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## Figure and Flight in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*)

### ABSTRACT:

This article discusses a previously unnoticed figural technique found in several poems and series in the *Chuci* 楚辭, one of the earliest poetry anthologies from ancient China. In these poems, images that appear in one sense reappear later on in a strikingly different meaning. In some of these poems and series, the effect may be merely coincidental, the result of poets or performers working with limited repertoires of tropes that therefore return in different ways. Elsewhere, however, the technique becomes regular and purposeful, part of a metatextual reflection upon the poems' own use of figures and images. By examining the poems and series that employ it, we can begin to trace the contours of a heretofore unwritten early history of literary theorization in China.

### KEYWORDS:

*Chuci*, *early Chinese literary theory*, *figurative language*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a moment in *Li sao* 離騷, a long poem of uncertain authorship that represents one of the most ancient and mysterious sources of the Chinese poetic tradition, wherein the relationships among its images seem to shift. This shift corresponds with the first transition in the poem between the modes of *tristia* (lament) and *itineraria* (journey), the two main categories of *Chuci* 楚辭 materials identified by David Hawkes in his seminal essay, "Quest of the Goddess."<sup>1</sup> Before the speaker of the poem decides to leave behind his lamentations about the human world and instead to "go off to view the four wilds," the poem's figurative tropes overlap one another in ways that make their interrelationships unclear. Consider, for example, the fifth through seventh stanzas.

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THIS ARTICLE was originally presented as a paper at the "Yale *Chuci* Workshop" in May, 2018. I am grateful for the comments of all the participants, and particularly those of Stephen Owen, Paul W. Kroll, Martin Kern, Michael Hunter, and Du Heng.

<sup>1</sup> David Hawkes, "The Quest of the Goddess," *AM NS* 13 (1967), pp. 71-94, reprinted in Cyril Birch, ed., *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1974).

- 日月忽其不淹兮， Sun and moon sped by, they would not stay;  
春與秋其代序。 springs and autumns replaced each other in  
turn.
- 惟草木之零落兮， I thought on the falling of the plants and trees,  
20 恐美人之遲暮。 and feared that the Fair One would draw to-  
wards dusk.
- 不撫壯而棄穢兮， Not to grasp the hale and discard the rotting –  
何不改性度。 why not change from this measure?
- 乘騏驎以馳騁兮， Ride a fine steed when you go galloping –  
24 來吾道夫先路。 come, I will serve as your forward chariot.
- 昔三后之純粹兮， Of old the Three Kings were fully pure;  
固眾芳之所在。 of course the many fragrances were by them.
- 雜申椒與菌桂兮， They interspersed pepper with cassia –  
28 豈維初夫蕙茝。 they did not merely string angelica and basil.<sup>2</sup>

In the lines that follow, the speaker, adorned with fragrant flowers, goes galloping in front and behind until he finds the carriage tracks of the former kings; the Fair One, however, believes slander, betrays his previous pledge of love to the speaker, and takes other lovers. Throughout this lament, five central tropes – the passage of time, aromatic flowers, chariotteering, antiquity, and sexual love – are overlapped without any apparent attempt to rationalize their collocations. The ancient kings, for example, are characterized by wearing certain fragrant plants as well as by distinctive carriage tracks; the speaker is evidently figured both as the carriage driver of the Fair One and as his jilted lover. After the speaker decides to leave behind his *tristia* to embark on his *itineraria*, however, the same five figures repeat in a way that interrelates them in a relatively clear narrative. The speaker adorns himself with the aromatic flowers that seem, in the *Jiu ge* 九歌 (another set of poems in the *Chuci* anthology that describe shamanic trysts with divine beings), to hold an attraction for the gods, and then goes chariotteering under their escort throughout the cosmos, meeting with former kings and potential lovers, as well as slowing the sun's course and traveling

<sup>2</sup> All citations of *Chuci* texts are drawn from Cui Fuzhang 崔富章 and Li Daming 李大明, eds., *Chuci jijiao jishi* 楚辭集校集釋, *Chuci xue wenku* 楚辭學文庫 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003; hereafter *CCJJS*); this passage is pp. 105–23. Its cumbersome appearance aside, this edition is among the most careful critical editions of the *Chuci* available, collating a very large number of premodern editions with modern textual scholarship. *CCJJS* also has the benefit of providing a large number of premodern and some modern commentaries as well. Because these volumes may not be available to all scholars, I will also provide citations to the more common Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, ed., *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983; hereafter *CCBZ*); this passage is *j.* 1, pp. 6–7. All translations are my own, but all have been influenced, to some degree or other, by David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985).

back in time. It is still, of course, possible to take the journey passages as figurative, but it is also considerably easier to take the tropes of this *itineraria* literally – as we will see, apparently some early readers did – than it is to take those same tropes literally before the speaker goes off on his tours of the cosmos.

As far as I can find, this shift has never been remarked upon as such. Instead, *Chuci* commentary traditionally treats these repeated images the same in both parts of the poem. Wang Yi 王逸 (ca. 89 AD–158), for example, argues that both the “fine steed” of line 23 and the “angelica and basil” of line 28 “are used as figures for the virtuous and wise,”<sup>3</sup> and he gives the same explanation of the images in the *itineraria* as well, suggesting that the phoenix that serves as the speaker’s outrider on his heavenly journey is “a figure for a benevolent and wise man,”<sup>4</sup> and that one of his potential love-interests, the goddess Fufei 處妃, is “a figure for a [virtuous] man in hiding.”<sup>5</sup> According to Wang Yi’s highly reductive glosses, *Li sao*’s figuration is basically of one type: a topical allegory representing the historical situation of its purported author, Qu Yuan 屈原. And Wang Yi’s basic procedure would in this respect come to define the commentarial tradition as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

This traditional interpretation of *Li sao* has, in turn, been particularly influential in Western scholarship, often delimiting the range of figuration thought characteristic of Chinese poetry writ large. In her seminal book on this topic, for example, Pauline Yu offers an extensive treatment of *Li sao* commentary to support her contention that Chinese poetry operates through philosophical assumptions fundamentally different from those that inform Western literature.<sup>7</sup> Western metaphor, she argues, is inherently a species of fiction, involving the creative re-description of a heretofore unrecognized similarity that provides insight

<sup>3</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 116 and 125; *CCBZ* 1, 6–7.

<sup>4</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 439; *CCBZ* 1, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 476; *CCBZ* p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> For a useful discussion of the intellectual world of Wang Yi’s commentary, see Timothy Wai Keung Chan, *Considering the End: Mortality in Early Medieval Chinese Poetic Representation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 7–40.

<sup>7</sup> Yu acknowledges that both the *Odes* and *Li sao* may have derived from contexts that were not exactly the same as those that shaped their commentaries; in this sense, her arguments concern how the poems were understood, rather than what they originally might have meant. However, she is also convinced that Wang Yi’s commentary actually does fit the *Li sao* quite well: “Indeed, it would make more sense to say that it was the *Songs of Chu*,” Yu writes, “with their intentionally substitutive images and Wang Yi’s explications of them, that influenced the commentaries on and theories of imagery in the *Classic of Poetry*, rather than the reverse.” See Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1987), p. 114.

into something that “remains in itself unobvious, hidden, or latent.”<sup>8</sup> In the *Li sao* commentaries, by contrast,

all natural imagery fulfilled the same purpose: using one thing to suggest something that was of greater significance yet was viewed as belonging to the same natural, pre-existing order. As in the case of the *Classic of Poetry*, and in marked contrast to most of the Western tradition, [*Li sao*'s commentators] did not construe correspondences between two objects or between an object and an idea as artificial or contrived in any way, the ingenious creation of the poet as maker of fictions. Rather, links between things were always already there, grounded by shared membership in an a priori category (*lei*) antecedent to any individual artifice... . [Qu Yuan] was simply, in their eyes, calling upon pre-established, self-evident, and literally true correlations... provoked by his experience and belonging to the same realm of being.<sup>9</sup>

According to Yu, these ideas about natural correlation were so pervasive in the Chinese tradition that “the poetry’s confirmation of [this] widespread belief did not have to be acknowledged” explicitly. It could, instead, merely be assumed by everyone within the Chinese interpretive community.

In this paper, I want to cast doubt on this conclusion, at least as it pertains to Chinese thought about figuration before Wang Yi’s time.<sup>10</sup> For if Wang and later commentators have overlooked the figural shifts I described above, earlier readers seem to have been interested in them. Such shifts, I will show, feature in a number of texts in the *Chuci* anthology, including some cases where they are clearly intentional, and where they serve as the vehicle for metatextual theorization of the nature and function of literary figuration. Though never as explicit in their “commentary” as Wang Yi’s is, these texts articulate through their figural shifts sophisticated reflections upon the genre in which they par-

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18; Yu here is quoting Derrida, who is given as offering the typical Western view. For a more concise statement of Yu’s argument about the difference between Chinese and Western modes of imagery, see Pauline Yu, “Metaphor and Chinese Poetry,” in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 3.2 (July 1981), pp. 205-24.

<sup>9</sup> Yu, *Reading of Imagery*, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Pauline Yu’s reading of Chinese imagery has previously been challenged by other scholars as well. Stephen R. Bokenkamp, for example, offered a critique in “Chinese Metaphor Again: Reading – and Understanding – Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition,” *JAOS* 109.2 (1989), pp. 211-21. Martin Svensson Ekstroem offered an alternative account of early Chinese metaphor in “Illusion, Lie, and Metaphor: The Paradox of Divergence in Early Chinese Poetics,” *Poetics Today* 23.2 (2002), pp. 251-89. And Gopal Sukhu has recently argued that *Li sao* is an allegory, in a sense quite similar to that in the Western tradition; see *The Shaman and the Heresiarch: A New Interpretation of the Li Sao* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012).

ticipate, reflections that constitute a heretofore-unrecognized strand in the early history of Chinese literary-critical thought.

We are not accustomed to reading these texts in this way, since they fit more readily into our category of “literature” than “literary theory.” Yet there seems to have been in early and medieval China no felt incongruity in embedding literary theory in literary forms,<sup>11</sup> as is attested by well-known texts like Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (58 BC–18 AD) “Anti-*Li sao*” 反離騷 and Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261–303) “Rhapsody on Literature” 文賦.<sup>12</sup> And when it comes to the *Chuci* in particular, even explicit commentary seems sometimes to have employed the tropes and techniques it theorized.<sup>13</sup> Consider, for example, Liu An’s 劉安 (ca. 179–122 BC) comments on *Li sao*:

[Qu Yuan’s] writing is brief and his words subtle; his ambition was pure and his conduct blameless. Even though his writing is but small, its import is extremely great; even though the categories (*lei*) that he raises are close, they manifest a significance that is distant. His ambition was pure, and therefore he spoke of fragrant things; his conduct was blameless, and therefore he died without seeking favor, estranging himself.<sup>14</sup> Sinking in the mud, he sloughed

<sup>11</sup> For an argument that Western Han literature is often “self-referential” in something like this way, see Martin Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*,” *HJAS* 63.2 (2003), pp. 383–437. Nicholas Morrow Williams has very recently made a similar but more-focused argument, one that anticipates some of the points to be made here, about the *Chuci*’s *Jiu zhang* 九章; see “Tropes of Entanglement and Strange Loops in the ‘Nine Avowals’ of the *Chuci*,” *BSOAS* 81.2 (2018), pp. 277–300. Williams has also argued recently that *Jiu tan* 九歎, to be discussed below, should be thought of “as a kind of commentary to the ‘*Li sao*,’ substantially earlier than Wang Yi’s commentary.” See his “Roaming the Infinite: Liu Xiang as *Chuci* Scholar and Would-be Transcendent,” *Tsing Hua Zhongwen xuebao* 清華中文學報 20 (2018), pp. 49–112. For an earlier essay reading one piece in the *Jiu zhang* as embodying literary-critical reflection, see Tseng Chen-chen, “An Allegory on Allegory: Reading ‘*Ju song*’ as Qu Yuan’s *Ars Poetica*,” *Dong Hwa Renwen xuebao* 東華人文學報 1 (1999), pp. 69–101.

<sup>12</sup> The “Anti-*Li sao*” is preserved in Yang Xiong’s biography in *Han shu*: see Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 87, pp. 3515–21; and for a translation, see David Knechtges, *Two Studies on the Han Fu*, Parerga 1 (Seattle: Far Eastern and Russian Institute, University of Washington, 1968), pp. 18–28. For the “Rhapsody on Literature,” see Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wenxuan* 文選, annot. Li Shan 李善 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), j. 17, pp. 761–74; for a translation, see David Knechtges, trans. and annot., *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume III* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 211–32.

<sup>13</sup> This is even true of much of the commentary that has circulated under Wang Yi’s name. As Kominami Ichirō 小南一郎 has pointed out, this commentary contains texts of various different styles, including two sorts of rhymed-verse commentary that are unlikely to be by Wang Yi. See his “Ō Itsu *Soji shōku* o megutte: Kandai shōkugaku no ichi sokumen” 王逸楚辭章句をめぐって、漢代章句學の一側面, *THGH* 63 (1991), pp. 61–114, and his *Soji to sono chūshakusha tachi* 楚辭とその注釈者達 (Kyoto: Hōyū shoten, 2003), pp. 300–26.

<sup>14</sup> The punctuation of this sentence has been debated: many scholars place *zishu* 自疏 in the following clause. The phrase appears to derive from *Li sao* itself; see *CCJJS*, p. 653; *CCBZ* 1, p. 43.

his molted shell among the muck and weeds to soar and roam beyond the dust of this world. He did not accept the age's stain, but was one who glowed white amidst dirt without being dyed by it. If you follow his aims to their conclusion, they can be said to vie for brightness with the sun and moon.

其文約，其辭微，其志絜，其行廉，其稱文小而其指極大，舉類邇而見義遠。其志絜，故其稱物芳。其行廉，故死而不容自疏。濯淖汙泥之中，蟬蛻於濁穢，以浮游塵埃之外，不獲世之滋垢，皜然泥而不滓者也。推此志也，雖與日月爭光可也。<sup>15</sup>

The echoes of *Li sao* in this literary-critical account of the text have been noticed before. Michael Schimmelpfennig, for instance, has read its imagery literally, arguing that the fact that Liu uses in this description several phrases from *Li sao itineraria* hints that he read that text as describing practices aimed at achieving literal immortality.<sup>16</sup> Yet even leaving aside the fact that Liu explicitly remarks here that Qu Yuan “died,” the passage – which focuses on parallels between Qu Yuan’s moral and literary qualities – seems to me much more interested in the figurative immortality that Qu Yuan achieved through his writing. And if this reading is correct, Liu’s choice to describe Qu Yuan’s achievement in a figural vocabulary that echoes the *Li sao* suggests that he may have read that text as itself possessed of a literary-theoretical dimension, or at least as providing useful tools for thinking about the possibilities of literature.<sup>17</sup> Liu’s redeployment of *Li sao* tropes in theorizing

<sup>15</sup> This passage is preserved in *Shiji* 史記; see Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982) 84, p. 2482, in a context wherein it is not clear that the words are Liu An’s. They have been attributed to Liu on the basis of Ban Gu’s 班固 (32–92) citation of a few sentences from the same passage as Liu An’s in his own “Preface to the *Chuci*,” which in turn is preserved in Hong Xingzu’s *Chuci buju* (see *CCBZ* 1, p. 49–50); one other reference to this document – albeit without the portion attributed to Liu An – is found in an annotation by Li Shan at *Wenxuan* 24, p. 1125. There is, as far as I can tell, no way to determine for certain whether this whole passage is a citation of Liu An, though it has generally been understood as such by contemporary scholars. It is, at any rate, almost certainly a Western Han document, and for the purposes of this paper, we can treat the name “Liu An” as a placeholder.

<sup>16</sup> See Michael Schimmelpfennig, “The Quest for a Classic: Wang Yi and the Exegetical Prehistory of His Commentary to the *Songs of Chu*,” *EC* 29 (2004), pp. 109–60, p. 119. The argument is based upon comparisons between the language in Liu An’s praise of *Li sao* and language in his *Huainanzi* 淮南子, which Schimmelpfennig takes to be describing literal immortality practices. But perhaps an implication of the connections Schimmelpfennig draws is that we should read *Huainanzi* less literally than he does.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible that the bulk of Liu An’s discussion of *Li sao*, beyond this passage, was itself in a “literary” form. Early sources that mention Liu An’s discussion of the text disagree as to its genre. *Han shu*, for example, attributes to Liu a *zhuan*-commentary 離騷傳 (*Han shu* 44, p. 2145), whereas Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209) in *Han ji* 漢紀 and Gao You 高誘 (ca. 168–212) in his preface to *Huainanzi* both refer to him as writing a *Li sao fu* 離騷賦 (see Xun Yue, *Qian Han ji* 前漢紀 [Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1971], j. 12, p. 123, and Yan Kejun 嚴可均, ed., *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sango liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991], j. 87, p. 945b, respectively). *Li sao fu* is precisely the term used

*Li sao*, in other words, is itself a figural shift of much the kind we will be tracking throughout this essay, and one that, ultimately, intimates a vision of literary possibility that has a decidedly tragic edge. For if the *Li sao* enables Qu Yuan to attain a literary immortality that manifests his virtue to perceptive readers like Liu, that immortality remains stubbornly figurative, accessible only to those of us willing to join him in the figures his benighted age forced him to use to manifest his otherwise overlooked virtue.

#### MECHANICAL SHIFTS: *JIU GE*, “XI SONG,” AND *AI SHI MING*

The *Chuci* anthology contains a few poems in which mid-text shifts in figuration seem merely mechanical. In the *Jiu ge*, for example, though the same images frequently appear attached to different speakers and with apparently different meanings, it is far from clear that these shifts are intentional. In “Shan gui” 山鬼, for example, much the same language applies to both the speaker and the goddess he is courting: first the goddess is “transfixed and forgets to return 憺忘歸” and, later, the speaker is “grieved and forgets to return 悵忘歸,” mourning the end of their tryst.<sup>18</sup> In “Xiang jun” 湘君, similarly, the speaker uses “hanging moss as his sail, and screens of melilotus” to pursue the goddess out on the river; when his quest fails, he refers to it as having been impossible as “plucking hanging moss in the midst of the waters.”<sup>19</sup> Such examples could easily be multiplied, but in each case the simplest explanation is merely that the poets or performers of the *Jiu ge* fashioned the texts out of a limited repertoire of tropes that, by virtue of this limitation, necessarily reappear with different valences at different junctures of the performance, without intending anything particular in their repetition.

A similar explanation can also be offered for the mid-text shifts in figuration that we find in a few of the less formulaic pieces of the *Chuci*, such as “Xi song” 惜誦, in the *Jiu zhang* 九章, another, likely-het-

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to refer to Qu Yuan’s own original text in the preface to Jia Yi’s 賈誼 (200–168 BC) *Diao Qu Yuan wen* 弔屈原原文 and in *Han shu* (see *Wenxuan* 60, p. 2590 and *Han shu* 48, p. 2222; the former may derive from the latter). As many scholars have suggested, *fu* 賦 may be preferable to *zhuan* 傳 given that Liu was supposed to have submitted the finished product to the emperor by the end of the day on which it was commissioned – a feat we can more easily associate with the sometimes extemporaneous rhythmic composition of *fu* than with the more painstaking research and erudition that would have been required for a *zhuan*-commentary. It is also possible that *zhuan* 傳 is a graphical mistake for *fu* 賦, which is how the term *fu* 賦 appears in certain excavated materials.

<sup>18</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 963 and 967, respectively; *CCBZ* 2, pp. 80 and 81.

<sup>19</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 779 and 790; *CCBZ* 2, pp. 61 and 62. The relevant phrases are 薜荔柏兮蕙網 and 采薜荔兮水中.

erogenous, collection of poems within the larger anthology. “Xi song” begins with its speaker appealing to heaven to hear his complaint and to investigate his loyalty, but switches exactly halfway through its length to the narration and interpretation of a dream wherein the speaker “was climbing up to heaven, but his soul in midcourse found itself without conveyance.”<sup>20</sup> Though each half of the poem concerns the speaker’s relationship to heaven, therefore, that relationship is figured differently in the first 44 lines than it is in the second, with heaven transitioning from a hopeful replacement for the speaker’s benighted ruler to an analogical dream-figuration of the latter’s court.<sup>21</sup> This poem represents a more complicated case than that of the *Jiu ge*, since rather than merely reusing a set of stock images as narrative building blocks, it appears to employ two different interpretations of the genre’s *itineraria* imagery, one in which the speaker’s travel represents an alternative to the court, and another wherein it is a figure for that court. Yet despite the poem’s precise symmetry, I cannot discern any obvious thematic significance to the shift in heaven’s function; the poem merely deploys these alternate interpretations in sequence, without any attempt to theorize their juxtaposition.

Much the same can be said of *Ai shi ming* 哀時命, which similarly combines within one long text various different interpretations of the *itineraria*, without clearly linking them together. *Ai shi ming*, however, also employs figural shifts on a more local level as well, and if the piece as a whole does not offer a sustained theorization of these shifts, the consistency of these smaller-scale reversals makes them likely, at least, to be intentional. In the poem’s first transition from *tristia* to *itineraria*, for example, the speaker complains that his “ambitions are deeply repressed and do not rise” because the “way (*dao* 道) is blocked and does not get through, and the rivers are wide and have no bridges” – apparently using these latter images as analogies for his inability to communicate with his ruler.<sup>22</sup> In response to these frustrations, he speaks in the next line of “wishing [instead] to go off to Kunlun’s Hanging

<sup>20</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 1316; *CCBZ* 4, p. 124: 昔余夢登天兮, 魂中道而無杭。

<sup>21</sup> For an indication of this shift, compare Zhu Xi’s comments to lines 4 and 48; Zhu Xi 朱熹, ed., *Chuci jizhu* 楚辭集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), j. 4, pp. 73–74 and 76. Huang Wenhuan 黃文煥 (1598–667) also notes the shift: “[At this point the text] suddenly turns to narrating a dream and to thinking of a past day. The literary mind goes from considering substance to considering illusion, and the literary force goes from forward-flowing to reversed” 忽然說夢, 追思昔日. 交心從實得幻, 交勢從順得逆 (see *CCJFS*, p. 1317).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2444; *CCBZ* 14, 260: 志沈抑而不揚, 道壅塞而不通兮, 江河廣而無梁. In both editions, see Wang Yi’s comment on the use of these figures as analogies (*ruo* 若) for his situation within the state. Images of blocked roads and uncrossable rivers are, of course, also common in the *Guo feng* 國風 section of *Shijing* 詩經.

Gardens,” but becomes discouraged that “The Weakwater rolls on, presenting a difficulty, and the road is cut off mid-course and does not get through.”<sup>23</sup> The images of blocked or broken roads and uncrossable rivers that populated the speaker’s *tristia*, then, reappear in this imagined *itineraria*, albeit in an apparently literal sense.

A similar shift occurs in the poem’s second invocation of *itineraria* imagery. Again the speaker laments:

身既不容於濁世兮， 40 不知進退之宜當。	Since my person does not fit in this muddy age, I do not know whether to advance or retreat is right.
冠崔嵬而切雲兮， 劍淋離而從橫。	My hat towers up and cleaves the clouds; the sword at my side is long and swings wide.
衣攝葉以儲與兮， 44 左袪挂於樽桑。 右衽拂於不周兮， 六合不足以肆行。	My robes are tight and constrict me: my left sleeve catches on the Fusang tree. On the right, my skirts brush Mt. Buzhou: the six dimensions are too small for me to move in freely. <sup>24</sup>

In the first couplet here, the speaker outlines his dilemma: he does not “fit 容” with the people of his age, and so his room for action is constrained. In the next six lines, these same tropes will return in a hyperbolized guise, his “person” (*shen* 身) now becoming a “body” (also *shen*) that does not “fit” within the narrow space of the cosmos.

A similar shift is characteristic of the poem’s third and final use of *itineraria* language as well. There is, however, no need to explore it here, since I can find no clear theorization of these consistent textual phenomena within the poem. The author or authors of *Ai shi ming*, I hypothesize, may have been purposefully imitating the figural shifts they found in earlier examples of the genre, but they did not use the technique to reflect upon literature’s capacities in the ways the texts we will consider below will do.

#### FIGURE AS ESCAPE: “HUI SHA”

If the phenomenon of figural shift in the *Chuci* were limited to works like the *Jiu ge*, “Xi song,” and *Ai shi ming*, it would deserve little more than a footnote in discussions of the complicated imagistic prac-

<sup>23</sup> The Weakwater 弱水 was a legendary river in the northwest that was impossible to cross because it was too weak to hold a boat. For these lines, see *CCJJS*, pp. 2444–46, and *CCBZ* 14, p. 260: 弱水汨其爲難兮，路中斷而不通。

<sup>24</sup> *CCJJS*, pp. 2449–50; *CCBZ* 14, p. 261.

tice of the collection. There are, however, a few poems and series of poems within the anthology that make their practice of analogy, including these sorts of figural shifts, a thematic focus. By offering images of their images, such poems provide resources for interpreting their own practices, in effect providing an autocommentary that theorizes what they are doing.

Among the earliest of these texts is probably “Huai sha” 懷沙, a poem included in the *Jiu zhang* that purports to explain Qu Yuan’s state of mind when he committed suicide by drowning himself in the Miluo River.<sup>25</sup> The piece revolves around the speaker’s lamentation that his contemporaries have proven themselves incapable of discerning his qualities, a complaint he articulates through a series of analogical figures:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 玄文處幽兮，<br>矇眊謂之不章；<br>離婁微睇兮，<br>24 瞽以爲無明。<br>變白以爲黑兮，<br>倒上以爲下。<br>鳳皇在笯兮，<br>28 雞鶩翔舞。<br>同糝玉石兮，<br>一概而相量。<br>夫惟黨人鄙固兮，<br>32 羌不知余之所臧。<br>任重載盛兮，<br>陷滯而不濟。<br><br>懷瑾握瑜兮，<br>36 窮不知所示。 | When dark brocade is placed in the dark,<br>the blind will say that it has no pattern;<br>when [sharp-sighted] Li Lou spies something<br>minute,<br>the sightless will say he lacks vision.<br>They turn white into black,<br>and overturn high into low;<br>the phoenix is caged,<br>hens and ducks soar and dance.<br>They mix together jade and rock,<br>and measure them by one standard.<br>Those men of faction are base and obstinate,<br>and do not know what I hold within.<br>My burden was heavy, my load great;<br>I sank and got stuck and could not cross the<br>stream.<br>I embosomed jewels and grasped jade;<br>but in extremity, I did not know whom I could<br>show them. <sup>26</sup> |
|---|---|

Insofar as the speaker yearns to display to others what he holds within, it might be possible to read the analogies he draws here as an attempt to “manifest the pattern” (*zhang* 章, both in the title of the set and in line 22 here) of his situation, which has been misunderstood by his

<sup>25</sup> This text is included in full in Qu Yuan’s biography in *Shiji* 84 (pp. 2486–90), which should make the *terminus ante quem* for its composition sometime before Sima Qian’s death in 86 BC; I say that the text is “probably” among the earliest, however, because the integrity of this biography has been questioned by several scholars. The actual date of the text is not ultimately consequential for my argument here.

<sup>26</sup> *CCJJS*, pp. 1586–96; *CCBZ* 4, pp. 142–43.

contemporaries. Near the end of the poem, however, the speaker decides that “in an age so muddy 溷濁 none can know me, and the human heart cannot be persuaded.”<sup>27</sup> He resolves, therefore, in the poem’s final line, to “clearly announce to noble men that I will be their kind 明告君子，吾將以爲類” by “embosoming sand” (*huai sha* 懷沙) and throwing himself into the waters.<sup>28</sup>

This final action represents several compressed figural shifts. “Embosoming sand” as ballast, for example, recalls the figurative jewels and jade that the speaker claimed to “embosom” (also *huai* 懷) in line 35. By drowning himself in the river, similarly, he is physicalizing his metaphorical claim in line 34 to have borne in his lifetime a “heavy burden” of worth and a “great load” of virtue that prevented him from “crossing the stream” to his ruler’s favor, causing him instead to “sink” in the “muddiness” of his age. This decisive action, moreover, is described in the poem’s last couplet as a “clear (literally, bright) announcement” (*ming gao* 明告) of his moral character – a verbal echo of the figures of sightlessness (*wu ming* 無明) and darkness by which he described his contemporaries in lines 21 to 24. Finally, the speaker’s resolve in that last couplet to be of a “kind” (*lei* 類) with noble men recalls the confusions of natural kind (also *lei*) described in lines 25 through 30. In all these ways, the figures that the speaker of “Huai sha” invokes in his lamentation return in his final action, just as the figures of *Ai shi ming*’s *tristia* repeatedly reappeared transformed in its *itineraria*.

Unlike *Ai shi ming*, however, “Huai sha” provides a way to make sense of why the figures return. In line 56, immediately before resolving to travel to the Miluo, the speaker states that he “wishes that his aims should have an image 願志之有像,”<sup>29</sup> in contrast, it would seem, to the “dark brocade” whose pattern was invisible in the dark. Yet if his suicide is an attempt to manifest such an image, it seems also to represent a turn away from language: as the speaker decides in line 80, “the human

<sup>27</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 1627; *CCBZ* 4, p. 146: 世溷濁莫吾知，人心不可謂。Wang Yi’s commentary takes *wei* 謂 as equivalent to *shui* 說。Modern scholars have suggested a variety of interpretations (see *CCJFS*, p. 1628), but most agree that the point is the speaker’s inability to communicate his true feelings or his true character to others. Hawkes is the only outlier, translating “the heart of man cannot be told” (see Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, p. 172).

<sup>28</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 1629; *CCBZ* 4, p. 146. This is the implicit interpretation of the piece given at *Shiji* 84, p. 2490; it is made explicit by comments by Hong Xingzu, Lin Yunming 林雲銘 (1628?–1697?), Xi Luyi 奚祿詒 (17th c.), and Liu Mengpeng 劉夢鵬, among others (see *CCJFS*, pp. 1628–31). Other commentators, however, have not always agreed that it is the suicide that accomplishes this “clear announcement”; the early Ming-dynasty commentator Wang Huan 汪瑗, for example, argues that Qu did not, in fact, commit suicide after writing this poem.

<sup>29</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 1611; *CCBZ* 4, p. 144. For the importance of such “images” to the themes of *Jiu zhang* and the genre as a whole, see also the final line of “Ju song” 橘頌: “I will set you [i.e. the orange tree] up as my image 置以爲像兮” (*CCJFS*, p. 1788; *CCBZ* 4, p. 155).

heart cannot be persuaded in words 人心不可謂。” In this sense, the suicide is an alternative physical medium for the message that the speaker had previously tried to communicate through the verbal figures cited above; those figures recur in physicalized form in the suicide because they manifest who he is. What “Huai sha” suggests, in other words, is that the manner of Qu Yuan’s death was significant. By physicalizing into a monumental “announcement 告” the figures that fill the poem, he escapes from the fruitless task of explaining himself in words.

As the word “announcement” hints, there is some irony to this conclusion. When the speaker resolves to leave behind the linguistic figures of poetry for the physical language of suicide, he apparently hopes to achieve some gain in clarity thereby. Yet the verbal figures that make up most of the poem already represent an attempt to “clearly announce” the speaker’s character to a world that fails to understand him; in shifting the medium, he escapes neither the “muddiness” of his age (ending up instead in the mud of the river) nor the analogies he seeks to leave behind. This point is brought home forcefully by the poem’s final words: “I clearly announce to noble men that I will be their kind” (as quoted, above). Although in these last lines the speaker imagines being reintegrated with his “natural kind” (*lei*) through his suicide, this reintegration will not involve any literal fellowship with worthy men. The speaker, rather, will merely be of a “kind” with the worthies he imagines will appreciate his suicide – “kind” being, not coincidentally, the closest word in classical Chinese to the English concept of “analogy.”<sup>30</sup> Far from escaping figuration, then, the speaker’s suicide gathers him into it completely.

#### A COMMUNITY OF FIGURES: *QI JIAN*

In providing an explanation for why Qu Yuan chose to drown himself, “Huai sha” offers the beginnings of a theory of what it is that the verbal figures of the genre associated with him do.<sup>31</sup> The poem’s analogies are attempts, first, to assert proper moral categories against a community that does not recognize them, and then, finally, to reach an alternate community (or rather, an analogy of community) that will. This account, it might be noted, is almost diametrically opposed to what

<sup>30</sup> On the ambiguity in the term *lei* between “readily apparent categories” and “inherent categories” – that is, between obvious groups and groups whose commonality needs to be discovered, through operations like metaphor, see Bokenkamp, “Chinese Metaphor Again,” p. 216.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, what the author/s of “Huai sha” knew of that genre might be very different from what we know now.

Pauline Yu found in post-Wang Yi *Chuci* commentary. Neither are these categories obvious to all, nor is there an assumed interpretive community that can be expected to take their existence for granted. That (figurative) community is the speaker's hope, not his reality.<sup>32</sup>

Similar issues of community come to the fore in other *Chuci* texts that leverage figural shift to theorize their imagery. This is particularly true in the suites that make up a late layer of the anthology, and which were written when the proliferation and perdurance of the *Chuci* genre had itself begun to constitute a sort of textual community of alienated voices. *Qi jian* 七諫, for example, often reflects upon this community through its broad citation of earlier texts in the genre.<sup>33</sup> Consider, for example, a bookending pair of citations drawn from the first poem and from the last lines of the suite. In the first poem, the speaker echoes the *Chuci* poem *Yuan you* 遠遊 to paradoxical effect: "I cannot reach those who went before, nor can I wait for those to come."<sup>34</sup> At the opposite end of the series, the final line takes up similar issues in a citation of the *Jiu zhang*'s "She Jiang" 涉江: "Things have been this way since ancient times, so why should I resent the men of today?"<sup>35</sup> In these quo-

<sup>32</sup> This image of the relationship between text and the ideal community it prescribes has notable convergences with visions of textual authority that are discussed in Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY P., 1999).

<sup>33</sup> The suite is attributed by Wang Yi's commentary to Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154?-93 BC?); the attribution, however, is generally recognized as unreliable, as Dongfang Shuo seems to have been a name to which a number of anonymous texts attached themselves (see Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, pp. 245-46, among others). Galal Walker has argued, convincingly to my mind, that *Qi jian* must be later than at least most of the texts it cites almost verbatim, since it borrows from texts that do not borrow from one another. See Galal Walker, "Towards a Formal History of the 'Chuci,'" Ph.D. diss. (Cornell University, 1982), pp. 175 and 179-87. Additionally, the research of Tang Bingzheng 湯炳正, Tim Chan, and Du Heng has provided reason to suspect that *Qi jian* was incorporated into the *Chuci* collection in a second redaction, rendering it possible that the author, authors, or editors of the suite might even have had access to an earlier form of our transmitted collection. See Tang Bingzheng, "*Chuci* bianzuanzhe jiqi chengshu niandai de tansuo" 楚辭編纂者及其成書年代的探索, *Jianghan xuebao* 江漢學報 (1963), pp. 49-57; Tim Wai-Keung Chan, "The *Jing/Zhuan* Structure of the *Chuci* Anthology: A New Approach to the Authorship of Some of the Poems," *TP* 84.4-5 (1998), pp. 293-327; and Du Heng, "The Author's Two Bodies: Paratext in Early Chinese Textual Culture," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 2018). While we should always be careful not to assume that any of our texts have remained unchanged over time, especially given the fluidity of textual culture in early China, none of my claims about *Qi jian*'s "citation" of earlier texts depends upon those texts remaining stable, beyond the general import of the phrases that *Qi jian* echoes.

<sup>34</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2369; *CCBZ* 13, p. 237: 往者不可及兮, 來者不可待。The *Yuan you* text (*CCJFS*, p. 1904; *CCBZ* 5, p. 164) is "Those who have gone before I don't reach; those to come I hear nothing of" 往者余弗及兮, 來者吾不聞。A similar couplet occurs in *Ai shi ming* (*CCJFS*, p. 2442; *CCBZ* 14, p. 259), but the language of the *Qi jian* is considerably closer to that of *Yuan you*.

<sup>35</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2437; *CCBZ* 13, p. 258: 自古而固然兮, 吾又何怨乎今之人。The language of "She Jiang" (*CCJFS*, p. 1406; *CCBZ* 4, p. 132) is only slightly different: "Past ages have all been this way, so why should I resent the men of today? 與前世而皆然兮, 吾又何怨乎今之人。"

tations, and many others in between, *Qi jian*'s speaker thus takes up the topic of community in language that begins to suggest the possibility of a community constituted by texts written by different authors at different times.

Although I will suggest that these two citations suggest a change in the speaker's attitude over the course of the series, *Qi jian* is far from articulating a linear progress. Instead, the suite mirrors the temporal dynamics of the genre as a whole in repeatedly returning to the moment of Qu Yuan's suicide, which the speaker either commits or contemplates in the first, second, third, and sixth poems, as well as several times within the sixth poem alone. I say that he "either commits or contemplates" suicide because it is not always clear which is which given the language's general lack of tense-markers. David Hawkes, for example, has translated the middle section of the sixth poem, "Ai ming" 哀命, as being spoken in the voice of a man who has already drowned, and whose body is disintegrating in the current even as he continues to complain about his king's benightedness and the mores of his age.<sup>36</sup> As far as I have found, no Chinese commentator has ever read the poem this way, but it is easy to see why Hawkes might have done so.

哀時命之不合兮，	I mourn that the fate of the age is not meet;
傷楚國之多憂。	I am pained by the many worries of Chu.
內懷情之潔白兮，	Within I harbor passions of pure white,
4 遭亂世而離尤。	but have met with an age of disorder and encountered blame.
惡耿介之直行兮，	They hate the gleaming greatness of my upright conduct;
世溷濁而不知。	the age is muddy and does not understand me.
何君臣之相失兮，	How far ruler and minister have lost one another!
8 上沅湘而分離。	I go up the Yuan and Xiang to separate myself.
測汨羅之湘水兮，	I plumb the Xiang's waters in the Miluo,
知時固而不反。	for I know the age is obstinate and will not return.
傷離散之交亂兮，	Pained at having parted in disorder,

<sup>36</sup> See Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, p. 255. Note that there were certainly precedents in Handynasty China for the possibility of the dead continuing to speak, including in ritual contexts wherein the dead were thought to possess the bodies of *wu* 巫 (often translated as "shamans"), a group of practitioners that have often been associated with the *Chuci*; see, for example, the "Lun si" 論死 chapter of Wang Chong 王充, *Lunheng quan yi* 論衡全譯, ed. Yuan Huazhong 袁華忠 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1993), j. 62, p. 1290. The ability of such *wu* to channel the spirits of the dead obviously raises tantalizing possibilities when it comes to a body of literature that often purports to speak in the voice of Qu Yuan, but these possibilities remain beyond the scope of my discussion here.

- 12 遂側身而既遠。 I then hide my body and go far away.  
 處玄舍之幽門兮, I dwell within the dark gates of a black abode,  
 穴巖石而窟伏。 lying caved within a cavern in the cliff-rocks.  
 從水蛟而爲徒兮, I go with water-krakens as my companions,  
 16 與神龍乎休息。 and take my rest with numinous dragons.  
 何山石之嶄巖兮, How towering are the mountain rocks!  
 靈魂屈而偃蹇。 my soul shrinks and crouches in fear.  
 含素水而蒙深兮, I fill my mouth with white water and am hid-  
   den deep,  
 20 日眇眇而既遠。 daily fainter in the distance, I go far away.  
 哀形體之離解兮, I mourn that my body should break up and  
   disperse,  
 神罔兩而無舍。 that my spirit in a daze should be without an  
   abode.  
 惟椒蘭之不反兮, I think on how pepper and orchid would not  
   return;  
 24 魂迷惑而不知路。 souls confused, not knowing the road.  
 ...  
 戲疾瀨之素水兮, I play with the white water of the rushing rapids,  
 望高山之蹇產。 and gaze on the ardors of the high mountains.  
 哀高丘之赤岸兮, Mourning for the red cliffs of Highhill,  
 40 遂沒身而不反。 I then sink my body, never to return.<sup>37</sup>

For Hawkes, the speaker drowns himself in line 9 when he “plumbs the depths” of the Miluo’s waters; most commentators, by contrast, delay the suicide until the final couplet. The poem’s language can bear both interpretations, depending upon whether we understand images like the speaker’s “deep hiding 蒙深” in line 19 literally (Hawkes) or figuratively (everyone else). And this ambiguity renders the poem’s temporality unclear, even as the speaker himself is obsessed with time’s relentless progress, which has him born under a bad sign at the outset of the poem and obsessing over what will not return 不反 in lines 10, 23, and 40. The poem is thus caught in a moment that is paradoxically both final and also unending.

The many ambiguous figural shifts of this poem can be understood, therefore, to import the futility of the speaker’s suicide, which once again (as it did in “Huai sha”) fails to meaningfully change his situation. The speaker might be described as dwelling in a “dark abode 玄舍” either in his exile or in his death; he might be the companion of water-krakens either pre- or post-mortem. The “pure white” (*jiebai* 潔白) “internal passions 內...情” he harbors within become the “pure white

<sup>37</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2411–17; *CCBZ* 13, pp. 250–52.

water” (*sushui* 素水) that he drinks in his exile – or as Hawkes reads the image, that fills his body after he drowns.<sup>38</sup> And if the “arduous red cliffs of Highhill” stand for the Chu court – as “Highhill” seems to have been conventionally understood<sup>39</sup> – both his exile and his death occur in a landscape of towering mountains that cause his soul to shrink in fear. Whether at court, in exile, or dead, then, the speaker continues to figure his situation in the same imagery.

Similar dynamics can be found in the other poems in the suite as well, thus formally repeating across its constituent parts the stasis constitutive of each. In “Yuan shi” 怨世, for example, the speaker begins the poem by declaring that “The age is drowning in mud 沈淖 and hard to persuade,”<sup>40</sup> and ends it by saying,

願自沈於江流兮， 絕橫流而徑逝。	I wish to sink myself in the river’s flow, to decisively run against the age’s mores and go off at once.
寧爲江海之泥塗兮， 68 安能久見此濁世？	I would rather be the mud of river and sea, for how could I long observe this muddy world? <sup>41</sup>

Between the opening figure of drowning in mud and the final resolution to literally drown in mud comes a long figural discussion of the speaker’s predicament in an age wherein “the pure and clear are destroyed, and the turbid and muddy grow more by the day,” and wherein even though the speaker “wears pure white in his wanderings, a far different color from their black finery,” nonetheless there is no one who “knows to check the difference between black and white.”<sup>42</sup> The speaker suggests at one point that things in the natural cosmos are simply what they are, regardless of human failures of interpretation: “August heaven preserves its loftiness,” he says, “and sovereign earth upholds its longevity.”<sup>43</sup> But human society cannot discern the personal quali-

<sup>38</sup> Wang Yi’s gloss on the meaning of the phrase “white water” as “pure white virtue 清白之節” in line 19 would suggest the possibility of reading this as figural shift; see *CCJFS*, p. 2413; *CCBZ* 13, p. 251.

<sup>39</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2417; note that not all commentators understand “highhill 高丘” this way. The phrase appears to derive originally from line 216 of *Li sao*; its meaning there is uncertain and has been much debated (see *ibid.*, pp. 463–64), but is identified by Wang Yi as being a mountain in Chu. This is clearly the meaning that Liu Xiang attributes to the phrase in *Jiu tan* (*ibid.*, pp. 2539, 2594, and 2633) and probably by Yang Xiong in the “Fan *Li sao*” (*Han shu* 87, p. 3521, and the translation by Knechtges, *Two Studies*, p. 27).

<sup>40</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2384; *CCBZ* 13, p. 242: 世沈淖而難論。

<sup>41</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2397; *CCBZ* 13, p. 247.

<sup>42</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2384, 2387, and 2394, respectively; *CCBZ* 13, pp. 243, 244, and 246: 清冷冷而穢滅兮，溷湛湛而日多；服清白以逍遙兮，偏與乎玄英異色；孰知察其黑白。

<sup>43</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2387; *CCBZ* 13, p. 244: 皇天保其高兮，后土持其久。 Note that “august heaven” 皇天 returns near the end of the poem in a less literal meaning (see *CCJFS*, p. 2396;

ties the speaker is therefore compelled to figure in the poem's plethora of elaborate comparisons. He resolves, therefore, to leave behind a muddy world of mixed up and misapprehended metaphors to be the literal mud at the bottom of the river – an escape that again ends up ironically restating his problems in another form.

The same structure is even clearer in “Zi bei” 自悲, the only poem in the suite that contains a cosmic *itinerarium*.

居愁懃其誰告兮，	I dwell in grief and labor: to whom can I make my plaint?
獨永思而憂悲。	alone I yearn endlessly, sad and melan- choly.
內自省而不慙兮，	Examining myself within, I am not ashamed:
4 操愈堅而不衰。	my fortitude is firmer and has not declined.
隱三年而無決兮，	I have hidden away three years without a resolution;
歲忽忽其若頽。	the autumns pass quickly, as if tumbling down.
憐余身不足以卒意兮，	I sorrow that I have not life enough left to finish my aims;
8 冀一見而復歸。	I hope to be seen once and return home.
哀人事之不幸兮，	Mourning that in human affairs I have been unlucky,
屬天命而委之咸池。	I attribute it to heaven's command and leave it to Xian Pool.
...	
悲不反余之所居兮，	I grieve that I cannot return to my dwelling, and regret that I have left my hometown.
恨離予之故鄉。	
鳥獸驚而失群兮，	When birds and beasts are startled and lose their flocks,
20 猶高飛而哀鳴。	even they will fly high and cry mournfully.
狐死必首丘兮，	When a fox dies, it always points its heads towards its den:
夫人孰能不反其真情？	what man would not return to his true nature?
故人疏而日忘兮，	Old friends are estranged and forgotten by the day;
24 新人近而俞好。	new acquaintances draw close in greater favor.
莫能行於杳冥兮，	None can walk in total darkness;
孰能施於無報？	and who can give without any recompense?

CCBZ 13, p. 247), another potential figural shift.

苦眾人之皆然兮， 28 乘回風而遠遊。 ... 觀天火之炎場兮， 聽大壑之波聲。 引八維以自道兮， 60 含沆瀣以長生。 居不樂以時思兮， 食草木之秋實， 飲菌若之朝露兮， 64 構桂木而爲室。 雜橘柚以爲圃兮， 列新夷與椒楨。 鷓鶴孤而夜號兮， 68 哀居者之誠貞。	I find it bitter that the many are all like this, and so I mount the whirlwind to wander far. ... I gaze at the flaming heat of Heaven's Fire; I listen to the sound of waves in the Great Crevasse. I go by the Eight Cords to guide myself, <sup>44</sup> and drink the dewdrops to live forever. Yet I dwell in unhappiness and constant longing, eating the autumn fruits of plants and trees. I sip the morning dews on mushroom and galangal, and build a chamber of cassia wood. I mix orange and pomelo to make an or- chard; I plant lines of lily-magnolia and pepper- privet. The cranes are lonesome and cry in the night, lamenting the earnest loyalty of the dweller there. <sup>45</sup>
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This very beautiful poem contains a large number of figural shifts. The most obvious is signaled by the fourfold repetition of the word *ju* 居, “to dwell,” which appears in the first line in an apparently figural sense – to “inhabit grief” – and in the last line as a literal lodging beyond the human world, where others “grieve” for him. This sort of literalization is evident as well in the speaker’s shift from figuratively leaving his fate to Xian Pool (the heavenly ocean where the sun bathes at night, and hence a metonymy for heaven, what lies beyond human control) to literally traveling to Heaven’s Fire (understood by some commentators as the sun) and the watery Great Crevasse (perhaps the ocean, or perhaps Xian Pool itself).<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the speaker’s decision to “ride the whirlwind” up to heaven literalizes his comparison of his feelings

<sup>44</sup> These are the Eight Cords of Heaven, in the eight directions. Hawkes explains: “The Great Circles, which divide the ‘fields’ of the sky, are here thought of as actual cords radiating from the Celestial Pole” (see *Songs of the South*, p. 261).

<sup>45</sup> *CCJJS*, pp. 2400–10; *CCBZ* 13, p. 248–50.

<sup>46</sup> For the claim that “Heaven’s Fire” is the sun, see Wang Siyuan’s 王泗原 comment at *CCJJS*, p. 2408; other commentators think that it is the name of a great conflagration in the south. Wang Yi interprets the “Great Crevasse” as the ocean, and most commentators have followed him, albeit without much evidence.

to those of startled birds who fly up in distress – birds that return again in another literalization in the final couplet. Finally, the speaker's apparent ascension to immortality (*zhen* 真, "truth") in the final section of the poem represents a figural shift of his resolve to return to his "true nature 真情."<sup>47</sup> Yet this return to truth and nature will represent in the end merely another failed escape, since his "true feelings" are for his human ruler and the human world, turning each of the components of this immortal realm into reminders of the situation he supposedly left behind.

No matter where the speaker turns, then, be it suicide or everlasting life, he can escape neither his obsession with his mortal situation nor the figures through which the benightedness of his age forces him to articulate it. It is in this context that the coda to the suite represents a surprising turn, the series' most long-distance figural recurrence apparently marking a change in attitude. In both the first poem of the series and then again in the coda, the speaker compares himself to a fine bird, flying off to give place to less auspicious barnfowl, and his contemporaries to poor orchard-keepers, chopping down excellent orange trees to make room for bitter fruits.<sup>48</sup> Although these suite-spanning recurrences echo the more-proximate recurrences that structured individual poems like "Yuan shi" and "Zi bei," we find here no figural shift: in both the first poem and the last, these images bear the same freight, analogically importing the speaker's unrecognized virtue and the benightedness of his contemporaries. It should be pointed out, moreover, that both of these figures are deeply conventional within the *Chuci* genre, the birds deriving almost verbatim from Jia Yi's "Diao Qu Yuan wen,"<sup>49</sup> and the analogy of the orange tree referencing "Ju song" from the *Jiu zhang*.<sup>50</sup> In simply repeating these traditional figures here without fleeing into suicide or immortality, it is as if the speaker of this final poem had finally accepted the inescapability of his situation, a reading perhaps supported by the unexpectedly optimistic final lines that follow immediately these images: "Things have been this way since ancient times, so why should I resent the men of today?" As this final quotation of "She Jiang" demonstrates, the speaker's isolation is, paradoxically, itself not isolated; it repeats not only within the series,

<sup>47</sup> These images seem to derive originally from "Ai Ying" 哀郢 (ibid., p. 1479; *CCBZ* 4, p. 136); given that they will be at the center of this poem's figural shift, it is almost as if *Qijian* is literalizing this precedent text.

<sup>48</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2368–69 and 2433–36; *CCBZ* 13, pp. 237 and 257.

<sup>49</sup> See *Shiji* 84, p. 2493, and *Wenxuan* 60, p. 2590.

<sup>50</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 1757–89; *CCBZ* 4, pp. 153–55.

but also across the larger genre that its quotational practice makes a display of inheriting. If the speaker cannot transcend his age to “reach those who went before, nor can he wait for those to come,” he seems at the end of a suite that thematized inescapable repetition to take some comfort in the fact that neither could the frustrated worthies of previous eras, and neither will the frustrated worthies of times to come.

Like “Huai sha,” then, *Qi jian* represents a metatextual reflection upon its own figural practices, and in particular, upon the possibility that they might provide access to an alternative community. Where *Qi jian* differs from “Huai sha” is in its suggestion that that alternate community might not merely be one of “kind,” but might more specifically be made possible by participation in a shared literary tradition. In its citations of previous pieces in the genre and in the ambiguity of the suite’s speaker – who may or may not be Qu Yuan himself,<sup>51</sup> even though the text was doubtless written several centuries after his legendary death – *Qi jian* suggests the possibility that poets and readers of this tradition might through it transcend their isolated individualities to meet in a timeless archetype. This difference, in turn, is linked to slightly different analyses of figuration and slightly different uses of figural shift. In “Huai sha,” poetic figuration was a linguistic attempt to manifest frustrated virtues, and figural shift was the result of trying to escape language to the more transparent medium of action. In *Qi jian*, by contrast, figural shift represents the inescapability of the speaker’s preoccupations. Instead of fleeing figuration into action, therefore, the suite finds a virtue in its generic repeatability, the way that it can demonstrate connections between individuals separated over time.

<sup>51</sup> The intended identity of the speaker is a difficult question. All of the commentators sampled in *CCJFS* (and only a few have ever commented upon *Qi jian*, which was cut from Zhu Xi’s edition of *Chuci* and so was almost never the subject of late-imperial scholarship) take the first line of the suite, 平生於國兮, as “I, Qu Ping, was born in the capital” (see *CCJFS*, p. 2363) – Qu Ping 屈平 being, of course, the alternative name for Qu Yuan as given in his *Shiji* biography. This interpretation could perhaps be supported by the fact that the speaker does, in “Ai ming,” seem to drown in the Miluo River, as Qu Yuan legends have him doing. On the other hand, however, *pingsheng* 平生 is a well-attested compound in early literature that could make sense in the first line without invoking the name of Qu Yuan: “I lived most of my life in the capital.” And given that the suite cites verbatim from texts that were not, as far as we know, attributed to Qu Yuan (such as *Jiu bian* 九辯 and *Diao Qu Yuan wen* [see n. 17, above]), its voice seems to be a generic blend rather than an attempt to ventriloquize Qu’s. Compare the relatively more focused borrowings of *Jiu tan*, which echoes two groups of texts (see Walker, “Towards a Formal History of the ‘Chuci,’” pp. 201–4): texts attributed to Qu Yuan and the late suites *Qi jian* and *Jiu huai* 九懷 (rarely), a scheme that, as we will see, matches its content quite closely.

FIGURATIVE IDENTITY: *JIU TAN*

The *Chuci* contains one more suite of poems that makes extensive use of figural shift. This suite, *Jiu tan* 九歎, was written by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BC), a member of the Han royal family and perhaps the most influential bibliographer in Chinese history.<sup>52</sup> Liu is purported to have been one of the original compilers of the *Chuci* anthology,<sup>53</sup> and he was clearly a careful reader of its texts. Yet the mere fact that his suite comes attached to a definite and historically well-known author moves us into a somewhat different literary world from the texts we have examined thus far.

Neither “Huai sha” nor *Qi jian* has a very plausible author attached to it; the former seems to be written in the voice of Qu Yuan, while the latter is almost pointedly ambiguous about its speaker. In stark contrast to these two poems, *Jiu tan* explicitly involves two speakers, each of whom is readily identifiable, at least at first. The opening poem of the series, for example, begins in Liu Xiang’s own voice, switching over after two introductory lines to a well-marked ventriloquism of Qu Yuan:

伊伯庸之末胄兮，	He was the last scion of Boyong’s line,
諒皇直之屈原。	truly the august and straight Qu Yuan.
云余肇祖於高陽兮，	He says: I trace my ancestry from Gao
	Yang,
4 惟楚懷之嬋連。	and am the kindred of King Huai of Chu.
原生受命於貞節兮，	I, Yuan, at birth received my mandate at a
	perfect juncture,
鴻永路有嘉名。	to exalt with fair fame the permanent
	road. <sup>54</sup>

The body of this poem continues on in Qu Yuan’s voice, with repeated use of the first-person pronoun *yu* 余; it then returns to Liu Xiang’s voice in the coda, speaking about Qu Yuan in the third person, and forming a clear ring-structure that keeps each speaker relatively distinct. By explicitly placing literature within something resembling a dialogical context, Liu Xiang thus deepens the *Qi jian*’s engagement with the precedent literary tradition, while simultaneously making it impossible

<sup>52</sup> For a concise introduction to Liu Xiang and the importance of his life’s work, see Michael Loewe, “Liu Xiang and Liu Xin,” in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen, eds., *Chang’an 26 BCE* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2015), pp. 369–90.

<sup>53</sup> Although Wang Yi identifies Liu Xiang as the original compiler of the anthology (*CCJJS*, p. 7), doubts have been raised about what role he may actually have played in it. See, for example, Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, pp. 30–35.

<sup>54</sup> *CCJJS*, pp. 2533–34; *CCBZ* 16, p. 282.

that his voice should simply disappear into the sort of timeless archetype the earlier suite seemed to describe.

Elsewhere in the series, however, the distinction between Liu Xiang's voice and Qu Yuan's becomes harder to draw. In the fifth poem, for example, the lack of pronouns makes it difficult to distinguish first-person discourse from third.

覽屈氏之離騷兮，	I read the <i>Li sao</i> of Mister Qu,
心哀哀而怫鬱。	my/his heart is/was sorrowful and depressed.
聲嗷嗷以寂寥兮，	My/his voice complains/ed in the lonely silence,
4 顧僕夫之憔悴。	as I/he consider/ed the carriage driver's desolation. <sup>55</sup>

It would perhaps be most natural to read this first quatrain entirely in the voice of Liu Xiang. Yet the second line is so typical of Qu Yuan's persona that its application to Liu Xiang could hardly fail to suggest a sort of transference between the long-dead poet and his latter-born reader. The fourth line, moreover, could either be read as invoking Qu Yuan's famous final departure from his homesick driver at the end of *Li sao*, or as Liu Xiang's pitying Qu Yuan, who (in one of *Li sao*'s many figural shifts) was himself figured as a chariot driver at the poem's beginning.<sup>56</sup> In other instances, the problems of distinguishing Liu's voice from Qu's seem to go even deeper. In "Min ming" 愍命, for example, the seventh poem of the suite, the speaker complains that "Han Xin is hidden among those wearing armor and helmets, while a passerby acts as general and leads assaults on cities."<sup>57</sup> Han Xin 韓信 (ca. 230–196 BC) was an adept strategist during the wars that established the Han dynasty, coming to prominence some seventy years or so after Qu Yuan is supposed to have died. There can be little doubt that Liu Xiang would have known the chronology quite well, and yet the same poem complains – apparently in the same first-person – about how "far is the road to Ying," the long-destroyed capital of Chu that Qu Yuan lamented in "Ai Ying" 哀郢. It is thus unclear who is speaking this poem and when, as if the previously distinct voices of Liu Xiang and Qu Yuan had begun to merge over the course of the series.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2586; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 295–96.

<sup>56</sup> See *CCJFS*, pp. 696 and 116, respectively; *CCBZ* 1, pp. 47 and 7.

<sup>57</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2617; *CCBZ* 16, p. 304.

<sup>58</sup> Du, "The Author's Two Bodies," argues that Liu Xiang's invocation of Han Xin is a hint to the reader that he is borrowing Qu Yuan's voice and persona to critique the government of his own time. The suggestion is plausible, given that Liu Xiang himself speaks of Qu Yuan's writing *Li sao* as a text of "subtle words 微文" in order to remonstrate with his ruler (*CCJFS*, p. 2627; *CCBZ* 16, p. 307).

What I hope to suggest here is that this complexity of voice, both distinguishing and blending Liu Xiang and Qu Yuan, is again part of a set of metatextual reflections upon literature, articulated once again through figural shifts. *Jiu tan* is the most flamboyant of any text in the *Chuci* in its use of this literary technique, which it employs both on large and smaller scales. Consider, for examples of the latter, the following quatrain, from the third poem of the series, “Yuan si” 怨思:

顧屈節以從流兮, I think of bending my principles to go with the  
current of the age,  
心鞏鞏而不夷. but my heart would be upset and not at peace.  
盍浮沅而馳騁兮, I would prefer to float on the Yuan and gallop on,  
52 下江湘以遭迴. to go down the Yangzi and Xiang, turning and  
whirling.<sup>59</sup>

We find the same thing in “You ku” 憂苦, the sixth poem in the set:

思余俗之流風兮, When I think of our folkways that are the cur-  
rent fashion (literally, “flowing wind”),  
心紛錯而不受. my heart is disordered and will not accept  
them.  
遵壅莽以呼風兮, I travel through wild moors, crying into the  
wind,  
8 步從容於山廈. and pace slowly around mountain bends.<sup>60</sup>

Liu Xiang also uses the technique of figural shift across greater distances as well. In “Yuan si,” for example, the speaker in his initial *tristia* compares his situation in the human world analogically to “a traveler (*zhengfu* 征夫) exhausting himself on a broad highway”; near the end of the poem, in the *itinerarium*, the same language returns in the speaker’s self-description as a literal “traveler (*zhengfu*) hurrying on, with no place to rest.”<sup>61</sup> In the fifth poem, similarly, Liu Xiang describes Qu Yuan’s virtue on the analogy to aromatic plants – “he wove cassia branches in great profusion, and braided basil and magnolia; such were his blossoms, and yet they were not used, but were cast out in the wilds to wilt and die” – and then has him in his exile literally “gathering hanging moss in the mountain wilderness, picking wild persimmons on the isles midstream.”<sup>62</sup> And in the final poem, “Yuan you” 遠遊, although the order is reversed, the basic structure is the same: Liu first describes

<sup>59</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2570–71; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 291–92.

<sup>60</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2598; *CCBZ* 16, p. 299.

<sup>61</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2563 and 2571; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 289 and 292: 征夫勞於周行 and 征夫皇皇, 其孰依兮. The former instance is revealed as analogical by its inherence in a string of similar comparisons.

<sup>62</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2589 and 2594; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 296 and 298: 結桂樹之旖旎兮, 紉荃蕙與辛

his speaker in his heavenly *itinerarium* as “whipping the wind god to serve as his fore-chariot” and then, when the poem turns to *tristia* in its second half, describes him figuratively as “unfolding crimson hangings that billow majestically, but that are ruined by the gusting of the wind.”<sup>63</sup> Examples like these could be multiplied at length.

All of these figural shifts, whether on small or large scales, share a common structure. In each case cited above, Liu Xiang uses figural shift to suggest at least an imagistic unity across the *tristia-itineraria* divide of Qu Yuan’s life: Qu was analogically a “haggard traveler” within the state, and literally a “haggard traveler” later in his exile. In other cases, Liu expands this structure to suggest a further unity between the speaker’s situation in the state, his exile, and his death. Consider, for example, the second poem of the suite, “Li shi” 離世, whose figural shifts give rise to temporal ambiguities similar to those we remarked above in our discussion of *Qi jian*.

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 端余行其如玉兮，<br>迹皇輿之躡跡。<br>群阿容以晦光兮， | Upright were my actions, like jade;<br>I laid out the tracks of the chariot of state.<br>But the many curried favor and shaded the<br>light, |
| 24 皇輿覆以幽辟。                      | and the august chariot was overturned in the<br>darkness.  |
| 輿中涂以回畔兮，<br>駟馬驚而橫奔。<br>執組者不能制兮， | In mid-course the chariot turned around;<br>the horses startled and ran amuck.<br>The one holding the reins could not control<br>them;       |
| 28 必折軛而摧轅。                      | the yoke was bound to break and the shafts to<br>be smashed.   |
| 斷鑣銜以馳驚兮，                        | The horses snapped their bridles as they sped<br>on  |
| 暮去次而敢止。                         | no one dared to halt them at the evening’s<br>lodgings.  |
| 路蕩蕩其無人兮，                        | The road now swept clean of any people,<br>it was not stopped for a thousand <i>li</i> .   |
| 32 遂不禦乎千里。<br>身衡陷而下沉兮，          | My person was suddenly submerged, I sunk<br>under,   |
| 不可獲而復登。                         | and was unable to climb again.   |
| 不顧身之卑賤兮，                        | I did not care about my own low status,  |

夷 and 攀薜荔於山野兮，采撚支於中洲。

<sup>63</sup> *CCJJS*, pp. 2641 and 2643; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 311 and 312: 鞭風伯使先驅 and 張絳帷湘以擔檐兮，風邑邑而蔽之。

- 36 惜皇輿之不興。 I only grieved that the august chariot should  
not arise.  
出國門而端指兮, I went out the city gate and straightened my aim,  
冀壹寤而錫還。 hoping my prince would awaken and recall me.  
哀僕夫之坎毒兮, I grieved that the chariot driver should un-  
dergo suffering,
- 40 屢離憂而逢患。 frequently meeting with sorrow and encounter-  
ing trouble.  
九年之中不吾反兮, For nine years I was not recalled,  
思彭咸之水游。 so I thought of Peng Xian's watery wanderings.  
惜師延之浮渚兮, I pitied Shi Yan's floating among the islets,<sup>64</sup>  
44 赴汨羅之長流。 and went to the Miluo's long flow.  
遵江曲之逶移兮, I followed the river's winding curves,  
觸石礫而衡遊。 dashing on huge rocks and roaming broadly.  
波澧澧而揚澆兮, The waves roared and raised spume,  
48 順長瀨之濁流。 as I followed in the muddy flow of long rapids.  
凌黃沱而下低兮, I rode the Huangtuo and came down low,  
思還流而復反。 yearning to turn the current to return me  
home.  
玄輿馳而竝集兮, But the black chariots sped and gathered to-  
gether,  
52 身容與而日遠。 and my body moved slowly on, getting further  
by the day.  
櫂舟杭以橫瀉兮, I skulled my boat to cross crosscurrent,  
濟湘流而南極。 through the Xiang's flow to the southern ex-  
treme.  
立江界而長吟兮, I stood on the river's brink and moaned long,  
56 愁哀哀而累息。 worried mournful and with repeated sighs.  
情恍惚以忘歸兮, My feelings blurred and unclear, I forgot to  
return;  
神浮遊以高厲。 my spirit floated wandering, and traveled high up.  
心蛩蛩而懷顧兮, Though my heart was grieved and yearned to  
look back,  
60 魂眷眷而獨逝。 my soul in yearning went off alone.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Shi Yan 師延 was the music master for king Zhou 紂 of the Shang dynasty; he drowned himself when the Zhou dynasty overthrew the Shang. See Wang Xianshen 王先慎, ed., *Han Fei zi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), j. 10, p. 63. Peng Xian, or “Peng and Xian,” is a highly vexed topic, and the compound was apparently understood in different ways in the early reception of the *Chuci*. The structure of this couplet seems to me to make it clear that Liu Xiang thought of Peng Xian as a legendary suicide, as Wang Yi would in his commentary. For an argument that we might still read “Shaman Peng and Shaman Xian” here, see Williams, “Roaming the Infinite,” pp. 92–99.

<sup>65</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2552–61; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 286–88.

As was the case in *Qi jian*'s "Ai ming," it is unclear where exactly in this narrative the speaker commits suicide. When he "dashes on huge rocks" and "comes down low," his "body" driven onwards by the "black chariots" of the water, he could either be boating on the Miluo River or have thrown himself into it, as Liu's readers would all know Qu Yuan did.<sup>66</sup> Yet if the transferability of these figures renders the speaker's suicide a continuation of his exile and his exile a foreshadowing of the posthumous wanderings of his disjoint body and soul, they also link both his exile and his death back to his previous situation in the state, in the first half of the poem. To give just the most obvious example of many, the ambivalent image of the "black chariots" of the water driving on Qu's boat or body represents a clear figural shift of the extensive conceit of the chariot of state "overturned in the darkness" that had dominated the poem's *tristia*. In drawing together life, exile, and death, Liu Xiang's use of the same images across different periods of Qu Yuan's existence thus works against the passage of time.<sup>67</sup>

Liu makes this point explicitly in the series' most ostentatious examples of figural shift: the codas of its first and last poems. The first of these codas offers an explicitly analogical 譬 characterization of Qu Yuan to suggest that his death was like his life. Both life and death, moreover, survive in Qu's writings, which are figuratively akin to both, and thus project them past his time to the time of readers and imitators like Liu Xiang.

身永流而不還兮， My body flowed off forever, never to return;  
60 魂長逝而常愁。 my soul went off eternally, in unending sorrow.

歎曰： The Lament says:  
譬彼流水， Compare him to flowing water,  
紛揚磕兮， in chaos rising and crashing,  
波逢洶涌， to waves meeting, surging and leaping,  
64 瀆滂沛兮， gushing on in vast flow.  
揄揚滌盪， To its rising and scouring,  
漂流隕往， floating flowing and sinking off,  
觸峯石兮， dashing on jagged rocks.  
68 龍叩脰圈， Swirling and circling,

<sup>66</sup> Hawkes, again, has him speaking from beyond his watery grave early on in the poem, from line 44 onwards; once again, Chinese commentators have generally seen him as waiting until the end of the poem to do himself in. See Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, p. 286.

<sup>67</sup> In the third and fourth lines of the poem, the speaker "approaches the august ancestors of king Huai, and makes his plaint to Holy Huai's ghosts." If in the second half of the poem, the speaker is himself a ghost, this might represent another figural shift germane to the question of time in the set. See *CCJJS*, p. 2548; *CCBZ* 16, p. 285.

縹戾宛轉，	whirling and eddying,
阻相薄兮。	breaking on obstacles in its course.
遭紛逢凶，	So he came up against chaos and met misfortune,
72 蹇離尤兮，	and blocked, encountered blame.
垂文揚采，	He left writings that raised brilliance,
遺將來兮。	and gave them to those to come. <sup>68</sup>

By repeating the word “flow 流” in the final couplet of the poem proper and the first line of the coda, Liu Xiang suggests once again the continuity between Qu Yuan’s death and his life, which was figuratively like the tumultuous river in which he drowned. This tumult, moreover, was congruous with and responsible for the tumultuous character of his writings, for just as the rivers of his life and death “rose up in chaos” (*fen yang* 紛揚), so too did Qu Yuan “raise” (*yang*) brilliant writings in response to the “chaos” (*fen*) of his age. Something crucial of Qu’s life, the shifting figures of this coda suggest, was thus embodied in his death, and the essence of both were embodied in his writings.

It is in the suggestion that these writings were “given” to the future that the complexity of the series’ voice becomes interesting. For not only does the figural shift of the word “flow” span Qu Yuan’s explicitly ventriloquized voice in the poem proper and Liu Xiang’s voice in the coda. Equally important, Liu Xiang’s poetry comes to take on in this coda the epideictic *fu* 賦 register of works like Mei Sheng’s 枚乘 (d. 140 BC) description of the tidal bore at Guangling,<sup>69</sup> a style often understood to aim at “embodying the object it describes 體物.”<sup>70</sup> As Liu depicts the tumultuous waters of Qu Yuan’s life, death, and writing, his own writing takes on a tumultuous wateriness. If figural shift thus manifests the general character common to the various phases of Qu Yuan’s identity, these figures prove transferrable: he can “give” them to Liu Xiang, and Liu Xiang’s writing can re-embody them, as Liu has re-embodyed Qu’s tendency to employ figural shifts (which he no doubt learned from poems he attributed to Qu Yuan, like *Li sao* and “Huai sha”).

The upshot of all this figural spanning of distinct moments and individualities is that something of Qu Yuan, though dead, can nonetheless live on in the works of latter-day writers like Liu Xiang. This is the point made in the coda to the final poem, which echoes the first in considering the possibility that poetry may project its author past

<sup>68</sup> *CCJJS*, pp. 2545–48; *CCBZ* 16, pp. 284–85.

<sup>69</sup> See *Wenxuan* 34, pp. 1569–70.

<sup>70</sup> For this description of the genre, see Lu Ji’s “Wen fu” 文賦 (*Wenxuan* 17, p. 766).

the limitations of his time.<sup>71</sup> In the body of the verse, the speaker goes roaming through the cosmos, conferring with immortals and spirits until near the poem's end, "seeing the ways that prevail in Southern Ying," he decides to "cast my body into the Yuan and Xiang Rivers."<sup>72</sup> In the coda, however, Liu Xiang's language returns to wandering the heavens, this time in an explicitly analogical and apparently metatextual register.

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| 譬彼蛟龍，    | Compare him/me to the horned dragon,       |
| 乘雲浮兮。    | floating as to ride the clouds;            |
| 汎淫瀕溶，    | Overflowing and billowing,                 |
| 64 紛若霧兮。 | in chaos like a fog.                       |
| 潺湲鞿轆，    | Flowing on in crisscrossing streams,       |
| 雷動電發，    | thunders stirring, lightning flashing,     |
| 馭高舉兮。    | galloping up high.                         |
| 68 升虛凌冥， | Ascending the void, surpassing the dark,   |
| 沛濁浮清，    | shedding the turbid to float on the clear, |
| 入帝宮兮。    | entering the palace of God.                |
| 搖翹奮羽，    | Beating wings and stirring pinions,        |
| 72 馳風騁雨， | racing the wind, driving the rain,         |
| 遊無窮兮。    | wandering without end. <sup>73</sup>       |

Whereas in the first poem it was clear that the coda was written in Liu Xiang's voice and about Qu Yuan, by the end of the series, those voices have become confused, and this last poem provides no obvious markers to indicate who is speaking, or about whom. Yet this ambiguity now seems precisely the point. On its surface, this coda mimics the structure of the first, describing how *like* an immortal wanderer the speaker of the preceding poem is in his depictions of immortal wanderings. This metatextual observation, however, is performed in the same figures as the poem it comments upon, a point made even more forcefully by the coda's adoption once again of the "object-embodying" *fu* register, twisting sinuously like the sky-wandering dragon it describes.<sup>74</sup> The scope

<sup>71</sup> For an alternative reading of this triumphant final poem, see Williams, "Roaming the Infinite," which argues that the set depicts "the Daoist apotheosis of its quasi-Quvian protagonist Liu Xiang" (p. 104). I agree with many of the points that Williams makes in coming to this conclusion, in particular his clear demonstration that there need not have been in Liu Xiang's time a "fundamental conflict between drowning and immortality" (p. 100). I diverge from his interpretation, however, in placing greater emphasis on the explicitly analogical 譬 nature of the transcendence described in this final triumph.

<sup>72</sup> *CCJFS*, p. 2642; *CCBZ* 16, p. 311.

<sup>73</sup> *CCJFS*, pp. 2633-46; *CCBZ* 16, p. 312.

<sup>74</sup> Compare here the language of Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (179-117 BC) "Daren fu" 大人賦, in *Shiji* 117, pp. 3056-62.

of the coda's comment thus comes to include itself, casting its analogical coloring back over the figures of the poem proper, and rendering the verse as a whole self-referential in an endless loop.<sup>75</sup> If we were inclined to read the voice of the poem proper and the voice of the coda as distinct, as we were encouraged to do in the first poem in the suite, this looping blends them together. Whoever it is speaks these words, he also becomes their subject, and is rapt by them into a literary immortality indistinguishable from the figures of the preceding poem.

This final figural shift thus serves once again to link potentially distinct moments, and to project them into timelessness. If the shifts we observed in the body of the suite tied together the various stages of Qu Yuan's existence – his life, his exile, his suicide, and his writing – this one wraps Qu Yuan and Liu Xiang together in the immortalizing, immortal poetic voice they have come to share.<sup>76</sup> In this process, the individualities of each moment and each author are sloughed like a molted shell, while their literary figures live on timelessly, capable of shifting into the voice of whoever would take them up. If in “Huai sha” the speaker's suicide represented a futile flight from figuration, therefore, in *Jiu tan* the figures are the flight.

## CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have suggested four points about the *Chuci* anthology that have not been generally recognized. First, I have demonstrated that despite the philological difficulties that have discouraged more extensive literary study of these texts among Western scholars, and that have often encouraged the most productive East Asian scholars working on this material to focus on word- and sentence-level cruxes, many poems in the anthology are carefully written textual constructions, leveraging purposive literary techniques that repay close reading of a structural kind. Second, I have shown that this sort of close reading can reveal some of these texts as metatextually reflective, part of an alternative history of early Chinese literary theory that this paper takes only a first step towards unearthing. Third, although Pauline Yu was right to note

<sup>75</sup> This feature of *Jiu tan* recalls Williams' insightful discussion of *Jiu zhang* as “strange loops.” I agree that this structure is often instantiated throughout the genre. See Williams, “Tropes of Entanglement.”

<sup>76</sup> The point would require further development, but Liu's interest in the metatextual possibility of blending with an earlier writer could help to make sense of what have often been seen as the more historically suspect of his decisions as a bibliographer, in particular his ascription of large corpora of texts, which scholars now consider likely to be heterogeneous in origin, to a relatively small number of named great voices, such as the Masters.

the importance of community in early Chinese discussions of literary images, I have argued that her sources, most importantly the *Chuci* commentative tradition beginning from Wang Yi, represent a late and polemical reinterpretation of figural practices theorized in the collection itself. Fourth, I have intimated that although the “timelessness of literature” and “literary immortality” may be dead metaphors to us, for Western Han readers and writers from Liu An to Liu Xiang, the idea seems to have invited serious thought.<sup>77</sup>

The final two points deserve a moment’s reflection here. Early China reserved places in its intellectual architecture for quite literal types of post-mortem existence, from religious transcendence to the more common survival of a person’s various souls after death.<sup>78</sup> Given this fact, I take it as instructive that Qu Yuan’s literary immortality seems often to have been discussed in literature that imitated his (putative) writing, rather than in more prosaic genres. Some of the texts we read above provide, I hope to have suggested, an implicit rationale for why this might have been the case. In the three central examples considered here, “Huai sha,” *Qi jian*, and *Jiu tan*, literary immortality was understood as essentially figurative, rather than literal: if it could be imagined, sustained, and accessed through literature’s shifting figures, it could not be cashed out in the world we live in most of the time. Within this context, Wang Yi’s choice to write his commentary in the prosaic *zhangju* 章句 form might have correlated with his attempts, visible throughout his interpretations of the *Li sao*’s imagery, to tame literature to the world outside it.<sup>79</sup>

This observation returns us to *Li sao* itself, and to the figural shifts within it that were outlined briefly at the beginning of this essay.

<sup>77</sup> The same point can of course be made with regard to Sima Qian, who explicitly cites Qu Yuan as a model for his own great project, a book that will replace the family line broken by his castration. On this topic, see Stephen Owen, “Speculative Futures: Making Books and Progeny” (forthcoming).

<sup>78</sup> For useful introductions to ideas about the dead and the afterlife in Han China, see Michèle Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, “Death and the Dead: Practices and Images in the Qin and Han,” in John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 949–1026, and Constance A. Cook, *Death in Ancient China: The Tale of One Man’s Journey* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> Although it would take another paper to prove the point, this speculation is generally supported by the verse commentary included within Wang Yi’s (see n. 13, above), which does not display the political-allegorical tendencies of the *zhangju* sections of the commentary. Unfortunately, we cannot tell for certain how innovative Wang Yi’s *zhangju* might have been. His introduction credits Liu An with a “*Li sao* jing zhangju” 離騷經章句, but as discussed above in n. 17, above, the precise genre of Liu An’s metatextual work on the *Li sao* is highly uncertain. Wang Yi also credits Ban Gu (a noted skeptic of Liu An’s claim as to Qu Yuan’s literary immortality; see *CCJFS*, p. 6) and Jia Kui 賈逵 (30–101) with *zhangju* commentaries (*ibid.*,

Whether or not we decide that these recurrences were originally as mechanical as those of the *Jiu ge*, our observations here should suggest at least that Western Han readers from Liu An to Liu Xiang probably thought they were significant. For them, I suspect, these shifts represented much that their own deployments of the technique suggest: the assumption of the frustrated speaker into a transcendent, but only figuratively transcendent, realm. And in that self-enclosed realm, readers can still find Qu Yuan roaming with the immortals, even if outside of literature, evidence of his life has so disintegrated that scholars reasonably doubt he ever existed at all.

*LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

- CCBZ            Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, ed., *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注  
 CCJJJS        Cui Fuzhang 崔富章 and Li Daming 李大明, eds., *Chuci jijiao  
 jishi* 楚辭集校集釋

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p. 6). For an exhaustive study of the history and prehistory of Wang Yi's commentary, see Michael Schimmelpfennig, "Qu Yuans Weg vom 'wahren Menschen' zum wirklichen Dichter: Der Han-zeitliche Kommentar von Wang Yi zum "*Li sao*" und den Liedern von Chu," Ph.D. diss. (University of Heidelberg, 1999).