiji* identifies as *fu* some works by Qu Yuan and his successors that in other early sources do not carry this designation, it does not mention the *fu* of Mei Sheng 李承 (d. 141 B.C.), Zhuang Zhu 與莊 (d. 122 B.C.; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Zhu 葉貞), Kong Zang 孔臧 (ca. 201–123 B.C.), Yuqiu Shouwang 湯丘壽王 (ca. 156–110 B.C.), Zhuji Yan 主父偃 (d. 126 B.C.), Zhu Maichen 朱買臣 (fl. 127 B.C.), Liu An 劉安 (175–122 B.C.), Liu Yan 劉偃 (or 鼎, fl. mid-second century B.C.), Mei Gao 李韜 (fl. 130–110 B.C.), Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154–93 B.C.), Dong Zhongsu 杜仲舒 (ca. 195–115 B.C.), or Zhuang Ji 莊忌 (ca. 188–105 B.C.; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Ji 葉忌), all of whom were well-known, prolific contemporaries of Sima Qian. In the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi," Liu An is credited with eighty-two *fu*, Kong Zang with twenty, Liu Yan with nineteen, Yuqiu Shouwang with fifteen, Mei Gao with one hundred and twenty (to which one has to add the "several dozens" censored by the compilers of the imperial catalogue), Zhuan Zhu with thirty-five, and even Sima Qian himself with eight. In addition, Dongfang Shuo is mentioned with twenty *pian* of writings, not among the *fu* authors but in the eclectic category of *zaji* 雜家. Sima Xiangru is said to have composed twenty-eight *fu*. Most of these men appear in various contexts in the *Shiji*, and some even have biographies included there. We find information about their official careers and canonical learning, or—in the cases of Mei Sheng and Zhuang Ji—see them mentioned as *youshui zhi shu* 游說之士 (wandering persuaders), that is, men of eloquent speech. In no case is any of them praised as a literary talent or author of a certain type of writing.

The two *Shiji* biographies that mention the *fu* differ distinctly in their presentation of the nature of the genre. In the Qu Yuan/Jia Yi chapter, the *fu* appears as a vehicle of personal frustration; in the Sima Xiangru chapter, it serves the purpose of indirect political admonition. The latter corresponds to the terms in which Yang Xiong, the most prominent literary figure of late Western Han times and the Wang Mang 王莽 interregnum (9–23), saw the *fu*. Nothing suggests that Sima Xiangru was driven by any of the intense feelings of...
personal misfortune and mistreatment that are given as the raison d'être of Qu Yuan's and Jia Yi's work. And conversely, while portraying Qu Yuan as a forthright official who in vain tried to influence his ruler, no effort is made to explain how Qu Yuan's and Jia Yi's "frustration fu" were designed as works of political criticism. 15 Altogether, the Shiji seems to define the "frustration fu" (Qu Yuan and Jia Yi) and the fu of political admonition (Sima Xiangru) through strong moral and political claims only to fall into complete silence on them beyond the two biographical chapters. Thus, the Shiji account on the fu is contradictory in at least two respects: first, between the Qu Yuan/Jia Yi and the Sima Xiangru biographies; second, between either one, and both of them, and the silence on the fu throughout the rest of the Shiji. This is all the more remarkable as Sima Qian can be counted among the politically most critical, personally most frustrated, and stylistically most accomplished authors of his time. These three aspects of his personality are given ample expression in his "Da Ren An Shu" 答任安書 (Letter in response to Ren An) and the "Taishi gong zixu." 16 If the mid-Western Han fu had the moral and political significance accorded to it in the two biographies, one wonders why Sima Qian apparently stripped almost all his contemporary fu authors, including his eminent teacher Dong Zhongshu, of their angry and critical voices. 17

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

15. In a somewhat parfumatory manner, this intention is ascribed twice to the "Li sao" 禦騨: once in the Qu Yuan biography and once in the "Taishi gong zixu"; see Shiji 84.2482. 130.3314.
16. In both texts, Sima Qian provides an entire genealogy of his personal heroes, including Qu Yuan, who wrote their works only when in dire straits, and he explicitly places himself in their tradition; see Hanshu 62.2735, Shiji 130.3300.
17. Both Dong Zhongshu’s "Shi bu ye fu" 士不遇賦 (Fu on the gentleman not meeting [his time]) and Sima Qian’s "Bei shi bu ye fu" 悲士不遇賦 (Fu on grieving over the gentleman not meeting [his time]) only survive in fragments quoted in the seventh-century Yewen leiju 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985) 30.541, and the more dubious Gwenn wan 古文苑. For an annotated translation of both pieces, see James Robert Highetower, "The Fu of T‘ao Ch‘en," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 17 (1954): 197–203. Another "frustration fu" of Sima Qian's own days is "Ai shi ming" 忾時命 (Lamenting the fate of the time), ascribed to Zhuang Ji and preserved in the Chu ci anthology. Finally, Dongfang Shuo’s "Da ke nan" 答客難 (Responding to a guest's objections) can be regarded as a "frustration fu." In the Shiji (126.3206–7), however, it is not marked as a literary composition (as it is in Hanshu 65.2864–67) but seamlessly integrated into the narrative; see Shiji 126.3206–7. For discussions of this piece, see Dominik Deleclercq, Writing Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third and Fourth Century China (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 21–38; and Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the Fu," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 63 (2003): 383–437.
19. Shiji 84.2482. Liu An’s text is quoted in Ban Gu’s "Li sao xu" 禦騨序, which is preserved in Wang Yi’s commentary to the "Li sao"; see Hong Xingzhu 洪興祖, Chu ci bieju 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986) 1.49. See also Hawkes, The Songs of the South, 55–56.
20. Shiji 84.2482.
21. Shiji 84.2486.
marked as a fu,22 and (e) an unknown source that comprises the bulk of the historical narrative, including the entire account prior to Qu Yuan's banishment.23 This unknown source, together with sources (a) and (b) that are embedded in it in the Shiji, mention the protagonist invariably as Qu Ping 屈平 (twelve times) or simply Ping 平 (once).24 On the other hand, the following narrative on his banishment, most of it being the text of the "Huai sha,"25 mentions him exclusively as Qu Yuan (seven times), as do the transition to the Jia Yi biography (twice),26 the historian's judgment ('"Taishi gong yue"; twice),27 and the five other passages in which Qu Yuan/Ping is mentioned throughout the Shiji.28 In sum, "Qu Ping" is associated only with the "Li sao" (mostly in the section coming from Liu An's "Li sao zhuan") and "Qu Yuan" only with the "Huai sha" and, albeit not explicitly, the "Yu fu." The "Yu fu" section is the only substantial part of the "Qu Yuan" narrative; it also is the part of the biography that includes the notion of fu.

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

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

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

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22. Shiji 84.2486–90.
23. For the overall structure, as well as for an annotated translation, of the biography, see Hawkes, The Songs of the South, 52–60.
24. Shiji 84.2481–85. This section is capped by an explicit quotation from the Yi jing (Changer) and thus clearly demarcated from the following paragraph. For the quotation, see Zhou Yi zhengyi 周易正義 (Shisan jing zhushu fu jiankan ji ed.) 5.48b.
26. Shiji 84.2491.
27. Shiji 84.2503.
28. Shiji 40.1725, 70.2292, 130.3309, 3309, 3314.
29. For Yang Xiong's highly critical evaluation of the fu, see Knechtges, The Han Rhapsody, 89–97, and Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the fu."
panegyrics and entertainment. But why would he assign high political significance to a literary genre and then fail ever to mention it again? No doubt, he knew his contemporaries who in the Hanshu Yiwen zhi literary, author, and brilliant stylist, does not say a word about their literary abilities.

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

30. Shi ji 117.3002.
31. See Shi ji 118.3002.
32. Shi ji 6.293.
33. Shi ji 96.2686–88.
34. Shi ji 126.3203, 3205. Chu Shaosun identifies himself here as the contributor; see Shi ji 126.3203. Derk Bolcke, China’s First Unifier, 110–11, has argued that the whole chapter cannot come from Sima Qian.
35. Shi ji 24.117. On this last case, which is less self-explanatory than the other seven, see Kern, “A Note on the Authenticity and Ideology of Shih-chi 24, ‘The Book on Music.’ “ Incidentally, the interpolated mention of high officials as readers in chapter 96 (see above) as well as the reference to reading the Five Classics in the later compiled “Yueshu” testify helpful to important changes in late Western Han and then Eastern Han literary culture; see Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of wen in Early China,” T’oung Pao 87 (2001): 43–91.
36. Shi ji 117.3002.
37. Shi ji 122.3243. In Hanshu 64A.2791, Zhu Maichen is said to have “explained the Spring and Autumn Annals” (shuo Chunqiu 說春秋) and “discussed compositions from Chu” (yan Chu ci 言楚詩) in front of the emperor.
In the *Shiji*, only later interpolations by Chu Shaozun employ the term to refer to the reading of a text. It was not used in this way by Sima Qian.

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

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

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

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

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

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

42. For the whole argument, see Derk Bodde, *China’s First Unifier*, 101–11. The character *tan* occurs on the following pages of the *Shiji*: 39.1682 (twice), 70.2286; 74.2348; 2350, 83.2476, 2479, 87.2563, 117.3064, 126.3197, 3200, 3201, 3205, 127.3219, 3221, 130.3286 (twice, both referring to Sima Tan). Bodde, who wrote before the
Fifth, philological comparison of the different versions of Sima Xiangru's "fu" in Shiji, Hanshu, and Wenzuan shows the Shiji version to be the most normalized one in terms of its writing conventions; it is the version farthest removed from however Sima Xiangru's text may have initially been written. Yves Hervouet, after reviewing some eight hundred textual variants that occur between the parallel Shiji and Hanshu chapters, felt confident to judge about four hundred of them and concluded that in more than seventy percent of these, the Hanshu version was superior to its Shiji counterpart, that is, closer to what the original form may have been.

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

In rhyming, reduplicative, and alliterative binomes, we frequently find the Shiji adding the same semantic classifier to both characters, rendering a phrase of strong aural value uniform in its visual appearance: binomes descriptive of water are generally written with the "water" classifier, those of mountains with the "mountain," those of minerals and stone with either "stone" or "jade," and those of plants with "grass." This phenomenon has been thoroughly demonstrated by Jian Zongwu, who lists one hundred sixty-five phrases from Sima Xiangru's "fu" in their three received versions from Hanshu, Shiji, and Wenzuan. In no less than ninety-four cases, the Wenzuan and Hanshu are identical but differ from the Shiji, mostly because of routinely added classifiers in the latter. By contrast, in sixteen cases advent of modern electronic concordances, found only the Shiji passages of chapters 39, 74, 83, 117, and 126; on these, he notes (p. 103): "In examining these five chapters, I have been struck by the fact that every one of them contains features which, quite aside from the occurrence of the word *fan*, tend to indicate that they, or at least parts of them, are not the work of Su-ma Chi'en."

43. In detailed studies, three different scholars have reached this conclusion independently from one another; see Yves Hervouet, "La valeur relative des textes du *Che* et du *Han chou*"; Jian Zongwu 詮宗武, *Han fu guanli yu jiazhì* zhì shàngduì 漢賦纂理與値之尚讃 (Taipei: Wenshihze, 1980), 45-110; and Kamatani Takeshi 釜谷武bars, "Fu ni nankai na ji ga o ni no wa naze ka: Zen-ban ni okeru fu no yomarekata" 葉に漢解字の多いのはなぜか: 前漢における赋の頭まれた, *Nihon Chūgoku gaikai hō* 日本中國學會報 48 (1996): 16-30.


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

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

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

46. See Juan Xongwu, Han fu yuanliu yu jiajshi zhi shanggu, 62–73.
47. See Hanshu, xuli 詩例, 2, and 57A.2529. For some examples, see Herouet, “La valeur relative des textes du Che ki et du Han chou,” 72–73. Yan Shigu’s statement tallies with the evidence that even Song dynasty scholars knew ancient character forms. In a number of cases, the ancient forms recorded in Guo Zhongshu’s 谷忠恕 (d. 977) Han jian 卷簡 and Xia Song’s 夏竦 (984–1059) Guwen shisheng yun 古文四聲韻 match characters in recently excavated manuscripts.
48. Guo Pu’s commentary is cited by both Yan Shigu in the Hanshu and Li Shan 李善 (d. 689) in the Wenxuan. Yan Shigu names four other commentators whom he accuses of tampering with the writing of Sima Xiangru’s fu: see Hanshu 57A.2529.
49. In addition to his accomplishments as a writer of poetry, Sima Xiangru is also credited with an apparently short character dictionary in one-bamboo bundle (piun 鬍), the Fan jiang 凡將 (see Hanshu 30.1720–21). While the Suishu 魏書 “Zhang zhi” 羅穀志 (Monograph on the classics and other writings) no longer lists the Fan jiang, it reappears in the bibliographic treatises of both Jiu Tongshu 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 46.1985, and Xin Tongshu 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua 1986), 57.1447. Not mentioned in later bibliographies, it was probably lost during Song times.
50. Pace Mark Edward Lewis, Writing and Authority in Early China (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999), 317, who thinks that in Sima Xiangru’s work, “the use of rare characters and their clustering in groups sharing a significant attention to the role of the written character in re-creating the world, and anticipates the theory of characters in the Shuo wen jie zì.”
51. These texts are the "Wu xing" 五行 (Five conduct) and "Ziyi" 紫衣 (Black robes) from Guodian, the "Wuxing" from Mawangdui, a fragmentary Odes anthology from Shuangguadui, and among the Shanghai Museum materials another "Ziyi" as well as a text that the modern editors have labelled "Kongzi shilun" 孔子訓論 (Confucius’
whether coming from the late fourth or early second century B.C., they consistently show a ratio of textual variants, compared both to the received text of the *Mao Shi* 毛詩 and to one another, in the range of thirty to forty percent of all characters. Most of these variants occur within the same *xiesheng* series, that is, in the element of the semantic classifiers; not surprisingly, the manuscripts are far less standardized than the received text of the *Odes*. For the first time, these manuscripts give us a clear idea of the remarkable degree to which early versions of the same poetic text differed from one another and from the *textus recepta*. More specifically, the manuscripts from Mawangdui and Shuanggudui allow us to understand the graphic fluidity of poetic texts in Sima Xiangru’s own times—and, in every point, the excavated texts confirm the conclusions scholars have reached on the differences among Sima Xiangru’s received *fu*.

In addition to the six pre-Han and early Han manuscripts with *Odes* quotations, there also is a bamboo manuscript from Yang Xiong’s time that proves relevant to our considerations: the “Shenwu *fu*” 神烏賦 (*Fu* on the spirit crow), discovered in 1993 in Yinwan 尹煬 tomb no. 6 (Lianyanggang 连阳岗, Jiangsu; tomb sealed ca. 10 B.C.). This densely rhymed, tetrasyllabic text of more than 600 characters not only shows the same measure of graphic fluidity as the *Odes* quotations in early manuscripts. It also in one instance quotes “*Qing ying*” (Mao 219) where it differs in eight out of fifteen characters from the received Mao recension. At least seven of these eight variants can be explained phonologically, exhibiting the same principle of pervasive graphic (but not lexical) variation between any two versions of the same poetic text that can be demonstrated for the early history of the *Odes*. In sum, we can now tell how thoroughly the received versions of such texts were retrospectively normalized in their writing. On the substantial evidence from recently excavated manuscripts, we can almost certainly rule out that Western Han versions of poetic

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

53. The text names itself as *fu*; however, the word *fu* is written 傅, not 赋. The words normally represented by the two graphs are nearly homophonic, sharing the same *Odes* rhyme group and having homorganic initials; 傅 is thus most likely a loan character for 赋. Qu Xigui 齊獻圭 has argued that both characters are in fact loan graphs for *fu 付* or *fu 傅, meaning “to spread out”; see Qu, “ ‘Shenwu fu’ (fu) ‘chutan’” (《神鳥賦 (賦)》初探, in *Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun* 尹煬漢簡讀論綜, ed. Lianyanggang shi bowuguan 连阳岗市博物馆 and Zhongguo weawu yanjiu 中國文物研究所 (Beijing: Kexue, 1999), 7. This corresponds to the Han parowomastic glosses on *fu* 赋; see Knoepfle, The Han Rhapsody, 12-13.

54. For the annotated text and brief discussions of the “*Fu* on the spirit crow,” see Qu Xigui, “ ‘Shenwu fu’ (fu) ‘chutan’,” 1-7; Wang Zhijing 王志平, “ ‘Shenwu fu’ (fu) ‘yu Han dai Shijing xue’” (《神鳥賦 (賦)》與漢代詩學, in *Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun*, 8-17; and Wan Guangzhi 万光治, “Yinwan Han jian ’Shenwu fu’ yanjiu” 尹煬漢簡《神鳥賦》研究, in Zhou Xinchu (主编) 中國出土文献論集 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jishuo, 1999), 163-85. For a recent study, see Zhu Xiaohai 朱曉海, “Lun ’Shenwu fu’ ji qi xiangguan wenti” (論《神鳥賦》及其相關問題, *Jianbo yanjiu* 简帛研究 2001: 456-74.

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

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

56. That is, the orthographically normalized Hanshu of early medieval times, before it was changed back into earlier writing conventions by Yan Shigu.
57. Bodde, China’s First Unifier, 109. For the same conclusion, see also Hervouet, “La valeur relative des textes du Che ki et du Han chou,” 67.
59. This is my conclusion from the fact that Yan Shigu, as noted above, remarks upon his efforts in his preface to the Hanshu and then again at the beginning of the Sima Xiangru biography.
60. As David B. Honey has argued for another Shiji chapter, its shorter Hanshu counterpart might preserve a version closer to Sima Qian’s original Shiji chapter, while the latter was amplified through the course of the later Shiji transmission; see his “The Han-shu, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the Shih-chu,” 67–97.
61. For the three passages, see Hanshu 87B.2575 and 57B.2600; Shiji 117.3063.
three passages, I divide the line into ten units that show textual differences; I also mark the major syntactical break within the line. Following the name [Sima] Xiangru, a string of textual differences can be found throughout the passage. Some of them are perhaps trivial or do not lend themselves to specific conclusions; others are substantial and deserve some discussion:

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<tr>
<td>[a] 相如</td>
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<td>大人</td>
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<td>欲以風</td>
<td>帝</td>
<td>反</td>
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<td>有陵雲之志</td>
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<td>[b] 相如</td>
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<tr>
<td>[c] 相如</td>
<td>既奏</td>
<td>大人之頌</td>
<td>天子</td>
<td>大說</td>
<td>飛</td>
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[a] Xiangru submitted the “Fu on the great man,” intending it as an indirect admonition. The thearch, on the contrary, felt light and airy, wishing to traverse the clouds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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65. As observed by Mizusawa Toshitada 水澤利雄 in his supplement to Takigawa Kamearō’s 高川亀太郎 *Shiki kuichi kenpo* 史記會注考按: see (the Chinese edition) *Shiji huiju houzheng fu jiaozhu* 史記會注考按附校補 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), 1916.
66. He is thus to be distinguished from his contemporary Mei Gao who appears as the court poet *par excellence*, accompanying the emperor on numerous occasions and offering impromptu recitations on every possible subject at hand, see Knéchtges, *The Emperor and Literature: Emperor Wu of the Han*, 57–58.
first printed edition dates from no earlier than Song times, that is, at least a millennium after the original textual composition. Through this enormous span of manuscript culture, probably all our received texts underwent a series of synchronic and diachronic editorial interferences, reconstructions, and collations. As a result, our texts more likely than not are complex artifacts of multiple chronological layers. Thus, while we may be able to identify textual corruption, it is generally not possible to determine the historical moment at which it entered the history of the text. Moreover, as Yan Shigu's remarks on his graphic reconstruction of the *Hanshu* show, texts do not simply degenerate continuously from their pristine beginning; textual histories don't always come in simple, linear fashion. Such a fluid state of affairs where only uncertainty abounds cautions us against quick verdicts in matters of textual authenticity. Judgments based on limited and selective evidence, especially if the evidence consists of only one type of data, can at best take the form of suggestions.

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

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