The Tension and Intersection of Rhetorics and Ethics: Some Implications of Han *Fu*

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ABSTRACT

As a literary expression of the material infrastructure of the Han empire, Han *fu* is crisscrossed by both rhetorics and ethics. Despite its coded ethical endeavor, the suspicion of the *fu*'s rhetorical excess remains unabated. However, the all-inclusive extravagance of Han *fu* witnesses the desire for the empire's self-representation that renders the politico-historical Han reinscribed and reincarnated in the rhetorical order. This ethico-political dimension is foregrounded by the public nature of the *fu*'s themes and by the popularity of *fu* composition as well.

Indeed, the tension of rhetoric and ethics needs to be cast in a new light. The sensuality and materiality of Han *fu* language reflect a certain reality of the time, thereby rendering the material display itself the true subject of the *fu*. As the ethical edification is bisected by the economy of rhetorics in the *fu*, the ethical intent becomes a rhetorical *topos*, which in turn has special ethical function in the socio-political context. Rhetoric and ethics are therefore both defining and defined by each other. It is this mutual implication that makes up the richness and complexities of Han *fu*.

KEY WORDS

Han *fu*
rhetoric
ethics
desire
reason

As a literary genre, Han *fu* 賦 (rhapsody) is an evolution from and a fusion of different intellectual traditions and literary expressions in the Pre-Qin 先秦 era, especially the time of the Warring States 戰國 when there were increasing communication and intercourse between north and south. What the Han people referred to as the *fu*, notably in terms of verbal *pupai* 鋪排, include compositions by Qu Yuan 屈原 (343-277 B.C.) and Xunzi 荀子 (third century B.C.) (Jian 1993: 195). Scholars have argued that the *fu* derives from *Chuci* 楚辭 (a southern form of literature especially associated with Chu poet Qu Yuan), or Songs of the South, which are influenced by the northern poetic tradition of *Shijing* 詩經, or the *Book of Odes* (Jian 1993: 131-2, 202; Knechtges 1976: 14-8; Liu 1983: 97-100; Wang 1985: 82-3). The rhetorical tradition of *Chuci* is not only a crucial origin of Han *fu*, but is also seminal in the shaping of verbal ornament in the later literary expressions (Shi 1989: 45-52; 191-225; Zhao 1985: 371-99). Another important source of Han *fu* is the rhetorical tradition of the *zonghengjia* 縱橫家, or the Roving Persuaders, especially regarding the rhetorical figures undertaken in the service of persuasion (Jian 1980: 50-1, 122; Zhang and Pease 1993: 25-6). The study of different rhetorics in Han *fu*, therefore, can not only help us understand the *fu's* own literary and cultural significance, but can also help us gain insight into its significant role in the development of the Chinese literature.

Readers of Han *fu* are often impressed or even struck by the doubling of discourses or what J. I. Crump calls the "doubled persuasion," namely a presentation of thesis and antithesis which seem to be equally efficacious (1964: 115-22). In the *fu* on hunt, this is epito-

mized in the contrast of the hyperbolic and lavish account of the hunt and the imperial reserve, and the emperor's conversion and subsequent denunciation of the improper excesses. This paper will put this double nature of the *fu* in the light of the tension and intersection of rhetorics and ethics. In addition to persuasion, I use the word rhetoric primarily in the sense of ornamental speech or language and thus it is basically associated with desire. By ethics, on the other hand, I mean the ideas or codes regarding reason and order. Through the study of the tension of desire and reason in Han *fu*, this paper will try to relate the problematics to the greater cultural context by addressing its socio-political implications.

The *fu* is the genre that is most closely associated with the Han dynasty. The reign from Emperor Wu 武帝 (141-87 B.C.) to Emperor Cheng 成帝 (33-7 B.C.), which correspondingly marks the trajectory from Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 B.C.) to Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.-A.D. 18), especially saw the golden age of Han *fu*. Among the *fu* recorded in the *Hanshu* 漢書, or *History of the Former Han*, almost nine out of ten were composed during this period. The emergence of the *fu* corresponded with the consolidation of Han authority, regarding which Emperor Wu was particularly important. Before Emperor Wu the dynasty was still suffering from the political instability and the emperor's authority was challenged and circumscribed by the revolts of the princes and feudal lords and by the foreign threats as well. Emperor Wu was able to consolidate centralization of government and secure the Han power over new territories in the east (Korea), the west (Center Asia), the south (Vietnam) and the north (the Huns). According to *Shiji pingzhunshu* 史記平準書, or *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, "漢興七十餘年之間，國家無事。非遇水旱之災，民則人給家足。都鄙廩庾皆滿，而府庫餘貨財" (Sima 1979 II: 1420) ("By the time [Emperor Wu] had been on the throne a few years, a period of over seventy years had passed since the founding of the Han. During that time the nation had met with no major disturbances so that, except in times of flood or drought, every person was well supplied and every family had enough to get along on. The granaries in the cities and the countryside were

full and the government treasuries were running over with wealth" [Watson 1961 II: 81]).

It was on this material basis that Emperor Wu brought into culmination the imperial power within and without. It was not until his time that far-flung military conquests excited imperial ambitions and thereby resulted in the establishment of Han control over the surrounding semi-Sinicized areas. Emperor Wu's military expeditions to the West increased Chinese contact with Central Asia and opened trade routes that brought from the West to Chinese various kinds of precious objects, animals and plants, thereby enriching and expanding the material array of the empire and the mental scope of the Chinese people.

As Zhang Cangshou and Jonathan Pease observe, "Han emperors were mightier beings than the Spring and Autumn Dukes had been. Han sovereigns had more power, greater ambitions, and an accompanying mind-set that reacted to rhetoric in ways quite different from their forbears" (1993: 11). Against this backdrop, the socio-historical situatedness of Han *fu* is writ large, namely, Han *fu* is a literary expression of the material infrastructure of the Han empire. Han *fu* is mostly recognized by the following features: rare words and elegant language, extensive cataloguing, elaborate description, amplification and exaggeration. Extravagance and all-inclusiveness can be marked out as the two catchwords of the *fu*. In the *Hanshu Yang Xiong zhuan xia* 漢書揚雄傳下, Yang Xiong is reported to have such comments on the features of the *fu*： "賦者將以風也，必推類而言，極麗靡之辭，閎侈鉅衍，競於使人不能加也" (Ban 1977 V: 3575) ("The *fu* writer is required to speak by adducing examples, use ornate language to the extreme, grossly exaggerate, greatly amplify, and strive to make it such that another person cannot add to it" [qtd. in Knechtges 1976: 32]). Thus in "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous" ("Zixu fu" 子虛賦), the description of the maid-servants starts from the texture and design of their costumes to the posture and movement of the wonderfully cut outfits and finally to the sounds of the flying sleeves, while in "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park" ("Shanglin fu" 上林賦), in addition to the elaborate account of the maid-servants' countenance, complexion,

posture, temperament, dresses, and spirit, we have a detailed illustration of their beautiful teeth, smiles, brows, and expression in their eyes. There remains little to be added, as the *fu* writers rack their brains collecting a full-scale array of inventories.[1]

This famous (or infamous) combination of extravagance and comprehensiveness is not only a kind of pedantry and desire to say it all on the part of the *fu* writer, but more importantly it is an embodiment of the socio-political order in the rhetorical order. Sima Xiangru's "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park" is a typical case in point. As suggested by the remarks of Lord No-Such (Wangshigong 亡是公), who is speaking on behalf of the imperial court, the lavish description accorded the Imperial Park is meant to overwhelm the feudal lords: "且夫齊魯之事，又烏足道乎。君未睹夫巨麗也，獨不聞天子之上林乎？" (Xiao 1986 I: 361) ("How are the affairs of Qi and Chu worth mentioning? Have you not seen what is truly great and beautiful? Have you alone not heard of the Imperial Park of the Son of Heaven?" [Knechtges 1982 II: 75]). Lord No-Such lays out in breathtaking detail all possible aspects of the Imperial Park. He fills his account with catalogues of trees, flowers, animals, water creatures, birds, gems, stones and many other exotic objects which may or may not exist, each of which is taken to its limit before the next is brought into display. This verbal maneuver intensifies, enlarges, and elaborates layer upon layer, unfolding on a magnificent scale.

Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. A.D. 23) recounts in *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 an alleged remark by Sima Xiangru: "賦家之心，苞括宇宙，總覽人物" (1979: 3.8a) ("A *fu* writer's mind encompasses the universe, as he pulls all men and creatures into his gaze"). The poetics implied there is a cultural decorum of "what" is said and "how" it is said. As the *fu* writer tries to display his masterful command of the literary conventions and exploit all his rhetorical stock-in-trade (which parallels or indeed "figures" the stock-in-trade in the imperial storehouses) to depict the Imperial Park, which stands *pars pro toto* for the Han empire, he is mapping out the physical grandeur and material abundance of the Han empire, which in turn is taken as a microcosm of the cosmos. In so doing, the writer renders his *fu* a verbal replica of the

might and magnificence of the Han empire, and indeed the *fu* becomes a monument in its own right. As the development of the *fu* corresponds to the attention to language itself—to aesthetic aspects such as sounds, sentence patterns and structures (Jian 1993: 193), the metasemiotic consciousness on the part of the *fu* writer (as best indicated by the use of parallelism and repetition of synonyms) also points to the purport of the *fu* as a kind of deliberate architecture. The visual aspect of the *fu* language is particularly foregrounded as the *fu* writer introduces many pictographic characters, especially indexical characters which have mountain 山 or water 水 as their radicals. For example, in Yang Xiong's "Rhapsody on the Shu Capital" ("Shu du fu" 蜀都賦), from *cang san yin tian* 倉山隱天 to *li hu yue yue* 礫乎岳岳, out of a total of 88 characters, there are 40 with mountain radicals (cf. Jian 1980: 84). As such they become indexical signs or even visual symbols for the landscape in sight as visualized in language, creating an image of range upon range of mountains.

This visualistic rhetorical aspect brings us to the important fact about the recurrent motif of the "gaze" in the *fu*, which is closely related to desire and power. The *fu* writer takes pains to speak out an ideal picture of the imperial head (the emperor) and body (the empire as epitomized in the park), and this desire to say/see it all charges the description with visualistic and perceptive details. The pervasiveness of the idea of the gaze is highlighted in a passage in Sima Xiangru's "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park:" "於是乎周覽泛觀，縝紛軋芴，芒芒怳忽。視之無端，察之無涯" (Xiao 1986 I: 366) ("And then/ *Gazing* round, broadly *viewing*,/ One *sees* such plenteous profusion, such a vast vista,/ He becomes dizzy and dazed, confounded and confused./ *Look* at it and it has no beginning;/ *Examine* it and it has no end" [Knechtges 1982 II: 87, emphasis mine]). The *fu* abound in ekphrasic descriptions whose sensual nature may turn what is depicted and perceived (e.g., the beautiful, magnificent landscape and exotic objects) into a fetishism of objects of (imperial) desire. This is especially true in the *fu* on hunt, in which the observing eye is enacted by the persona of the emperor, whose gaze is emblematic of the imperial desire and whose exploits in the hunt are symbolic of the military

conquests of the Han power.

In such context we can better understand the dominance of the *fu* in the Han literary production and further recognize the significance of *fu* composition as court activity. The *fu* have been traditionally regarded as products of aristocratic entertainment. In the early Han times, as Kenneth P. H. Ho points out, "Very often the primary intention of the [*fu*] writer was simply to give pleasure to his royal patron through the richness and beauty of his language or the exotic scenes described" (1976: 181). It is not unusual that a *fu* writer becomes an official or a courtier on account of his excellence in writing a *fu*. Emperor Wu invited Sima Xiangru to the court because he was much impressed by the writer's "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous" (Sima 1979 IV: 3002), and Yang Xiong was summoned by Emperor Cheng to an audience because his compositions were recommended as resembling those of Sima Xiangru (Xiao 1986 I: 321).

The *fu* writer/courtier is not just regaling with poetic offerings their lord patrons who take delight in the consumption of the beauty of their language. More often than not, the rhetorical extravagance on the part of the *fu* writer/courtier is correlated to the display of the lord's political power. In Sima Xiangru's "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous" and "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park," each of the three speakers (each from a different court) indulges his rhetorical skill on behalf of his ruler with an aim to surpassing each other with tantalizing boasts and flamboyant hyperboles (basically rendered in the style of the *zonghengjia*). The case is concluded by Lord No-Such, who first criticizes the improper behavior of the vassal lords and then manages to intimidate the other two counterparts with an overwhelming account of the Imperial Park of the Son of Heaven, the "truly great and beautiful." The comments launched by Lord No-Such and the varying length and complexity in which Sima describes the hunts (or the parks) imply an edifying ethics on political decorum and a binding hierarchy between the emperor and the feudal lords. In Yang Xiong's "Rhapsody on the Tall Poplars Palace" ("Changyang fu" 長楊賦), the host also accords the imperial hunt (and admittedly the *fu* itself) the function of impressing the non-Chinese visitors with the might and gran-

deur of the Han regime so as to win their allegiance (Xiao 1986 I: 411).

The political function of the *fu* writer/courtier, however, is much more complicated than is generally acknowledged. As Hellmut Wilhelm argues, "Almost all *fu* have a political purport, and, in addition, almost all of them deal with the relationship with the ruler and his officials" (1957: 311). Since the *fu* writer/courtier is often commanded to present occasional pieces which deal with themes of public nature, the ethical and political implications of the *fu* become acute. Particularly suggesting in this regard are the *fu* on hunt, whose importance is testified by the popularity of the identical subject. For instance, Yang Xiong, Wang Bao 王褒, and Liu Xin all composed a *fu* on the Sweet Springs sacrifices, and a friend of Yang Xiong also wrote a piece probably related to the same ritual attended by Yang (Knechtges 1976: 45). The imperial hunt involves not only the hunting of animals, but actually is a combination of hunting, military review, and the parade of the imperial entourage. In other words, it is a royal display and ritualistic reenactment of the nexus of relationships which constitute the court itself. Viewed in this light, the hunts, like the sacrifices, are a kind of state ceremony in which the politics and ethics at court are reinstituted and the authority of the emperor is upheld and reaffirmed. In celebrating the majesty of the spectacle, the *fu* are reinscribing the power and the glory in textual forms and thus take on the empire's desire to represent itself to itself. This desire for imperial reflexiveness and self-representation is highly significant: for once the state events (and the empire itself) are recounted and recast in verbal or textual forms, the politico-historical Han is reinscribed and reincarnated in the rhetorical/textual order, and thereby the empire's presence and influence are reinforced, expanded and disseminated. Furthermore, as the state events are reproduced in signs or texts, a semiotic system or a repertoire of reference texts (i.e., a normative Han canon) will emerge to function as modeling system and make available a set of codes which governs the way people think and act, thus creating a continuum of ethical behavior and rhetorical/textual endeavor.

The popularity of *fu* composition evidences the ethical aspect in the greater literary and political milieu in which it is imbedded. In *Hanshu shi fu lue* 漢書詩賦略 (the "Summary on Songs and Rhapsodies" in the *History of the Former Han*), there is an account which reads as follows:

> 傳曰：「不歌而誦謂之賦，登高能賦，可以為大夫。」言感物造耑，材知深美，可與圖事，故可列為大夫也。古者諸侯卿大夫，交接鄰國，以微言相感。當揖讓之時，必稱詩以諭其志，蓋以別賢不肖而觀盛衰。
>
> (Ban 1977 II: 1755-6)
>
> The commentary says, "To recite/chant without singing is called *fu*. Upon climbing high, if one can recite/chant, he may become a great officer". . . . When his talent and wisdom are profound and excellent, it is possible to consult with him on state affairs. Therefore, he can be ranked with the great officers. Anciently, when the lords, ministers, and great officers had contact with a neighboring state they tried to exert their influence with subtle words. When the time came to present themselves they invariably recited a poem in order to express their intention. Generally, in this way they could distinguish between the worthy and unworthy and perceive whether a state would prosper or decay. (qtd. in Knechtges 1976: 12-3)

Several assumptions in this famous passage merit special attention. First, the ability to recite is regarded as an indexical sign for a good officer. Second, the command of rhetorical skill ("subtle words") is a diplomatic strategy which empowers one to speak on behalf of one's own state when negotiating with other states (which reminds us of the fact that the *fu* poet *par excellence* Sima Xiangru was also a diplomat). Third, a state's future is determined by whether it has good rhapsodists as officers. As the rhetorical skill is likened to political power, the rhetorical order and the socio-political order become indistinguishable.

Under such circumstances, *fu*-writing becomes an important instrument of statecraft, as especially illuminated by the case of Emperor Wu. Emperor Wu is the first *imperator literatus* in the Chinese literary history, both in the sense that he showed great interest in literature and in the sense that he was a poet himself.[2] In addition to his unprecedented military accomplishments, Emperor Wu seemed to aspire for the kind of literary/textual power which implies an intellectual/spiritual conquest. Eager to recruit poets (or literary attendants) all over the empire to the court, Emperor Wu was one of the few emperors in Chinese history who were able to rule by both word and sword.

Under the influence of Emperor Wu, *fu* composition becomes an indispensable activity at the imperial court. In the preface to his "Two Capitals Rhapsody" ("Liangdu fu" 兩都賦), Ban Gu 班固 has such elaborate description of the *fu* phenomenon:

> 故言語侍從之臣，若司馬相如、虞丘壽王、東方朔、枚皋、王褒、劉向之屬，朝夕論思，日月獻納。而公卿大臣……時時間作。(Xiao 1986 I: 2-3)
> Therefore, officers who attended and served the emperor by virtue of their skill with words, such as Sima Xiangru, Yuqiu Shouwang, Dongfang Sho, Mei Gao, Wang Bao, and Liu Xiang, day and night deliberated and thought, monthly and daily presented and offered compositions, while high ministers and great statesmen . . . from time to time wrote compositions. (Knechtges 1982 II: 95)

The composition of the *fu* is such a popular practice that "Han rulers liked to be addressed through *fu*; Han literati found the *fu* effective when they wished to participate in politics by advising rulers, displaying aspirations, or defending ideas" (Zhang and Pease 1993: 16). The writing of the *fu* is thus the courtiers' way of relating one to another. Every time they communicate through the *fu*, therefore, they are recoding the suppositions and values of the court which make their composition possible. Bound together by the convention and

institution of *fu*-writing, they share a common reference system and constitute themselves as a kind of literary community whose identity is defined by the ability to write a *fu*.

However, the *fu* writer does not simply belong to the literary community at the court presided over by the emperor, but he also plays a mediating role among the emperor, the court, and the common people. Ban Gu explains the purpose of *fu*-writing thus: "或以抒下情而通諷諭，或以宣上德而盡忠孝" (Xiao 1986 I: 3) ("Sometimes it was for the purpose of expressing the feelings of the emperor's subjects and conveying subtle criticism and advice. Other times it was for the purpose of proclaiming the superior's virtue and demonstrating utmost loyalty and filial obedience" [Knechtges 1982 II: 95]). In both cases, the *fu* are composed with an aim to persuading the audience. But since the writer's immediate audience is the emperor himself, the political decorum requires him to deliver criticism in an indirect and oblique manner. Sarah Spence suggests that in the primary relationship of author to audience, "the author is allied with the positive and powerful force of reason, while the audience, in its unknown and ultimately enigmatic capacity, is linked with desire" (1988: 5). Unlike the Roman orator who tries to overwhelm the audience at the forum by his reason and power, the *fu* writer has to take into account the emperor's desire and deploys, or even plays down, the force of his own reason in a very deliberate way. Yang Xiong's "Rhapsody on the Tall Poplars Palace" is a case in point, for, as the writer himself proclaims, it is written for the purpose of swaying the emperor's opinion (Xiao 1986 I: 404). At first sight it might seem that Yang is siding with the host's apology for the imperial hunt; however, the writer's views are somehow channeled through the words of the guest. In other words, Yang, while employing the guest as his mouthpiece, deliberately obscures his position by the counter argument of the host. Throughout the whole *fu*, there is no direct criticism of the emperor and the conversion scene, as it always is, comes as an self-edification on the part of the emperor.

The in-betweenness of the *fu* writer's position and the concomitant tension of reason and desire are intertwined with the ambivalent

attitude toward the *fu*. It was during the reign of Emperor Wu that Confucianism was instituted as the official creed of the state. At the instigation of some of his Confucian councilors (especially Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, himself also a *fu* writer), Emperor Wu founded the imperial university (Taixue 太學) in which the five Classics were taught (Lin 1975: 70). Ethically and politically minded, the Confucianists hold an utilitarian view of literature and accord to literature the primary function of conveying moral/ethical edification. Especially endorsed are the moral message, clear thought, and decent language, which constitute the Confucian code for proper literary expression.

In such cultural and political milieu, the *fu* inevitably takes on a dubious nature. On the one hand, the *fu* is invested with edifying function (as is clearly stated in Yang Xiong's preface to his "Sweet Springs Palace Rhapsody" ("Ganquan fu" 甘泉賦 [Xiao 1986 I: 321-2]), and there seems to be a symbiosis of the *fu*'s intent and the Confucian doctrine (Jian 1993: 215, 223, 231). In "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park," Sima Xiangru even inscribes the Confucian canon in the narrative and action of the hunt, making the physical event an allegory of ethical fulfillment in the preserve of the Six Classics (Xiao 1986 I: 377).

Despite this Confucian, ethical semblance, the suspicion of the unbridled desire and provocative excess of the *fu*'s rhetorical overindulgence remains unabated. The historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 reports that when Sima Xiangru's "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous" was presented to Emperor Wu and his court, objections were raised that its language "侈靡過其實，且非義理所尚" (Sima 1979 IV: 3043) ("the extravagant language of the poet had overstepped the bounds of reality and displayed too little respect for the dictates of reason and good sense" [Watson 1961 II: 321]). Yang Xiong, a follower of the Confucian school, in his later writings *Fayen wuzi pian* 法言吾子篇, or *Model Sayings*, denounces *fu* composition as a frivolous puerile exercise and professes his disillusionment with the *fu* because it encourages, rather than dissuades, culpable behavior (Yang 1983: 1). In *Hanshu* Yang is also quoted as saying that he has given up writing the

fu because "賦勸而不止，明矣。又頗似俳優淳于髡、優孟之徒，非法度所存，賢人君子詩賦之正也" (Ban 1977 V: 3575) ("The rhapsody only encourages and does not restrain. It is rather like an entertainer such as Chun-yu Kun or Jester Meng. It is nothing sustained by rules and measures, nor does it rectify behavior like the poems and rhapsodies of nobles and gentlemen" (qtd. in Knechtges 1976: 4). In Liu Xie's 劉勰celebrated *Wenxin diaolong kuashi pian* 文心雕龍夸飾篇, or the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, we have such a succinct criticism of Han *fu*："自宋玉景差，夸飾始盛，相如憑風，詭濫愈甚。故上林之館，奔星與宛虹入軒……及揚雄甘泉，酌其餘波，語瓌奇，則假珍於玉樹，言峻極，則顛墜於鬼神" ("Lavish exaggeration in description was first employed in the works of Song Yu and Jing Cai; and [Sima] Xiangru, who gave [Emperor Wu himself] a sense of flying on the wind, contributed to the ascendancy of literary oddities and excesses. In his 'Shanglin fu' he said that shooting stars and an arching rainbow entered the window of the Shanglin palace. . . . Yang Xiong, following in his wake, spoke of the precious in his 'Ganquan fu' by borrowing the gems of jade trees, and of height by referring to the fall of ghosts and deities" (Shih trans. 1970: 281-2, transliteration modified).

It is against such kind of hostile relegation that some scholars try to salvage the ethical status of the *fu*. This tradition goes back to Ban Gu, who, in order to justify the worth and respectability of the *fu*, claims in the preface to his "Two Capitals Rhapsody" that "賦者古詩之流也" (Xiao 1986 I: 1);[3] in other words, the *fu* was descended from the *Shijing* or the *Book of Odes*, which had supposedly been edited by Confucius himself. This theory that the *fu* is a continuation of classical poetry's ethical bent has been quite influential (e.g., Jian 1993: 134). Even though Ban Gu's account might be unhistorical (Watson 1971: 3-4), what matters here is that it is symbolic of the attempt to reconcile the incongruities of rhetorical desire and ethical reason occasioned by this literary practice. Besides, the rhetorical display of the *fu* can be related to the Confucian emphasis on *wen* 文, or refined language, as witnessed by the role of literature (*wenxue* 文學) and discourse (*yenyu* 言語) in the Confucian discipline (Jian

1980: 117).

The double nature of the *fu* as foregrounded by the conflicts of rhetoric and ethics, of desire and reason draws our attention to the competing cultural codes and different beliefs in the proper use of language as signs. The conflict of didacticism and entertainment, for example, is in essence a stylistic struggle whose problematics lies in the ways in which signs are to be used. For didactic purpose, words (signifiers) are mere vehicles of ideas or moral message (signified), while for entertainment the beauty and materiality of the words/signifiers are enjoyed in their own right. In view of didacticism, overemphasis on signifiers (flamboyant style and rhetorical excesses) is even regarded as unrestraint of dubious desire. In the case of the *fu*, therefore, the problematics of signifier/signified, form/content, entertainment/didacticism, desire/reason, and rhetoric/ethics become closely related to one another and as such they reveal the early yet recurrent Chinese conception of the verbal sign as realized in the attitude toward rhetorics in literary practice.

However, even the tension of signifier/signified and rhetoric/ethics needs to be cast in a new light. The sensuality and materiality of the signifier can become the signified. Despite all the harsh criticisms leveled against the aristocratic luxury in Han *fu* (e.g., Jiang 1988: 4), the formality and materiality of Han *fu* language reflect a certain reality of the time, thereby rendering the material display itself the subject (or even the moral, truthful message) of the *fu*. While reality in the *fu* seems to give way to fiction, fiction in turn becomes another form of reality, thus constituting a continuum (and a blurring as well) of fiction and reality. This can also be reinforced by the above discussion that rhetoric in fact has important ethical function in the socio-political context. This is also true with the *fu*'s literary forbears such as Qu Yuan and the *zonhengjia*. For all the *pathos* and rhetorical display associated with his poetry, Qu Yuan has long been hailed as a poet of great *ethos* and his *Lisao* 離騷, crisscrossed by both *pathos* and *ethos*, becomes an ethical/political allegory (Knechtges 1976: 16; Shi 1989: 141). The *zonghengjia*, on their part, in an effort to bring into being what they think a better ethico-political or-

der, engage in vigorous debating grounded in rhetorical techniques, indulging in pedantic exhibition by drawing support from histories and allusions.

On the other hand, as the dictates of Confucianism demand the *fu* to contain a didactic element, the ethical edification is bisected by the economy of rhetorics in the *fu*. This is testified by the fact that when Sima Xiangru presented the "Great Man Rhapsody" ("Daren fu" 大人賦) as a satire on Emperor Wu's interest in immortals, to the opposite effect, the emperor was made to feel more like walking on air (Sima 1979 IV: 3063). As Kenneth Ho rightly comments, "[That] the Han *fu* contain an element of *feng-chien* [諷諫] is, in fact, merely a gesture to the literary convention of the time when Confucianism became the orthodox creed of the state in the Han period" (1976: 181). In other words, the ethical intent of the *fu* becomes a rhetorical *topos*, which in turn can be undertaken in the service of certain ethical purports. In this regard, rhetoric and ethics are both defining and defined by each other. It is this mutual implication (in the literary text and in its cultural/political context as well) that makes up the richness and complexities of Han *fu*.

NOTES

[1] This comprehensiveness is a culmination of the rhetorical bent of *Chuci*. In Qu Yuan's *Zhaohun* 招魂, for example, there is an elaborate account of the comfort of the court and palace, the grandeur of arrangement, the serene gardens, wide-spreading flowers, the number of beauties, the wonder of dances, the fine food, the beautiful music, chess and other arts and entertainment—a paradise that keeps the spirit stay.

[2] Emperor Wu loved *Chuci*, the precursor of the *fu* genre, and composed "Rhapsody on Lady Li" ("Li Furen fu" 李夫人賦) as a lament for his deceased concubine (Ban 1977 V:3953-5); another piece "Song of the Autumn Wind" ("Qiufeng ci" 秋風辭) is also attributed to him (Xiao 1986 V:2025-6). *Hanshu yiwenzhi* 漢書藝文志 also reports that Emperor Wu composed two rhapsodies (Ban

1977 II: 1748).

[3] The significance of Ban's theory is evidenced by the fact that the preface to his rhapsody opens the renowned *Wenxuan*, and as such it serves virtually as a second introduction to that prestigious collection.

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