

Between Heaven and Man and the Voice Beyond the Strings: Expression of Opinion and Political Games in Han Literary Forms

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the literature of the Han Dynasty, analyses how the three major literary forms of poetry, fugue and prose carried and shaped the expression of public opinion, and explores the complex interactions among literary forms, political systems and media of communication. Through multi-dimensional analyses, we reveal the strategies of the Han intellectual class in seeking a balance between 'glorification of sainthood' and 'satire', as well as the unique roles and inherent tensions of different literary forms in the arena of public opinion, thus providing a new perspective for understanding the deeper connection between ancient literature and socio-politics.

KEYWORDS

The literature of the Han dynasty; Poetry; Poetic essay; Prose; Voice of opinion; Political gaming

1 Poetry: the straightforward shouting of folk opinion and the metaphorical writing of the scholarly classes

1.1 Yuefu poetry: from 'street ballads' to the duality of ideological tools

During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, he adopted the policy of 'dismissing the hundred schools and revering only the Confucians', and consolidated the legitimacy of his rule through the system of rituals and music. The establishment of music institutions, such as the 'Han Shu · Yiwen Zhi', 'there are Zhao, Dai, Qin, Chu's Acura', not only meet the needs of music management, but also play the role of a political tool: through the collection of folk songs 'to view the customs, know the gains and losses', public opinion will be included in the official monitoring system. The design of this system clearly reflects the 'dual attitude' of the Han rulers towards the voices of the people - both the need to understand the people's sentiments with the help of ballads, and the dissolution of their critical nature through the embellishment of the text. For example, in 'Stranger in the Mulberry', Luoshi's resistance is weakened from 'What a fool you are' to 'You have your own wife', transforming the resistance narrative into an ethical discipline, fully exposing the superficiality of the 'rumour-raising' system. This fully exposes the contradictory nature of the 'rumour-raising' system, which on the surface 'seeks the welfare of the people', but in reality 'selectively collects public opinion'^[1].

1.1.1 The original record of civil opinion and the mechanisms of its dissemination

During the Han Dynasty, social stratification was serious and land annexation intensified, as recorded in the Book of Han - Foodstuffs and Goods Zhi: 'or ploughing the fields of the rich and powerful people, see the tax of Shih-Fu'. The accusation in the poem 'Dongmen Xing' of 'Other Families Wish to be Rich and Powerful, and Concubines Feeding with the King' and the pathos in 'Woman's Disease Xing' of 'Closing the Door and Plugging the Lattice, Shedding Orphans and Going to the City' are the direct reflections of this reality. Such works form a regional resonance of public opinion through the 'song of harmony', a form of group singing in which 'one person sings and three people sing in harmony' from Song Shu - Le Zhi, with its 'exquisite language and vivid imagery', which can create local public opinion pressure through 'issue setting and stakeholder resonance' even though its dissemination is limited to a specific region. 'Although its dissemination is limited to a specific geographical area, it is able to create localised public opinion pressure through 'issue-setting and stakeholder resonance'^[1].

1.1.2 The ideological adoption of official poetry collection and the literary projection of borderland subjects

The adaptation of folk songs by the musical institutions was not a simple textual modification, but rather a strategy of 'depoliticisation' to dissolve the critical nature of the songs, such as the fierce vow of 'the mountains have no lingering, the river is exhausted' in Shangye, which was incorporated into the court version as 'house music' and transformed into

an indirect tribute to the majesty of the emperor. In the court version, for example, the fierce oaths in Shangye, 'Mountains have no mountains and rivers are exhausted,' were incorporated into the 'music in the room,' transforming them into an indirect tribute to the emperor's majesty. In addition, border wars and ethnic relations during the Han dynasty were also projected in the music poems, such as the Xiongnu Song, 'The loss of my Qilian Mountains will make my six animals not flourish,' reflecting the deterrent power of the Han army, and Cai Yan's 'Poem of Sorrow and Anger,' 'Men's heads hanging by the side of the horses, women carried behind the horses,' exposing the devastation of the wars on the civilian population. The poem of Cai Yan's 'Sorrow and Anger', 'Men's Heads Hanging by the Horse, Women Carried Behind the Horse', reveals the destruction of civilians by war. Such works are both literary footnotes to military policy and expose the costs of imperial expansion.

1.2 Literati pentameter: hidden writing and public opinion security strategies

In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, with the dictatorship of the relatives and eunuchs and the alienation of the imperial examination system into a game of the powerful and the rich, the scholars were caught in the dilemma of 'glorifying the saints' and 'satirising' the scholars. Ban Gu's 'Winged History', with the phrase 'A hundred men are more troubled than a single Tigress', on the surface appeared to be an ode to filial piety, but in fact it was a clever allusion to judicial corruption by virtue of the allusion to Emperor Wen's abolition of the punishment of corporal punishment. This writing strategy of 'using the past to satirise the present' echoes Lü Zongli's analysis of the 'issue setting' of public opinion in the Han Dynasty - through the reconstruction of historical contexts, 'sensitive issues were transformed into legitimate discussions'. 'transforming sensitive issues into legitimate discussions' ^[1].

1.2.1 Metaphorical writing and strategies for avoiding the scourge of party confinement

Under the shadow of the scourge of Party confinement, Nineteen Poems of Ancient Poetry uses the nostalgia of a wanderer, 'The horse of Hu is dependent on the north wind, the bird of Yue nests in the south branch', to satirise the monopoly of promotion by the eunuchs and foreign relatives, while Zhang Heng's Poem of the Four Sorrows uses the imagery of the beauty of the vanilla 'Beauty presents me with the golden sword' as a metaphor for criticising the dictatorship of the eunuchs. Zhang Heng's 'Poem of Four Sorrows' used the vanilla and beauty imagery of 'Beauty gifted me with a golden sword' as a metaphor for criticising the dictatorship of eunuchs. These poems 'use natural imagery to avoid the risk of literal imprisonment', and their critical nature is 'hidden in the simile, and revealed in the resonance'. The scholarly community formed an 'underground opinion network' through the circulation of poems and the private singing of songs, not only maintaining a moral stance, but also avoiding the suppression of the 'Demon's Speech Order'.

1.2.2 The counterproductive effects of institutional repression and the 'safety threshold' of opinion expression

The Counterproductive Effects of Institutional Repression and the 'Safety Threshold' of Opinion Expression: When cryptic writing could not satisfy the critical demands, some scholars turned to fierce and straightforward statements. Zhao Yi's 'Prick of the World Disease and Evil Fugue' exposes official corruption with 'licking hemorrhoids and teaming up with the right colours in vain', which triggered the suppression of 'literary officials wanting to arrest Yi' as described in 'Hou Han Shu - Literary Garden Biography', but it promoted the rise of the trend of 'qingdian'. The rise of the trend of 'qingdao'. This case confirms the 'safety threshold' theory of Han Dynasty public opinion expression - when criticism breaks through the metaphorical boundary, institutional backlash is bound to occur. ^[1] It is worth noting that the Han Wendi briefly abolished the offence of 'libel and slander', which provided limited space for the expression of public opinion, but in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, high-handed control became the norm.

1.3 Ballads: the straightforward expression of folk opinion and the game of political power

1.3.1 The two-way political practice of song: the tension between conformity and manipulation

Songs in the Han Dynasty were both a tool for public opinion to push back policy and a weapon in the game of power. Liu Bang used his soldiers to 'sing about returning to the east', which was clearly recorded in the Records of the Grand Historian. Emperor Wen's reinstatement of the heir of the King of Huainan because of the Song of One Foot of Cloth, 'the two brothers are incompatible,' reflects the ruler's compromise with the symbolic pressure of public opinion. Incidents such as Gaixia's 'Chu Songs on All Sides', which broke up the Chu army, and Tian's attack on Guanfu through the

children's songs of Yingchuan, reveal the selective use of songs by the power hierarchy to achieve political ends by exaggerating anxieties or concealing the truth. These cases reveal the 'double-edged sword' quality of ballads: their dissemination depends to a large extent on the narrative strategies of the subjects of power. These cases reveal the 'double-edged sword' quality of the ballad: its dissemination depends to a large extent on the narrative strategy of the subject of power.

1.3.2 The alienation of the 'rumour' system: from a mirror of good governance to an instrument of power struggle

When Emperor Guangwu of the Eastern Han Dynasty set up the 'Rumour Casting' system, the original intention was to assess the governance of officials through songs, and it did serve as an incentive for clean officials in the early period. For example, when Zhang Kan ruled Yuyang, the people sang the song 'Mulberry with no branch attached', which was highly praised by the people for his political achievements. However, there were obvious structural flaws in the system, which eventually led to its collapse. In terms of procedural misconduct, Emperor Guangwu 'used rumours to change the chief of guards', and unilaterally adopted ballads, resulting in chaotic local governance; in terms of judging corruption, Emperor Huandi's period, the three princes took bribes to falsely accuse officials at the border, and there was the abnormal phenomenon of 'those who cultivate the city sit in the opposite direction, and those who corrupt the city remain unharmed'. In terms of text forgery, Wang Mang forged 30,000 songs of praise to create the illusion of heavenly orders, and Emperor Zhangdi's 'the city is good at high buns' was actually a satire on Empress Dowager Ma's extravagance. To the end of the Han Dynasty, this system was completely reduced to a tool for party disputes, fully proving the profound truth that 'public opinion monitoring in the absence of procedural justice is inevitably alienated'.

1.3.3 Dispelling and restoring: identifying the illusion of public opinion in ballads

The poem 'Seven days without food' in the Song of Pingcheng directly accuses the heavy trauma caused by the war, and the line 'Officials need not be feared' in the Ballad of Wheat Greening unabashedly refers to the sharp confrontation between the government and the people, and the language is simple and unadorned, obviously projecting the real emotions of the lower class; while the so-called 'world model Li Yuanli' and other ballads of the Party members, with their neat sentences and serious conceptualisation, are obviously made deliberately by the scholars for the sake of branding themselves as leaders and competing for discourse power, and are fundamentally different from the logic of folk creations. Lu Zongli emphasised the need to accurately judge the attributes of a ballad in relation to its linguistic style and scope of dissemination; for example, despite its fierce rhetoric, 'The Assassination of the World's Diseases and Evils' could not truly represent the demands of the common people as it was mainly disseminated within the circle of the scholars^[1].

2 Fugue: the ritualisation of power chant and the breakout of critical opinion

2.1 Han dafu: power complicity and the construction of imperial ideology

During the period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, with the continuous strengthening of centralised power and the advancement of frontier expansion, the Han Dafu ushered in a period of prosperity and development. Sima Xiangru's 'Zi Xu Fu' and 'Shanglin Fu' used the gorgeous rhetoric of 'spreading and spreading the text' to delicately depict the magnificent scenes of the Son of Heaven's hunting trips, and effectively dissolved the legitimacy of the vassals through the grandiose narrative of 'the Son of Heaven with the Four Seas as his home', becoming an important literary carrier of the ideology of 'great unity'. It became an important literary carrier of the ideology of 'great unity'. Ban Gu's 'Two Capitals Fugu', through a careful comparison of the palace establishments of Chang'an and Luoyang, skilfully argues the relocation of the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty as 'the return of heaven's destiny', which in fact provides cultural support for the political legitimacy of Emperor Guangwu. This kind of fugue is usually performed by 'reciting fugue officials' on important occasions such as pilgrimage meetings and rituals, which is clearly recorded in 'Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital', and the cult of imperial power is deeply implanted in the collective memory through the ceremonial presentation of the rhythms of sound and rhythm.

The Han Dafu constructs the myth of the frontier with the presentation of 'Cangwu on the left and the West Pole on the right' ('Shanglin Fugu'), echoing Emperor Wu's military ambition of 'chiseling away at the Western Regions'. The hymn in the Song of Suburban Sacrifices, 'Heavenly Horses Come from the Western Pole' (Han Shu - Rituals and Music Zhi), moreover, directly links the fugue to imperial expansion. Sima Xiangru's 'Upper Forest Fugue' used more than 4,000

words to exaggerate the majesty of the Son of Heaven, and only added the admonition of 'saving punishment' at the end of the article. This structure makes irony 'submerged in a torrent of rhetoric', but in fact it is a moral veneer for the glorification of sainthood. The exaggerated narratives of the Han dynasty's great fugue 'form a hidden pressure of public opinion by exposing the ruler's moral anxiety', such as Yang Xiong's 'Feathered Hunting Fugu', which implicitly satirises Emperor Wu's extravagance. The Han dynasty is dependent on the court performance to strengthen the concept of 'divine right of kings', and its out-of-the-way use of canon, such as Ban Gu 'Xidu Fu' with more than ten kinds of rare birds and exotic beasts, naturally excluded from the bottom of the dissemination of the elites into the elite of the elite of the scholarly and imperial conspiracy tool.

2.2 The sao style fugue: historical metaphors and the sharp edge of political resistance

At the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty, the feudal lords were in conflict, and at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the eunuchs were in power, and the scholars were facing great political pressure, so they inherited the fine tradition of Chu Rhetoric of 'expressing indignation and emotion' with the help of the reconstruction of the history to realise the breakthrough of the public opinion. Jia Yi's 'Hanging Qu Yuan Fugue' uses vivid metaphors such as 'luan and phoenix running away, scops owl soaring' to closely link Qu Yuan's soul with his own situation of being sidelined by Guan Ying and Zhou Bo; Zhao Yi's 'The World's Disease and Evil Fugue' was a direct rebuke of the 'licking piles and teaming up' of official corruption during the Huan Ling period, and its vehemence even triggered the 'clerical officials wanting to arrest Yi' as a serious consequence.

The Han literati cleverly 'transformed sensitive issues into legitimate discussions' through historical metaphors, and the strength of their critique depended largely on the degree of acceptance of the consensus. By using the ghosts of the wrongdoers in Chu to make their voices heard, Jia Yi not only succeeded in circumventing the harsh suppression of the 'Demonic Speech Order', but also aroused the collective discontent of the scholars with the dictatorship of the ministers of merit. Zhao Yi bravely breaks through the boundary of metaphor with his 'righteousness' and directly exposes the dark reality of power and money trading, which profoundly proves the theory that 'the backlash of public opinion is bound to happen'.^[1] This outspoken cost maps the phases of institutional repression - the short-lived leniency of Emperor Wen's abolition of 'defamation offence' in the early Han Dynasty contrasts with the brutal repression of the Eastern Han Dynasty's party confinement scourge.

2.3 Lyric minor fugue: life criticism and gentle detachment

In the middle and late Eastern Han Dynasty, under the environment of high-pressure politics, some scholars helplessly turned to lyrical fugue to ease the anxiety of reality with subtle and introverted strokes. Zhang Heng's 'Return to the Fields', 'Soaring high to catch the wind, fishing in the long stream below.', implicitly criticises the dark reality of the eunuchs' dictatorship through the imagery of idyllic life; Cai Yong's "Description of the Line", "Poorly changed and ingenious on the terrace and pavilions, and the people are exposed to the wetness of their beds", subtly contrasts the extravagance of the court with the hardships and hardships of the people. Cai Yong's 'The Preface on Conduct and Action' contrasts the extravagance of the palace with the hardship of the people, and deeply exposes the serious injustice of the society under Emperor Huan's rule. In 'Returning to the Field', the 'escaping birds' and 'long streams' symbolise the unlimited yearning for freedom, which contrasts with the filthiness of the officialdom; the contrast between the motion and static of 'fishing' and 'flying' also implies the meaning of detachment from the whirlpool of power. The contrast between 'fishing' and 'flying' implies a detachment from the whirlpool of power.

The language of lyric fugue is concise and clear, and it mostly adopts four lines, such as 'I don't want to do anything, but I want to entertain myself.'. Although this form is conducive to the internal circulation and exchange of the scholars, due to the lack of the kind of ceremonial dissemination channels of the Han dynasty fugue, the effectiveness of its criticism is relatively limited, and it eventually became a typical representative of the 'To be carefree here, just to entertain myself.'. This form was favourable to the internal circulation and communication of the scholars.

3 Prose: the writing of history and the battle for the discourse of public opinion

3.1 The historical records: the historian's record and revaluation of popular opinion

When writing the Historical Records, Sima Qian boldly broke through the framework of the official narrative and constructed a unique historical view of public opinion through the inclusion of folk proverbs and legends. In Wei qi

Wu'anhou Lianzhuan, it is recorded that the people of Yingchuan sang: 'When Yingshui is clear, Yingshi is peaceful; when Yingshui is turbid, Yingshi is a clan' because of the rampage of the Irrigation family, which is a metaphor for the consensus of public opinion that the powerful and the rich are bound to be defeated by the natural imagery. Zhao Zixuan points out that such ballads 'carry the energy of public opinion for social criticism, and the gathering of attention drives the dissemination of information'.^[2] Sima Qian even incorporated doubtful folklore into the official history, for example, although the story of 'Zhao's Orphans' in the Zhao Shijia was proved to be a fabrication by Liang Yujiao, a Qing scholar, he believed that it was spread through 'the oral transmission of public opinion among the people, which reflected the people's hatred of tyranny'. This writing strategy not only greatly enhances the poignancy of the historical narrative, but also highlights Sima Qian's respect for the authenticity of civil opinion—even if the facts are dubious, the collective sentiment they reflect itself constitutes an indispensable part of the historical truth.

At the level of political criticism, the Shiji - Legend of the Coolies exposes the social reality of the rule of the coolies, where 'there are many laws and regulations, and many thieves', by means of the ballad 'I'd rather see a tiger than the wrath of a straight man', which 'amplifies the suffering of the people through exaggerated narrative'. Through exaggerated narratives, these proverbs 'magnified the suffering of the people and became an amplifier of public opinion at the bottom of the hierarchy'.^[2] Sima Qian even used the Biography of the Rangers to speak out for the marginalised groups, claiming that Guo Xie and the other rangers 'were true to their words, true to their deeds, and true to their promises', which was in fact a counter-attack on the high-handed policy of the Han Emperor, 'using the law as a means of teaching', and that this historical view of 'the world of heaven and mankind, and the changes of the past and present' conferred historical legitimacy on folk opinion and formed a counter-attack on the official narrative. This historical concept of 'studying the world of heaven and man, and understanding the changes of the past and present' gives historical legitimacy to the folk opinion and forms a confrontation with the official narrative.

3.2 The book of han: official ideological discipline of public opinion

When compiling the Book of Han, Ban Gu demonstrated a very different opinion position from Sima Qian's. Comparing the 'Historical Records of Gaozu' and the 'Book of Han', Ban Gu skilfully deleted the vulgarity of Liu Bang's words and deeds, such as 'sharing a cup of soup with me', instead, he made a great effort to exaggerate the myth of 'the son of the Red Emperor beheading the White Snake', and meticulously shaped the sacred image of Liu Bang as 'the Emperor by command'. The divine image of Liu Bang as 'Emperor by Order' is carefully portrayed. This rewriting is not an accidental phenomenon: in The Five Elements, he incorporates the nursery rhyme 'Thousands of miles of grass, why is it green?' into the theoretical framework of 'celestial and human senses', interpreting it as an omen of Dong Zhuo's downfall, and subtly dissolving its folk-critical nature through a mystical narrative. Lü Zongli points out that the rulers of the Han dynasty provided a basis for the advice of Confucian scholars by 'forcibly correlating calamities with "deficiencies in the virtue of the ruler"', but this also led to the "proliferation of prophecies and the concealment of truths"^[3].

Ban Gu's systematic deletion of the text of the Historical Records thoroughly exposes the mechanism by which official historiography disciplines public opinion, for example, by weakening the pathos of Xiang Yu's 'crime of not fighting' and emphasising his strategic blunder of 'turning his back on Chu' in the biography of Xiang Yu in the Book of Han, with the aim of 'to construct a narrative of the destiny of Liu's regime and eliminate the folk voices that threaten orthodoxy'.^[2] Echoing this, the Han Book of Arts and Letters defines the music and poetry collection as a corrective tool for 'observing customs and knowing the gains and losses', which is essentially a deep ideological compilation of folk opinion.

3.3 Political essays: the opinion arena for straightforward presentation of current problems and policy gaming

The Han Dynasty political essays successfully broke through the narrative framework of history and biography, and deeply intervened in political decision-making with the sharpness of straight talk and extreme advice, forming an extremely special 'public opinion field of policy'. Chao's 'On the Precious Corn' put forward the idea of 'precious corn and lowly jade', and pinpointed the serious problem of land annexation during the reign of Wen and Jing with the sharp assertion that 'when the people are poor, treachery and evil will be born'. Through the circulation of the court and recitation in the Imperial College, the sermon created a strong pressure for policy discussion within the bureaucracy, which ultimately led to the effective implementation of the system of 'paying a title to the corn'. This mode of interaction, 'the court plays to the right - policy adjustment', is a strong proof of the 'institutionalised channel of advice on the channeling of public opinion energy'.

Jia Yi's 'Policies on Law and Order' reinforced the crisis narrative with the rhetorical strategy of 'weeping and weeping and sighing', and influenced Emperor Wen's decision-making by advocating the reduction of the feudal system through the idea of 'building up the feudal lords and reducing their power'. The dissemination of the text had a double effect: at the official level, it was included in the *Xinshu* (New Book) as an important reference for governance, while at the private level, it was copied by private citizens, triggering a continuous fermentation of public opinion. Huan Kuan's *Salt and Iron Discourse* vividly reproduces the controversy over the salt and iron monopoly policy of Emperor Zhao's period with the actual record of the debate between the 'literature' and the 'great physicians', in which the criticism of the literature of Xianliang, that 'if you show the people benefits, then the people's customs will be thin', is in essence a clever elevation of an economic issue into a game of moral discourse.

During the Eastern Han Dynasty prophecy prevailed and political prose took a mystical turn. Although Wang Chong's 'Lun Heng' boasts of 'blistering falsehood', he still argues for political legitimacy by means of the concept of 'Rui Ying', such as 'Xuan Han', which lists 'Ganlu descended, Zhi Cao was born' and other auspicious events as notes for Han's virtue. For example, the Xuanhan Chapter lists auspicious events such as 'Ganlu descending and Zhigao growing' as notes for the Han Dynasty. This ambivalence fully exposes the wisdom of the intellectual class to survive under high-pressure politics - Zhang Heng's 'Please Ban Prophecies' criticises 'hypocrites who want the world to get money' on the one hand, and admits that 'the legal calendar, the trigrams, the nine palaces, the winds and the horns have their own effects' on the other, so that through the flexible conversion of discourse strategies, the margin of public opinion security is maintained.

4 Conclusions

The interaction between literature and public opinion in the Han Dynasty profoundly reveals a triple tension: in terms of form and function, poetry, fugue and prose together constitute an organic public opinion ecosystem of 'cathartic valve - megaphone - armoury'. 'In terms of the dialectical nature of the institutional game, the Chajiao system not only motivated the literati to 'interfere in politics with literature' to a certain extent, but also severely suppressed dissent through the 'Demon's Speech Order'; in terms of the anti-power aspect of the media hierarchy, the fluidity of oral opinion contrasts sharply with the limited dissemination of the written media.

Historical experience has amply demonstrated that high-handedly blocking public opinion only accelerates the secret fermentation of discontent, while the vitality of historical writing lies in its ability to present a plurality of voices, which is an extremely important revelation for contemporary public opinion governance: the crucial function of civil discourse as a 'safety valve' must be acknowledged, and institutionalised channels of appeal should be actively established, so that long-term social stability can be achieved.

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