

# Beyond the Suburban Temple: Children's Ditties and Imperial Edicts of Self-Accusation – A New Discussion on Han Dynasty Sacrificial Poetry Forms

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## Abstract

The turbulent social situation and the collapse of ritual and political order during the pre-Qin period led to prose becoming the dominant literary form during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. This constrained the two main poetic creation groups—the common people and the nobility—resulting in a situation where the generation and dissemination of poetic texts could hardly be sustained. In the Han Dynasty, poetic creation, based on the Chu music (楚声) tradition, continued the characteristic of the Book of Songs (《诗》) being set to music and performed, possessing the potential to enter state sacrificial ceremonies and effectively carry the expressive needs of the state sacrificial process. Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry includes not only the traditional suburban temple songs, the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and the Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》), but also sacrificial-related descriptions found in other song lyrics of the Han Music Bureau repertoire. Beyond the Han Music Bureau poems, children's ditties and parts of imperial edicts of self-accusation not only exhibit significant poetic form but also possess profound sacrificial attributes, thus also belonging to the category of sacrificial poetry.

**Keywords:** *Han Dynasty; Sacrificial Poetry; Suburban Temple Songs; Children's Ditties; Imperial Edicts of Self-Accusation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Transitioning from Qin to Han, Chu culture and Central Plains culture completed their final fusion. However, after two cultural catastrophes—the book burning by the First Emperor and the Chu-Han contention—many sacrificial traditions and ritual texts were lost. At the same time, the Qin dynasty's policy of burning books and burying scholars alive forcibly promoted ideological integration. By the Han Dynasty, there was an urgent need not only to collect and reconstruct lost texts but also to create new ideological concepts and textual vehicles to support the operation of state religion and sacrifices. The Han Dynasty was a critical turning point in the history of ancient Chinese poetry. The *Yiwen Leiju* (《艺文类聚·杂文部·诗》) records that during Emperor Wu's time (武帝时期), the Boliang Terrace (柏梁台) was built, and officials were summoned to present poems discussing governance. Later generations compiled these into the Boliang Terrace Poem (《柏梁台诗》), attributing it to Emperor Wu Liu Che (刘彻). Throughout the Boliang Terrace Poem (《柏梁台》), the Emperor used poetry as a guide, and his ministers used poetry to discuss governance. This practice not only realized the emperor's duty to hear governance and the ministers' duty to report, preserving the poetic tradition of “observing customs” (观风), but also turned various affairs of state into the

imagery of poetry, enriching its content. The poem is resplendent in diction and rich in emotion; it is both a record of a literary feast and a microcosm of the Han Dynasty's prevalent use of poetry and its transition to a new stage of poetic style. In specific sacrificial practices, a series of ancestral temple dance lyrics and other temple songs were created for the needs of ancestral temple offerings. Simultaneously, celestial phenomena, earthly disasters, and the emperor's political reputation were closely linked, giving rise to significant folk children's ditties and imperial edicts of self-accusation within Han sacrificial culture. These literary forms, closely related to sacrifice, entered the creative purview of Han writers, propelling Han sacrificial poetry onto a path of diversification.

## I. Overview of Sacrificial Poetry Creation from Pre-Qin to Han

After Confucius compiled and edited the Book of Songs (《诗三百》), throughout the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, although the Songs (《诗》) were often used as the basis for diplomatic exchanges among feudal lords, few representative new poetic works from this era have been transmitted. As Qian Zhixi (钱志熙) states, after the Cheng-Kang period (成康之后), the literary tradition of the Book of Songs declined. Although poetic hymns revived during the Wu-Xuan period, they were already vastly different from the Book of Songs and required a new name—fu (赋). Several factors contributed to this situation:

First, the turbulent social situation objectively impacted literary creation. “As the Zhou declined, the feudal lords, about to exceed the legal limits, hated that [the texts] harmed them, so they all destroyed their records.” The two main poetic creation groups—commoners and nobility—were constrained by survival factors, leading to a situation where the generation and dissemination of poetic texts could hardly be sustained. The Analects states (《论语·季氏》): “When the Way does not prevail in the world, ceremonies, music, and punitive military expeditions proceed from the feudal lords.” During times of political peace, the Songs (《诗》) were tools used by the Zhou king (周天子) to observe customs, gather the people's will, and implement education. At such times, poetry was the dominant literary form, its generation and dissemination needed by the era. But when the Zhou imperial family (周王室) weakened and the feudal lords grew powerful, these poetry creators could hardly be tolerated by the situation, stifling the regeneration of the Songs (《诗》) at its source.

Second, in the political context of collapsed ritual and music, poetry—a literary form that from its inception emphasized ritual and educative functions—lost its most fertile ground for survival. Confucius believed that “Songs” (诗) “Rites” (礼) and “Music” (乐) were three essential elements for cultivating a gentleman: “Be aroused by the Songs, take your stand through the rites, and be perfected by music.” But if the political and social environment guided by ritual and music was lost, it could not be sustained. Hence his lament: “The phoenix does not come; the river gives forth no chart. It is all over with me!” Confucius was both lamenting the lack of a wise ruler, symbolized by the absence of the phoenix and the river chart, and indirectly criticizing the impact of the social situation on literary creation.

Third, prose, primarily practical, served as the mainstream form of literature during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods of vertical and horizontal alliances. The

Hanshu·Yiwenzhi (《汉书·艺文志》) points out the background of this era: “During the Warring States, with vertical and horizontal [alliances], truth and falsehood contended, and the words of the various masters were chaotic and confused.” In such a social context, a trend towards utilitarian creation was inevitable. The persuasive prose of the Warring States strategists met the needs of the scholar class to directly expound strategies and realize their value, as well as the feudal lords' desire for good plans but pursuit of efficiency. Even Confucius, who advocated using the Songs for education, had to admit: “Though a man may be able to recite the three hundred Songs, if when given a governmental responsibility, he fails to act effectively, or when sent to distant quarters, he is unable to deal independently with affairs, although he has a great many songs, what good are they to him?” Ban Gu (班固) believed the reason for the phenomenon Confucius described—the difficulty of practicing the Songs—was “adapting to circumstances and devising appropriate measures, receiving the mission but not the specific words.” This style, which both satisfied the needs of the mobile scholar class and the expansionist ambitions of the feudal lords, and was detached from musical performance, inevitably further squeezed the living space of poetry.

After the frequent wars of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods and the great catastrophe of the Qin book burning, the art form of poetry encountered new opportunities for development in the Han Dynasty. Recalling the old land of Chu, the Chu people were significantly influenced by Central Plains culture during the ethnic integrations of the Spring and Autumn, Warring States, and Qin periods. Zhang Zhengming's History of Chu Culture (张正明《楚文化史》), examining the general trend of Chu cultural evolution, also points out that “the mid-Spring and Autumn period was when Chu culture met its moment,” describing the pattern of cultural evolution during this period as a process of “blending, derivation, flourishing, and transformation.” From its initial founding to its mature form rivaling Central Plains culture, Chu culture was always in a dynamic state of fusion with it. Thus, it is not surprising that the Chu people had a relatively complete history of receiving poetic traditions, as can be seen from Wang Yi's (王逸) frequent practice of “quoting the Songs to explain the Li Sao” (“引《诗》解《骚》”) in later times. Therefore, clear traces of the Book of Songs can be seen in Han Dynasty Music Bureau poems. For example, the Songs for the Temple of Anshi: the Songshu·Treatise on Music states: “Anshi songs were originally a Han Dynasty song name... Anshi music is like the Zhou ‘Chamber Music’. Therefore, past commentators considered the chamber songs to exemplify the virtue of the queen and consorts, influence the world and rectify husband-wife relations.” Not only is the form very similar to the Songs, but the educative meaning is directly inherited.

Furthermore, Han Dynasty poetic creation, based on the Chu sound tradition, continued the stylistic characteristic of the Book of Songs being set to music and sung. Stephen Owen, discussing this characteristic of poetry-music unity in Mi-Lou (《迷楼》), suggests that it was governed by the ritual culture of China's ancient sage kings. This quality of conforming to “ritual” gave it the potential to enter state sacrificial ceremonies. At the same time, because Chu sounds had long been regarded as “shamanic tones” (“巫音”), the Lüshi Chunqiu (《吕氏春秋》) states: “The decline of Chu was marked by the creation of shamanic music.” Its musical system differed from that of the Book of Songs. The Qianfu Lun (《潜夫论·浮侈》) clearly states that the Songs, whose main function was education, were not the same as

shamanic invocations: “The Songs satirize ‘She does not spin her hemp, but starts dancing.’ Now many women do not perform their domestic duties, abandon their silkworms and weaving, and instead learn shamanic invocations, drumming and dancing to serve spirits, thus deceiving the common people and confusing the masses.” Although Wang Chong's harsh criticism of “serving spirits and misleading the people” shamanism contained considerable personal sentiment, it objectively revealed that Chu sounds, long used as shamanic music, differed significantly from the elegant and hymn-like tones of the Songs, both in form and in the transmission of poetic emotion. This difference was an important factor allowing Han Dynasty poetry, compared to the Book of Songs, to possess broader space for innovation and new development.

## II. Traditional Conceptions of Han Dynasty Sacrificial Poetry: The Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and the Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》)

The Hanshu·Treatise on Rites and Music (《汉书·礼乐志》) provides the main framework for later research on defining Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry:

During Gaozu's time, Shu Suntong, using Qin musicians, created ancestral temple music. The Grand Invocator welcomed the spirits at the temple gate, performing the 'Jia Zhi,' akin to the ancient music for summoning spirits. When the emperor entered the temple gate, the 'Yong Zhi' was performed, serving as a rhythm for walking, like the ancient 'Cai Qi' and 'Si Xia.' When the dried offerings were presented, the 'Deng Ge' was performed, sung alone without instrumental accompaniment to disturb the human voice, so that all present could hear it fully, like the ancient 'Qing Miao' song. After the 'Deng Ge' concluded twice, the 'Xiu Cheng' music was performed below, praising the spirits' acceptance of the offering. When the emperor went to the east wing for wine and was seated, the 'Yong An' music was performed, praising the completion of the rites. There was also 'Chamber Sacrificial Music,' composed by Gaozu's Lady Tangshan. The Zhou had 'Chamber Music,' which by Qin was called 'Shou Ren.' Generally, music celebrates its origin; rites do not forget the root. Gaozu enjoyed Chu sounds, therefore the 'Chamber Music' used Chu sounds. In the second year of Emperor Hui, the Music Bureau Director Xiahou Kuan was ordered to add panpipes and renamed it 'Anshi Music.'

The Gao Temple performed the 'Wu De,' 'Wen Shi,' and 'Wu Xing' dances; the Emperor Wen Temple performed the 'Zhao De,' 'Wen Shi,' 'Si Shi,' and 'Wu Xing' dances; the Emperor Wu Temple performed the 'Sheng De,' 'Wen Shi,' 'Si Shi,' and 'Wu Xing' dances. The 'Wu De' dance was created in the fourth year of Gaozu, symbolizing the world rejoicing at his martial actions to quell disorder. The 'Wen Shi' dance was originally the Shun era 'Zhao' dance, renamed 'Wen Shi' in the sixth year of Gaozu to show non-imitation. The 'Wu Xing' dance was originally a Zhou dance, renamed 'Wu Xing' in the 26th year of Qin Shi Huang. The 'Si Shi' dance was created by Emperor Wen to show the world's peace and harmony. Generally, music created by oneself shows there is regulation; music of former kings shows there is model. Emperor Jing adapted the 'Wu De' dance into the 'Zhao De' to honor the Great Ancestral Temple. By Emperor Xuan, the 'Zhao De' dance was adapted into the 'Sheng De' to honor the Shizong Temple. The temples of various emperors typically performed the 'Wen Shi,' 'Si Shi,' and 'Wu Xing' dances. In the sixth year of Gaozu, the 'Zhao Rong Music' and 'Li Rong Music' were also created. 'Zhao Rong' was like the ancient 'Zhao Xia,' primarily derived from the 'Wu De' dance. 'Li Rong' was primarily derived from the 'Wen Shi' and 'Wu Xing' dances. Dancers without music: when approaching the supreme presence, they did not dare use music; when exiting using music, it meant the dance did not lose its rhythm and could conclude with music.

Generally, these followed old Qin practices... By Emperor Wu, when the suburban sacrifice rites were standardized... the Music Bureau was established, collecting poems and reciting them at night, including songs from Zhao, Dai, Qin, and Chu. Li Yannian was appointed Chief Harmonizing Director, and he frequently enlisted dozens of people including Sima Xiangru to create poems and rhapsodies, roughly discussing pitch standards to harmonize with the eight tones, composing the nineteen songs.

（高祖时，叔孙通因秦乐人制宗庙乐。大祝迎神于庙门，奏《嘉至》，犹古降神之乐也。皇帝入庙门，奏《永至》，以为行步之节，犹古《采芡》《肆夏》也。乾豆上，奏《登歌》，独上歌，不以管弦乱人声，欲在位者遍闻之，犹古《清庙》之歌也。《登歌》再终，下奏《休成》之乐，美神明既飨也。皇帝就酒东厢，坐定，奏《永安》之乐，美礼已成也。又有《房中祠乐》，高祖唐山夫人所作也。周有《房中乐》，至秦名曰《寿人》。凡乐，乐其所生，礼不忘本。高祖乐楚声，故《房中乐》楚声也。孝惠二年，使乐府令夏侯宽备其箫管，更名曰《安世乐》。

高庙奏《武德》《文始》《五行》之舞；孝文庙奏《昭德》《文始》《四时》《五行》之舞；孝武庙奏《盛德》《文始》《四时》《五行》之舞。《武德舞》者，高祖四年作，以象天下乐已行武以除乱也。《文始舞》者，曰本舜《招舞》也，高祖六年更名曰《文始》，以示不相袭也。《五行舞》者，本周舞也，秦始皇二十六年更名曰《五行》也。《四时舞》者，孝文所作，以示天下之安和也。盖乐已所自作，明有制也；乐先王之乐，明有法也。孝景采《武德舞》以为《昭德》，以尊大宗庙。至孝宣，采《昭德舞》为《盛德》，以尊世宗庙。诸帝庙皆常奏《文始》《四时》《五行舞》云。高祖六年又作《昭容乐》《礼容乐》。《昭容》者，犹古之《昭夏》也，主出《武德舞》。《礼容》者，主出《文始》《五行舞》。舞人无乐者，将至尊之前不敢以乐也；出用乐者，言舞不失节，能以乐终也。大氏皆因秦旧事焉.....至武帝定郊祀之礼.....乃立乐府，采诗夜诵，有赵、代、秦、楚之讴。以李延年为协律都尉，多举司马相如等数十人造为诗赋，略论律吕，以合八音之调，作十九章之歌。）

Existing research largely considers the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) Nineteen Chapters and the Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》) Seventeen Chapters as sacrificial songs in the traditional sense. The Han Shi Tong Jian states (《汉诗统笺》) that the first chapter of the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》), “Lian Shi Ri” (《练时日》), is the “general sacrificial music for the Five Emperors” (“总祀五帝乐章”). The Gushi Yuan (《古诗源》) comments on the Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》): “The family method of the Han dynasty for centuries was initiated from this.” (“汉朝数百年家法，自此开出。”) Wang Changhua and Xu Qian argue that the Suburban Sacrificial Songs originally had only eleven chapters, being “traditional religious sacrificial songs for mountains, rivers, and various deities.” It was only during Emperor Wu's reign, with the increased frequency of large state sacrifices and the need to praise auspicious signs, that the remaining chapters were composed on command, finally totaling nineteen. Regarding the

Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》), Zhang Shuguo proposes three main points: first, the author should be Shu Suntong, but four of the songs bear traces of Chu sounds composed by Lady Tangshan; second, the object of praise in the text—"the ancestral temple" ("祖庙")—should be the "Gao Temple" ("高庙"), thus the sacrificial object was indeed Gaozu Liu Bang; third, the nature of this set of songs is ancestral temple sacrificial poetry, and analyzing their artistic value must be done in conjunction with the early Han sacrificial system.

The reasons why ancient and modern scholars generally regard the Han Suburban Sacrificial Songs and the Songs for the Temple of Anshi as typical sacrificial poetry are as follows:

(I) In the process of later compilation and transmission, the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and the Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》) were included in sections on suburban and temple songs. Taking the Wen Xuan by Crown Prince Zhaoming (昭明太子《文选》), the Yuefu Shiji by Guo Maoqian (郭德璨《乐府诗集》), and the Pre-Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties Poetry by Lu Qinli as examples (逯钦立《先秦两汉魏晋南北朝诗》), all classify the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》) under categories like "Suburban Temple" ("郊庙") or "Suburban Temple Songs". ("郊庙歌辞") This establishes their sacrificial attribute from a bibliographical perspective.

(II) The Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》) have clear sacrificial creation and application contexts. Zhao Yingchang, starting from the authorial group of the nineteen Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》), proved that they were indeed poems created by dozens of individuals, including Sima Xiangru and Li Yannian, as "lyrics for suburban sacrificial music composed under commission" in the context of sacrificing to the Great One and the Earth Sovereign. Zhang Yongxin, in his work Research on Han Yuefu (《汉乐府研究》), also summarized the views of Qing scholar Shen Qinhan's Hanshu Shuzheng (沈钦韩《汉书疏证》), Wei-era official Miao Xi's memorial, Song scholar Zheng Qiao's General Preface to Music Bureau Poems in the Tongzhi (魏人缪袭的奏章、宋人郑樵《通志·乐府总序》), the Qing Qian Hanshu Kaozheng (清《前汉书考证》), and Qing scholar Chen Benli's Han Shi Tong Jian (清人陈本礼《汉诗统笺》), providing a systematic overview of the nature of the seventeen Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》).

As representative works of Han Dynasty elegant music (汉代雅乐), numerous historical texts, either directly or through annotations, contain records of them being performed and sung in sacrificial ceremonies by the Han ruling class. The Songshu·Treatise on Music states (《宋书·乐志》): "Emperor Guangwu of Han... expanded the suburban sacrifices, with Emperor Gao Liu Bang as associate recipient. Music performed included the dances of

‘Qing Yang,’ ‘Zhu Ming,’ ‘Xi Hao,’ ‘Xuan Ming,’ ‘Yun Qiao,’ and ‘Yu Ming.’ For the northern suburban sacrifice and the Bright Hall sacrifice, music was performed as in the southern suburban sacrifice. For welcoming the seasonal energies at the five suburban altars: in spring, sang ‘Qing Yang’; in summer, sang ‘Zhu Ming’; both with the ‘Yun Qiao’ dance; in autumn, sang ‘Xi Hao’; in winter, sang ‘Xuan Ming’; both with the ‘Yu Ming’ dance; in late summer, sang ‘Zhu Ming’; with both dances performed.” (汉光武……增广郊祀，高皇帝配食，乐奏《青阳》《朱明》《西皓》《玄冥》《云翘》《育命》之舞。北郊及祀明堂，并奏乐如南郊。迎时气五郊：春哥《青阳》，夏哥《朱明》，并舞《云翘》之舞；秋哥《西皓》，冬哥《玄冥》，并舞《育命》之舞；季夏哥《朱明》，并舞二舞。) Also, the Shiji-Fengshan Shu (《史记·封禅书》) records Emperor Wu adopting Li Yannian's (武帝纳李延年) suggestion, initiating the use of stringed music, konghou, zithers, and se in sacrifices to the Great One and Earth Sovereign: “The matter was referred to the high officials for discussion. They said: ‘Among the people, sacrifices still have drumming and dance music. Now for the suburban sacrifices there is no music—is this fitting?’ The high officials said: ‘In ancient times, sacrificing to Heaven and Earth always involved music, so that the deities could be ritually honored’... Thereupon, after pacifying Nanyue, when praying and sacrificing to the Great One and Earth Sovereign, they began to use music and dance, increasingly summoning singers. The making of the twenty-five-string zither and the konghou, zither, and se began from this.” (“下公卿议，曰：‘民间祠尚有鼓舞乐，今郊祠而无乐，岂称乎？’公卿曰：‘古者祀天地皆有乐，而神祇可得而礼。’……于是塞南越，禘祠泰一、后土，始用乐舞，益召歌儿，作二十五弦及空侯琴瑟自此起。”) Thus, in terms of the intended recipients of the texts, both are consistent with sacrifice.

(III) Returning to the textual content and creative mindset of the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and the Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》), it is not difficult to see some characteristics common to sacrificial literature in both works:

First, the language is obscure and archaic. The article “A Humble View on Disaster Aversion in Han Dynasty Suburban Temple Songs” (《汉代郊庙歌辞禳灾谏议》) discusses the obscurity of the language in Han suburban temple songs: “Sima Qian's Shiji-Treatise on Music comments (司马迁《史记·乐书》): ‘When the present Emperor ascended the throne, he created the nineteen songs... Scholars proficient in a single classic could not understand the lyrics alone; they had to assemble experts in the Five Classics to study and read them together before they could fully comprehend their meaning.’ He believed the suburban temple songs used the classics extensively, even to the point of being incomprehensible without broad learning.” (“司马迁《史记·乐书》评曰：‘至今上即位，作十九章……通一经之士不能独知其辞，皆集会五经家，相与共讲习读之，乃能通知其意。’他认为郊庙歌辞用经磅礴、乃近刁钻，非博览群经之人不可解。”)

Second, in terms of imagery, deities, ancestors, and spirits appear together. Wang Changhua and Xu Qian, in "Han 'Suburban Sacrificial Songs' and the Suburban Sacrificial Ritual Music of the Emperor Wu Period" (《汉<郊祀歌>与汉武帝时期的郊祀礼

乐》), argue that the new sounds of the suburban sacrificial songs during Emperor Wu's time intentionally downplayed the expression of “ancestors” found in the Hymns and strengthened the presence of “spirits” as the object of sacrifice. This move signified that the Han Suburban Sacrificial Songs were “no longer expressing the sincere piety and gratitude of the sacrificers, but rather a ceremony through which the highest rulers of Han exaggerated and promoted their own vast achievements.” According to Wang and Xu, this move aimed to break free from the constraints of the beyond to craft the this-worldly image of the Han emperor. But viewed from the level of sacrificial literature, its effect was also to expand the scope of sacrificial objects, thereby further consolidating the sacrificial connotation of the works and establishing their sacrificial attribute.

Third, the style is grand and elegant. Just as Stephen Owen, discussing Chinese sacrificial ceremonies, gave an evaluation of “flawless”, thus the formation of this style was inevitable. The Wenxin Diaolong·Yuefu comments (《文心雕龙·乐府》): “Therefore they could stir the Seven Beginnings of sound, and their influence moved the Eight Winds... Thus the ‘Wu De’ (《武德》) arose with Gaozu, the ‘Si Shi’ (《四时》) was expanded by Emperor Wen. Although they imitated the ‘Shao’ (《韶》) and ‘Xia’ (《夏》), they considerably followed Qin precedents; the sound of harmony and balance fell silent, never to return. When Emperor Wu revered the rites, he first established the Music Bureau, gathering the sounds of Zhao, collecting the aura of Qi and Chu. Li Yannian used melodious sounds to harmonize pitch, Zhu Ma used Sao-style to compose songs. The ‘Gui Hua’ (《桂华》) miscellaneous tunes are beautiful but unorthodox; the ‘Chi Yan’ (《赤雁》) series of pieces are elegant but not canonical. Although the Hejian recommended the elegant music, it was rarely used; hence Ji An (汲黯) voiced criticism regarding the ‘Heavenly Horse.’ (《天马》) By Emperor Xuan's time, elegant hymns were composed, poems imitating the ‘Deer Cry’ (《鹿鸣》) ... In the Later Han suburban temple music, only mixed elegant pieces remained; although the language was classical, the music was not that of Kui Kuang (夔旷).” (“故能情感七始, 化动八风.....于是《武德》兴乎高祖, 《四时》广于孝文, 虽摹《韶》《夏》, 而颇袭秦旧, 中和之响, 阒其不还。暨武帝崇礼, 始立乐府, 总赵代之音, 撮齐楚之气, 延年以曼声协律, 朱马以骚体制歌, 《桂华》杂曲, 丽而不经, 《赤雁》群篇, 靡而非典, 河间荐雅而罕御, 故汲黯致讥于《天马》也。至宣帝雅颂, 诗效《鹿鸣》.....暨后汉郊庙, 惟杂雅章, 辞虽典文, 而律非夔旷。”) Liu Yanhe meticulously examined the transmission of the Han Dynasty's folk songs and sacrificial odes. Although he criticized the false qualities of the poems, such as being “ornate but not profound” (“丽而不经”) and “flowery but not appropriate” (“靡而非典”), he also acknowledged the characteristic of this literary genre that “the language is elegant and refined” (“辞虽典文”), meaning an artistic style that is highly sophisticated. These features determined that such themes were not conducive to social dissemination and could only be used for worshiping deities, praising ancestral temples, and offering sacrifices to heaven and earth. However, defining Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry by such standards easily falls into the misconception of equating Han

sacrificial poetry solely with the nineteen Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and the seventeen Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》)

### III. Beyond the Suburban Temple: Sacrificial Lyrics in the Han Yuefu and Folk Sacrificial Poetry

Admittedly, the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》) meet the selection criteria for Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry in terms of literary form, textual content, creative motivation, application context, and historical background. This standard should meet three basic conditions: temporally located within the span of Western and Eastern Han; authorial identity being Han Chinese; textual generation involving sacrificial imagery or based on a sacrificial mindset. Viewed thus, using the Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》) and Songs for the Temple of Anshi (《安世房中歌》) as the sum total of Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry is a narrow view of its scope.

Taking the Han Music Bureau as an example, apart from the suburban temple songs such as the sacrificial odes for palaces and temples, which were composed for the sacrifices of the ruling class, some of the sacrificial-related descriptions can also be found in the sacrificial odes for banquets of the nobility, such as the Han Raogu odes. Wang Ying, in her article “Han Dynasty Drumming Music and Its Development” (《汉代鼓吹乐及其发展》), synthesizing Han Dynasty music theories, provides strong evidence for the argument that Han Nao Ge and similar drumming lyrics were used in sacrificial contexts. These lyrics were generally circulated among the nobility, their style close to the solemn elegance of suburban temple songs. This poetic style tradition gradually formed a commonality in Han Dynasty poetic works. Wang Guowei, in his *Guan Tang Lin Ji* (《观堂林集》), believed this commonality was transmitted from the Songs: “The Xiang Drinking Ceremony, Xiang Shooting Ceremony, and Banquet Ceremony combined music... This is how the musical order should be.” (‘‘飨饮酒礼、飨射礼、燕礼合乐.....是乐次当如此。’’) From this perspective, the lyrics used for drinking parties, banquets, and archery ceremonies still had the connotation of “ritual” at work. Therefore, a relationship of mutual transformation existed between these lyrics and suburban temple songs. It is thus possible that sacrificial content appeared within them, or they were directly used in sacrificial contexts playing the role of suburban temple songs. Regarding Han Music Bureau poems collected through the poetry-gathering system, some folk poems containing sacrificial elements naturally entered the purview of Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry. Consider the “Song of the Elders of Ji County for Cui Yuan” (《汲县长老为崔瑗歌》) from the Han Miscellaneous Songs and Ballads (《杂歌谣辞》):

上天降神明，锡我仁慈父。

临民布德泽，恩惠施以序。

穿沟广溉灌，决渠作甘雨。

The background of the poem, according to Lu Qinli's (逯钦立) research, is: "Cui Yuan was the magistrate of Ji County. He opened canals and created paddy fields, turning saline-alkali land into fertile soil. The people benefited from this, and the elders sang of him." The first line directly points to the existence of a "divine spirit," ("神明") but the spirit descending from heaven did not use its own power to change the harsh environment; instead, it bestowed upon the people a "benevolent father" ("仁慈父") —Cui Yuan. In the poem, Cui Yuan is depicted as the embodiment of the "divine spirit" ("神明") to "spread virtuous influence" ("布德泽") and "apply kindness and favor." ("恩惠施") But the ballad does not completely mystify him; instead, through concrete agricultural practices like "digging canals" ("穿沟"), "opening channels" ("决渠"), and "widely irrigating" ("广溉灌"), he achieves the goal of "creating sweet rain." ("作甘雨") Cui Yuan, worshipped by the people, is portrayed in the poetry as a "divine spirit" ("神明"), and this portrayal comes from the mouths (or hands) of the "elders" ("长老") who held the dominant right in sacrificial activities and the speaking right in sacrificial texts within the clan community. Thus, Cui Yuan acquires the quality of an object of sacrifice, and the poem consequently possesses complete sacrificial elements, making it a typical Han Dynasty folk sacrificial song. These poems often take folk elements like agricultural affairs, customs, and beliefs as their starting point, their content including spontaneously worshipped folk deities and folk-created sacrificial processes. Consider another poem from the Han Miscellaneous Songs and Ballads (《杂歌谣辞》), "Ballad of the Three Mao Lords" (《时人为三茅君谣》):

茅山连金陵，江湖据下流。  
三神乘白鹤，各在一山头。  
佳雨灌畦稻，陆地亦复周。  
妻子保堂室，使我无百忧。  
白鹤翔青天，何时复来游。

The background of this poem, according to Lu's citation from the Li Zun Mao Jun Nei Zhuan (《李尊茅君内传》): "Mao Ying (茅盈), a man of Xianyang, attained the Dao and secluded at Mount Juqu. The people therefore changed Juqu to Mount Mao Jun. At that time, Mao Ying's two younger brothers were both high officials... Later, all attained the Dao of immortality. The Supreme Lord ordered them to govern... Mao Ying became the Director of Fate, True Lord, and High Minister of the Eastern Peak... This was in the second year of the Yuanshou era of Han Pingdi. The inner methods having merged, the outer teachings became level and smooth. Then wind and rain came seasonably, the five grains ripened, epidemics did not arise, violence and harm did not occur. The elders sang." ("茅盈，咸阳人也，得道隐句曲。邦人因改句曲为茅君之山，时盈二弟俱贵.....后咸得仙道。太上命固治丹阳句曲山，衷治良常之山，盈为司命真君东嶽上卿.....汉平帝元寿二年也，内法既融，外教

坦平，尔乃风雨以时，五禾成熟，疾厉不起，暴害不行。父老歌曰。”） In the poem, Mao Ying (茅盈) attains the Dao and ascends, his brothers also become spirits, the "three deities" ride white cranes, dwell on sacred mountains, can control wind and rain benefiting agriculture, and even change the terrain. Commoners live without worry under their protection. The poem directly expresses the hope for the "three deities" ("三神") to return. In terms of content, this is a typical folk sacrificial piece. The objects of sacrifice, Mao Ying (茅盈) and his brothers, were not nobles, yet the Han populace regarded them as deities no different from those in myths, hence granting them the treatment of "riding white cranes" ("乘白鹤") and "dwelling on mountain peaks." ("在山头") Their various supernatural abilities in the poem, like "irrigating paddy rice" ("灌畦稻"), "covering dry land" ("复陆地"), "protecting the hall" ("保堂室"), are also closely related to folk production and life, embodying the direct and simple needs of the Han people.

Although their artistic form may not match that of official sacrificial poetry, the literary value of these Han Music Bureau folk songs, uniquely reflecting folk social conditions and cultural psychology, was also favored by later poetry critics. Zhang Xuecheng praised the Han Yuefu's rich themes, spanning "from suburban sacrifices down to alleyway ditties and amusements, all were encompassed." ("上自郊祀，下迄里巷馥趣，皆见罔罗。") He also noted their combination of music and words, a height difficult for later generations to reach: "Yuefu could be sung, hence their words seem to come from the mouth. Later generations, even if they wanted to imitate, having lost the music—with the skin gone, where can the fur adhere?" ("乐府可歌，故其辞若自口出。后人虽欲摹拟，既失其音，皮之不存，毛将焉傅矣。")

Furthermore, these folk sacrificial poems may have been influenced by official sacrifices. Consider the "Proverb about You Yin in Guanzhong" (《关中为游殷谚》):

生有知人之明，死有贵神之灵。

The poem records the event: "You Yin... was harmed by Hu Zhen. A month later, Zhen fell ill, only saying 'Fu Fu, You Youqi is bringing ghosts.' Then he died violently." ("游殷.....为胡軫所害。月余，軫得病，但言伏伏，游幼齐将鬼来，于是剧死。") The general content involves the common folk theme of ghostly revenge. However, the expression "spirit of a deity" ("神之灵") used in the poem carries distinct colors of official sacrificial objects, highly consistent with the "spirit" ("神灵") expression in the chapter "Lian Shi Ri" (《练时日》) of the Han Suburban Sacrificial Songs (《郊祀歌》): "The spirits come, how majestic!" ("灵之来，神哉沛") Consider also the "Saying in Chang'an during the Gengshi Era" (《更始时长安中语》):

灶下养，中郎将。烂羊胃，骑都尉。烂羊头，关内侯。

This poem was composed against the background: “When Gengshi was in Chang'an, the offices and titles he bestowed were all to petty men and merchants, or cooks and kitchen men. Chang'an therefore said.” (“更始在长安，所授官爵皆群小贾人，或膳夫庖人，长安为之语曰。”) In terms of theme, it is closer to a poem satirizing current affairs. However, the line “The kitchen scullion becomes a General of the Household” (“灶下养，中郎将”), upon deeper examination, reveals itself as a display of official Han sacrifice in the folk context. The tradition of sacrificing to the hearth god existed since Zhou. The Liji (《礼记·祭法》) on Sacrifices says: “The king establishes seven sacrifices for the multitude of surnames... one is the hearth... commoners... may establish the hearth.” (“王为群姓立七祀.....曰灶.....庶人.....或立灶。”) At the same time, Zheng Xuan (郑玄) believed that a considerable number of Han folk sacrifices inherited Zhou practices: “Saying ‘Nowadays among the people, some perform spring and autumn sacrifices to the Director of Fate, the God of the Road, the Mountain God, the Gate, the Door, and the Hearth beside them’—Zheng, because there is no text from Zhou, therefore cites present Han practices where people sometimes sacrifice in spring and autumn to the Director of Fate, the God of the Road, and the Mountain God... When sacrificing to these—the Director of Fate, the God of the Road, and the Mountain God—the three deities Gate, Door, and Hearth are beside the other deities, positioned for sacrifice... Since Han times sacrifice to both the Director of Fate and the Mountain God in spring and autumn, surely in Zhou times they must have sacrificed to the Director of Fate in spring.” (“云‘今时民家，或春秋祠司命、行神、山神、门、户、灶在旁’者，郑以无文，故引今汉时民家或有春秋二祠时司命、行神、山神也.....其祠此司命、行神、山神之时，门、户、灶三神在诸神之旁，列位而祭也.....汉时既春秋俱祠司命与山神，则是周时必应春祠司命。”) Analyzing this, the tradition of sacrificing to the hearth god was initially a command issued by Zhou rulers to the people. When the Zhou people obeyed and adopted it, it became an ancient sacrificial rite passed down to the Han Dynasty. The divine image of the hearth god thus became fixed, appearing in the sacrificial lists of Han rulers. The most classic example is Li Shaojun advising Emperor Wu that sacrificing to the hearth could lead to longevity, recorded in the Zizhi Tongjian (《资治通鉴·汉纪·世宗孝武皇帝》): “Li Shaojun, using methods for sacrificing to the hearth to prevent aging, appeared before the Emperor, who honored him.” (“李少君以祠灶却老方见上，上尊之。”) The commentary says: “Sacrificing to the hearth means offering to the hearth to summon ghostly beings, transforming cinnabar into gold, making eating vessels from it, can extend life. So say the masters of techniques.” (“祠灶者，祭灶以致鬼物，化丹砂以为黄金，以为饮食器，可以延年。方士之言云尔。”) Thus, the hearth, as an important object of sacrifice in Han state religion, itself had considerable folk origins. Entering Han Music Bureau folk songs, it combined the form of folk sacrificial literature with the connotations of noble sacrifice, and one can also observe from this the dissemination trends of Han Dynasty theological thought.

#### IV. Beyond the Suburban Temple: Children's Ditties and Imperial Edicts of Self-accusation

Broadening the view, beyond the Han Music Bureau poems, there are two other poetic forms rarely noticed but rich in sacrificial meaning: Han Dynasty children's ditties and parts of Han imperial edicts of self-accusation.

##### (I) *Children's Ditties*

According to Zhang Xiaofeng's (张小锋) statistics, the Hanshu (《汉书》) and Hou Hanshu (《后汉书》) contain a total of 16 examples of Han Dynasty children's ditties, mostly recorded in the Treatise on the Five Elements (《五行志》): three from Western Han: “Children's Ditty from the Time of Emperor Yuan”《元帝时童谣》, “Children's Ditty from the Time of Emperor Cheng”《成帝时童谣》 “Ballad from the Time of Emperor Cheng”《成帝时歌谣》; 13 from late Western Han to Eastern Han: “Nanyang Children's Ditty (Gengshi Era)”《(更始) 南阳童谣》 “Shu Children's Ditty (6th Year of Jianwu)”《(建武六年) 蜀童谣》 “Tianshui Children's Ditty (Late Wang Mang)”《(王莽末) 天水童谣》 “Capital Children's Ditty (Late Emperor Shun)”《(顺帝末) 京都童谣》 “All Under Heaven Children's Ditty (Early Emperor Huan)”《(桓帝初) 天下童谣》 “Capital Children's Ditty (Early Emperor Huan)”《(桓帝初) 京都童谣 (二)》 “Capital Children's Ditty (Early Emperor Huan)”《(桓帝末) 京都童谣》 “Capital Children's Ditty (Late Emperor Huan)” “Capital Children's Ditty (Late Emperor Huan)”《(桓帝末) 京都童谣 (二)》 “Capital Children's Ditty (Late Emperor Ling)”《(灵帝末) 京都童谣》 “Capital Song (Middle Zhongping Era, Emperor Ling)”《(灵帝中平中) 京都歌》 “Capital Children's Ditty (Early Emperor Xian)”《(献帝初) 京都童谣》 “Jingzhou Children's Ditty (Early Jian'an Era).”《(建安初) 荆州童谣》

Children's ditties, as a widely circulated literary form, have an unidentifiable authorial group. But the fact that their textual content is scattered throughout Han historical texts allows a glimpse into the fact that they were a literary form originating among the people, spreading upwards to the ruling class. As Zhao Yaodan's article “Thirty Years of Research on Ancient Chinese Ballads and Proverbs” (《中国古代谣谚研究三十年》), The research status of ancient proverbs and sayings in modern times was summarized in the form of a literature review. In the research results on folk sayings during the transition period between the Han Dynasties, Zhao, in conjunction with Lu Zongli's article “Rumors and Misinformation in the Han Dynasty” (《汉代的流言与讹言》), made a rather insightful discussion, arguing that this article conducted a meticulous analysis of the emergence and dissemination of folk rhymes in the Han Dynasty, the social consensus they embodied, as well as the official attitude and handling of these rhymes.

This conclusion itself acknowledges the close connection between Han children's ditties and the Han nobility class and state politics. Stylistically, these ditties broke through the four-

character form of the Book of Songs (《诗三百》), resembling instead the folk poems of the Han Yuefu. Consider the “Children's Ditty from the Time of Emperor Yuan” (《元帝时童谣》):

井水溢，灭灶烟；灌玉堂，流金门

The original incident in the Hanshu (《汉书·五行志》): “In the second year of the Jianshi era of Emperor Cheng, third month, day Wuzi, the water in the well of the Northern Palace gradually rose, overflowed and flowed south... Well water is yin; hearth smoke is yang; the Jade Hall and Golden Gate are the abodes of the Supreme: this symbolizes yin flourishing and extinguishing yang, secretly corresponding to the palace buildings.” (“至成帝建始二年三月戊子，北宫中井泉稍上，溢出南流……井水，阴也；灶烟，阳也；玉堂、金门，至尊之居：象阴盛而灭阳，窃有宫室之应也。”) The imagery of “hearth” (“灶”), “Jade Hall” (“玉堂”), “Golden Gate” (“金门”), and the strong Yin-Yang and prognostication/weft coloring of the original incident all reveal this poem's close connection to sacrifice. Consider also the “Tianshui Children's Ditty (Late Wang Mang)” (《(王莽末)天水童谣》):

出吴门，望缙群。

见一蹇人，言欲上天。

今天可上，地上安得民。

Gao Dianshi (高殿石) believes this children's ditty is “a prediction of Wei Ao's desire to become emperor and his inevitable failure. It explains that without the people's support on earth, wanting to ascend heaven can only mean dying, the soul flying beyond the skies.” Although this view summarizes the poem's meaning accurately, this direct approach to the poetic theme obliterates the sacrificial connotations behind the lines “says he wants to ascend heaven” (“言欲上天”) and “if heaven could be ascended” (“今天可上”), and ignores the deeper meaning behind the people's view of heaven in the poem: If Wei Ao wanted to become emperor, and if this goal were achieved, the first thing he would do afterwards would be to sacrifice to Heaven.

Therefore, the “ascend heaven” (“上天”) mentioned in this poem not only refers to Kei Xiao's (隗嚣) desire to become emperor but should also include the behavioral level meaning of Kei Xiao sacrificing to Heaven after his success.

These works are mainly in three-character, four-character (三言), and five-character (四言) forms, occasionally mixed, giving an overall impression of liveliness and lack of rigid pattern, from which folk linguistic habits can be clearly seen. In content, they inherit the satirical tradition of the Book of Songs (《诗三百》), their criticism directed straight at the

dissolute lives and disastrous ends of the nobility. Wang Zijin was noticed that the folk songs of the Han Dynasty had the functions of social criticism and political criticism, believing that children's ditties were a “form of folk public opinion” (“民间舆论形式”) aimed at satirizing worldly corruption and evil, with vivid language, and also had the function of predicting the course of history and widely publicizing it.

Among them, pieces with strong sacrificial overtones, like the “Capital Children's Ditty (Early Emperor Xian)” (《(献帝初) 京师童谣》):

千里草，何青青？十日卜，不得生！

The poem comes from the Hou Hanshu (《后汉书·五行志》), which explains: “Consider: ‘Thousand-li grass’ forms Dong; ‘Ten days divination’ forms Zhuo... Now these two characters being like this, Heaven's meaning seems to say: Zhuo rubbed against the superior from below, a minister encroaching upon his lord. ‘Lush and green’ is the appearance of violent flourishing. ‘No life is seen’ means he will also quickly be destroyed.” (“案千里草为董，十日卜为卓……今二字如此者，天意若曰：卓自下摩上，以臣陵君也。青青者，暴盛之貌也。不得生者，亦旋破亡。”) This explanation undoubtedly directs this ditty towards “riddle” (“字谜”) literature. Regardless of the correctness of interpreting “ten days divination” (“十日卜”) as the character “Zhuo” (“卓”), solely in terms of interpreting the poem itself, it is a typical sacrificial-type children's ditty: the poem begins by asking why the “thousand-li green grass” (“千里青草”) is so “lush and green” (“青青”), clearly a typical use of the “xing” (“兴”) evocative technique; then, after “Bu” (“卜”) for ten days, the result is the inauspicious sign of “no life” (“不得生”), succinctly show a ritual centered on divination.

In fact, among the various social and political functions undertaken by children's ditties, sacrifice is undoubtedly one. Zhou Shuyun (周书云) believes this might be related to the ancient people's efforts to avert natural disasters, because when ancient people sacrificed to spirits and ancestors, besides “beating gongs and drums, burning incense, worshipping Buddhas, knocking heads and seeking divine efficacy” (“敲锣打鼓，烧香拜佛，叩神求灵”), they also often induced children to chant ditties. The reason is that children's ditties, as a kind of witchcraft language, possess a quality similar to incantations, to some extent serving as a tool for communicating with the sacrificed spirits and ancestors. However, unlike pure witchcraft incantations, they possess broad social dissemination, acceptability, and literary artistry, preventing this special poetic form from disappearing like witchcraft incantations due to obscurity and lack of literary value, but allowing it to be passed down enduringly as a representative of sacrificial literature.

It is noteworthy that these children's ditties were obviously influenced by Han Dynasty prognostication ideological trend and theological concepts, incorporating strange events beyond contemporary understanding into the horizon of poetic generation, to the extent that

Wang Chong in the Lunheng·Ding Gui directly denounced them as “ominous words” (“妖言”) . This also stems from the fact that most children's ditties themselves carried strong overtones of sacrificial prophecy. Like the “Throw from the Pavilion” (《投阁》) ditty recorded in the Gushi Yuan (《古诗源》) :

惟寂寞，自投阁。爰清静，作符命。

The poem was sung during Wang Mang's administration (王莽秉政时期) . According to the Gushi Yuan (《古诗源》) citing the Hanshu (《汉书》) for its background: it concerns Yang Xiong throwing himself from a pavilion due to involvement with prophetic tallies (符命): “After Wang Mang usurped the throne, those who again presented prophetic tallies... Wang Mang executed them all... The envoy wanted to arrest Yang Xiong. Xiong, in fear, threw himself from the pavilion, nearly dying. The capital said.” (“王莽篡位后，复上符命者，莽尽诛之.....使者欲收雄，雄恐，乃从阁自投，几死。京师语曰。”) As mentioned earlier, Wang Mang's successful accession was significantly aided by the trend of prophetic tallies. From this children's ditty, one can see that the theory of prophetic tallies had already formed a sweeping trend in society at that time, costing people like Yang Xiong their lives. It is not difficult to imagine the situation of other activities and doctrines also under the sway of theological concepts during this period, such as sacrifice, prognostication, divination, and prayers. The strong sacrificial and prognostication colors in ditties like “Children's Ditty from the Time of Emperor Cheng: The Crooked Path Ruins Good Fields” (《成帝时童谣·邪径败良田》) and “Shu Children's Ditty: The Yellow Ox with the White Belly” (《蜀中童谣·黄牛白腹》) are compelling evidence.

Compared to traditional prognostication poetry, children's ditties not only possessed high predictive accuracy but, more importantly, their widespread circulation gave them social mobilizing power, leading the ruling class to treat them as an important political evaluation criterion seriously. As Shu Daqing states, the value of this poetic form lies in the authors' reference to the current political situation, analysis of various forces, and use of a mystified form to speculate on future historical patterns. The significance of the children's ditty form for Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry lies more in the concept of “the people” promoted by Han Confucianism, providing a inversion observation of the emperor's political practice. Through these poems chantable by children, they conveyed the common people's opinions on the political situation to the ruler, urging the emperor to reflect on himself and improve state policies. Although the process of selection into the histories inevitably involved the historians' subjective colors and political purposes, surveying these theologically prominent ballads makes the prevailing trend of Han Dynasty sacrificial culture.

## (II) *Children's Ditties*

If the Music Bureau poems and children's ditties are seen as a transcendence of the Book of Songs stylistic tradition by Han poetry, then the imperial edicts of self-accusation represent a qualified return to this tradition. The reason for this view is that Han imperial edicts of self-accusation were partly in the form of four-character poetry and partly existed as prose. Taking

Emperor Wu's "Edict on Worthy and Good Literati" (《贤良诏》) compiled in the Wen Xuan (《文选》) as an example:

日月所烛，罔不率俾。周之成康，刑措不用，德及鸟兽；教通四海，海外肃慎。北发渠搜，氏羌来服。星辰不孛，日月不蚀，山陵不崩，川谷不塞。麟凤在郊薮，河洛出图书。

This edict was issued early in Emperor Wu's reign, tracing back to the great unity of the ancient sage kings' era, with its good governance and simultaneous appearance of auspicious signs. Moved, he issued the edict seeking worthy and good strategies for governing the realm from the empire. Although Xiao Tong titled it "Edict on Worthy and Good Literati" (《贤良诏》) when recording it, from the edict's comparison of ancient governance with his own situation, and phrases like "Now I have received the honor of serving the ancestral temple... as if treading deep water, not knowing how to cross" ("今朕获奉宗庙.....若涉渊水，未知所济") and "I am not intelligent, unable to extend virtue far" ("朕之不敏，不能远德"), one can easily see the strong sense of self-accusation in this edict. Moreover, this edict was influenced by the four-six character poetic style. Scholar Liu Xianglan (刘湘兰), researching Han Dynasty edict styles, also used Emperor Wu's "Edict on Worthy and Good Literati" (《贤良诏》) as an example, describing it as "lofty in conception, full of vigor, concise and elegant in language. The sentence structure is neat yet not rigid, possessing aesthetic appeal in both diction and meaning." Furthermore, the desires expressed in "星辰不孛，日月不蚀，山陵不崩，川谷不塞。麟凤在郊薮，河洛出图书"—the regular movement of stars, absence of eclipses, geological disasters like landslides and blocked rivers, the appearance of auspicious beasts like qilin and phoenixes in the suburbs, the re-emergence of the River Chart and Luo Writing—were all frequently mentioned in Han sacrifices and commonly found in sacrificial poetry.

Wang Fu (王符) of the Eastern Han, reflecting on this, said: "In former times, the capital was not prevented... since then, auspicious responses and propitious signs, descendants flourishing and multiplying, cannot surpass the past." ("旧时京师不防.....以来吉祥应瑞，子孙昌炽，不能过前。") Therefore, viewing Han imperial edicts of self-accusation from the perspective of sacrificial poetry and exploring the elements of sacrificial poetry within them, this edict is representative.

Regarding the poetic parts, Han imperial edicts of self-accusation, besides being influenced by classical learning and thus respecting the Songs style, were also 明显 influenced by Qin stone inscriptions, hence the verses often contain self-praise for their merits and virtues.

Taking the Mount Tai Stone Inscription (《泰山石刻》) by Li Si as an example, the inscription recalls the First Emperor's early accession, establishing laws, rectifying ministers, using force to pacify the realm; then describes the emperor's eastern tour, climbing the mountain and thinking of the past, with Li Si as attendant inscribing the stone to eulogize his virtue.

The general content is that the people engaged in production activities according to the law, national culture was transmitted thanks to stable political conditions, the Emperor himself governed diligently, his prestige spread far, and social customs were renewed: hierarchy, gender ethics, official conduct, etc., were all orderly.

This method of praise, starting from the emperor's personal achievements, expanding the perspective to the state, society, and people, and then using the great order of the state, social stability, and people's productive happiness as evidence of the emperor's personal ability, exerted considerable influence on Han edicts, especially edicts of self-accusation. Try comparing with an edict of self-accusation by Emperor Zhang:

朕以眇身，托于王侯之上，统理万机，惧失厥中，兢兢业业，未知所济。深惟守文之主，必建师傅之官。《诗》不云乎：“不愆不忘，率由旧章。”……“三事大夫，莫肯夙夜”，《小雅》之所伤也。“予违汝弼，汝无面从”，股肱之正义也。群后百僚，勉思厥职，各贡忠诚，以辅不逮。申敕四方，称朕意焉。

The edict aims at self-accusation, but expressions like “governing the myriad tasks” (“统理万机”) “trembling and cautious” (“兢兢业业”) “proclaimed to the four quarters, to fulfill my intention” (“申敕四方，称朕意焉”) all serve to display the emperor's sage virtue.

The edict's language uses both poetic and prose styles, the four-character phrases are orderliness and polished, and the content directly quotes the Songs. From this, one can clearly see the tradition of the Songs and the legacy of Qin eulogium stone inscriptions.

If this was the case in Eastern Han, it was even more so in Western Han, to the extent that from the very beginning of edicts of self-accusation, before the Songs were even canonized, during Emperor Wen's time, traces were already visible. Consider Emperor Wen's posthumous edict:

朕获保宗庙……赖天之灵。社稷之福，方内安宁，靡有兵革。朕既不敏，常畏过行，以羞先帝之遗德；惟年之久长，惧于不终。今乃幸以天年得复供养于高庙，朕之不明与嘉之，其奚哀念之有！……无禁取妇、嫁女、祠祀、饮酒、食肉……布告天下，使明知朕意。

This edict possesses all three elements: poetic style, self-praise, and sacrifice. Emperor Wen first summarizes his life's achievements in four-character poetic style, praising his own virtue.

Then, in the edict, he instructs his subjects not to conduct his funeral extravagantly. While advising frugal burial, expressions in the edict concerning the “Gao Temple” (“高庙”) “ancestral temple” (“宗庙”) “altars of soil and grain” (“社稷”) and “sacrificing” (“祠祀”) reflect Emperor Wen's personal emphasis on state sacrifice, also making the entire edict a guide to sacrifice for the early Han.

The imperial edict of self-accusation, which originated in the Han Dynasty, has self-evident sacrificial overtones.

Considering the “Rain Sacrifice” (“雩祭”) aspect of Han edicts of self-accusation: “Edicts of self-accusation concerning rainfall issues contain expressions for praying for rain and for stopping rain... Han edicts of self-accusation contain writings on drought calamity: ‘In winter, little lingering snow; in spring, no soaking rain. Divided prayers and requests, no deity not sacrificed to.’ (‘冬鲜宿雪，春无澍雨。分祷祈请，靡神不祭。’) The types of rain prayers: first, the ruling class performed the Yu sacrifice, Chunqiu Fanlu: ‘For great drought, perform the Yu sacrifice and pray for rain.’ (‘大旱雩祭而请雨。’)

Second, using edicts of self-accusation to recruit extraordinary men from among the people to pray for rain on behalf of the people: ‘Now again there is drought, like flames, like burning... Pray to the Five Peaks and Four Rivers, and to the famous mountains that can raise clouds and bring rain, hoping to receive the response of raining over all under heaven before the morning is over’ (‘今时复旱，如炎如焚.....祷五岳四渎，及名山能兴云致雨者，冀蒙不崇朝遍雨天下之报。’) ... And poor harvests and people's hunger were also reflected in edicts of self-accusation: ‘From spring through summer, great drought blazing fiercely, anxious heartbe on the rack, therefore we prayed and sacrificed to the bright... but the winter wheat was rather damaged.’ (‘自春涉夏，大旱炎赫，忧心京京，故得祷祈明祀.....而宿麦颇伤。’) ” ( ) Sacrificial expressions in Han edicts of self-accusation generally fell into two situations:

The first was under the Han concept of interaction between Heaven and Man, where certain natural disasters or anomalous phenomena were seen as omens of the ruler's lack of virtue or incompetence.

As stated: “The beginning of calamity is like a spark sufficient to start a fire... a lifetime without the disaster of fire, yet one does not know the virtue of prevention.” (“夫祸之始也，犹燔火蘖足也.....终身无失火之患，而不知德也。”) Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒) also said: “Heaven cannot but be revered and feared... If one does not revere and fear Heaven, its calamity comes covertly.” (“天之不可不敬畏.....不畏敬天，其殃来至暗。”) Especially when these portents caused loss of life and property among the common people, the emperor issuing an edict of self-accusation was a way to appease Heaven's anger and remedy his own political shortcomings. The second was the opposite of calamitous portents—auspicious signs (祥瑞) . The “Preface to the Zhouyi Zhengyi” (《周易正义序》) states: “The king's actions must model the Way of Heaven and Earth... Therefore he can encompass the universe, interact with the spirits. The ancestral altars are thereby endless... beneficial to the living beings.” (“王者动必则天地之道.....故能弥纶宇宙，酬酢神明。宗社所以无穷.....生灵之所益也。”) These manifested as the appearance of rare things, or the emergence of symbols that, in the traditional historical context, signified the emperor's excellent virtue and effective governance.

The “Preface to the Gongyang Zhuan” (《春秋穀梁传序》) states: “The Way of the former kings being vast, the qilin was moved and came in response.” (“先王之道既弘，麟

感而来应。”) The commentary says: “Because the qilin is a numinous creature, it does not appear without a sage.” (“以麟是神灵之物，非圣不臻。”) At such times, the emperor would also issue edicts of self-accusation, but the content often expressed a humble stance of being unworthy of the auspice, not matching the propitious sign. For example, in the first year of Yuankang, Emperor Xuan Liu Bingji, because of the two auspicious signs “phoenixes gathering” (“凤皇集”) and “sweet dew falling” (“甘露降”) issued an edict of self-accusation: “Phoenixes gathered on Mount Tai and in Chenliu, sweet dew fell in the Weiyang Palace. I have been unable to manifest the excellent achievements of the former emperor... yet I have received auspicious signs, bestowed this happiness.” (“凤皇集泰山、陈留，甘露降未央宫。朕未能章先帝休烈.....获蒙嘉瑞，赐兹祉福。”)

But in either case, they displayed the emotional color of the ruler receiving the mandate from Heaven and being constrained by Heaven, within the sacrificial context dominated by the Han theory of interaction between Heaven and Man. At the same time, viewing the thread of literary history, the form of the edict of self-accusation was also an early practice of the fusion of poetry and prose in political literature. Su Shi (苏轼) commented: “As for the methods of employing men and listening to words... accusing oneself to win the people's hearts, changing one's faults to correspond with the Heavenly Way... such things are too numerous to list all.”

(“至于用人听言之法.....罪己以收人心，改过以应天道.....如此之流，未易悉数。”)

This shows its relatively profound influence on later literature of a political and educational nature.

## CONCLUSION

In mainstream literary criticism, works on sacrificial themes often occupy a lower position. The verdict of being “temple literature,” the ornamentation of diction with hollow ideological content, and the obscurity of the language's connotations are three major hurdles facing the realization of the value of Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry forms. But this does not mean that sacrificial poetry lacks highlights in literary value: Sacrificial poetry has a rich historical background, being an amalgamation of numerous cultures, thus possessing irreplaceable cultural value; the development of Han Dynasty natural studies allowed Han sacrificial poetry to generate unique imagistic value in terms of human and object imagery; under the political-educational perspective, satire and civilize are the most practically significant parts of Han sacrificial poetry's literary value.

The influence of Han Dynasty sacrificial poetry on later literature is also powerful proof refuting the claim that Han sacrificial poetry and rhapsodies lack prominent literary value. It profoundly influenced sacrificial poetry creation after the Han and is also connected to later poetic themes like wandering immortals and ascending towers.

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## References

- 1) After studying the sacrificial ceremonies and the associated sentiments of the Chinese people, Stephen Owen, taking the “Hymns of Zhou” 《周颂》 as an example, argues that under the influence of this unique national sacrificial sentiment, people feared that “doing something wrong and incurring ‘guilt and remorse’ during the ceremony would displease the ancestors, who would then no longer bestow blessings upon their descendants.” Therefore, the sacrificial rites had to be “flawless”. (Stephen Owen, trans, Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Chinese Classical Literature 《追忆·中国古典文学中的往事再现》, SDX Joint Publishing Company in 2014, P. 11.)
- 2) In this paper, Wang Ying demonstrates that the drumming and blowing music 鼓吹乐 of the Han Dynasty was used in sacrificial contexts. For funeral ceremonies, as recorded in Later Han 《后汉书·礼仪志》: “When the coffin was to be carried out from the hall... the Huangmen drumming and blowing music was performed three times, bells and drums were sounded, and the Son of Heaven expressed his grief.” “枢将发于殿.....黄门鼓吹三通, 鸣钟鼓, 天子举哀。” For suburban sacrifice ceremonies, as stated in the Later Han 《后汉书·光武帝纪下》: “The northern suburban altar was located at the northwest corner of the city... the drumming and blowing music, dancers, and imperial tents were all moved from the equipment used in the southern suburban sacrifices.” “北郊坛在城西北角.....其鼓吹乐及舞人御帐, 皆徙南郊之具。” (Wang Ying, Han Dynasty Society and Drumming Music 汉代社会与鼓吹乐, Southwest University in 2020, P.32.)
- 3) In his work Lunheng 《论衡·订鬼》 specifically the chapter "Discussing Ghosts," Wang Chong 王充 makes several statements condemning literary forms such as children's ditties as “ominous sayings.” “妖言” For example, he writes, “Between heaven and earth, there is more than one kind of evil portent... Like children's ditties. Children's ditties are spoken from the mouth spontaneously, just as the words of shamans flow naturally from their thoughts.” “天地之间, 妖怪非一.....若童之谣矣。童谣口自言, 巫辞意自出。” He also states, “It is commonly said that children's ditties are induced by the Sparkling Deluder, for those words seem to have some basis in observation.” “世谓童谣, 荧惑使之, 彼言有所见也。” Furthermore, he argues, “In the ‘Hong Fan’ 《洪范》 chapter, among the Five Agents, the second is fire; among the Five Affairs, the second is speech. Speech and fire share the same ether, therefore children's ditties and songs are ominous sayings... Thus, ominous sayings emanate from young children.” “《洪范》五行二曰火, 五事二曰言。言、火同气, 故童谣、诗歌为妖言.....故妖言出于小童。” (Wang Chong 王充, Lunheng jiaoshi 《论衡校释》, collated and annotated by Huang Hui 黄晖校释, Zhonghua Book Company in 2018, p.940–944.)