# In Search of Satire in Classical Chinese Poetry and Prose

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## ABSTRACT

It has been claimed that there is no way to understand the meaning of *fengci* in the modern term *fengci xiaoshuo* ("satiric fiction") through either its etymology or traditional generic distinction. Did concepts of satire in Chinese literary genres exist prior to modern times? And if such concepts did exist, were they expressed only in terms of *fengci*? This article traces traditional conceptions of satire to their origins and offers a selective overview of the development of the satiric mode in classical poetry and prose up to Tang times. Satire was in fact one of the dominant modes in early elite literature, and was justified by both moralistic and expressive theories. In ideal terms, this satire was supposed to be pedagogical and corrective, intended for the public good rather than private ends; it was supposed to adopt moderation, indirection, and a gentle tone. Of course, the reality sometimes departed quite far from the ideal. Some critics strongly criticized frivolous uses of wit and humor. They also worried that works that were supposedly admonitory may have inadvertently encouraged the reader to indulge in extravagant behavior, misconduct, and even vice. In the reading and composition of satire, moralistic hermeneutics reigned supreme. The dominant trend of moralistic criticism nudged writers in the direction of adopting an allegorical framework, and acculturated readers to look for hidden meanings.

## KEY WORDS

*feng* 風，諷
*ci* 刺
*quan* 勸
*jie* 戒，誡
*fengyu* 諷喻
*ji* 譏
*xinüe* 戲謔
*paitiao* 排調
*yuanci* 怨刺
*feng jian* 諷諫
*guji* 滑稽
*paixie* 俳諧
serious or non-serious subject matter
public or personal scope
gentle or stern tone
witty
ludicrous
Moralistic Theory
Expressive Theory

In an essay discussing the characteristics and types of Chinese satiric novels, Zhang Hongyong 張宏庸, a modern critic, states that there is no way to understand the meaning of *fengci* 諷刺 in the modern term *fengci xiaoshuo* 諷刺小說 ("satiric fiction") through either its etymology or traditional generic distinction (22). However, the meaning of *fengci*, the modern Chinese translation of the Western word "satire," can in fact be understood by tracing its etymology and earlier usage in poetry. Although the term *fengci* was not specifically used to designate any subgenre in fiction, the concept of satire existed in traditional literature and was expressed—both directly and indirectly—through *feng* and *ci* as well as various other terms such as *quan* 勸 (advising), *jie* 戒 (warning), *fengyu* 諷喻 (satiric admonition), *ji* 譏 (sarcasm), *xinüe* 戲謔 (ridicule and mocking), and *paitiao* 排調 (taunting and teasing).

While Zhang Hongyong relies upon Western forms of satire for a taxonomy to characterize and categorize Chinese satire, I propose to trace satiric elements in the Chinese context. Satire is best understood as a mode of writing that can appear in various genres of both elite and popular literature. As David R. Knechtges noted, while most Chinese writers of ancient times took literature very seriously, humor and satire were found in some early prose, verse, popular ballads, and songs (79-98). Although a comprehensive, encyclopedic survey of the satiric mode throughout Chinese literary history would be useful, I have condensed my findings into a selective overview.[1] This article is primarily concerned with classical poetry and prose. A second article will examine *xiaoshuo* 小說, drama, and oral literature.

For purposes of clarity, a brief explanation of terms is in order. I

divide satiric elements into serious and non-serious according to their subjects, and into public and personal according to their scope. Within the serious type of satire, I explore the spectrum ranging from gentle to stern in tone. Within the non-serious type of satire, I distinguish between the witty variety, marked by refined humor, and its ludicrous counterpart with cruder humor. While noting aggression, judgment, play, and laughter as the four essential elements of satire (Test 15-31), I find judgment to be the most important element in serious Chinese satire. Even in the non-serious types replete with playfulness and laughter, one still usually finds some measure of moral judgment or ameliorative intent.

## I. Early Chinese Literature

### A. The Serious Aspect of Classical Poetry, Prose, and Criticism: Moralistic and Expressive Theories

Satiric elements appeared as early as the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing* 詩經, c. 840-620 B.C.), the most ancient anthology of Chinese poetry in which the origins of *feng* and *ci* can be found. The term *feng* 風, written without the speech radical, means "wind" or "airs," and is the first of the six modes of poetry in this anthology.[2] The section "Guo feng" 國風 ("Airs of the States"), containing poems collected from various regions which convey popular sentiments to the rulers, can also be understood as the "prevailing-mood" of the states (Gibbs 287). It is believed that sage kings of ancient times routinely dispatched officials to collect the Airs in order to inform themselves about people's grievances and correct their faults and mistakes in governing. The Airs thus served important political and moral purposes.

The term *ci* ("to stab, pierce, prod, criticize, or lampoon") appears, for example, in "Geju" 葛屨 ("Dolichos Shoes"), one of the earliest personal satires. The Southern Song philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) speculates that this poem was written by a woman who had to make clothes for her husband (63). The poem satirizes a stingy nobleman who assumes a dignified air in public and yet forces his

bride to make all his clothes and shoes for him. It ends with the following lines: "Because he is so petty-minded, / I criticize him in this poem" (*wei shi bianxin, shi yi wei ci* 維是褊心，是以為刺).[3] In addition to satirizing the man's miserliness and pettiness, this poem implicitly mocks his hypocrisy by revealing the disparity between his public and private selves. Another interpretation offered by the Mao 毛 commentary (c. first century B.C.) gives the poem a public dimension: "Dolichos Shoes," an Air from the State of Wei, satirizes the parsimoniousness of the ruler of the Wei (Zheng 40).

*Feng* and ci figure significantly in the Mao commentary to the *Classic of Poetry*. "The Major Preface" uses *feng* to articulate its dominant theory of poetry, the purpose of which is to serve political and moral functions. *Ci*, in the sense of "satirizing," appears frequently in the "Minor Prefaces," which provide short interpretations for most of the individual poems.

Confucius legitimated a variety of functions served by the *Classic of Poetry*: ethical, social, political, expressive, and cognitive. According to Confucius, this classic stimulates and inspires the mind (*xing* 興, "to stir, arouse"), allows observation and evaluation of the successes and failures of the government (*guan* 觀), helps communicate thoughts collectively (*qun* 羣), vents the author's personal grievances (*yuan* 怨), teaches obedience and service to parents and rulers, and broadens the reader's knowledge of the names of birds, animals, and plants.[4]

While Confucius recognized several pragmatic functions in the *Classic of Poetry*, the Mao commentary "sought to explain all the Poems as part of the moral history of the Zhou dynasty" (Owen, *An Anthology* 32), endorsing the moralistic function in particular. This moralistic theory, designated by the modern scholar James J. Y. Liu as "pragmatic,"[5] conceives of literature as a means of achieving socio-political, moral, or educational goals; it has become the most influential approach in traditional Chinese criticism (*Chinese Theories* 106).

Satire contributes not only to the moralistic function of poetry, but also to the expressive function. While performing a public duty by

attempting to correct the government's mistakes, satirical works also meet a private need by providing an outlet for an author's sense of indignation. Both the *Classic of Poetry* and the later *Songs of the South* (*Chu ci* 楚辭, attributed to the much-frustrated poet Qu Yuan 屈原, ca. 340-278 B.C.) include poems expressing personal grievances. In *The History of the Former Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) explained that poems about grievances and satire (*yuanci* 怨刺) from the *Classic of Poetry* arose when the Way of the Zhou dynasty declined.[6] According to Wang Yi 王逸, who compiled and commented on *The Songs of the South* in the second century A.D., Qu Yuan wrote "Li Sao" 離騷 ("On Encountering Sorrow") not only to "satirize and admonish" (*feng jian* 諷諫) the emperor but also to "console himself" (*zi wei* 自慰) (Wang Yi 54). Thus conceived, satiric poems served dual purposes by calling attention to and helping to correct social problems, while also allowing poets to vent and purge personal grievances.

The moralistic theory articulated by "The Major Preface" is both descriptive and prescriptive. The preface describes the authors' motivation for the composition of some of the poems. Several poets, for example, announce their intention to admonish a ruler or official (J. Liu, *Chinese Theories* 106). Consistent with this "description," "The Minor Prefaces" interpret many poems as either "praising" (*mei* 美) or "blaming and satirizing" (*ci*) (Legge 37-81). As a result, the "description" turns into a prescription and the Mao commentary, especially influential during the first and second centuries A.D., establishes satire—or praise and blame—as a canonical poetic function. Read according to this theoretical model, more than half of the poems in the *Classic of Poetry* are satires. The dominance of the satiric mode is thus indisputable.

Both *feng* and *ci* appear simultaneously in "The Major Preface," meaning "Airs" and "to spur or to prod," respectively:

> Superiors used the Airs to transform those below; those below used the Airs to spur their superiors on (*shang yi feng hua xia, xia yi feng ci shang* 上以風化下, 下以風刺

上). Striving for delicacy, inferiors remonstrate obliquely (*jue jian* 譎諫). As a result, the speaker does not offend, and still the hearer takes warning (*jie* 戒). Thus they are called "Airs."[7]

This passage outlines an ideal of satire—it should educate, correct, and benefit both the superiors and inferiors. The Airs should serve the purpose of "suasive transformation" (Van Zoeren 101). However, the targets of the Airs depend upon whether they were written by authors at the top or at the bottom of the social hierarchy; the object is to transform the commoners in some instances, and criticize and eventually change the superiors in others. As Donald Gibbs and Timothy Wong note, the meaning of *feng* here is extended to signify "influence" in a didactic sense (Gibbs 288; Wong 52). In order to emphasize this meaning and to distinguish between the two functions of *feng*, Gibbs interprets *feng* as "persuasion." He somewhat arbitrarily renders the *feng* from those high in the social hierarchy as "suasive force," while rendering the *feng* from those low in the hierarchy as "critical persuasion" (Gibbs 288).

The use of *feng* to mean "influence" or "suasive force" recalls a famous line from *The Analects* (*Lun yu* 論語). When a minister asks Confucius if he should kill disobedient people, Confucius tells him not to kill, but simply to desire the good and then the common people will be good: "The virtue of a noble-minded person is like wind (*junzi zhi de feng* 君子之德風); the virtue of a petty person is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend."[8] Confucius thus urges the ruling class to set a good example for others to emulate. "The Minor Prefaces" extend the Confucian meaning of feng to "power to change" and "teaching" (*jiao* 教): "Just as wind moves things, so teaching transforms the people" (Legge 37; Gibbs 288).

Rather than transforming the commoners, the second meaning of *feng* as "critical persuasion" is aimed at rulers and the government, "prodding" them into adopting virtuous ways. It is this second meaning which later became dominant. Focusing exclusively on this function, the Confucian classicist Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) pro-

claimed that "poetry is the sound of satiric admonition (*fengyu* 諷喻) set to music." He suggested that poets praise the ruler's virtue (*mei* 美) while satirizing his vices (*e* 惡).[9]

Within this moralistic framework, the concept of satire is also expressed through such terms as *jie* (warning and admonition) and *quan* (advising). Jie is employed by an official writing for his equals in the poem "Min lao" 民勞 ("The People Are Burdened") in the *Classic of Poetry*. Urging his colleagues to join efforts to drive away oppressors and relieve the common folk of misery, the poet concludes: "The King wishes to value you as jade, / Therefore I offer you this great admonition (*dajie* 大戒)" (Legge 495-498; J. Liu, *Chinese Theories* 106). "The Minor Prefaces" interpret many poems allegorically as satirizing (*ci*), warning (*jie*), or advising (*quan*) a certain ruler or official against misconduct and vice.[10]

*Feng*, in the sense of satire and "to satirize," was frequently written with the speech radical—implying the need to speak out—from at least the first century B.C. Affirming the significance of the second sense of *feng*, the compound verb *feng jian* 諷諫 (to satirize and admonish) is written with this new character *feng*. Closely associated with satires for moral and political ends, *feng jian* emphasizes the public duty of the subordinate toward the ruler. *The History of the Former Han* uses the compound to describe the royal tutor Wei Meng 韋孟 (second century B.C.), who "wrote a satirical poem as a remonstrance" (*zuo shi feng jian* 作詩諷諫) to a profligate prince (*Han shu* 73.1a; Hightower 151, n. 45); in this poem Wei Meng sharply criticizes the prince, urging him to reform himself soon (*Wen xuan*, vol. 1, juan 19, 274-275). The compound appears again in *The History of the Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), which explains that Zhang Heng 張衡(78-139) composed "Rhyme-prose on Two Metropolises" ("Erjing fu" 二京賦) in order to "satirize and admonish" the emperor.[11] As mentioned earlier, Wang Yi also used *feng jian* to describe Qu Yuan's motivation for writing "On Encountering Sorrow."

In order to accomplish the moral transformations intended by *feng*, either through suasion or persuasion, poets adopted a common technique: they provided both positive and negative examples, using

the positive as a moral exemplar for emulation and the negative as a warning. The first Air "Guanju" 關雎, for example, praises the virtues of the consort of King Wen of the Zhou as well as her harmonious relationship with the king (Legge 37), thus recording, affirming, and canonizing the moral power of the virtuous consort. The Air was repeatedly invoked for moral and political purposes in later literature. As Steven Van Zoeren has indicated, the "paradigmatically correct" poems could be employed by the ruler in implementing his program of moral transformation. Moreover, a poem such as "Guanju" not only preserves "the original charismatic event of King Wen's influence," but is, in itself, a historical event because it has been "institutionalized" as one of the "rites" (Van Zoeren 103).

Another technique for accomplishing suasion or persuasion employs analogy and allegory (*piyu* 譬喻 or *biyu* 比喻). According to Zheng Xuan, "Both transformation (*fenghua* 風化) and satire (*fengci*) occur through comparisons (*piyu*, 'simile, analogy, metaphor, and allegory'), not through direct speech" (Zheng 1; Saussy 79). However, rulers who were assumed to be morally superior to their subordinates could be forthright and direct in their expression. In contrast, when socially inferior and politically powerless subordinates remonstrated (*jian*) with superiors, for safety's sake they had to be subtle and indirect, or "wily and crafty" (*jue*). Needing to avoid openly attacking the rulers, poets of inferior status often resorted to using metaphors, allegories, and irony as camouflage.

According to the Confucian tradition, the preferred manner of "satirizing and admonishing" involves moderation and indirection. The "Jing jie" 經解 of the *Classic of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記) describes the teaching of the *Classic of Poetry* as "warm, gentle, sincere, and tolerant" (*wenrou dunhou* 溫柔敦厚, *Li ji* 182), because the poems criticize indirectly, rather than directly. "The Major Preface" emphasizes delicate, indirect, and inoffensive remonstration.

A gentle tone was also adopted for practical, psychological, and aesthetic reasons. As Jame J. Y. Liu indicates, the poet is expected to be moderate, "showing grievances without being rebellious" (*yuan er bu nu* 怨而不怒). Instead, the poet should caution the ruler and try to

move him to mend his ways (*Art of Chinese Poetry* 67). Aesthetically, a gentle tone makes moralistic poems more appealing. Psychologically, a gentle tone disarms the object of satire and thus helps the author to achieve his corrective goal: when a ruler is not angered by the poem, he will more likely consider and accept its remonstrance. This exhortation for a gentle tone appears frequently throughout subsequent criticism as an explicit preference and also as a standard for judging and reproaching less moderate satirists.

In imitation of the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Songs of the South*, some of the poems written in the Han were satirical in the sense of expressing grievances or admonition (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 193-194). The group of "Music Bureau" poems (*yuefu shi* 樂府詩) contains the more important satires directly expressing people's grievances. The Music Bureau was established by Emperor Wu of the Han to collect folk songs; its poems resemble those in the *Classic of Poetry*, in that these poems were also purportedly gathered by officials to aid the government. But instead of resorting to indirection, some of the Music Bureau poems clearly recount hardships and criticize the government. For example, "Fighting South of the Wall" ("Zhan cheng nan" 戰城南) explicitly depicts the ravages of war, while "The Ballad of a Sick Woman" ("Fu bing xing" 婦病行) and "The Ballad of an Orphan" ("Guer xing" 孤兒行) voice the suffering of the poor (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 197-199). Although the tone of these poems still permits "showing grievances without being rebellious," the target of the satire becomes unambiguous.

Moving from poetry to a consideration of prose, we find that it too is associated with the moralistic theory. Mencius claimed that when the Way was in decline and rulers no longer sent out officials to collect poems, there were no more poems, and histories of the different states began to be written. According to Mencius: "The events recorded concern Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 and Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公, and the style is that of the official historian. Confucius said, 'I have appropriated the didactic principles therein'" (*Meng Zi* IV.B.21; Lau, *Mencius* 131-132). Histories thus serve a function similar to that of the Airs: They praise virtuous historical figures while condemning

evildoers; uphold moral principles and standards; help transform the society and improve the government; and aid the rulers in governing.

Mencius explains, for example, that Confucius' decision to compose the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu* 春秋, history of the state of Lu 魯) was his alarm at the heresies, violence, and chaos he observed in his own time.[12] Concerned with the legitimacy of the ruling house, Confucius advocated the "rectification of names" (*zhengming* 正名), stressed the importance of proper titles and status, and criticized disloyal subjects and usurpers, especially those who incited rebellions or committed regicide. He distinguished benevolent people from the unvirtuous based on whether they fulfilled their political and familial duties, and he warned potential evildoers that they would be condemned in history unless they reformed. After reading the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, wicked and usurping ministers were frightened by the implied criticism of their actions. Confucius' frankness in assigning praise and blame as well as his refusal to ingratiate himself apparently prompted evildoers to exercise restraint, thereby restoring some measure of moral order.

Celebrating the virtuous and disparaging the wicked thus would become important functions in official histories modeled on Confucius' work. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145 B.C.-c. 86 B.C.), for example, indicated in his preface that the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記) emulated Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals*. He also described Confucius' principle in writing history as "to praise virtue and censure evil" (*shan shan wu e* 善善惡惡) (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 173). In recounting historical events and in the biographical accounts (*zhuan* 傳) of historical figures, Sima Qian took it upon himself to clearly depict and distinguish between good and evil. Even unofficial biographies such as Liu Xiang's 劉向 (80-9 B.C.) *Biographical Accounts of Notable Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳) followed the model, praising virtuous women and condemning wicked ones.

In writing the *New History of the Tang* (*Xin Tang shu* 新唐書), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) also adopted the purposes and style of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.[13] In a manner similar to Confucius, Ouyang Xiu emphasized the technique of assigning praise and

blame because he believed that history should function as warning and admonition. He also criticized rulers who were fascinated with beautiful women or actors and appointed eunuchs to important positions, using a standard like Confucius' and ascribing praise and blame to subjects based on their "loyalty to the ruler" (Lee 124-125).

In addition to the moralistic theory of writing prose, the expressive theory is sometimes called upon to explain the author's motivation. In his famous "Letter to Ren An" ("Bao Ren Shaoqing shu" 報任少卿書), Sima Qian confessed that one reason for not committing suicide, despite his suffering the shame of castration, was to leave a literary work to posterity. He believed that since ancient times, great men have written when they suffered from hardships and were unable to put their principles into action. Confucius, for example, wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals* when he found himself in difficulties, and Qu Yuan composed "Encountering Sorrow" while in exile. These outstanding men of action resorted to writing books "in which they expressed their pent-up feelings, hoping to realize themselves in literature, since action was denied them" (Sima 101).

Satiric elements can also be found in several other prose subgenres such as the "epistle" (*shu* 書), the "explanation" (*jie* 解), and the "rhyme-prose" (*fu* 賦, the poetic "exposition" on a subject, also referred to as "prose-poetry" or "rhapsody"). The "epistle," or the letter, can be used for remonstrance.[14] Moreover, because of its private use, letter-writing allows for confession and more candid expressions of grievances. In his "Letter to Ren An," Sima Qian freely vented strong resentment over his unfair and harsh treatment by the ruler. The "explanation" affords the writer use of the dialogic form to explain a question or express grievances. In "An Explanation of Mockery" ("Jie chao" 解嘲, *Wen xuan*, vol. 2, juan 45, 630-633), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.-A.D. 18) publicly defends his actions and also elucidates the reason for people having ridiculed him. Thus, it both satirizes the political situation and expresses personal grievances (Chu 328-329). The "rhyme-prose" originated in the Warring States period and was also used for admonition. The philosopher Xun Kuang 荀況, for example, wrote "A Rhyme-prose on Needles" ("Zhen fu"

箴賦) to satirize the ruler. Using the "enigma" (*yinyu* 隱語, literally "hidden word") as a technique, Xun Kuang compares the needle to a worthy person, thus indirectly advising the ruler not to belittle worthy subjects.[15] As we will see below, the beneficial use of a needle in acupuncture is associated with the function of satire.

The moralistic hermeneutics of "The Major Preface" and "The Minor Prefaces" established the dominant mode of interpreting the *Classic of Poetry*. Some critics writing subsequent to the time of the prefaces, however, have challenged the appropriateness of a moralistic reading of the poems, a reading not necessarily intended by the original authors. For example, Zhu Xi and the Qing scholar Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) questioned the topical readings in "The Minor Prefaces" and pointed out the arbitrariness of allegorical readings.[16] Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓, the author of the Qing novel *The Scholars* (*Rulin waishi* 儒林外史), uses a positive character to voice a fresh reading of some poems in the *Classic of Poetry* (chap. 34, 468-469); eschewing allegorical readings, this original reading offers an interpretation that is closer to everyday life and accords with common sense. Concerns about overreading, misreading, and misinterpretation are justified, especially when meanings beyond the literal are imposed on the simplicity and straightforwardness of, for example, a love poem.

Following Zhu Xi, modern scholars such as Zheng Zhenduo have perceived the Prefaces as a "forced and incorrect interpretation" and a "distortion of the poems' meaning."[17] Many critics in both China and the West continue to attack the Confucian literati's allegorical, ethical, and political readings of the poems. But these critics cannot pinpoint the "original" and "literal" meaning of these poems (Saussy 57-61).

It is worth noting that both embedding criticism in a literary work and interpreting a work as topical and allegorical constitute legitimate, time-honored traditions in China. The style of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, for example, was frequently discussed in the commentary tradition, and the commentators looked for hidden meanings in the text achieved by the authors' choice and control of diction (Plaks 76-77). The moralistic and expressive theories in writ-

ing justify such a reading. According to both of these theories, a serious work necessarily includes moral appraisal and, at times, expression of personal attitudes. Moreover, since the traditions of writing and interpreting frequently influence one another, such readings encouraged later writers to adopt a topical and allegorical mode in the belief that their readers would also read beneath the surface level to discover the underlying moral meaning.

## B. The Non-Serious Tradition: The Debate Over the Role of Humor and Wit

Parallel to the serious satire described above, a non-serious tradition of satire developed, primarily in popular literature but also to some extent in elite literature. However, in the hierarchy of values expressed by moral-minded theorists, the non-serious tradition has not been considered simply a "parallel" tradition. Instead, this literature has been considered less significant by authors and critics alike who undervalue, or even deride it, *unless* the humor has a serious purpose.

In non-serious satire, the "witty" rather than the "ludicrous" type has been valued by the educated elite. The "witty" type emphasizes the role of the jester, who displays his quick wit and intelligence. This type of satire entertains with humor in good taste or shows the comic irony of a situation. By comparison, the "ludicrous" type entertains by ridiculing—sometimes mercilessly—the victim's stupidity, physical defects, or deviations from the norm. The humor in this type of satire can be in bad taste and include sexual and scatological jokes.

An early occurrence of jesting in "witty" satire is found in the poem "Qi ao" 淇奧 ("At the Banks of River Qi") in the *Classic of Poetry*. Praising a virtuous duke, the poem ends with the following lines: "He is skilled in jests and jokes *(xinüe* 戲謔), / But he keeps from hurting (nüe 虐) anyone with them."[18] Referring to "children laughing and chatting" (Lin and Gao, vol. 4, 367), *xi* emphasizes the aspect of jesting that is childlike, playful, and without malicious intent. *Xinüe* usually means "to ridicule and mock," and by extension,

can mean "to play tricks on others." It is clear that banter, ridicule, and satire are acceptable as long as the jests are not rude or offensive and do not hurt others. In fact, the poem implies that the ability to be playful and joke can be a virtue. Commenting on this poem, Zheng Xuan stated that a noble-minded person should joke from time to time, rather than being always solemn (23). Thus, to joke and to be serious are both necessary for virtue.

The "witty" type of satire was especially admired when it served moral, political, and social purposes. Good examples can be found in the humorous anecdote of Zou Ji 鄒忌 and the satire of the court jester Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 (c. 385-c. 305 B.C.) in the *Intrigues of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), one of the early historical writings (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 70-72). The "Biographies of the Jesters" ("Guji liezhuan" 滑稽列傳) in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* assemble anecdotes of the wits (*guji*, also read as *huaji*) who were primarily court jesters of the Warring States kings and Han emperors. Since the *hua* in *huaji* means "smooth or slippery," this term suggests quick wit and glibness. In addition, *guji* meant "confusion," indicating that "a quick-witted person can [deliberately] mix up similarities and differences," and it was also a term for wine vessel,[19] possibly hinting that a jester provides as much pleasure as a wine vessel. These *guji*, called "ironical critics" by Timoteus Pokora, sometimes used techniques of dramatic art such as "imitation of voice and manners, gestures and poses, wit and songs, satire and recitations" (61-62).

However these jesters did not delight in wit for its own sake, nor did they merely entertain. Their wit served more pragmatic ends. For example, court jesters such as Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154-93 B.C.) and Chunyu Kun were noted for their skill with enigmas and riddles (*yinyu*) which they used to remonstrate rulers (Chu 81-82; Lin and Gao, vol. 9, 1293-1294). As David R. Knechtges demonstrates, the jester "makes a moral point to his ruler by means of a witty speech full of sarcasm and irony" (83-85).

Indeed, as was also true for the use of allegory and irony by subordinates, the employment of wit was perceived as a necessary

expediency. Often intending to assert themselves against their rulers, these jesters operated "on slippery ground," and thus resorted to wit, irony, and satire in order to "achieve their aim without running into difficulties and eventual punishment" (Pokora 59). The jesters' courage and ingenuity are much praised in Sima Qian's biographies.

As an effective rhetorical means to serve a moral end, wit is also an important ingredient in the rhyme-prose, a genre greatly favored by the aristocracy during the Han. An extremely serious example, such as occurs in Han writer Zhao Yi's 趙壹 "Rhyme-prose to Satirize the World and Abhor Evil" ("Cishi jixie fu" 刺世疾邪賦), directly exposes socio-political corruption and attacks both the ruler and the government (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 153). Written in a gentler tone, Dongfang Shuo's "Response to a Guest's Objections" ("Da ke nan" 答客難, *Wen xuan*, vol. 2, juan 45, 628-629) contends that since the talented man is not appreciated, it is better for him to withdraw.[20] Song Yu's 宋玉 (attrib.) "Rhyme-prose on Dengtu Zi the Lecher" ("Dengtu Zi haose fu" 登徒子好色賦, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, juan 19, 268-269) is a witty satire. In this work of rhyme-prose, Dengtu zi accuses Song Yu of lechery and warns the king of Chu 楚 against allowing Song to go into his inner palace. Yet Song Yu retorts that Dengtu Zi is actually the lecherous one. In spite of the fact that Dengtu Zi's wife is notoriously ugly, he is so fond of her that he has sired five sons with her. Song Yu's intelligent remarks not only allow him to turn the tables on Dengtu Zi, but also to satirize Dengtu, implying that his sensuality is of a particularly indiscriminating kind.

However, during the Han, the rhyme-prose developed into a more ambiguous form. Usually cast as a dialogue between a host and a guest, it is full of elaborate and exaggerated descriptions of palaces, hunting trips, gorgeous costumes, sumptuous food, charming songs and women. The rhyme-prose concludes with a moral about how extravagance can lead to the fall of a state. It was supposed to admonish through entertainment and to conceal criticism under ostensible praise. But the rhyme-prose in fact entertained more than it admonished, and was therefore pleasing to the emperors and the aristocracy.

While noting that Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (179-117 B.C.)

rhyme-prose had much insubstantial talk, Sima Qian nevertheless approved of the purpose which "was no different from the intention of the poets [in the *Classic of Poetry*] to satirize and admonish (*feng jian*)" (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 145). In other words, the rhyme-prose with its concluding moral still served to legitimate the moralistic purpose of poetry. But with the embellished diction and elaborate, detailed descriptions that characterize the rhyme-prose, a reader tends to be overwhelmed by the grandeur and beauty of the language and to neglect the work's underlying moral. Sima Xiangru's "Rhyme-prose on the Great Man" ("Daren fu" 大人賦) is a case in point. Indirectly ridiculing Emperor Wu of the Han (Knechtges 91-94), a zealot engaged in the Taoist pursuit of immortality, this eulogy contains such praise of the immortal realm that Emperor Wu's desire to become immortal was reputedly increased, not diminished, by reading it.[21] While Song Yu's (attrib.) "Rhyme-prose on the Gaotang Terrace" ("Gaotang fu" 高唐賦) has a brief moral at the end, it resembles his "Rhyme-prose on the Goddess" ("Shennü fu" 神女賦) in containing abundant description of feminine beauty in erotic overtones.[22]

Yang Xiong, another renowned writer of such rhyme-prose, lamented that the genre served so little satirical purpose that it in fact encouraged (*quan*) rulers to indulge in extravagant ways.[23] It should be noted that the word *quan* has two different and contrary meanings that become clear only from context. Meaning to "advise someone against misconduct" when used in "The Minor Prefaces," it is used here in its more common meaning "to encourage," and especially "to encourage someone to indulge in misconduct." Becoming ambiguous in its impact, the rhyme-prose fails to motivate change and thus defeats its own declared purpose. Doubting that the rhyme-prose performed its intended function—and being honest enough to admit as much—Yang Xiong decided to stop writing rhyme-prose in his later years (Liu Dajie, vol. 1, 150).

In addition to this moralistic use of satire which Yang Xiong complains has gone awry, humor is presented for its own sake in a few other works. According to Knechtges, there is, for example, a genuine and sustained humor in *Zhuang Zi* 莊子 (97-98). However,

in most philosophical works, satire still carries a certain amount of moralizing. Examples can be found in the following: the satiric vignette in *Mencius* about the shameless man of Qi 齊 who tried to deceive his wife and concubine (*Meng Zi* 4B.33); the brief tale in *Lie Zi* 列子 about a rustic offering sunshine to the ruler in expectation of reward; another anecdote in *Lie Zi* about a robber so obsessed with his own greed that he is oblivious to the witnesses to his crime (*Lie Zi* 86, 101); and the comic tale in *Han Fei Zi* 韓非子 about a farmer who stands by a stump waiting for more hares to come and dash themselves against it (*Han Fei Zi 339*). Used by philosophers to advance an argument, these satires evince philosophical truth and are therefore more than simply playful.

While the "witty" type of humor was more highly respected by the elite, the "ludicrous" type was more popular. Aiming only to entertain regardless of taste, this type includes what David R. Knechtges calls "tendency wit," a category of "cruel and sadistic humor in which suffering or injury is an object of laughter." Examples can be found in *Intrigues of the Warring States* (89-91). As I will discuss in my second article, the "ludicrous" type of satire appears most frequently in popular and oral literature.

The "ludicrous" type was especially prominent near the end of the Eastern Han dynasty with the appearance of the first Chinese jokebook, Handan Chun's 邯鄲淳 (fl. A.D. 220) *Forest of Laughs* (*Xiao lin* 笑林).[24] The surviving items in *Forest of Laughs* illustrate that no distinction was made between the witty, such as the witty repartee among notables, and the ludicrous, including jokes satirizing misers, boors, fools, and the obese (Handan 31-34). As Lu Xun points out, the *Forest of Laughs* marks the beginning of humorous literature (*paixie wenzi* 俳諧文字) in China (Lu, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo* 71).

The term *paixie* stresses the entertaining function of satire. *Pai* means "amusement" and can refer to a comedian, while *xie* means "humorous" and also "harmonious," thereby implying also the function of enhancing social harmony. Both the "witty" and the "ludicrous" types of satire existed in early humorous literature. Early humorists included elite philosophers such as Zhuang Zi, as well as

more common jesters such as Dongfang Shuo and Handan Chun. Later collectors of humorous anecdotes and jokes frequently referred to these figures both as a source of inspiration and as a justification for their own comic-satiric works.

## II. The Six Dynasties: Reactions to Frivolous Uses of Humor, Warnings about Personal Satire, and Writing as Surgery (*Ci*)

The Six Dynasties witnessed the development of both the serious and non-serious traditions. Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (403-444) *New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語), a collection of anecdotes about notable individuals' admirable conduct and eccentric behavior, is a good case in point. Including both praise and satire, it conformed to the tradition established by the *Classic of Poetry* of juxtaposing exemplary and censurable behaviors. However, Liu Yiqing also follows the example of witty anecdotes found earlier in *Lie Zi*, *Han Fei Zi*, the *Forest of Laughs*, and especially Pei Qi's 裴啟 *Forest of Remarks* (*Yu lin* 語林, ca. 362, no longer extant)—the immediate model of *New Account of Tales of the World*—and even features a chapter on humorous remarks and dialogues entitled "taunting and teasing" (*paitiao* 排調).[25] It thus creates a model of *zhiren* 志人 ("recording notable people") related to the non-serious aspect of satire, a kind of writing that categorizes notable people by underscoring their wit and sometimes even their ludicrous behavior. As literary historians have pointed out, the tremendous appeal of Liu Yiqing's collection set a precedent for many subsequent writers (Lu, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo* 73-74).

It was no doubt in reaction to the kind of frivolous uses of satire found in the *Forest of Laughs* and Liu Yiqing's "taunting and teasing" that Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 467-ca. 532) expressed his contempt for humor in the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, ca. 502), a classic of Chinese literature.[26] In the chapter entitled "Humor and Enigma" ("Xie yin" 諧讔), Liu Xie

points out the insignificance of humor and riddles in the realm of literature, and proclaims his utter disregard for farce and jokes ridiculing people merely for the sake of fun (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 166-176; Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 154-165). In particular, Liu Xie attacks writers of tendency wit who derive personal pleasure from making fun of the physical defects of others, and are therefore "a disgrace to moral principles" (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 169; Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 156-157). He clearly objects to the "ludicrous" type of humor, but is merely condescending toward the "witty" type.

Liu Xie does, however, recognize the pragmatic value of the ancient satires and riddles (*chao yin* 嘲隱) which admonish and warn (*fengjie* 諷誡 and *zhenjie* 箴誡) people, even advising them in critical and difficult situations (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 167, 176; Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 154, 162-165). He notes that when aimed at "the right principle," humor can be employed to remonstrate with rulers and "suppress what would have been stupidity and ruthlessness"; enigma can serve to either "bring about good government and help develop personality" or "assist in recalling the erring and in dissolving doubts" (Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 156-159). Liu Xie thus declares that humorous literature can be esteemed only when it performs political and moral functions.

Along with many other authors and critics, Liu Xie clearly adheres to a moralistic evaluation of literature. Expressing his approval of serious satire in the chapter "Elucidating Poetry" ("Ming shi" 明詩), he reiterates his belief in the tradition established by the *Classic of Poetry*. Characterizing the poetry in the state of Chu as "satires and laments" and Qu Yuan's poetry as "satirical allegory" (*ci*), he argues that Wei Meng followed the example of the Zhou poets, and identifies him as the first to use the four-character line for "formal remonstration." (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 56-58; Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 60-65). Thus Liu Xie combines the ideal of the *Classic of Poetry* with new genres emerging in later poetry.

In his study of various genres and modes of writing, Liu Xie designates *feng* (written with the speech radical) and *ci* as two prose subgenres related to satire. In the chapter "Miscellaneous Writings"

("Zawen" 雜文), *feng* is "a satirical writing." This chapter makes clear that Liu Xie values substance over ornamentation, preferring writings which convey profound ideas over those which unduly emphasize style. Recalling Yang Xiong's famous criticism of the rhyme-prose, he cautions against writings which abound in lavish descriptions of the beauty of objects, women, and scenery as well as the pleasures of life: "But for every statement of remonstration there are hundreds of encouragement (*feng yi quan bai* 諷一勸百). It is indeed difficult to return to what is right" (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 159; Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 148-151). If written in a grand style, a work may have unintended consequences—namely stirring up the reader's desire for luxuries. Liu Xie thus believes the style of writing to be of the utmost importance: it should help achieve, rather than work against, the intended purpose of satire.

Similar to *feng*, which unambiguously expresses the writer's satirical intention, *ci* (literally, "to stab, pierce"), a subgenre discussed in the chapter "Epistolary Writing" ("Shu ji" 書記), focuses on direct communication. In ancient times, the ruler and his deputies used *ci* as a means of obtaining information about high-ranking officials, lower functionaries, and ordinary people (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 311, n. 29). Liu Xie explains that *ci* means to convey (*da* 達), and ancient poets used satire (*fengci*) to correct wrongdoing: "When a narrative account of things is successfully conveyed, it is like piercing an obstruction or blockage with a needle (*zhen* 針)."[27] The term "to convey" recalls Confucius' famous dictum that words should serve to convey one's thoughts (*ci da er yi yi* 辭達而已矣), rather than as ornamentation (*Lun yu* 15.41). Liu Xie's association of satire with the art of acupuncture indicates his understanding that satire should function to cure society of its ills.

Liu Xie's understanding of satire's curative function apparently has its ancient origins. *Mr. Lü's Annals* (*Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), for example, already reflects the belief that an official's honest admonishments may "pierce a blockage" in the diseased political and cosmic body:

> When the ruler's virtue does not flow [i.e., when he is out of touch with his subjects], and the wishes of his people do not reach him, this is the stasis of a state. When the stasis of a state abides for a long time, a hundred pathologies arise in concert, and a myriad catastrophes swarm in . . . The reason that the sage kings valued heroic retainers and faithful ministers is that they dared to speak directly, breaking through such stases (Sivin 20-21).

If we expand the notion of satire to include such therapeutic functions, we should also consider *zhen* 箴 ("exhortation" or "admonition") and *jie* 戒 ("cautionary piece"), two early types of writing ostensibly unrelated to satire but occasionally performing similar functions. Although rarely employing wit for purposes of social criticism, *zhen* and *jie* are at least indirectly related to serious satire because they function to correct and ameliorate socio-political problems. Yang Xiong's "Exhortation on Wine" ("Jiu zhen" 酒箴), for example, is in fact a humorous allegory that subtly criticizes the court system (Knechtges 91-94).

In his chapter "Inscription and Exhortation" ("Ming zhen" 銘箴), Liu Xie explains that the function of *zhen* 箴 (which literally means *zhen* 針, "needle") is to point out and prevent mistakes: "to attack sickness and prevent disease [of character], as the therapeutic puncture does in medicine." While the ancients used *zhen* to admonish the ruler and other officials, to promote hard work, and to inculcate virtue in general, Liu Xie notes the decline of this mode of writing among his contemporaries (Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 128-131; Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind* 120-123). Xiao Tong's 蕭統 (501-531) preface to his *Literary Anthology* (*Wen xuan* 文選) explains the two modes of writing, *zhen* and *jie*, as follows: *zhen* (admonition) "arises from repairing defects," and *jie* (cautionary piece) "derives from setting things to rights."[28] Thus both Liu Xie's and Xiao Tong's explanations reinforce the ameliorative function of these writings.

Moreover, since subordinates cannot directly lampoon their ruler, *zhen* sometimes provides a legitimate outlet for covert, satiric

intentions. Zhang Hua's 張華 (232-300) "Admonitions of the Imperial Preceptress" ("Nüshi zhen" 女史箴) is a case in point.[29] For Zhang Hua, an official at Empress Jia's court, adopting a widely accepted genre such as *zhen* to fulfill a subordinate's duty to admonish was a wise strategy. It is not Zhang Hua, but rather the persona of a court instructress who lectures on the paradigmatic relationship between consorts and emperor prescribed in the Confucian tradition, citing exemplary behaviors from the *Biographical Accounts of Notable Women* and warning against the consorts' jealousy and monopolizing of imperial favor. Of course there may well have been instances of moral decline that prompted Zhang Hua to reiterate these rules. Since the relationship of consorts to ruler is analogous to that of officials to ruler, Zhang Hua might have drawn a parallel to the norms for the ruler-subject relationship. He may further have intended to indirectly convey his displeasure with Empress Jia 賈, whose rise to power was achieved precisely by violating the very rules he advocated.

Respected for its public (*gong* 公) moral functions, satire is nevertheless regarded with disapproval by some moralistic critics when presented in the wrong context or when used as a personal (*si* 私) weapon. As the quote from the chapter "Epistolary Writing" makes clear, *fengci* as a compound appeared at least as early as Liu Xie's *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, where it was used in a positive sense. But by the time it appeared in the scholar-official Yan Zhitui's 顏之推 (531-591) *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓), *fengci* has begun to acquire negative connotations in addition to its positive meaning.

Yan Zhitui argues that even as a tool to correct faults, the satirical poem should be reserved primarily for the mature reader, as it might mislead the less experienced reader who is ignorant of its true intent. In the section entitled "Teaching Children" ("Jiao zi" 教子), he explains that texts such as the satirical (*fengci*) verses in the *Classic of Poetry* should not even be mentioned when fathers and sons discuss ancient poetry (Yan, *Yanshi jiaxun* 15; Yen, *Family Instructions* 5). Although Yan does not oppose a third party's teaching of

these satirical verses, many of which describe love affairs, he feels that a father's dignity might suffer from his instruction of indecent verses to his son.

In the section entitled "On Essays" in Yan Zhitui's *Family Instructions, fengci* loses its originally positive meaning of disinterested criticism for the public good, implying instead only the negative connotation of *ad hominem* ridicule. The negative aspect might have derived from Wang Chong's condemnation of calumny in *Lun heng*. Sophistry, Wang contends, is among the most destructive forces that can be levelled against society: a glib tongue can ruin a whole state, and a slanderer's mouth contains the worst poison (224). Just as slander can be politically damaging by causing a worthy person to lose the ruler's favor, so can a lampoon harm a person socially by diminishing his status. As Lu Xun has pointed out, beginning from the late Han, scholars have cared greatly about estimations of character, and "fame or infamy might depend on a single expression of praise or condemnation" (Lu, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo* 65; Lu, *Brief History* 66). The literary interest in appraising people, sometimes in a jesting spirit, is evidenced in Liu Yiqing's *New Account of Tales of the World*. Viewed in this context, lampoon can be a dangerous weapon.

As a firm believer in Buddhism, Yan Zhitui also brings popular Buddhist beliefs in divine retribution to his understanding of satirical effect. He cautions that satire is a double-edged sword, and that frivolous lampoon and selfish invectives not only wound other people, but can even bring disaster upon the satirist: "The wound caused by sand or a pebble can hurt more than that caused by a spear or halberd. The disaster caused by satirical remarks (*fengci*) arises more swiftly than wind and thunder. You should carefully guard against this and consider its consequences, so as to protect your good fortune" (Yan, *Yanshi jiaxun* 238). Yan Zhitui thus attempts to warn his descendants of the potential consequences of satirical statements, namely divine retribution and the curtailment of good fortune.

## III. Tang and Song Dynasties: Revival of Satire's Moralistic Purpose and Satiric Appropriation of Serious Genres

The Tang witnessed the important *fu gu* 復古 ("return to antiquity") movement that articulated a strong desire to reclaim the ethical ideal of the *Classic of Poetry*. Rejecting the court poetry of the Southern dynasties as well as the contemporary poetry based on sentiment, proponents of this movement argued that poetry should be written in accordance with Confucian morality and with the ethical implications for the audience in mind. Yet according to Stephen Owen, while most poets affirmed the ideal of *fu gu*, they "ignored it in practice." Thus, the self-conscious striving to achieve an ethical ideal in writing, which first appeared during the Tang, did not fully develop until later in the Song (*Poetry of Meng Chiao 9-10*).

Still, even in the Tang, the achievements of the *fu gu* movement were already quite remarkable. Yuan Jie 元結 (719-772) was among the few who endeavored to realize this literary ideal in his poetry. He believed in returning to the function of the *Classic of Poetry*'s Airs, which meant conveying the sentiments of the people to their ruler through poetry. Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) was another poet with a strong social conscience. As Stephen Owen has pointed out, Yuan Jie was more self-conscious, as well as more active, in pursuing the *fu gu* ideal than was Du Fu (*Great Age* 234). However, Du Fu exerted more influence on later poets who pursued the *fu gu* ideal than Yuan Jie. As Eva Shan Chou indicated, "The undeviating, active Confucian sense of responsibility which Tu Fu [Du Fu] expressed in his work brought the moral function of lyric poetry to attention in a forceful new way that was, in addition, to have a permanent influence on subsequent poetry" (63).

By all accounts a great poet and a "poet-historian," Du Fu actualized the *fu gu* ideal in a number of poems of social criticism. In fact, he lost his position as censor because of his outspokenness. As the Qing commentator Qiu Zhao'ao pointed out, Du Fu's famous poem "Going from the Capital to Fengxian, Singing my Feelings in Five

Hundred Words" ("Zi jing fu Fengxian xian yonghuai wubai zi" 自京赴奉先縣詠懷五百字) ridicules (*ji* 譏) the emperor's extravagance. By alluding to the historical figure of Emperor Wu of the Han for the purposes of ridicule (*feng*) and satire (*ci*), the "Ballad of Army Wagons" ("Bing ju xing" 兵車行) supposedly aroused the emperor's empathy for the war-weary populace and made him reconsider his emphasis upon military actions.[30]

Applying moralistic hermeneutics to the interpretation of poetry, the Ming critic Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1547-1624) read some of Du Fu's poems ostensibly on plants or creatures as moral allegories offering advice and warnings (*quanjie*) (Du, vol. 2, 614). According to Qiu Zhao'ao, Du Fu's poems serve the same four functions—*xing*, *guan*, *qun*, *yuan*—as those which Confucius discerned in the *Classic of Poetry*. Qiu Zhao'ao reads the following poems as Du Fu's using analogy for the purpose of satire: "Firefly" ("Yinghuo" 螢火) satirizes (*ci*) eunuchs; "Wild Amaranth" ("Yexian" 野莧) ridicules petty persons; and "Bitter Bamboo" ("Kuzhu" 苦竹) praises noble-minded persons.[31]

The poetry of Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751-814) and Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) also articulates the *fu gu* poetics, as Stephen Owen has noted (*Poetry of Meng Chiao*, chapter 1). Han Yu's poetry exhibits the following tendencies: rejection of sentimentality, affirmation of the didactic responsibilities of poetry, fascination with stylistic austerity, and a distaste for flowery language (Owen, *Poetry of Meng Chiao*, 36). To a significant degree, these elements go hand in hand with the poetics articulated in the Mao commentary and the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* regarding the moralistic function of literary works and the preeminence of substance over form.

*Fu gu* principles were also articulated by the closely related "Ancient Prose Movement" (*guwen yundong* 古文運動), of which Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) were notable supporters. Liu Zongyuan, in particular, argues that literature is to be used only to assign praise or blame, or to instruct through satiric admonition (*fengyu*); satire, he contends, is based on "analogy" and "stimulus" (*bi xing* 比興). Liu is famous for his allegorical fables satirizing

eunuchs, officials, and human foibles such as greed.[32]

Liu Zongyuan's "The Snake-Catcher" ("Bu she zhe shuo" 捕蛇者說) aptly uses the catching of snakes as stimulus and poisonous snakes as analogy for government *(Liu Zongyuan ji*, vol. 2, 455-457). It indirectly satirizes tyrannical acts of government through the words of a catcher of an extremely venomous but medically valuable snake. The catcher confesses that although his father and grandfather were poisoned by venom, his family is exempt from taxes because of this profession handed down for generations. They are fortunate to survive, while neighbors starve or suffer extreme dearth at the hands of fierce tax collectors. This story serves as an ironic allegory of government oppression. Liu Zongyuan's "Biographical Account of Hejian" ("Hejian zhuan" 河間傳) adopts the mode of "biographical account" and turns it into a parable. Liu concludes the piece by pointing out that the account should be understood metaphorically: the relationship between the lecherous wife and her loving husband parallels that of a subject and a ruler. Yet the text is replete with satire and irony even on its literal level, and reveals much political as well as social and psychological significance.[33]

By far the strongest proponent of *fu gu* principles was the mid-Tang engagé writer Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846). Worried about the decreasing popularity of satirical works serving moral functions since the end of the Han, he became an enthusiastic proponent of reviving the serious tradition of satire. Sharing his concern, Bai Juyi's close friend and political ally Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) wrote satirical poems aimed at correcting social ills (Liu Dajie, vol. 2, 138-139).

In Bai Juyi's famous "Letter To Yuan Zhen" ("Yu Yuan jiu shu" 與元九書), an important document of literary criticism, he laments the decline of the tradition established in the *Classic of Poetry*. In his view, by the time of Qu Yuan and Su Wu 蘇武, the tradition had already deteriorated to the point that poetry chiefly expressed personal frustrations at the expense of broader societal concerns. Later, the tradition totally disappeared and belles lettres neither served pragmatic functions nor benefitted society. Bai deplores the profusion of frivolous poetry and expresses disappointment at finding so few

satiric poems even in the extensive oeuvre of Du Fu (*Bai Juyi xuanji* 345-347)

To restore and promote the satiric tradition, Bai Juyi designated a group of his poems, 150 in total, as "poems of satiric admonition" ("Fengyu shi" 諷喻詩). These poems, which were his favorites, adopt the purposes, modes, and methods of the *Classic of Poetry*: "praising [the virtuous] (*mei*), criticizing [the wicked] (*ci*), stimulus (*xing*, also means "to arouse and incite emotions"), and analogy (*bi*)" (*Bai Juyi xuanji* 344-364). In the *Classic of Poetry*, "praise and criticism" are the two major stated purposes; "stimulus and analogy," two of the six modes; and satire through analogy is the traditional method of poetic technique. It should also be noted that the "yu" in "fengyu" means "to instruct, to admonish, to illustrate" and also "parable." Thus, *fengyu* poetry, such as Bai Juyi's, intends to stir up people's feelings, along with instructing and admonishing the reader, and all through the use of analogy and parable.

Bai Juyi followed the Confucian tradition in favoring substance over form, and his "poems of satiric admonition" were greatly influenced by those in the *Classic of Poetry* in terms of function and technique. However, the tone of this group of poems departs from the ideal tradition established in "The Major Preface," which recommends that remonstration be made by hints and indirection in order that the speaker not give offense. These poems more closely resemble the "Music Bureau" poems of the Han dynasty in directly expressing grievances and articulating satirical themes without mincing words.

Bai Juyi repeatedly explains how and why he emphasizes forceful thought and direct language over "moderation," the preferred tone of satire: "the thought is forceful and its expression outspoken, while the diction is plain and unadorned" (*yi ji er yan zhi* 意激而言直) (*Bai Juyi xuanji* 361). In his preface to *The New Music Bureau* (*Xin yuefu* 新樂府), Bai explains that his poems adopt plain and straightforward diction so that readers can easily understand them. Remarks made in the poems are "direct and earnest, so the hearer can fathom a profound warning (*shenjie* 深戒)."[34] Bai concludes the preface by

pointing out the poems' usefulness, "These poems were composed for the emperor, the officials, the people, things, and events, but not for belletristic literature (*wen* 文)" (Liu Dajie, vol. 2, 134). Assigning priority to the moralistic and ameliorative functions of literature as opposed to the functions of entertainment or aesthetic pleasure, Bai clearly believes that direct, forceful remonstration is more effective than the indirect and artful kind, even though the poet thereby risks offending his superiors and losing his home or even his life.

His zeal for the "poems of satiric admonition" notwithstanding, Bai Juyi was aware that explicit moral messages conveyed in a stern tone with plain diction violated certain aesthetic expectations and therefore might not be pleasing (*Bai Juyi xuanji* 361). It should be noted that during the Tang many poets, whether advocates of the *fu gu* principles or not, continued to write poems of a satiric nature, though usually in a gentler tone than that employed by Bai Juyi.

Even a poet such as Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813?-858), famous for intricately allusive poems of secret love and deep sentiments, wrote a number of poems of outspoken social criticism. His long poem "Stopping at the Western Outskirts, Composing One Hundred Lines" ("Xingci xijiao zuo yibai yun" 行次西郊作一百韻) vividly describes the common folk's various hardships, the wreckage of war, government corruption, and his own indignation upon beholding such suffering and injustice (Li, vol. 1, 96-110). His "poems on historical themes" (*yongshi shi* 詠史詩, "poems singing of history") such as "Palace of the Sui Dynasty" ("Sui gong" 隋宮) and "The Northern Qi Dynasty" ("Bei Qi" 北齊) clearly satirize contemporary government behind a thin veil of allusions to the past (Li, vol. 2, 686-687, 709-711).

Alongside the poetry which revived *fu gu* poetics, other writings in the category of non-serious satirical literature continued to be enjoyed. As Stephen Owen has ingeniously demonstrated, Mid-Tang poets such as Bai Juyi exhibited a "playful cleverness" that was linked to "the small pleasures of domestic life." The poet, using humor and parody, "processes" the seemingly worthless raw material "poetically into a finished product that is worth more than the raw

material," and can thus assert possession of the "surplus of value"—his wit (*The End* 83-85). Wit was cherished for its own sake, for its contribution to the poet's private self and life, and for bringing joy and harmony to society. Humor thus became one of the essential ingredients in poetry writing. The desire to maximize the "surplus of value" is evidenced by the famous Song poet Huang Tingjian's 黃庭堅 (1045-1105) suggestion for ending a poem with a jesting punch line: "Writing a poem is like writing a play. In the beginning you arrange things in order, and in the end you must make a comic remark (*dahun* 打諢) before exiting" (Wang Jide 165 and 166, n. 6.)

Some writers appropriated serious modes of writing such as *zhuan* ("biographical account") and *jie* ("cautionary piece") for humorous purposes. As the modern scholar Herbert Franke has noted, Han Yu was the first to write a pseudo-biography as a stylistic parody of the *Records of the Grand Historian*. Han's "Biography of the Brush" ("Mao Ying zhuan" 毛穎傳, in Han 97-104) reads like a biography of a historical person, but is in fact a descriptive pseudo-biography of a writing brush. Philip F. Williams also concludes that this "biography" is a whimsical allegory that imparts no moral edification, but is instead an exercise in tongue-in-cheek punning; Williams argues that in this piece Han Yu contradicts in practice his basic theories of what ancient-style prose should be (193-200).

Whether Han's "Biography of the Brush" can be considered humor for humor's sake is more problematic than would at first appear. This biography must have been denounced by some moralistic critics as frivolous because Liu Zongyuan wrote an essay in its defense. Lauding Han's "Biography of the Brush," Liu argued that the sages do not abandon humor: Sima Qian, for example, wrote selectively about court jesters and how they use jokes to benefit the world (Liu Zongyuan, vol. 2, 569-572, esp., 569-570). Thus, while affirming the value of humor, Liu also emphasized its usefulness, thereby implying that Han's biography serves the serious function of benefitting society. Later critics similarly interpreted the biography as satire, and thus as moralistically useful. Believing that Han wrote for the sole purpose of amusing the educated reader, Herbert Franke nevertheless

indicates that from the time of the Song dynasty this "biography" has been interpreted allegorically as "a satire directed against inefficient officials" (24).

Han Yu's appropriation of the serious subgenre of "biography" for playful purposes is matched by Liu Zongyuan's appropriation of another serious mode of writing, the *jie* ("cautionary piece"), for humorous and satirical purposes. Liu Zongyuan wrote three animal fables—"The Deer of Linjiang" ("Linjiang zhi mi" 臨江之麋), "The Donkey of Guizhou" ("Qian zhi lü" 黔之驢), and "The Rats of a Family in Yongzhou" ("Yong moshi zhi shu" 永某氏之鼠) (Liu Zongyuan, vol. 2, 533-536). Although called "Three Cautionary Pieces" ("San jie" 三戒), these satires are spiced with wit and humor.

The interaction between interpretive and writing traditions can again be seen in the fact that although Han Yu may have written the "Biography of the Brush" for sheer fun, it was often read allegorically. And as a result of such hermeneutical influence, many later imitations were written specifically for satiric purposes. Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), an admirer and imitator of Liu Zongyuan's "Three Cautionary Pieces" (Liu Zongyuan, vol. 2, 533), was one of Han Yu's many successors in the genre of the pseudo-biography. As Franke has noted, the tradition of pseudo-biographical writing was continued by more satiric "biographies" of writing instruments, flowers, plants, and other objects (25-26). The playwright Gao Ming 高明 (1310-1380) who wrote the "Biography of Mr. Black Treasure" ("Wu Bao zhuan" 烏寶傳) to condemn the evils of money and moneymaking, was successful, as Franke points out, in turning a literary joke into "a medium of expressing social criticism" (30).

## IV. Conclusion

Although the present study deals mostly with poetry and prose up to the Tang, this brief survey should clarify the development of satire in elite Chinese literature. Scholar-officials favored serious satire that aimed at moral admonition. In ideal terms, this satire was supposed to be pedagogical and corrective, teaching and transforming

the people morally, and instructing the ruler so that he might mend his faults. It should praise virtue and censure evil, offering positive examples for readers to emulate and cautioning readers with negative examples. Moderation, indirection, and a gentle tone ought to characterize the expression of satire. However, the reality sometimes departed quite far from the ideal. For example, ornate rhyme-prose could have inadvertently encouraged the emperor to indulge in extravagant behavior, misconduct, and even vice, instead of satirizing and admonishing him. Reacting to such a misuse of satire, Bai Juyi advocated conveying unambiguous moral messages in plain diction and a stern tone.

Satire has a public scope and a political function. Although expressive theories of literature justify satire's conveyance of personal frustrations, it was supposed to admonish and serve moralistic purposes, and be intended primarily for the public good rather than private ends. It works with, rather than against, the ruling house. Even when a writer condemns wicked ministers, criticizes corruption in the government, and deplores the emperor's appointment of the unworthy and the neglect of talented scholars, he is still assumed to be loyal to the emperor. In other words, the satirist criticizes the ruling house for its own good. Such a well-intended satirist thus differs from those who slander the emperor with a view to inciting rebellion and toppling the legitimate ruling house.

In the reading and composition of satire, moralistic hermeneutics reigned supreme. Allegorical and topical readings are common, and sometimes wrongly applied to non-satiric texts. Personal lampoon with no apparent public purpose was condemned and its writer warned of divine retribution, though some writers still used their works to vent resentment through invectives directed at their enemies. The dominant trend of moralistic criticism nudged writers in the direction of adopting an allegorical framework, and acculturated readers who were inclined to read between the lines for hidden meanings. The witty satire tended to gain the favor of the educated elite, while the ludicrous type was more accessible to the general public. Both types of satire were even more abundant in popular literary genres—a sub-

ject my second article will address.

## NOTES

I would like to thank the following organizations which helped support the writing of this article: The Academic Senate and Office of the Dean at the University of California at Riverside, and the University of California Pacific Rim Research Program. I also thank the anonymous referees for their suggestions.

[1] Due to limitation of space, I will not be able to examine specific examples in detail in this paper.

[2] The six modes are *feng* (airs), *ya* 雅 (odes), *song* 頌 (hymns), *fu* 賦 (exposition), *bi* 比 (comparison, analogy), *xing* 興 (stimulation, stirring).

[3] Cf. Legge, trans., 164.

[4] *Lun yu* 17.9. My reading of this passage differs somewhat from that of D. C. Lau. See Lau, *Confucius* 145.

[5] I choose not use the term "pragmatic" in this context because I regard the "moralistic" as only one of the pragmatic functions.

[6] In "Li yue zhi" 禮樂志 of *Han shu*. Quoted in Lin and Gao, vol. 4, 52.

[7] This translation is from Van Zoeren 96. I have made some modifications.

[8] *Lun yu* XII.19; cf. Lau, *Confucius* 115-116 and Gibbs 288.

[9] Zheng Xuan's remarks are quoted and translated in James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories*, 112. While Liu translates *fengyu* as "admonition," I translate it as "satiric admonition."

10 See Legge 37-81 for the many occurrences of *ci*. For *jie*, see, for example, 57, 64, and 79, and for *quan*, see 40, 57.

[11] *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, juan 2, 36; Lin and Gao, vol. 8, 1079. Zhang Heng's "Rhyme-prose on Western Metropolis" ("Xijing fu" 西京賦, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, juan 2, 36-50) depicts Chang'an 長安 as a capital of extravagance and indirectly criticizes the emperors, while his "Rhyme-prose on Eastern Metropolis" ("Dongjing fu" 東京賦, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, juan 3, 51-68) portrays Luoyang 洛陽 as a place of

restraint. See also Knechtges' translation in *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature* 181-310.

[12] *Meng Zi*, III.B.9. Lau, *Mencius* 114. "When the world declined and the Way fell into obscurity, heresies and violence again rose. There were instances of regicides and parricides. Confucius was apprehensive and composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Strictly speaking, this is the Emperor's prerogative. That is why Confucius said, "Those who understand me will do so through the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; those who condemn me will also do so because of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*."

[13] Ronald C. Egan (27) mentions that Ouyang Xiu and his co-compiler Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061) wrote this history entirely in the *guwen* 古文 style, rewriting even Tang documents originally composed in parallel prose.

[14] See the example in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 of Zichan's 子產 remonstrating Fan (Xuanzi 范宣子) with a letter, requesting him not to demand heavy tribute from smaller feudal states. Quoted in Liu Xie 299 and 301, n. 10.

[15] Xun Kuang, "Zhen fu," quoted in Chu Binjie, *Zhongguo gudai*, 81.

[16] Zhu Xi 135-136, 139, 207; and Wei Yuan, *Shi gu wei*, cited in Zhao 72.

[17] Quoted in Saussy 49.

[18] Cf. the translation in Legge 93.

[19] See the quotations from *Shi ji suoyin* 史記索隱 and Yang Xiong's "Jiu fu," respectively, in Xu Shupi (Ming dynasty), *Shi xiao lu*, 260.

[20] See also Knechtges' introduction to *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, 34-35.

[21] See "Yang Xiong zhuan" 揚雄傳 from *Han shu* in Guo 33.

[22] See the two pieces (attributed to Song Yu) in *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, juan 19, 264-268.

[23] See the quote from Yang Xiong's *Fa yan* 法言 in Guo 33.

[24] Handan Chun, *Xiao lin*, in Jiang, vol. 1, 31-34. See also Knechtges 95-97.

[25] Liu Yiqing, vol. 1, 407-430. See the surviving anecdotes from Pei Qi's *Yu lin* in Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo*, 66.

[26] Although Liu Xie was generally believed to have died around 520 or so, new researches have discovered that he was more likely to have died around 532. For a discussion of the controversy of Liu Xie's dates, see Guo Jinxi, "Qianyan" 前言, in Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong*, 1-2.

[27] Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong*, 307; cf. Liu Hsieh, *Literary Mind*, 292-293.

[28] *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, p. 2. Cf. Hightower 152.

[29] This piece is quoted and translated in Shih 10-12.

[30] See the poems in Du Fu, vol. 1, 113-118, 264-275, esp., 117, 269.

[31] See Qiu Zhao'ao's preface in Du Fu, vol. 1, 1-2.

[32] See the preface to the collected works of Liu Zongyuan in Liu Zongyuan, vol. 1, 8-10. See also Liu Wu-chi 131-133.

[33] See "Hejian zhuan" in Liu Zongyuan, vol. 4, 1341-1345. For a more detailed analysis of this text see Wu Yanna.

[34] The last sentence echoes and yet also modifies the famous quote in "The Major Preface."

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