THE FU GENRE OF IMPERIAL CHINA

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THE FU GENRE OF IMPERIAL CHINA

STUDIES IN THE RHAPSODIC IMAGINATION

Edited by
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We dedicate this volume to Chen Zhi, director of the Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology, Hong Kong Baptist University.

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PREFACE

The generic term *fu* 賦, as well as the complementary term *shi* 詩, are used in roman font without italicization throughout this volume. In discussions of the word *fu* encompassing other meanings apart from the name of the literary genre, it is italicized as usual. Poetic compositions whose genre is not otherwise specified can be assumed to belong to the fu genre.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: THE RHAPSODIC IMAGINATION

Nicholas Morrow Williams*

THE *FU* 賦 is a major genre of Chinese literature, intricately involved with the society and culture of imperial China from the Han through the Qing dynasties. It is a poetic form of tireless ambition that has been used for exhaustive descriptions of cities and palaces, as well as private reflections and lamentations, but also for carefully modulated political protest and esoteric ruminations on philosophical subtleties. Though no English term even approximates it, "rhapsody" at least suggests the energy and recitative origins of the fu. But the particular imaginative scope of the fu is unique to Chinese literature; it has been the tool of choice for Chinese poets aiming to articulate the features of the greatest cities and the tiniest insects. In politics, the fu has been the definitive genre by which to narrate the ruin of dynasties, or to counsel against the sins that incur the ruin. Whether political, astronomical, geographical, zoological, mineral, botanical, historical, metaphysical, anthropological, or horticultural, every field of learning about the exterior world lay within the scope of the rhapsodic imagination. This volume seeks to illustrate and interpret some of the key aspects of the fu genre throughout the history of imperial China, as one of the primary means by which Chinese writers limned the very limits of their universe and portrayed its diverse contents.

Various tools of literary criticism or historical analysis could be used to examine it, but first and foremost fu should be seen as a variety of Chinese poetry. This approach follows the lead of the great historian and poet Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), who opened his magisterial composition on the "Two Capitals" 兩都賦 with the assertion that: "It has been said that the fu is a derivation from the ancient *Songs*."[1] Ban Gu was relating this genre to the *Shijing* 詩經, the classic anthology of poems supposedly edited by Confucius, and this filiation has the effect of placing it squarely in the main tradition of Chinese poetry. Moreover, since "Two Capitals" was chosen as the first piece in the supreme anthology of early medieval literature, the *Wen xuan* 文選, this sentence would also open that anthology and define the status of the fu for ages to come.[2]

The source of this quotation is unknown, and it is possible that Ban Gu is simply asserting his own viewpoint.[3] Yet Ban Gu had a strong basis for his argument. By this time

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1 或曰賦者古詩之流也. *Wen xuan*, 1.1.

2 For the remainder of this volume *fu* and its counterpart *shi* will not be italicized but treated as English words.

3 Cf. Cheng Zhangcan's more detailed discussion of this issue in the fourth chapter of this volume.

in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the fu was well established as the pre-eminent form of court literature. The earliest examples of the fu seem to have been recited at court, and the word fu itself originally was a verb used in the compound *fu shi*, "to recite a poem."[4] As one of the Six Principles in the *Book of Songs*, it may have been a particular way of performing those ancient poems. So Ban Gu was correct, from an etymological point of view, to relate the fu to the *Book of Songs*.[5] At the same time, the poems of the *Elegies of Chu* (Chuci 楚辭), in particular the "Li sao" 離騷 (Encountering sorrow) of Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 300 BCE), were retrospectively treated as fu by some scholars.[6] These poems are in general longer and more rhetorically elaborate than those of the *Book of Songs*. Combining influences from both traditions of the *Book of Songs* and the *Elegies of Chu*, the fu was a synthesis of earlier poetic genres and flourished as the dominant means of literary expression in the Han dynasty.

After the Han, then, Ban Gu's understanding of the main tradition of Chinese poetry, as one developing out of the *Book of Songs* into the fu, would become widely accepted. Not just in the *Wen xuan* but as late as the Song dynasty (960–1279), in the vast anthology *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, the fu would be placed first among genres. The fu was long considered a privileged genre of Chinese poetry, even the foremost literary heir of the classical tradition. Though in the late imperial era it vied for significance with numerous other literary forms, the fu maintained a prominent place in literati culture. Beginning already in the Tang dynasty, fu composition was sometimes required for the imperial examinations, and the genre continued to play a part in them up through the Qing dynasty alongside the examination essay.[7] One contributor to this volume argues convincingly that the fu was "uniquely suited to the spirit of the age" as late as the Ming dynasty.[8]

Attempting to define the fu genre as a whole is as difficult as to set forth a single definition for poetry, or humour, or beauty. The only way to make a reasonable approach at it is to characterize certain subtypes of the fu in particular periods and contexts.[9] Roughly speaking, we may identify at least four major varieties of fu: the grand fu of the Han, the lyrical fu, the regulated fu, and the essayistic fu.[10] The grand fu is best represented by the

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4 See the concise account of the origins of the fu in Knechtges (Kang Dawei), "Lun futi de yuanliu."

5 For more details see Su Jui-lung's discussion in the second chapter of this volume.

6 See, for instance, the "Monograph on Arts and Letters" 藝文志 compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 CE), in *Han shu* 30.1747–56. For a more detailed survey of the relationship between fu and *sao*, see Guo Jianxun, *Chuci yu Zhongguo gudai yunwen*, 15–65.

7 Recent monographs discussing the relationship between the fu and the imperial examinations include Zhan Hanglun, *Tangdai keju yu shifu*, and Xu Jie, *Fuxue: Zhidu yu piping*. There is a useful survey of the role of fu in the Qing examinations in Yu Shiling, "Lun Qingdai keju yu cifu."

8 See Chapter 5.

9 In the same way, Robert Neather warns "against attempting to find 'universal' definitions of the *fu*, in favour of a far more 'localized' approach which focuses on particular generic subgroups." See Neather, "The *Fu* Genre in the Mid-Tang," 3. The summary below is not "localized" sufficiently to be comprehensively accurate but is merely intended as a sketch of some major subvarieties.

10 The proper distinction and classification of the fu is a major and involved problem. Since different generic categories arose in different periods and were normally applied only retrospectively, the

"Imperial Park" 上林賦 of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE) and the "Two Capitals" of Ban Gu. These are extremely long poems, rich in descriptive detail and naturalistic catalogues. They are also distinguished by the use of descriptive binomes, disyllabic words whose pronunciations normally alliterate or rhyme, which are used as much for phonoaesthetic effect as for semantic value. Already in the Han, though, there were also numerous lyrical fu, normally shorter pieces, composed in a single meter, often tetrasyllabic or the *sao* meter of the *Elegies of Chu*. Indeed, Qu Yuan's "Li sao" might be considered a lyrical fu of extended length. So throughout the Han and Six Dynasties period the fu encompassed a range of possibilities, some indistinguishable from contemporary shi poetry.[11]

The Tang dynasty saw the appearance of the regulated fu.[12] This form follows strict rules of tonal prosody and rhyme changes, normally composed to a series of eight rhymes which themselves follow certain rules of prosodic variation. The strict regulation of this form made it especially appropriate for the civil service examinations, since it was an excellent test of one's mastery of literary technique. The essayistic fu (*wen fu* 文賦), which thrived especially in the Song dynasty, was the opposite: written under the influence of the *guwen* tendency, it did not obey strict metrical or prosodic rules.[13] Though occasionally described as the "prose fu," in fact these pieces still employ rhyme, parallelism, and meter. In some cases they exhibit even more intricate sound patterning than other types of fu, as we will see later in this introduction.

Though fu continued to be popular in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing, the late imperial period did not see the creation of new subgenres. Still, fu of each of the above types continued to be composed, and rather than fading out, they remained available for use by writers who needed them. Even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, some scholars have continued to write fu. The Japanese Sinologist Suzuki Torao 鈴木虎雄 (1878–1963) composed a fu lamenting the fall of the Qing dynasty;[14] Hong Kong scholar and polymath Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤 (1917–2018) composed a number of mournful fu on the turmoil and suffering caused by the Japanese occupation of China.[15] Thus the fu has been an integral part of Chinese classical poetry ever since the Han dynasty, though employed in an iridescent variety of specific subtypes.

Western scholarship on the fu has long misrepresented it as a form of prose. One of the most accessible surveys of the fu, for instance, describes it as "rhyme-prose," a

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classification of any particular work can lead to contentious debate. For a concise survey of different historical classifications, concluding in a magisterial chart, see Ma, *Lidai cifu yanjiu shiliao gaishu*, 10–21. My summary here is only heuristic.

11 For more detailed discussions of these complex interrelations throughout the medieval period, see Chapters 3 and 4 of this volume.

12 For a careful study of the tonal regulations of Tang regulated fu, see Kwong, "Tangdai lüfu yu lü."

13 There is at least one monograph on this important topic: Gu Rouli, *Bei Song wenfu zonglun*. See also Zhang Hongsheng, "Wenfu de xingcheng ji qi shidai neihan."

14 "Shin o awaremu fu" 哀清賦. See Suzuki, *Gyōkanroku*, 186–87.

15 See Williams, *The Residue of Dreams*, 28–33.

concept hard to comprehend or even parse, since texts that rhyme are generally identified as verse, not prose.[16] Even a recent history of Chinese literature includes the following sentence: "The truth is that poetry from the fifth century on has also taken over some of the traits and topics traditionally associated with *fu* …."[17] The problem with this kind of statement is that it implies that fu normally existed in some kind of compartment isolated from the rest of the poetic and literary tradition. Marginalizing the fu in this way has led to longstanding critical neglect, especially in comparison to its obvious importance in Chinese letters and culture. The challenges to studying such a singular genre are already serious enough without adding the unnecessary confusion of isolating it from the poetic tradition to which it belongs.

To some extent this tendency is also visible in Chinese scholarship, due to the influence of the modern Chinese language. The term *shige* 詩歌 ("poems and songs") was chosen as the disyllabic compound used to represent the Western term "poetry" (*la poésie*, *die Dichtung*, etc.). Probably this was the most suitable choice, yet it was by no means the only possible one. Even today *shici* 詩詞, "shi and *ci*," is frequently used to designate classical Chinese poetry, including the *ci* lyrics that thrived in the Song dynasty together with shi poetry. Another term, *yunwen* 韻文, "rhymed literature" or "verse," is in current use and includes fu as well. Before the Song dynasty, however, the more common compound was *shifu* 詩賦, treating these forms as the complementary poles of Chinese poetry. Thus Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) wrote in his great "Essay on Literature" 文賦:[18]

> The Lyric (*shi*), born of pure emotion, is gossamer fibre woven into the finest fabric;
> The Rhapsody (*fu*), being true to the objects, is vividness incarnate.
>
> 詩緣情而綺靡，賦體物而瀏亮。

For Lu Ji, the shi and fu are two poetic forms of comparable weight and significance. Each is expressive and varied according to circumstance, but also has its own specific virtues. The shi emphasizes emotion while the fu tends to vivid representation of objects. Both forms, though, are "poetic" by any definition.

Moreover, from a comparative perspective, its elaborate meters, rhyming structure, and ornate rhetoric all imply that the fu should be treated first and foremost as a variety of poetry. There is no objective rule for determining what is or is not poetry, of course, as the term in modern languages has developed a subjective quality that resists any universal application. What this volume will set out to show, however, is that poetic treatment of the fu is highly rewarding and allows us to make better sense of both fu and Chinese poetry as a whole. Perhaps most importantly, recognizing the place of the fu in the history of Chinese

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16 See Watson, *Chinese Rhyme-Prose*.

17 Tian Xiaofei, "From the Eastern Jin through the Early Tang (317–649)," 1:264. The same history identifies *shi* and poetry even more rigidly in later periods, as in the following remark on Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–1151): "Today we have twenty or so poems and prose essays as well as about fifty song lyrics by this extraordinary writer." See Michael Fuller and Shuen-fu Lin, "North and South: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," 1:469.

18 *Wen xuan* 17.766. Translation modified from Chen Shih-hsiang, quoted in *Lu Ji Wen fu jiaoshi*, 42.

poetry expands our conception of its literary value, and allows us to re-examine many of the most distinctive features of Chinese poetry. For far too long, Western impressions of Chinese poetry have been dominated by the spare, imagistic quatrains of the Tang dynasty, which, splendid as they are, cannot possibly represent the full range of Chinese poetry. The fu is an inalienable component of Chinese poetry and civilization.

Over the past century scholarship on the fu has alternately thrived and stultified, mainly for reasons exogenous to literary history per se. In the twentieth century, fu poems were often excluded from histories of Chinese poetry for ideological reasons. Beginning with the May Fourth movement and climaxing in Maoist China, Chinese scholars often devalued the fu as a type of aristocratic literature that did not reflect popular concerns. Chinese poetry was viewed as originating in folk songs that conveyed the emotions of the people. With the benefit of more extensive research, however, it has become clear that even the *Shijing* has an aristocratic and court-centric element, so the factual premise of this exclusion is mistaken, even leaving aside its evaluative component.[19] Happily, the past several decades have seen a renaissance of fu scholarship in the Chinese-speaking world. There are now too many important scholars and Chinese-language studies dealing with the fu to detail here, but we might briefly mention publications from the 1960s onwards by Gong Kechang 龔克昌, Ma Jigao馬積高, and Chien Tsung-wu 簡宗梧, as well as the younger scholars Xu Jie 許結, Zhan Hanglun 詹杭倫, Yu-yu Cheng鄭毓瑜, and Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦 (the last two both represented in this volume). All these scholars have shed new light on the historical origins and cultural contexts of the fu.

The English-speaking world, by contrast, has seen relatively few studies of the fu. Despite a strong start with Arthur Waley's and Cyril le Gros Clark's translations of numerous fu, there have been relatively few studies of the genre in the past half-century.[20] Though there are scattered discussion and translations of individual pieces, Western-language scholarship in this area is still relatively backwards, and many treatments of Chinese poetry do not incorporate fu at all. The primary publications in this area are David R. Knechtges's studies of Han and Six Dynasties fu, as well as his complete three-volume translation of the fu in the *Wen xuan*, and Burton Watson's translation of some of the same pieces in *Chinese Rhyme-Prose*.[21] The seminal importance of Knechtges's work can be seen throughout this volume in the many references to his studies and translations. But a genre as important as the fu should not be treated as the province of a single scholar, and one aim of this volume is to demonstrate how the fu ought to be incorporated into the work of every serious scholar of Chinese literature.

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19 For a recent take on these issues with respect to the *Shijing*, see Shaughnessy, "Unearthed Documents and the Question of the Oral Versus Written Nature of the *Classic of Poetry*."

20 Waley, *The Temple and Other Poems*, translates eleven fu; Clark, *The Prose-Poetry of Su Tung-p'o*, the entire fu corpus of Su Shi.

21 For a partial bibliography of Knechtges's articles, see "Bibliography of David R. Knechtges." Apart from this there have, of course, been numerous individual studies of specific fu, but few surveys of the genre in any later periods after the Han apart from Paul W. Kroll's important study, "The Significance of the *Fu* in the History of T'ang Poetry."

Given the current state of research, this volume will not attempt a comprehensive survey, but rather aims to identify some prominent aspects of the fu's development throughout imperial Chinese literature. Since the fu underwent important developments in its history of over two millennia, it would be foolish to attempt to generalize beyond historical periods, and it is impossible to sum up the essence of the fu with any single word or form. Instead, this volume will distinguish four key elements of fu writing: recitation and rhetorical display, lyricism and metrical form, dialogue and philosophical discourse, and political critique.[22] Though any individual fu may illustrate these features only partially, they recur frequently enough to be distinctive characteristics of the fu in general. By examining each in turn we can sum up some of the basic features of the fu genre. Individual chapters of this book will further examine features of the fu in specific historical periods.

The first section of this book, containing the second and third chapters, examines some of the distinctive features of fu from the Han dynasty, when many of the genre's conventions were established. One of the essential qualities of early fu is that of "epideictic" rhetoric, the use of certain figures of speech and sound patterning purely for the purpose of display. We can understand this element partly in terms of the origins of the fu genre. As Su Jui-lung shows in the next chapter, the original meaning of the term as a generic designation is closest to "recitation." The fu is essentially a long recitation on a given topic, intended to show off its particular features. Su's study is invaluable for elucidating the performative contexts that initially defined the fu genre. Even the more bookish compositions of later dynasties were grounded in this tradition.

It was the great translator Arthur Waley who first rendered the term fu as "rhapsody," which clearly identifies its nature as a grand "recitation."[23] The ancient Greek rhapsodists were the blind reciters of Homeric poetry, and there is indeed an affinity between the tireless flow of epic poetry and the fu genre. Waley described the virtuosity of the early fu writers as "a glittering torrent of words," and readers today can still appreciate the overwhelming impression created by fu language. In the third chapter of this book, "Into the New Realm of *Belles Lettres*: Intersections of Sevens and Song Verses in Jian'an Poetry," Hsiang-lin Shih shows how the fu-like Sevens genre appealed to its audience through the beautiful images of its rhetoric.

It is important to note, while highlighting the distinctive features of the fu genre as a whole, that individual fu can be similar to contemporary shi poems. This is particularly true during the Six Dynasties period, when the fu is said to have undergone a process of "lyricization." Cheng Zhangcan reconsiders this problem in the fourth chapter, "The Assimilation and Dissimilation of Fu and Shi Poetry up to the Tang Dynasty." Cheng examines how the two forms mutually influenced one another in the medieval period,

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22 It is the recitation and display, as well as the use of dialogue and introduction of discursive analysis, that distinguish the fu from the shi genre; while it is the metrical form and political critique which are consistent with expectations for shi poetry.

23 Waley, *More Translations from the Chinese*, 14. Aristotle also uses the verb ῥαψῳδέω to refer specifically, and rather condescendingly, to performance: ἐπεὶ ἔστι περιεργάζεσθαι τοῖς σημείοις καὶ ῥαψῳδοῦντα, ὅπερ [ἐστὶ] Σωσίστρατος. See *Poetics*, 1462a.

as well as how each distinguished itself. While Cheng discusses the shifting modes of the fu in the medieval period, the fifth chapter, by Casey Schoenberger, examines the transformed aesthetics of the fu in the late Ming dynasty. Schoenberger's study, "Xu Wei's Early Modern Rhapsodies: Catalogue and Critique, Lyricism and Logic," is careful to situate Xu Wei's 徐渭 (1521–1593) fu compositions in their unique cultural milieu. New attention to personal taste and material consumption introduced a new and multilayered sense of self-consciousness to the fu. At the same time, Schoenberger's detailed treatment of their formal features confirms the value of treating fu as an independent poetic genre.

Notably, the fu was capable of certain effects that were hard or impossible to reproduce in other poetic forms. Two related devices that were especially distinctive are the use of dialogue, and also discursive passages on philosophical topics. Nicholas Morrow Williams's chapter on "The Metaphysical Rhapsody of the Six Dynasties" studies how the fu of the Six Dynasties integrated abstract discussions of Daoist or Buddhist subjects, a development that sheds much light on the literary history of the period. Another element of some fu that is difficult to replicate in other poetic genres is the use of multiple speakers. The grand fu of the Han, for instance, typically involve two or three separate speakers who attempt to outdo one another with their displays of rhetoric and poetic verve. Robert Neather's chapter, "Argumentation and Generic Change in the Mid-Tang Fu," highlights this aspect of the fu in the mid-Tang period. Examining the fu on "Suffering the Pitiless Rains" and other works by Li Guan 李觀 (766–794), Neather shows how the dialogue with a fictional interlocutor remained a prominent device even in the Tang. This is a rhetorical device that is relatively rare in the history of the shi, but fundamental to the fu. Incidentally, both Williams and Neather discuss certain compositions in genres beyond the fu that share fu-like qualities in prosody or structure, confirming the importance of the rhapsodic imagination to Chinese literature in general.

Chinese poetry of every form or genre has been used for political advocacy, and the fu is no exception, but the flexibility of the fu form allows, potentially, for political messages of unparalleled subtlety.[24] Two different studies in this volume address different uses of the fu for political critique, both explicit and implicit. Though the magical or imaginary journey can be found as early as the "Li sao," Y. Edmund Lien's chapter shows how the theme developed in the fu of the Han dynasty. The astronomical imagery of Zhang Heng's "Contemplating the Mystery" is used for political and personal ends, to convey Zhang's sense of cosmic unity and order. Finally, Yu-yu Cheng's wide-ranging study, "A New Discourse on 'Lament for the South' in the Fu of the Ming–Qing Transition," transforms our understanding of the fu genre as a whole. Though the novels of the Ming and Qing have long been celebrated in Western scholarship, and recent studies have also drawn our attention to classical verse and prose, Western scholars have barely even mentioned the fu genre. Yet Cheng shows how the fu was one of the primary means by which scholars who endured the cataclysmic dynastic transition of the seventeenth century

24 Bischoff's study *Interpreting the Fu* emphasizes this dimension of the genre to an extreme, neglecting its other features.

conveyed their outrage and lament. The great political frustration of these literati could have no grander and more complete expression than in the ancient genre of the fu.

The chapters of this volume aim to present new perspectives on one of China's oldest and culturally central literary forms. The fu is a major part of China's poetic heritage from the very beginning, with its direct inspiration from the *Book of Songs*. It remains so at the end of the imperial era, as one of the most powerful modes of protest in the face of conquest and civil war. There are countless texts, authors, and theoretical issues that still lie completely open for future research. Western scholarship has barely discussed the development of the genre after the Tang, the literary features of the regulated fu, or its role in the imperial examinations. The reason only two essays in this volume deal with fu from after the Song dynasty is not because these are scarce, but rather because so much fundamental research in this area lies undone. Thus the goal of this volume is to set forth some modes of inquiry suited to the fu as a genre of Chinese poetry, and to prepare the way for more detailed and comprehensive work to come.

In the remainder of this introduction I will use a single, widely celebrated and renowned example of the fu to illustrate how the genre defies some widespread modern misconceptions. The fu has faced considerable opposition in modern literary scholarship. The fu is sometimes described as a formal oddity halfway between poetry and prose; it is denigrated as a minor genre that flourished only in a particular period of Chinese history, the Han dynasty; and it has been rejected as an artificial form unsuitable to the expression of ordinary feelings or personal experience. Yet all these misconceptions can easily be dispelled by the sole example of Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037–1101) "Rhapsody on the Red Cliff" 赤壁賦, one of the best-loved works of the entire Chinese literary tradition. This is one of two fu on the same topic that Su Shi composed in Huangzhou 黃州 (modern Huanggang 黃岡, southeastern Hubei), where he had been exiled in 1080.[25] This period of reclusion was a time of great productivity for Su as well, and the fu may be considered one way that he responded to political frustration through his art. Moreover, it integrates Su's reflections on life and death, philosophy and history, in a vividly dramatic presentation. As Ronald Egan comments, "the first Red Cliff rhapsody may be considered the culmination of several strands of his thought, and probably their most satisfying literary embodiment."[26] Composed a millennium after the Han dynasty, displaying all of Su Shi's brilliance and originality, yet partaking in the traditional features of the fu form as well, this piece is the finest demonstration of the fu genre in both its generic conventions and its expressive freedom.[27]

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25 *Su Shi wenji* 1.5–7. This piece is sometimes identified as the "Former Rhapsody on the Red Cliff" 前赤壁賦 in contradistinction to the "Latter Rhapsody on the Red Cliff" 後赤壁賦 (*Su Shi wenji*, 1.8).

26 Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 226.

27 For a visual representation of the poem produced not long after the poem itself, see the painting by Li Song 李嵩 (active 1190–1230) reproduced on the cover of this volume. Jerome Silbergeld points out that visual representations of the two "Red Cliff" rhapsodies can be distinguished by the presence or absence of the crane. Since it is absent in Li Song's image, the subject must be the first rhapsody. See Silbergeld, "Back to the Red Cliff," 23–24.

The "Rhapsody on the Red Cliff" is a representative example of the "essayistic fu" that thrived in the Song. Here *fu* might best be rendered in English as "verse essay," since the work has something of the spontaneous and occasional quality of an essay. The following translation is intended to represent this formal structure in a few distinctive ways. Formally, the piece is written primarily in rhyming verse, but with irregular and free rhythms that clearly distinguish it from an ordinary shi poem. At the same time it also includes passages of regular shi, as well as a few brief unrhymed sections, setting the stage at the beginning or providing transitions later. Robert Hegel sums up its structure as "composite" and calls the piece a "very carefully constructed art work."[28] To represent this formal structure in translation, I have presented the rhyming passages as verse, with line breaks and end-rhyme in approximately the same places as in the Chinese.[29] The translation begins as prose; the first level of indentation represents rhyming passages; and double-indented passages are quotations of songs or shi poetry.[30]

In the autumn of 1082, when the moon of the seventh month was at its ascendancy,[31] Master Su and a guest passed leisurely in a boat under the Red Cliff. A cool breeze blew along gently, and barely a ripple appeared. Raising a glass to toast my friend, I recited the ode of the bright moon, and sang stanzas in praise of its retiring beauty.[32]

Somewhat later,
The moon rose up over the hills in the East,
And between Dipper and Ox it lingered high;
A white dew covered the Yangtze's face,
And a watery sheen had filled the sky.

Wherever one reed-like boat might wander along,
As far through empty space as endless miles extend,
Gallant as one traversing void and driving the wind,
But never knowing where it all will end;

Floating carefree as one departed alone from the world,
Who has sprouted wings and risen up never to die:
Once we had drunk deep and were full of joy,
I beat on the hull and sang to my friend.

28 Hegel, "The Sights and Sounds of Red Cliffs," 11.

29 The rhyme structure and phonic patterning of the original text is extremely intricate and it is possible only to make some suggestive parallels. To specify the rhymes, I have inserted in the Chinese text reconstructions of the rhyme groups following Wang Li's Song-dynasty rhymes, as given in *Hanyu yuyin shi*, 296–341. Note, however, that our sources for Song phonology are problematic (because of the strong tendency to anachronism in rhyme books).

30 Previous translations include Clark, *Prose-poetry of Su Tung-p'o*, 126–35; Bischoff, *Interpreting the Fu*, 211–13; Watson, *Su Tung-p'o*, 87–93; Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 222–23; Hegel, "Sights and Sounds of Red Cliff," 16–17.

31 On the sixteenth day of the month, that is, August 12, 1082.

32 *Shijing*, 143.

A song like this:
With paddles made from cassia, and oars of orchid scent;
Striking the gleaming emptiness, up a stream of light I went.
Far, far, far away was the desire of my heart;
I gazed towards that Beauty in Heaven set apart.

My friend could play the panpipes, so he accompanied the song with his music.
The sound of it was low and deep,
As if bearing resentment, or admiration,
Full of tears, or incrimination––
Its aftertone was tremulous and faint,
But unbroken as a single filament;
Making the flood dragon dance in a delitescent vale,
As if causing a widow in a solitary boat to wail.[33]

Master Su looked depressed. He straightened his collar and sat up erect, asking his friend: "Why must it all be like this?"

His friend answered:
" 'The moon is bright and scant the stars,
Crows and magpies fly southwards.'[34]

"Isn't this a poem by Cao Mengde?[35]
To the west we gaze towards Xiakou;
To the east we gaze towards Wuchang.[36]
Mountains and rivers into each other flow,
Enveloped by lush foliage all along.[37]
Isn't this how it was when Mengde was entrapped by Master Zhou? He had just conquered Jingzhou, and descended past Jiangling, following the flow of the Yangtze River to the east. His great ships of battle extended one thousand leagues, the banners and pennants hid the sky from view. He sipped the wine while overlooking the river, and composed a verse with halberd outstretched. Yet all those heroes of a bygone age, what has become of them today?

"While you and I roam free as fishermen or woodcutters
on the rivers and isles,
Partnering fish and prawns, befriending elaphure and deer,

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33 See Hegel's consideration of the various literary resonances of this line in "Sights and Sounds of Red Cliffs," 19–20.

34 From Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) poem "Short Song" 短歌行. See *Wen xuan*, 27.1281.

35 Cao Cao's style name was Mengde 孟德. See discussion below.

36 Both Xiakou and Wuchang are areas near Red Cliff on the Yangtze river. Xiakou was located in modern Yunmeng 雲夢 county, Hubei, and Wuchang was the new name for Jiangxia 江夏 commandery given to it by Sun Quan 孫權 in 221. Xiakou was also the site of an important battle between Sun Quan and Liu Biao fought in 203, while Wuchang was an original name bestowed by the Wu kingdom after the battle of the Red Cliff had been decided, so the two place names look back and forwards in time, respectively, from the battle of Red Cliff.

37 This passage is not a quotation from the same Cao Cao poem but follows its tetrasyllabic meter as if it were. Moreover, it has a distinctive ABAB rhyme scheme, marking it as a tetrasyllabic verse.

Riding together on a little skiff,
We raise gourd and goblet to toast good cheer;
Though merely a mayfly lodging between heaven and earth,
A single grain of millet set upon the watchet sea;
How I lament that this life is no more than a moment,
And envy the Yangtze for its infinity!

I'd seize a flying immortal and roam above with him,
Embrace the full moon to live for ever and ever––
But knowing I cannot achieve this for now,
I'd rather consign an echo to the mournful zephyr."

Master Su said:
"Do you know of the water and the moon?
What departs is like the former, yet it never truly goes;
What waxes and wanes is like the latter,
Yet in the end it neither diminishes nor grows.

Thus examining them from the viewpoint of what changes,
All of Heaven and Earth cannot endure even a moment long;
But examining them from the viewpoint of what does not change,
Both these things and myself are never altogether gone.

So what then ought we to envy?
In all of Heaven and Earth's great plenty,
Each object belongs in its owner's care;
If it is not my own possession,
I would not willingly take even a hair:

Except for the cool breeze rippling on the stream,
And the moonbeam darting in the hills;
They become sounds only when my ear takes them in,
Become colours only when my eye meets them;
Consuming them is not forbidden,
And enjoyment never depletes them.
The Fashioner of Things gave us this inexhaustible treasure,
In which you and I may ever share at our leisure."

My friend, laughing with delight,
Washed out his cup and poured anew;
The meats and nuts were all finished,
Cups and dishes haplessly bestrewn.
We leant up against one another in the boat,
Not yet aware of the East's whitening hue.

壬戌之秋，七月既望，蘇子與客泛舟遊於赤壁之下。清風徐來，水波不興，舉酒屬客，誦明月之詩，歌窈窕之**章**(aŋ)。

少**焉**(an)，月出於東山之**上**(aŋ)，徘徊於斗牛之**間**(an)，白露橫**江**(aŋ)，水光接**天**(an)；縱一葦之所如，凌萬頃之茫**然**(an)。浩浩乎如馮虛御風，而不知其所**止**(ɳ)；飄飄乎如遺世獨立，羽化而登**仙**(an)。於是飲酒樂甚，扣舷而歌**之**(ɳ)。

歌曰：「桂棹兮蘭**槳**(aŋ)，擊空明兮泝流**光**(aŋ)。渺渺兮予懷，望美人兮天一**方**(aŋ)。」

客有吹洞簫者，倚歌而和之，其聲嗚嗚然，如怨、如**慕**(u)、如泣、如**訴**(u)，餘音嫋**嫋**(æu)，不絕如**縷**(u)。舞幽壑之潛**蛟**(æu)，泣孤舟之嫠**婦**(u)。

蘇子愀然，正襟危坐，而問客曰：「何為其然也？」客曰：「『月明星**稀**(i)，烏鵲南**飛**(i)』此非曹孟德之**詩**(i)乎？「西望夏**口**(əu)，東望武**昌**(aŋ)。山川相**繆**(əu)，鬱乎蒼**蒼**(aŋ)。此非孟德之困於周**郎**(aŋ)者乎？方其破荊州，下江陵，順流而**東**(uŋ)也，舳艫千里，旌旗蔽**空**(uŋ)，釃酒臨江，橫槊賦詩，固一世之**雄**(uŋ)也，而今安在哉？

況吾與子漁樵於江渚之上，侶魚蝦而友麋**鹿**(uk)；駕一葉之扁舟，舉匏樽以相**屬**(uk)。寄蜉蝣於天地，渺滄海之一**粟**(uk)。哀吾生之須臾，羨長江之無**窮**(uŋ)。挾飛仙以遨遊，抱明月而長**終**(uŋ)。知不可乎驟得，託遺響於悲**風**(uŋ)。」

蘇子曰：「客亦知夫水與月乎？逝者如斯，而未嘗**往**(aŋ)也；盈虛者如彼，而卒莫消**長**(aŋ)也，蓋將自其變者而觀之，則天地曾不能以一**瞬**(ən)；自其不變者而觀之，則物與我皆無**盡**(ən)也，而又何羨(æn)乎？且夫天地之間(an)，物各有**主**(u)，苟非吾之所**有**(u)，雖一毫而莫**取**(u)。惟江上之清風(uŋ)，與山間之明**月**(æt)，耳得之而為聲(iŋ)，[38]目遇之而成**色**(it)，取之無禁，用之不**竭**(æt)，是造物者之無盡藏也，而吾與子之所共**適**(it)。」

客喜而笑，洗盞更**酌**(ak)。餚核既盡，杯盤狼**藉**(it)，相與枕藉乎舟中，不知東方之既**白**(ək)。[39]

The "Rhapsody on the Red Cliff" exhibits all the key features of the fu genre that this book will introduce and interpret. The piece is first of all a description or exposition on its topic, the Red Cliff, which was the site of one of the most decisive battles in Chinese history. Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) armies had been advancing southward, and were preparing a major assault on the forces of Wu 吳 in the south. The Wu general Zhou Yu 周瑜 (175–210) defeated them at the battle of Red Cliff in 208, and from that time on Cao forfeited his hopes of conquering the entire realm. Su Shi's piece not only mentions these historical events, but even quotes from a famous poem by Cao Cao. It also contains a passage of hyperbolic description of that battle, in which "banners and pennants hid the sky from view," recalling the rhetoric of the grand fu of the Han dynasty. Su Shi's description of the scene deploys some poetic licence, incidentally, since he was not actually at the historical site of the great battle but at a different location in Hubei also called Red Cliff. Although description of the site is not the primary focus of Su Shi's poem, it provides the setting for the piece and pays homage to the oldest generic convention of the fu, its epideictic element.

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38 *Feng* 風 and *sheng* 聲 were probably distinct rhymes in Su Shi's time, though they merged in Old Mandarin. I take their relationship here to be one of close assonance, though not strict rhyme. See my article, "The Half-Life of Half-Rhyme," for a discussion of the importance of lax rhyming in Chinese poetry, though it is not in general applicable to this piece, whose rhymes are mostly strict.

39 The long series of entering-tone rhyme words, beginning with *yue* 月, does not look like a strict rhyme sequence according to Wang Li's reconstructions. But these entering-tone words did frequently rhyme together in Song poetry, for example, in a *ci* lyric by Tang Hui 湯恢, where *se* 色, *ji* 藉, and *bai* 白 all rhyme together as here. See *Quan Song ci*, 4:2978.

The piece has always been described as a *wenfu* because it does not follow any particular meter throughout, and is certainly not a lyrical or regulated fu.[40] Yet at the same time, it bears little resemblance to "prose" as the term is used conventionally in English, implying a lack of metrical structure.[41] Consider, for instance, the passage describing the sound of the friend's musical performance:

如怨如**慕**	As if bearing some resentment, or admiration,
如泣如**訴**	Full of tears, or incrimination––
餘音嫋**嫋**	Its aftertone was tremulous and faint,
不絕如**縷**	But unbroken as a single filament;
舞幽壑之潛**蛟**	Making the flood dragon dance in a delitescent vale,
泣孤舟之嫠**婦**	As if causing a widow in a solitary boat to wail.

The metrical structure is apparent: six lines of length 4-4-4-4-6-6, arranged in three syntactically parallel couplets. There is a strict rhyme scheme of AABABA, not evident in modern Mandarin pronunciation, but clear enough in Wang Li's reconstruction of Song rhymes.[42] This is one of the most exquisite passages in the entire piece, but numerous others could be cited to illustrate its lyrical forms that are present.

Yet these passages do not even fully exhaust the formal intricacy of the work, since it also includes two verse quatrains (lines 21–24 and 41–44), not to mention the poem from the *Book of Songs* alluded to in the opening, and the couplet quoted from Cao Cao. The first original quatrain is in the *sao* form of the *Elegies of Chu*, including the distinctive particle *xi* 兮, while the latter is in the tetrasyllabic meter of both the *Book of Songs* and the *yuefu* poem of Cao Cao. Thus with these metrical forms and allusions, Su Shi links his work directly to both the major traditions of ancient poetry: the two classic anthologies *Book of Songs* and *Elegies of Chu*. The whole piece contains so many poetic elements and disparate meters that it might be more accurate to call it not a verse essay but an essay of verses.

At the same time, Su Shi places these lyrical elements in contrast with other features distinctively fu-ish, namely the use of dialogue and philosophical discourse. The entire piece is presented as a poetic dialogue between Su and an unnamed "guest" or "friend" (*ke* 客). Though the piece is assigned a specific date as if it were a historical event, it is surely fictionalized, and the friend is most likely as fictional as "Sir Vacuous" in the eponymous fu of Sima Xiangru. Su Shi is employing some poetic licence, that is, and the friend serves as a convenient device for presenting different points of view and emotions in sequence. The dialogue form also allows for convenient transitions between different meters and registers. In particular, it is the back-and-forth of the dialogue that allows Su to build up to the crescendo of his final speech, demonstrating the continuity of human

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40 See Kwong Kin Hung's thoughtful examination of how Su Shi's two "Red Cliff" fu fit within the *wenfu* genre, "Lun wenfu zhi 'wen' yu wenfu mingpian Su Shi qian, hou 'Chibi fu.' "

41 The *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "prose," gives as its first definition: "Language in the form in which it is typically written (or spoken), usually characterized as having no deliberate metrical structure (in contrast with verse or poetry)."

42 Since English is rhyme-poor I represent this roughly as AABBCC.

existence as represented by the river and moon, always changing but ever present. The key passage, which incidentally is a rhyming quatrain, goes as follows:

> Thus examining them from the viewpoint of what changes,
> All of Heaven and Earth cannot endure even a moment long;
> But examining them from the viewpoint of what does not change,
> Both these things and myself are never altogether gone.
>
> 蓋將自其變者而觀之，則天地曾不能以一**瞬**。
> 自其不變者而觀之，則物與我皆無**盡**也。

Complementary analyses from the viewpoint of transience and permanence can be found in many classic texts known to Su Shi, ranging from the *tongbian* 通變 principle in the *Book of Changes* to *Zhuangzi*.[43] Perhaps the most important of all is the philosophy of duality and nonduality in Mahāyāna Buddhism, introduced to Chinese literati as early as Sengzhao's 僧趙 "On the Non-transience of Beings" 物不遷論.[44] In the Tiantai elaboration of this concept, we are enjoined both to assert the impermanence of all things, and to deny it, and then yet again to deny our own denial. This sense of continuity coexisting with inexorable change was well established within Chinese thought by Su Shi's time, but it was left for him to introduce it so gracefully into a literary composition, and it was only by taking advantage of the special poetic devices proper to the fu that he was able to do so. The Chinese text contains numerous conjunctions or other grammatical elements that would normally be omitted from verse. Su Shi's inclusion of them marks this passage as formally close to argumentative prose, as in the *Mencius* or *Zhuangzi*. Yet in spite of these it is more or less an octametric quatrain, rhyming on the even lines, and marking the end of the odd lines with the repeated phrase *bian zhe er guan zhi* 變者而觀之. Among other things, Su Shi's "Rhapsody on the Red Cliff" is discursive, philosophical verse at its best.

Finally we should not neglect the political element in the "Rhapsody on the Red Cliff." Though it does nominally record only a private outing with a friend, the political implications are significant. On one hand, of course, the main topic of Cao Cao's defeat at Red Cliff continues to hold out an important message for later political actors. Even today, though Cao is long dead and gone, we continue to remember him, to quote his poetry, and to be inspired by his boldness (as of that of his opponent Zhou Yu). Apart from these historical references, "Red Cliff" also holds special significance when read in light of Su Shi's biography. At this time, just two years after he was exiled by his political opponents, they remained in his mind and served as one impetus for all his poetry of this period. Ronald Egan sums up his state of mind at this point: "Once poetry became for him not only a source of consolation … but also a way of showing that his spirit and outrage over what had befallen him were undiminished, he had to keep writing. To stop would have been tacitly to admit either that

43 See Chen, "Change and Continuation in Su Shih's Theory of Literature," for a thoughtful consideration of some of these issues.

44 Cf. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 413n52.

he no longer saw any injustice or that he no longer dared to call attention to it."[45] Thus the consolation Su Shi finds in his philosophical reflections is no idle byway of the imagination, but a moral choice that requires tact and fortitude. Both his spirit and his outrage remain undiminished.[46]

The key elements of the fu genre discussed in the volume, then, are all relevant to one of the most celebrated works of Chinese literature, Su Shi's "Red Cliff," and exploring the conventions and contexts of the fu genre is indispensable to a thorough examination of the history of Chinese poetry. If "Red Cliff" is an important, memorable, profound composition, it owes its success not just to Su Shi's brilliance but also to Su Shi's familiarity with the fu tradition, a tradition fully continuous with that of the *Book of Songs* and the *Elegies of Chu*.

The conventions and forms of the fu are unusual by world standards, and not easy to fit into the schemes and classifications of comparative literature today.[47] The dialogue between multiple speakers seems to belong to drama, while the prose introductions and transitions seem to belong to the prose essay. The parallel couplets and varying meters, combined with extensive rhyme, do not seem to map easily onto any Western poetic forms. The content, too, with its combination of autobiographical elements, discursive arguments, and pure description, is hard to fit into typical genres like comedy, tragedy, and romance. Even the fiction/nonfiction binary so important in European literature does not apply easily or directly to many fu, as we have seen so well with "Red Cliff." But the fact that fu poetics is hard to place by the standards of Western literary criticism is all the more reason to value it, not just as an important stream in the Chinese literary tradition, but as a singular contribution to human civilization. The essays in this volume aim to illuminate some major fu compositions, but also to interpret the fu as a major genre of Chinese literature and now of world literature as well.

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45 Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 260.

46 Bischoff identifies a more specific contemporary parallel between the Battle of Red Cliff and the great loss of the fortress of Yongle 永樂 to the Tangut invaders in 1082 (*Interpreting the Fu*, 195–98). The fact that this occurred after the fu was composed scarcely deters his exegetical ingenuity.

47 For example, is the fu lyric, drama, or epic? In spite of Tökei's intriguing attempt to resolve this question by identifying the fu as elegy, an intermediate mode between lyric and epic, the proper answer must surely be "all of these and none at all." See Tökei, *Naissance de l'élégie chinoise: K'iu Yuan et son époque*.

PART ONE

RECITATION AND DISPLAY