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978-0-521-10346-6 - The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the Fu of Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.-A.D. 18)

David R. Knechtges

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# The Han Rhapsody

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A study of the *Fu* of Yang Hsiung  
(53 B.C.-A.D. 18)

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To my respected teacher  
HELLMUT WILHELM  
*Professor Emeritus*  
*University of Washington*

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## Preface

This study of Yang Hsiung began in the autumn of 1963 while I was still an undergraduate at the University of Washington. I was introduced to the Han *fu* in Professor Hellmut Wilhelm's course in the history of Chinese literature. Discovering that the only translations of Yang Hsiung's major writings were the German renderings of Erwin von Zach,<sup>1</sup> I was bold enough to make my own clumsy translations. Encouraged by Professor Wilhelm, I continued to study more *fu*, and in my reading of these poems I became increasingly convinced that the key to understanding this perplexing literary genre lay in an examination of early Chinese rhetoric. While studying Chinese literature at Harvard University under James Robert Hightower in 1965, I began a study of Han rhetoric, and I was helped immensely by the timely appearance of Professor James I. Crump's study on the rhetorical features of the *Chan-kuo ts' e*.<sup>2</sup>

When I returned to Seattle in the summer of 1965 I resumed my study of Han literature. Already by this time two important monographs on the *fu* had been published: Yves Hervouet's study of Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju,<sup>3</sup> and Nakashima Chiaki's extensive monograph on the *fu* of the Former and Later Han dynasties.<sup>4</sup> It was particularly gratifying to find that Professor Nakashima devoted much of his volume to the relationship between the *fu* and the rhetorical tradition. During 1966 I was fortunate enough to study for a brief period with Professor Robert O. Payne of the University of Washington's department of English. Professor Payne had just completed a study of Chaucer and medieval rhetoric,<sup>5</sup> and I learned much about Western rhetoric from him.

The present study is a substantially revised version of my doctoral dissertation 'Yang Shyong, the *Fuh*, and Han Rhetoric' (University of Washington, 1968). This work contained a detailed biography of Yang Hsiung followed by an examination of the rhetorical features and conventions of the Han *fu*, particularly as reflected in the writings of the Yang Hsiung.

It should be noted that I use the word rhetoric in two senses: one, in the primary sense of persuasive speech; and secondarily, as ornamental speech. The single term 'rhetoric' generally designates the primary meaning of the

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word. The secondary sense is normally indicated by the qualified terms 'ornamental rhetoric', 'decorative rhetoric', etc.

Another term that may be somewhat confusing to the Sinologist is the use of the word 'poem' to refer to a composition in the *fu* genre. The use of this term implies no judgment on the prose or verse character of the *fu*, and simply means 'a composition, whether in prose or verse, having beauty of thought or language'.<sup>6</sup>

There are many who have been helpful to me in my studies. My first expression of gratitude must go to Hellmut Wilhelm, who introduced me to Yang Hsiung. I hope some of his enthusiasm for Yang's writing has been imparted to me. I owe a special debt to another of my respected teachers, Professor Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Chinese literature and language is always astounding. He was kind enough to carefully read my manuscript, and thanks to his critical eye, the errors are less than they would have been. Also helpful on crucial problems of classical language was Professor Paul L-M. Serruys, who has had a long-term interest in Yang Hsiung. I am especially grateful to Professor Vincent Yu-chung Shih, who gave me much aid in unravelling the abstruse philosophical problems of Yang Hsiung's *Model Sayings* and *The Great Dark*. My colleague C. H. Wang and my former colleague, Hans Frankel of Yale University, have both read my manuscript and offered constructive criticism. I especially want to thank Professor Frankel for writing the Foreword.

Others who helped me in ways impossible to specify here include: Jack L. Dull, Roy Andrew Miller, Robert O. Payne, and the late Hsü Dau-lin of the University of Washington; Li Fang-kuei of the University of Hawaii; Maureen Robertson of Rochester University; James Robert Hightower of Harvard University; Chow Tse-tsung and Francis A. Westbrook of the University of Wisconsin; Jerry Swanson of the University of Vermont; Stephen Owen and Hugh M. Stimson of Yale University; Yves Hervouet of the University of Versailles; Timoteus Pokora, Prague; and J. T. Wixted, Oxford.

D. R. K.

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## Abbreviations

- AM: *Asia Major*  
 AO: *Archiv Orientalní*  
 AS: *Asiatische Studien*  
 BD: *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*  
 BMFEA: *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*  
 BSOAS: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*  
 CHC: *Ch'u hsüeh chi*  
 CHW: *Ch'üan Han wen*  
 CKT: *Chan-kuo t'se*  
 F YYS: *Fa-yen yi-shu*  
 HCTC: *Hsi-ching tsa-chi*  
 HFHD: *History of the Former Han Dynasty*  
 HJAS: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*  
 HNT: *Huai-nan tzu*  
 HS: *Han shu*  
 JA: *Journal asiatique*  
 JAS: *Journal of Asian Studies*  
 JAOS: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*  
 JNCBRAS: *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*  
 KWY-A: *Ku-wen yüan, Tai-nan ko ts'ung-shu* ed.  
 KWY-B: *Ku-wen yüan, SPTK* ed.  
 LSCC: *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*  
 Mh: *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*  
 MS: *Monumenta Serica*  
 MTB: *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*  
 PTSC: *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao*  
 SC: *Shih chi*  
 SPPY: *Ssu-pu pei-yao*  
 SPTK: *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an*  
 TP: *T'oung Pao*  
 WH: *Wen hsüan*  
 YWLC: *Yi-wen lei-chü*

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## Foreword

A sort of divine justice guides ultimate judgments in literary history. No matter how badly and how long great writers, movements, and art forms are downgraded or ignored, eventually their true worth will be recognized. For centuries, *gongorismo* was considered a symptom of decadence in the development of Spanish literature, but since 1927 Góngora has been celebrated as one of Spain's finest poets. In France, the unique beauty of that country's baroque literature has been appreciated only since the late 1940s. In our own time, too, we have witnessed the rehabilitation of Li Ho as one of the great Chinese poets, after nearly a thousand years of neglect. Now we have a book which establishes the rightful positions in Chinese literature for a brilliant writer and an important poetic genre.

True, Yang Hsiung has had other scholarly champions before, as Professor Knechtges points out, but the full range of his literary qualities and his particular contributions to the *fu* genre have never been as thoroughly explored and as fairly assessed as in this book. And though Knechtges benefits by earlier investigations of the *fu*, he breaks new ground in reaching a broader and deeper understanding of this literary genre and in demolishing the prejudices that are still widely held against it. Typical of what many specialists in Chinese literature have thought of the *fu* down to modern times is the following statement: '...even the best *fu* has become difficult to understand, let alone to appreciate' (Lai Ming, *A History of Chinese Literature* [first published 1964], New York: Capricorn Books, 1966, p. 107).

Despite his youth, David R. Knechtges has already had a distinguished academic career, and mastered several diverse fields of study, all of which come into play in the present work. He has become an expert on the literature of the Han period (he is currently collaborating with Hellmut Wilhelm on a literary history of that period), on the *fu* genre, on the rhetorical tradition in China and Europe, and on Yang Hsiung. It is no accident that he has been attracted to this particular writer, for the two men have much in common. Yang Hsiung, like David Knechtges and his teacher Hellmut Wilhelm (to whom this book is dedicated), was a polyhistor with wide-ranging interests and extraordinary literary sensibility. What makes the study of Yang Hsiung's works especially

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rewarding is that he was not only a brilliant writer but also a literary critic, graced with the rare gift of self-criticism. On the other hand, he is one of the most difficult authors in the Chinese language, and a lesser scholar would be unable to translate and interpret him as accurately, lucidly, and profoundly as David Knechtges does in this volume. Nor would a lesser scholar be able to muster so much secondary literature – in many languages – on the complex subject, and to adduce so many illuminating parallels from Western civilization to the phenomena being studied.

It is interesting to reflect on the different developments of the rhetorical tradition in China and the West. In China, as this book shows, it arose among itinerant political theorists and promoters of specific political programs. It soon became a literary tradition, in marked contrast to ancient Greece and Rome, where oratory played an important role. Aside from the arguments put forward at court, seeking to persuade the ruler to adopt the viewpoint of an individual or a group, there was little demand in early China for the art of elocution. Conspicuously absent in China were the Western legal tradition where lawyers pleaded their clients' or the state's case, and the tradition of public political debate in a popular assembly, forum, parliament, or mass meeting. At the same time, the high value which the Chinese have always placed on the written word, and the extraordinary literacy of Chinese civilization, may help to explain why rhetoric ceased to be an oral function and became instead a genre of poetry. The astounding popularity of this genre in Han times may also have been a reaction against the prevailing trend toward brevity, conciseness, and understatement in Chinese poetry and prose. Admirable though these qualities are, there can be too much of a good thing, and the opposite tendencies, long suppressed, burst forth with tremendous vigor in the Han *fu*. The special qualities of this unique Chinese art form, so long deprecated and misunderstood, will be appreciated by the readers of this book.

HANS H. FRANKEL  
*Yale University*