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Religion and Folk Belief in Chinese Literature and Theatre

Edited by
Xiaohuan Zhao

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Editor

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Cover image courtesy of Xiaohuan Zhao
Spring Festival parade in honor of the Great Emperor Cishan (Cishan dadi 祠山大帝), a tutelary god widely worshipped in the border area of Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Photo taken by Xiaohuan Zhao in Langxi county, Anhui province on 1 February 2017.

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About the Editor

Xiaohuan Zhao

Xiaohuan Zhao is Associate Professor of Chinese Literary and Theatre Studies at the University of Sydney. He holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh and taught at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland and Otago in New Zealand before taking up his current position in Sydney, Australia. With a specialist focus on ritual/religion and literature/theatre, his research is profiled in internationally renowned journals such as T'oung Pao; TDR/The Drama Review; Asian Theatre Journal, Religions; Ecumenica: Performance and Religion; and Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft. He is currently sitting on the editorial boards of Religions and Humanities and Social Sciences Communications. His most recent book is Chinese Theatre: An Illustrated History Through Nuoxi and Mulianxi—Volume One: From Exorcism to Entertainment and Chinese Theatre: An Illustrated History Through Nuoxi and Mulianxi—Volume Two: From Storytelling to Story-acting, published by Routledge.

Preface to "Religion and Folk Belief in Chinese Literature and Theatre "

This edited volume of Religions is a reprint of the articles published in the Special Issue on 'Religion and Folk Belief in Chinese Literature and Theatre'. The issue attracted more than twenty submissions from a broad range of scholars at different stages of their academic career. I am delighted that after going through a rigorous peer review, ten of them were accepted for publication in the issue, thereby constituting ten chapters of this volume.

This collection of essays offers a historical, textual and ethnoanthropological exploration of the meaning and value of religion and ritual and their form and function in relation to Chinese literature and theatre. The term 'theatre' is used here to refer broadly to various types of live performances—theatrical and non-theatrical; sacred and profane—presented in a religious setting, thus including ritual performance and oral performance. Likewise, literature in this volume broadly encompasses both written and oral literatures, including drama, poetry, hagiography, legend, mythology and prosimetric narrative or chantefable for telling and singing. The contributors to the issue draw on a wide range of materials from historical, philosophical and literary texts to field reports and archaeological finds to archived documents and local gazetteers to personal interviews and participant observations. While all the essays are collected under the theme of 'Religion and Folk Belief in Chinese Literature and Theatre', they differ from each other in subject matter, source material and research approach. Rich and varied as they are, these essays fall into two main categories, namely, a historical approach to religion and ritual recorded in (written and visual) texts and an integrated approach that combines historical inquiries into written and visual texts with ethnoanthropological fieldwork on religious rituals and associated performances. Contributions from Jinhua Jia, Noga Ganany, Qian Wang and Qiong Yang, Xing Lan, Xiaoyang Wang and Shixiao Wang and Ludi Wang and Yongfeng Huang may be classified into the first type, whereas those from Rostislav Berezkin, Chao Guo et al., Thomas Riccio and Xiaohuan Zhao the second type.

This edited volume begins with an article by Jinhua Jia, Adjunct Professor of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Macau and Professor of College of Humanities at Yangzhou University. In this chapter, Jia provides an exhaustive examination of philosophical, philological and literary texts from early China in search of the religious-ritual origin of cheng (sincerity), a key concept and code of conduct at the core of Confucian ethics and aesthetics that also finds expression in ritual practice of various religious traditions in China. Jia effectively employs a synthetic approach of etymological, religious, philosophical and literary studies and successfully generates from early Chinese texts' and religious rituals' four-layered meanings and implications of cheng, thus unravelling the mysteries that have long surrounded it.

In Chapter 2, and in a similar vein, Noga Ganany, University Assistant Professor in the Study of Late Imperial China at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Cambridge, conducts a critical analysis of the textual hybridity of Deng Zhimo's (fl. late sixteenth century to early seventeenth century) Saints Trilogy, i.e., three illustrated hagiographies of Daoist immortals, Lü Dongbin (The Flying Sword), Xu Xun (The Iron Tree) and Sa Shoujian (The Enchanted Date). The trilogy, Canany argues convincingly, 'offers encyclopedic, practical, and entertaining guidebooks for worshipping the three immortals and pursuing Daoist attainment', thus 'highlighting the close interplay between "literature" and "religion" in late-imperial China'.

The following two chapters deal with religion and drama. In Chapter 3, Qian Wang, Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature at Yangzhou University, and Qiong Yang, Academic Editor

at Social Sciences in China Press, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), closely examine three types of willow narratives (the ritual shooting of willow trees; the deliverance of willow spirits by the Daoist immortal Lü Dongbin; and the figurative use of the word 'willow' to refer to women) in Yuan zaju (variety play)—the earliest mature form of Chinese musical theatre or xiqu in northern style that rose in the early to mid-thirteenth century and predominated Chinese theatre during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). They demonstrate beyond doubt that willow narratives in Yuan zaju are an artistic manifestation and combination of centuries-old myths and legends, religious rituals and folk beliefs and historical and literary works about the willow.

In Chapter 4, Xing Lan, a PhD candidate in Chinese Studies at the University of Edinburgh, opens a new avenue of research in religion and drama. With focus on Daoism in Chuanju or Sichuan Opera, a regional form of Chinese theatre prevalent in southwestern China since the eighteenth century, this chapter studies the influence of Daoism in the dramatisation of Liaozhaixi, a group of cycle plays adapted from the Liaozhai zhiyi (Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio), a collection of classical tales of gods, ghosts and spirits written by Pu Songling (1640-1715) mainly based on myths, legends, folktales and local histories. From a large body of newly recovered playscripts of Liaozhaixi in Chuanju and a close comparison of them with the original tales in the Liaozhai, Lan formulates two basic modes of theatrical adaptation in the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, that is, 'transplantation' and 'improvement', the former being an attempt at integrating the belief and worship of Daoist immortals into the storyline of the original tale and the latter an attempt at improving and refining ordinary Daoist priests and practitioners in the original tales into perfected saints and immortals in line with Sichuan local Daoist beliefs.

Chapters 5 and 6 are broadly concerned with religion and poetry. In Chapter 5, Xiaoyang Wang, Chair Professor of Art and Archaeology at Southeast University in Nanjing, and Shixiao Wang, Assistant Research Fellow in the School of Arts, Nanjing University, perform a careful examination of the portrayal of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu) in Han Rhapsodies (fu) and Han tomb paintings, the two major genres of art that give form to her cult in the Han era (206BC–AD 220). Arguably the most popular deity in Han China, the Queen Mother of the West has long been a hot topic for scholars of Chinese mythology, religion and literature, but to my knowledge, hardly any serious research has been conducted to compare literary and visual representations of the goddess. From the differences in the depiction of the deity between Han Rhapsodies and Han tomb paintings, among other primary sources, they conclude that there exist two Queen Mothers of the West in the Han era: 'one worshipped as a goddess of longevity and immortality by people from the upper class; the other worshipped by the ordinary people as a seemingly omnipotent deity with divine power over both the immortal world and the mortal world'.

In Chapter 6, Ludi Wang, Post-doctoral Fellow of the Department of Philosophy, and Yongfeng Huang, Professor of the Department of Philosophy, Director of the Research Centre for Daoism and Traditional Chinese Culture and Director of the Research Institute for Religious Studies, both at Xiamen University, undertake a detailed survey of a group of shi poems written to monks by Pei Yue (fl. 906), a lesser-known late Tang poet. These poems, they find, reveal Pei's longing for the pure land and his frustration over failure to free himself from earthbound life, a mindset commonly shared among great Tang poets such as Wang Wei (700–761), Bai Juyi (722–846) and Li Shangyin (813–858).

Chapter 7, the first essay in the second category, is devoted to a study of Xuehu baojuan or Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond, a newly discovered manuscript dating from the nineteenth century and identified as a text for the performance of jiangjing ('telling scripture'), a form of ritual storytelling and storysinging based on the narrative prosimetrum called baojuan ('precious scroll'). This study comes as part of a series of research projects carried out by Rostislav Berezkin, Professor of Chinese

Popular Religion and Social History at the National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies, Fudan University, on the ritual performance of precious scrolls in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, where 'telling scripture' is a centuries-old living tradition. The author scrutinises the text and context of this newly discovered manuscript and showcases it as 'a precious scroll functioning in the context of modern telling scripture in Changshu' and also as evidence for 'the local varieties of this type of storytelling in connection with ritual practices'.

There are two chapters, Chapters 8–9, in this volume that deal with religion and ritual of the Hmong (Miao), an ethnic group of people living in the Southwest of China. In Chapter 8, Chao Guo, Associate Professor at the Department of Chinese (Zhuhai) of Sun Yat-sen University, examines in detail, with the assistance of two young scholars, the Xiu Yax Lus Qim or Yalu wang (Ode to King Yalu), a newly discovered 'heroic epic' that had long been orally transmitted, performed and circulated in fragments of varying degree among various subgroups of the Miao people for ritual performances in association with Miao festivals and particularly funerals. 'Embedded in Miao sorcery beliefs and practices', they argue—forcefully and authoritatively—¬¬the Yalu wang is first and foremost a ritual text for Miao funerals rather than an 'heroic epic' as officially described; any attempt to disassociate it from its primary function at Miao funeral rites and study and stage it as an epic about the origin and history of the Miao people will hollow out its soul and will inevitably result in 'the erosion, dilution, or even elimination' of this great oral tradition.

In Chapter 9, Thomas Riccio, Professor of Visual and Performing Arts, Director of Theatre Programme at the University of Texas at Dallas, USA, and Visiting Professor of Ethnography at Jishou University, China, provides a fieldwork-informed case study of the zhuiniu ritual of 'killing of the water buffalo with a spear', one of the most important religious rituals still performed across Miao communities in Xiangxi or Western Hunan with its roots traceable to 'the worship of spirits and natural elements' in prehistorical times. In this chapter, Riccio describes the zhuiniu ritual as 'an adaptative and interpretative cultural narrative' embodied and expressed through performance, arguing that the survival of this ancient sacrificial ritual into the twentieth-first century is owing to its modularity and adaptability, and above all, its ability to cater for 'the practical and spiritual needs' of the Miao.

The last chapter in this volume is a richly illustrated study of village temples and temple festivals in northern China based on the fieldwork conducted by its author, Xiaohuan Zhao, Associate Professor of Chinese Literature and Theatre at the University of Sydney and Distinguished Overseas Professor of the Research Institute for Xiqu and Xiqu Relics at Shanxi Normal University. In this chapter, Zhao first traces the historical development of temple festivals (saishe, shehuo, miaosai or yingshen saishe) from ancient wu-shamanic rituals to a highly integrated form of ritual performance and theatrical entertainment and then proceeds to a case study of temple culture and temple theatre in rural northern China. This study represents his most recent effort to explore the ritual roots of Chinese theatre and the mechanism for the integration of ritual into and from theatre.

Xiaohuan Zhao
Editor

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Article

Writings, Emotions, and Oblations: The Religious-Ritual Origin of the Classical Confucian Conception of Cheng (Sincerity)

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Abstract: *Cheng* 誠 (sincerity) is one of the primary concepts in the Confucian tradition as well as Chinese intellectual history. Its rich implications involve dimensions of religion, ritual, folk belief, ethics, psychology, cosmology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and literature. In the Confucian classics, *cheng* is described as the "Dao of heaven"; humans through cultivation can reach the mysterious state of "the utmost sincerity functioning as spirits" and thus can "assist the transforming and generating power of heaven and earth." Because of *cheng*'s rich, sacred, and mysterious implications, it has been regarded as the most difficult and perplexing of Chinese concepts. Scholars have long studied *cheng* mainly from the perspective of philosophy to analyze its ideological conceptions in the Confucian classics, resulting in fruitful and inspiring interpretations. However, because they have not traced the origin of *cheng* to its rich religious, ritual, and literary sources, their interpretations have been unable to answer the question: why is *cheng* covered with such a mysterious veil? In recent decades, some scholars have started exploring *cheng*'s relationship with ancient religious beliefs and rituals, but so far a comprehensive examination of the religious-ritual origin of this significant concept remains lacking. To discover *cheng*'s mysterious origins, we must apply a synthetic approach of etymological, religious, philosophical, and literary studies. Drawing upon both transmitted and excavated texts, this essay first analyzes the graphic-phonetic structure and semantic implications of the character *cheng* 成 (completion), which was the character *cheng*'s 誠 early form. It then examines the rich meanings implied in both characters related to sacrificial-divinatory rituals, including invoking the spirits with sincere writings, emotions, and oblations, in order to seduce them to descend and enjoy the offerings, as well as perfectively completing the human-spirit communication. Finally, the essay discusses how those religious beliefs and ritual ceremonies evolved into Confucian ethical values and aesthetic concepts, thus lifting the mysterious veil from *cheng*.

Keywords: *Cheng* 誠; *cheng* 成; sincerity; completion; religion; ritual; Classical Confucianism; literature

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1. Introduction

Cheng 誠 (sincerity) is one of the primary concepts in the Confucian tradition as well as Chinese intellectual history. Its rich implications involve dimensions of religion, ritual, folk belief, ethics, psychology, cosmology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and literature. In the Confucian classics, *cheng* is described as the "Dao of heaven"; humans through cultivation can reach the mysterious state of "the utmost sincerity functioning as spirits" 至誠如神 and thus can "assist the transforming and generating power of heaven and earth" 贊天地之化育 (Mencius, 4A12; Zheng and Kong 2000, 53.1689b, 1691a–b, 1693a).[1] Because of *cheng*'s rich, sacred, and mysterious implications, it has been regarded as the most difficult and perplexing of Chinese concepts (Zhang 1983, p. 133; Munro 1988, p. 177), being translated variously as "sincerity," "realness," "reality," "truth," "integrity," "creativity," "force," "perfection," or simply transliterated as "cheng."[2]

Scholars have long studied *cheng* mainly from the perspective of philosophy to analyze its ideological conceptions in the Confucian classics, resulting in fruitful and inspiring interpretations. However, because they have not traced the origin of *cheng*

to its rich religious, ritual, and literary sources, their interpretations have been unable to answer the question: why is *cheng* covered with such a mysterious, sacred veil?

In recent decades, however, some scholars have started exploring *cheng*'s relationship with ancient religious beliefs and rituals. Li Zehou indicated that *cheng* was originally an important emotional factor and mental state in ancient *wu* 巫 (shaman) activities (1999, p. 61). This view was further developed by other scholars (Zhong 2013, pp. 12–20; M. Chen 2009, pp. 103–28). Ji Zhichang proposed that the concept of *cheng* developed from the rites of fast in ancient sacrificial rituals (Ji 2000, pp. 1084–92). Mark Csikszentmihalyi also described *cheng* as a kind of spiritual attitude in religious rituals (Csikszentmihalyi 2009, pp. 519–42). Sato Masayuki analyzed the appearances of *cheng* in the *Liji* 禮記 (Records of Ritual) and identified some of them as referring to a sincere attitude toward spirits and sacrificial rituals (Sato 2005, pp. 215–44). Although these scholars have presented some initial, insightful views for studying *cheng* from a new perspective that could help lift its mysterious veil, so far a comprehensive examination of the religious-ritual origin of this significant concept remains lacking.

The actual performance of *wu*-shamanistic activities in the pre-historical era is difficult to describe specifically because of insufficient evidence. Many early sources, however, indicate that in the official dimension, the ancient *wu*-shamanistic culture became ritualized during the Zhou dynasty and developed into a set of sacrificial rituals to the ancestral and natural spirits (Li 1999, pp. 34–40; L. Chen 2009, pp. 29–37). At the same time, in the folk dimension *wu*-shamanistic activities continued to flourish in various forms of ceremonies and techniques (Harper 1999, pp. 813–84; Li 2006a, 2006b). In both dimensions, the most important ceremonial procedure was to invoke the spirits with emotions, words, writings, music, dances, and offerings, in order to seduce them to descend and enjoy the sacrificial feasts and bestow blessings. This kind of ceremonial procedure is seen in numerous transmitted and excavated texts, especially in literary works because the ritual was accompanied by dancing, singing, and invoking. For example, Xu Shen defined *wu*-shaman as being "able to serve the formless and invoke spirits to descend with their dance" 能事無形, 以舞降神者 (Xu 1963, p. 100a),[3] the "formless" referring to spirits. The Chu songs (*Chuci* 楚辭) of the Warring States period, especially the entire series of the "Nine Songs" ("Jiuge" 九歌), vividly describe the ritual performance of the interaction between the *wu*-shaman and various gods/spirits (Hawkes 1985, pp. 42–51; Zhou 1986; Sukhu 2012, pp. 75–85). The concept of *cheng* was originally connected to this kind of ritual performance, which is the main reason for its sacred-mysterious luster.

In early China, there was no demarcation between philosophy, religion, literature, and so forth. All these dimensions were inter-related and cross-fertilized. To discover *cheng*'s mysterious origins, therefore, we must apply a synthetic approach of etymological, religious, philosophical, and literary studies. Drawing upon both transmitted and excavated texts, in this essay I first analyze the graphic-phonetic structure and semantic implications of the character *cheng* 成 (completion; hereafter marked as *cheng*[1]), which was the early form of the character *cheng* 誠 (sincerity; hereafter marked as *cheng*[2]). Then, I examine the rich meanings implied in *cheng*[1] and *cheng*[2] related to sacrificial rituals, including invoking the spirits with sincere writings, emotions, and oblations, in order to seduce them into descending and enjoying the offerings, as well as perfectively completing the human-spirit communication. Finally, I discuss how these religious beliefs and ritual ceremonies evolved into Confucian ethical values and aesthetic concepts.

2. *Cheng*'s Early Form and Implications

Scholars have sighed from being unable to trace the origin of the character *cheng*[2] because it is not seen in either the oracle bone or bronze inscriptions, and it also seldom appears in pre-Warring States texts. However, as with many Chinese characters

whose categorical constituents—such as *yan* 言 (word), *xin* 心 (heart, mind), *shui* 水 (water), *mu* 木 (wood), and so on—were later additions, the original graph of *cheng*^{2} was *cheng*^{1} without a *yan*-word constituent. This etymology is clearly seen in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean): "Sincerity means self-completion. . . . Sincerity does not merely complete oneself but also completes things" 誠者, 自成也 . . . 誠者, 非自成己而已也, 所以成物也 (Zheng and Kong 2000, 53.1694a). In the early classics, these two characters were commonly used interchangeably. For example, in a poem from the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry, no. 188), we read, "If it is true (*cheng*^{1}) you are not influenced by her riches, you still are so by the difference" 成不以富, 亦祇以異.[4] Then, when the *Analects* (12.10) cites these lines, *cheng*^{1} (true) is written as *cheng*^{2}. In other early texts, such as the *Mozi* 墨子 (Master Mo Di), *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 (Master Han Fei), and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master Huainan), we see the same interchange between the two characters (Sun 2001, 12.441; Chen 2000, 8. 552, 554; He 1998, 3.262). Furthermore, according to modern scholars' reconstruction of old Chinese, both characters share the same initial consonant and final vowel. For example, Zheng Zhang Shangfang has reconstructed both as *djeŋ (Zheng Zhang 2003, p. 288), while William H. Baxter and Laurent Sagart have reconstructed them as *[d]eŋ (Baxter and Sagart 2014, pp. 12–13). Because *cheng*^{1} is both the phonetic and semantic, it should be the etymon for *cheng*^{2} as well as its early form.

In the OBI, *cheng*^{1} comprises *xu* 戌 (a kind of axe-weapon) and *gun* 丨 (stick; Guo 1979–1983, p. 4905, no. 39503; Xu 1998, pp. 1552–53). Many scholars have indicated that in ancient times, huge axe-weapons such as *xu*, *wu* 戊, *qi* 戚, or *yue* 戉 might have been used as clan insignias, command symbols, or ritual weapons (Ding 1956, pp. 93–99; Tang 1977, July 14; Qiu 1978, pp. 165–66; Boltz 1994, p. 48). These weapons were used in rituals to symbolize the sanctioned triple power of religion, polity, and military. For example, the jade axes from the Liangzhu 良渚 culture (ca. 3300–2000 BCE) were carved with spirit face motifs (Su 1994, p. 249), while the bronze *yue*-axes excavated from the Shang-dynasty tomb in Yidu 益都, Shandong province, present similar motifs (Shandong Province Museum 山東省博物館 1972, pp. 17–30). King Wu of Zhou (r. ca. 1046–1043) held a yellow *yue*-axe at the ritual of reporting to heaven and the ancestors his victory of conquering the Shang (Huang 1995, pp. 447–53). In the Zhou-dynasty dance performance of sacrificial rituals, "the sovereign holds shield and axe standing on his dance position" (Zheng and Kong 2000, 49.1577a). *Xu* is also used interchangeably with *cheng*^{1} or *cheng*^{2}, such as in a record in the *Huainanzi*, "*Xu* is *cheng*^{1}" 戌爲成 (He 1998, 3.262), or a record in the *Yupian* 玉篇 (Jade Volume), "*Xu* is *cheng*^{2}" 戌, 誠也 (Hu 1989, 30. 5883–84). Xu Shen interpreted *cheng*^{1}'s component of *gun* 丨 as meaning "to connect the high and the low" 上下通也 (Xu 1963, p. 33a). The high refers to heaven and divinities, and the low refers to earth and humans. If Xu Shen's interpretation can be trusted, *cheng*^{1}'s early meaning may have been the connection and communication between humans and spirits in shamanistic-religious rituals. However, even if we do not adopt Xu Shen's interpretation, as a ritual weapon *cheng*^{1} was still connected to rituals aimed at communicating with spirits.

As mentioned above, the most important ceremony among the sacrificial rituals involved seducing the spirits to descend to enjoy the offerings and bestow blessings. This ceremony was closely connected to the concept of *cheng*^{1}. For example, among the manuscripts excavated from the tombs of the Chu state in the Warring States era, some records involve *cheng*^{1} as follows:

(1) The sacrifice to kin father is completed. The sacrifice to kin mother is completed. 親父既成. 親母既成.
(2) The sacrifice to the Great One, Earth God, Director of Destiny, Director of Calamity, Great Water, Two Heaven's Sons, and Spirit of Mount Wei have all been completed. 大, 后土, 司命, 司禍, 大水, 二天子, 巳山既皆成.
(3) The sacrifice to the lord of the ancestral temple is completed. 公主既成.
(4) The sacrifice to the Gate Deity is completed. 門既成.

(5) Auspicious, the wish is granted. 吉, 既成.
(6) Having completed the sacrifice, the supplicant comes down from the altar to further hold the *yan* sacrifice. 既成, 攻逾而厭之.
(7) Divining it, auspicious, the wish is granted. 占之, 吉. 既成 (W. Chen 2009, pp. 92–93, 275, 277, 397, 398, 416).

In these records, the term "cheng[1]" has been interpreted as "completion of sacrifice and supplication" 祭禱完畢 by Yu (1999, p. 167), as "completion of removing the ghosts" 完成移祟 by Shen (2007, p. 433), and as "the ancestral spirits having enjoyed the sacrifices and offerings" 神祖歆享其祀 and the supplications and wishes having been granted by Li (1993, p. 441). According to these interpretations, *cheng*[1] refers to the completion of the sacrificial-divinatory ceremonies by which the ancestral spirits, heavenly gods, or terrestrial deities were invoked to descend and enjoy the offerings, the wishes of the supplication and divination were granted, and the human-spirit communication was completed (*cheng*[1]). The first record describes the sacrifice to deceased ancestral spirits; the second to the Great One, Earth Deity, Fortune God, Disaster God, Flood Deity, Two Gods of Heaven's Son, and Spirit of Mount Wei; the third to the dominant spirit in the ancestral temple; and the fourth to the Gate Deity. The sixth does not define the specific spirit, while the fifth and seventh describe divinatory ceremonies. In addition, the implication of "cheng[1]" in the fifth and seventh records is the same as in some records of the excavated day books (*rishu* 日書), which are folk divinatory texts (Li 2006b, pp. 318–29).

Transmitted texts also hold many records that support *cheng*[1]'s connection with the invocation ceremony. For example, the first stanza of the poem "Wild-Ducks and Gulls" ("Fu Yi" 鳧鷖) from the *Classic of Poetry* (no. 248) reads:

The wild-ducks and gulls are on the stream;
The impersonator of the ancestral spirit feasts peacefully.
Your wines are clear;
Your viands are fragrant.
The impersonator of the ancestral spirit feasts and drinks;
Blessings are made complete.
鳧鷖在涇, 公尸來燕來寧. 爾酒既清, 爾殽既馨. 公尸燕飲, 福祿來成.

This stanza describes the invocation ceremony held by the Zhou king for hosting a feast for the impersonator, a descendant who served in the place of the ancestral spirit. The ancestral spirit descends into the impersonator and enjoys the feast, finally completing (*cheng*[1]) its blessings to the king. In the *Classic of Ritual*, when the impersonator completes a sacrificial feast, it is usually accompanied by the line, "The supplicant announces [to the host] that the feast ritual is auspiciously completed" 祝告利成 (Zheng and Jia 2000a, 42.936a, 46.1023a; 48.1073a). The *Zhouli* 周禮 (Ritual of Zhou), which records a sacrificial music called the "Grand Blending Music" (Daheyue 大合樂), with nine sections for invoking different gods and spirits, states such: "If playing the music to the sixth section, all the heavenly gods will descend and can be approached, and the sacrificial ritual can be held for them; . . . If playing the music to the eighth section, all the terrestrial deities will come out and can be approached, and the sacrificial ritual can be held for them; . . . If playing the music to the ninth section, then human spirits can be approached and the sacrificial ritual can be held for them" 若樂六變, 則天神皆降, 可得而禮矣. . . . 若樂八變, 則地示皆出, 可得而禮矣. . . . 若樂九變, 則人鬼可得而禮矣 (Zheng and Jia 2000b, 22. 679a-b, 689b-690a). The annotator Kong Yingda 孔穎達 explained that when one section was completed, the music must be changed; therefore, the *Ritual of Zhou* names a musical section as *bian* 變 (change), while the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents) names it as *cheng*[1] (completion; Kong and Kong 2000, 5.152, 154). This informs us that using *cheng*[1] to name a

musical section might have originally referred to gods and spirits (or their impersonators) appearing at the end of each section and thus completing each ceremony.

3. Sincere Writings, Emotions, Oblations, and the Completion of Human-Spirit Communication at Sacrificial Rituals

Later, the constituent *yan*-word was added to *cheng*[1] to become *cheng*[2], whose early implication was still closely connected to sacrificial rituals. In the *Records of Ritual*, *cheng*[2] refers in most cases to the Confucian moral concept of sincerity, but some references still retain its early religious-ritual implications. For example:

> As for invocation, sacrifice, and oblation for the spirits and gods, it would lack sincerity and solemnity if these were held without observing the ritual. 禱祠祭祀, 供給鬼神, 非禮不誠不莊.

> To exhaust the root and understand the change, this is the genuine state of music; to present the sincere and remove the artificial, this is the principle of ritual. Ritual and music imitate the genuine condition of heaven and earth, attain the virtue of the spirits, and make the spirits of the high and the low descend and rise. 窮本知變, 樂之情也; 著誠去僞, 禮之經也. 禮樂倣天地之情, 達神明之德, 降興上下之神. (Zheng and Kong 2000, 1. 17a, 38. 1301a)

> To illumine sincerity for sacrifice. 絜誠以祭祀. (Wang 1983, 7.120)

All these cases show that *cheng*[2] carried on *cheng*[1]'s relationship with sacrificial rituals, while it further developed additional meanings such as the importance of sincerity in invoking the gods and spirits to descend in order to complete the rituals.

The rich religious-ritual implications of *cheng* can additionally be examined from the four layers of writings, emotions, materials, and completion of the human-spirit communication, elaborated as follows.

3.1. The Layer of Writings

During sacrificial rituals, important performances involved delivering sincere invocations to invoke the spirits. According to the *Ritual of Zhou*, the grand supplicant (*taizhu* 太祝) was responsible for composing and reciting six kinds of invocation (*liuzhu* 六祝) and six kinds of invocation (*liuqi* 六祈) to serve the gods and spirits, the former for invoking blessings, and the latter for warding off calamities (Zheng and Jia 2000b, 25.774a-780a). In the *Classic of Ritual*, we see numerous records of concrete invocations, prayers, laments, prognostications, and so forth (Zheng and Jia 2000a, 43.949b–966a, 47.1039b, 48.1058b). Because these ritual classics are now generally regarded as having been completed during the period of the Warring States to the early Han, these excessively neat, detailed records may contain later modifications. We do, however, have numerous actual writings of invocation and prayer in oracle bone inscriptions, bronze inscriptions, transmitted texts, and excavated manuscripts. These include a large number of the most refined literary works, such as the many poems included in the *Classic of Poetry* and the Chu songs (Chuci 楚辭).

Here I use as an example the writing of the *Jade Plaque of Qin Yin Praying for Healing Illness* 秦騉禱病玉版, a text excavated at Mount Hua 華山 (in present day Shaanxi). Qin Yin was probably King Huiwen of Qin (r. 325–311 BCE), who prayed to the spirits of Mount Hua, the Great One, and the Great General for healing his serious illness (Li 2000, pp. 41–45; Lian 2001, pp. 49–57; Zhou 2001, pp. 217–32). This text is a refined, rhymed literary work, which mixes tetrasyllabic lines, the dominant poetic form in the pre-Han period, with lines of varied syllabics. It is virtually a verse of the *fu* 賦 genre that originated in the late Warring States and flourished in the Han dynasty. The text, with about 300 characters, can be divided into four sections. The first expresses the king's sad feelings about his illness:

> In the tenth month, the beginning of winter,
> The retrograde atmosphere is fading and bleak.

> My body is suffering from a serious illness,
> Which makes me very sad and worried.
> I toss and turn, restlessly and repeatedly,
> But my illness shows no sign of recovery.
> People don't know why, and I also don't know why
> —it is never over.
> I am desperate and find no way out,
> Sighing deeply with my sorrows.
> 孟冬十月, 厥氣敗凋. 余身遭病, 爲我戚憂. 忡忡反側, 無間無瘳. 衆人弗知, 余亦弗知, 而靡有定休. 吾窮而無奈之何, 永嘆憂愁. (Li 2006b, pp. 343–61)

This section comprises mainly tetrasyllabic lines, which are neatly rhymed with the *you* 幽 rhyme group, just like a typical poem in the *Classic of Poetry*. It starts by describing a fading scene of early winter, which effectively leads to the expression of the king's sorrowful feelings about his serious illness. The next section narrates how the king intends to pray to all the heavenly gods, territorial deities, and ancestral spirits, but does not know the ways to do so because the fall of the Zhou court had caused the loss of the ritual codes. In the third section, the king professes to the gods that he has never committed any crimes. Finally, the king prays to the gods and spirits of Mount Hua, the Great One, and the Great General, promising a long list of offerings if those spirits will help him recover from his illness. The text thus sincerely describes and expresses the king's painful illness, sorrowful feelings, and bitter supplication to the gods/spirits.

The purpose of the sincerity presented in supplicatory writings was to gain *xin* 信 (trustworthiness, faithfulness) from the gods and spirits. For example, the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo's Commentary) records:

> The so-called Dao is to be loyal to the people and trustworthy to the gods. The ruler thinks about benefiting the people—this is loyalty; the supplicant and scribe present correct writings to the gods—this is trustworthiness 所謂道, 忠于民而信于神也. 上思利民, 忠也; 祝史正辭, 信也. (Huan 6, 706 BCE)

> The supplicant and scribe present trustworthy writings to the spirits and gods without words of qualm. 其祝史陳信于鬼神, 無愧辭. (Xiang 27; 546 BCE)

Here, *xin* (trustworthiness) in both records clearly refers to presenting sincere supplicatory writings to attain the trust of the gods and spirits. Although the term *ci* 辭 refers to both words and writings in classical Chinese, supplicatory "ci" was usually written down. As the *Mozi* tells us, services to the gods and spirits were so significant that they must be written on bamboo and silk or engraved on bronzeware and stone, so as to be transmitted to later generations. 故書之簡帛 . . . 琢之盤盂, 鏤之金石以重之 (Sun 2001, pp. 237–38).

In contrast, if the invocation were not sincere, the gods and spirits not only would not bestow any blessings but would also exercise a bad influence. For example, Duke Xian of Jin's 晉獻公 heir Shensheng 申生 committed suicide under the slanders of Concubine Li; later his brother Duke Hui of Jin 晉惠公 reburied him with the correct ritual, but his body emitted a foul smell. The people of Jin then said, "The correct ritual was not accepted by the deceased because the supplication (*xin*) was not sincere" 貞爲不聽, 信爲不誠 (Lai 2000, pp. 438–41). Here, *xin* is used directly to refer to the supplicatory writing recited by the supplicant during the funeral ritual.

The character *xin* 信 comprises the two graphs *ren* 人 (human) and *yan* 言 (word), meaning that a human's words are trustworthy and faithful. *Xin*'s early implication might have been the use of words to gain the trust of the gods and spirits, as seen in the above citation that directly uses *xin* to refer to supplication. Xu Shen explained *xin* as *cheng*^{2} and *cheng*^{2} as *xin* (Xu 1963, p. 52a–b); thus, the two are virtually synonyms. With the addition of the constituent *yan* (word), *cheng*^{2} also referred to using sincere words/writings to gain the trust of the gods and spirits in order to supplicate them to

descend and enjoy the offerings. As a result, *cheng*[2] and *xin* were often used together or else formed the compound *chengxin* 誠信 to indicate sincere and trustworthy supplicatory words and writings. For example, the *Records of Ritual* states: "Therefore, when the virtuous person holds sacrificial rituals, he presents his sincere-trustworthy [supplicatory writings]" 是故賢者之祭也, 致其誠信 (Zheng and Kong 2000, 49. 1571a-1573b).

3.2. The Layer of Emotions

The second layer embedded in *cheng*'s relationship with sacrificial ritual is psychological emotion and attitude of sincere reverence (*jing* 敬) and fear (*wei* 畏) toward the gods/spirits. Although the character *cheng*[2] comprises the categorical constituent of *yan* (word), not *xin* (heart-mind), psychological sentiment is also an extremely significant factor. According to the *Classic of Ritual*, during a sacrificial ritual, from the king of Zhou to the common people, everyone must fast and dress up, reverently and repeatedly kowtowing to the impersonator of ancestral spirits and exhorting him to enjoy the offerings, even though the impersonator would be much younger (usually played by a grandson) and lower in social position than the ritual hosts (Zheng and Jia 2000a, 44.967a-46.1035b). The *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States) records Guan Shefu's 觀射父 words on sacrificial ritual, saying: "Who dares not be fearful in serving the many gods?" 其誰敢不戰戰競競, 以事百神, and "Who dares not fast solemnly and reverently devote oneself to the gods?" 其誰敢不齊肅恭敬, 致力於神 (Lai 2000, 18.804). According to the *Analects* (3.12):

> Confucius made sacrifice to the ancestral spirits as if the spirits were present, and made sacrifice to the gods as if the gods were present. The master said, "If I cannot take part in a sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice." 祭如在, 祭神如神在. 子曰: ''吾不與祭, 如不祭."

When Confucius took part in a sacrifice, he was always sincerely reverent as if the spirits and gods were indeed present. Confucius had a famous saying of "showing reverence to the spirits and gods while keeping distance from them" 敬鬼神而遠之 (*Analects,* 6.22); his disciple Zizhang 子張 said, "One must think about reverence when making the sacrifice" 祭思敬 (*Analects,* 19.1). According to the *Records of Ritual*, sacrificial rituals must "offer one's devoted reverence" 與其忠敬, and "to do one's utmost is called reverence" 盡之謂敬 (Zheng and Kong 2000, 49.1571a, 1573a-b). The same ritual classic also contains many more discussions of the importance of *jing* (reverence) in sacrificial rituals. As a result, *cheng*[2] and *jing* are often used together or else combined to form the compound *chengjing* 誠敬 (sincere reverence). For example, the *Records of Ritual* states that a superior person's (*junzi* 君子) attitude toward ritual is "to present one's reverence, sincerity, and submission" 致其敬而誠若. Later, the literary theorist Liu Xie 劉勰 (b. ca. 465) said this: "The style of supplicatory writing must be sincere and reverent. . . . Ban Gu's writing for the sacrificial ritual to Mount Zhuoxie displays sincere-reverence of supplication" 祈禱之式, 必誠以敬. . . . 班固之祀涿山, 祈禱之誠敬也 (Fan 1958, pp. 176–77).

3.3. The Layer of Materials

The third layer embedded in *cheng*'s relationship with sacrificial ritual has to do with materials in offering abundant oblations to the gods and spirits. It is also essential to completing the sacrificial ritual that the oblations be sincerely presented and the spirits (impersonators) be fully filled and satisfied.

The *Records of Ritual* says, "The sacrifice to heaven held in the suburb uses the particular victim (calf), and the sacrifice to earth uses the great victim (ox). . . . This is to value the implication of sincerity. . . . To use a calf is to value sincerity" 郊特牲而社稷大牢, . . . 貴誠之義也. . . . 用犢, 貴誠也. The sacrifice to heaven is more significant than the one to earth, so why does the ritual use smaller victim? According to Zheng Xuan's annotation, a calf has not yet known the distinction between male and

female and therefore represents purity and sincerity (Zheng and Kong 2000, 25.892a; 26.927a). Guan Shefu's discourse on ritual mentioned above further indicates that to offer victims in a sacrificial ritual is "to connect to spirits with sincerity" 接誠于神 (Lai 2000, 18.803). The numerous manuscripts of sacrificial records excavated at Baoshan 包山, Wangshan 望山, Geling 葛陵, and so on all record in detail the victims, wines, and foods presented to the spirits in sacrifices (W. Chen 2009, pp. 91–117, 271–85, 395–445). In the *Jade Plaque of Qin Yin Praying for Healing Illness* discussed above, the king of Qin used various jade articles to pray to the spirit of Mount Hua and promised that if his illness was healed, he would offer the spirit the sacrificial victims of ox, sheep, and pig, as well as artificial chariots, horses, and human figures. The *Classic of Ritual* lists varied kinds of abundant offerings, stating how foods are "filling the tripods" 實于鼎, "filling the basket" 實于篚, "filling the bowl" 實于豆, and "filling the plate" 實于盤 before the ceremony. The text also describes how the impersonator is urged to eat and drink during the ceremony, from "one time" to the maximum of "fifteen times," during which the impersonator "pronounces he is full" 告飽 again and again, while the supplicant urges repeatedly, "Your grand impersonator has not yet been full" 皇尸未實 (Zheng and Jia 2000a, 47.1036a-48.1076a, 49.1077a-50.1133a).

The character *shi* 實 comprises *mian* 宀 (room) and *guan* 貫 (shell-money, goods), which symbolizes a room full of wealth and thus means richness and fullness (Xu 1963, p. 150b). In the above cases, *shi* is used to describe two kinds of activities during a sacrificial ceremony: the first is to fill various food containers with the offerings so as to display the abundant and substantial offerings to the spirit; the second is to urge the impersonator of the spirit to eat and drink so as to make his belly full. The "Thich Tribulus" (*Chuci* 楚茨) poem from the *Classic of Poetry* (no. 209) describes a sacrificial ritual to the ancestral spirits hosted by the king of Zhou, vibrantly describing such activities:

> Stanza III
> They attend to the furnaces with reverence;
> They prepare the trays, which are very large,
> Some for the roast meat, some for the broiled.
> The consorts are still and reverent,
> Preparing the numerous dishes.
> The guests and visitors,
> Present the cups and drink all round.
> Every form is according to ritual propriety;
> Every smile and word are as they should be.
> The spirits arrive,
> And respond with great blessings,
> Myriads of years as the reward.
>
> 執爨踖踖, 為俎孔碩, 或燔或炙. 君婦莫莫, 為豆孔庶. 為賓為客, 獻酬交錯. 禮儀卒度, 笑語卒獲. 神保是格, 報以介福, 萬壽攸酢.
>
> Stanza V
> The ceremony having been completed,
> The bells and drums having informed it,
> The filial descendent goes to his place,
> And the supplicant makes his announcement,
> "The spirits are drunk;
> The grand impersonator rises."
> The drums and bells escort his withdrawal,
> And the spirits thus return.
> All the majordomos and consorts
> Remove the offerings without delay.
> The uncles and cousins

All stay for the private feast.

禮儀既備, 鍾鼓既戒. 孝孫徂位, 工祝致告: 神具醉止, 皇尸載起. 鼓鍾送尸, 神保聿歸. 諸宰君婦, 廢徹不遲. 諸父兄弟, 備言燕私.

In stanza three, the majordomos and consorts of the royal house reverently prepare foods and drinks and fill them into large containers and dishes, all of which observes ritual propriety. The spirits are invoked to come and bestow blessings upon the king and the royal house. In stanza five, the spirits are full and drunk, and the ceremonies are perfectly completed. These descriptions vividly show how the sumptuous sacrificial feast pleased the spirits, thus "connecting to gods with sincerity."[5]

3.4. The Layer of the Completion of Human-Spirit Communication

The fourth layer embedded in *cheng*'s relationship with sacrificial ritual is the completion (*cheng*[1]) of human-spirit communication. As cited above, the seven records from newly excavated manuscripts and many records from transmitted texts use the term *cheng*[1] to describe the completion of the spirits' descending and responding to the hosts' sacrificial ceremonies. The poem "Wild-Ducks and Gulls" cited above also describes how "the impersonator of the ancestral spirit feasts and drinks; Blessings are made complete (*cheng*[1])."

Cheng[2] also carries forward this meaning. For example, the *Annals of Sire Lü* records such: "If being sincere, then the spirits respond to humans" (Chen 2001, 26.1697). The *Records of Ritual* attributes the following discourse to Confucius:

> How abundantly do the spirits and gods display their powers! We look for them but do not see them; we listen to them but do not hear them. Yet they are embodied in things, and there is nothing without them. If all the people in the world fast purely and dress up solemnly to attend the sacrifices, then like overflowing water, the spirits seem to be over our head and on our right and left. It is said in the *Classic of Poetry*, "As for the arrival of the spirits, you cannot surmise; but how can you be weary of the sacrifice!" Such is the manifestness of what is subtle and the impossibility of repressing sincerity.
> 鬼神之爲德, 其盛矣乎! 視之而弗見, 聽之而弗聞, 體物而不可遺. 使天下之人, 齊明盛服, 以承祭祀, 洋洋乎如在其上, 如在其左右. 詩曰: "神之格思, 不可度思, 矧可射思." 夫微之顯, 誠之不可揜如此夫! (Zheng and Kong 2000, 52.1675a–1676a)

Zheng Xuan explained the word *cheng*[2] (sincerity) at the end of the discourse as referring to the spirits being real (Zheng and Kong 2000, 52.1676a), an interpretation that many scholars have followed. In fact, this discourse is talking about the importance of holding sacrificial rituals with a sincere attitude. First, it indicates that although the spirits are formless and soundless, if humans attend the rituals sincerely, the spirits will be moved to come and make their presence known. It then cites lines from the *Classic of Poetry* to state that even though it is difficult to know for certain that the spirits have arrived, humans should not become weary of the rituals. Lao Sze-kwang has argued that the word "ge" 格 here denotes both meanings of the spirits "coming to enjoy the offerings" and "communicating with humans" (Lao 2001, pp. 60–61). Therefore, here *cheng*[2] should be interpreted as being sincere when invoking the spirits to come and thus complete the ceremony of human-spirit communication.

4. From Religious-Ritual Beliefs to Classical Confucian Ethical-Aesthetic Concepts

As discussed above, both *cheng*[1] and *cheng*[2] are related to sacrificial ritual and imply four layers of attitude toward or condition of the gods and spirits: *chengxin* 誠信, or sincere-trustworthy writings; *chengjing* 誠敬, or sincere-reverent sentiments; *chengshi* 誠實, or sincere-substantial oblations; and *cheng*[1], or completion of human-spirit communication. Indeed, the *Records of Ritual* describes the "Dao of sacrifice" 祭之道

as meaning "to present sincere-trustworthy supplications, offer devotional-reverent emotions, and contribute substantial oblations. . . . Sincere-trustworthy means to do their utmost, and to do their utmost means to be reverent. Being reverent and doing their utmost, then they can serve the gods and spirits" 致其誠信, 與其忠敬, 奉之以物 . . . 誠信之謂盡，盡之謂敬. 敬盡然後可以事神明 (Zheng and Kong 2000, 25.1571a–1573b). Guan Shefu's discourse on sacrificial rituals mentioned above also further describes the sacrificial procedure in four layers of contributing substantial oblations, expressing reverent emotions, presenting sincere invocations, and completing the ritual with the arrival of the ancestral spirits (Lai 2000, 18.804). Both records indeed demonstrate the four layers of *cheng*[1]/*cheng*[2]-related sacrificial rituals.

With this new discussion of the religious-ritual origin of *cheng*[2], we can now more clearly understand its rich and mysterious implications in classical Confucian ethics and aesthetics, which also can be unfolded in four corresponding layers.

4.1. Chengxin

We have shown that *cheng* and *xin* are synonyms and are often used together to form the compound *chengxin*. From the Western Zhou to the Spring and Autumn period, *xin* was already an important virtue, referring to sincere, devoted trustworthiness and faithfulness in a person's or a state's words/writings and conduct (Chen 2006, pp. 335–43; An 2004, pp. 119–21). Confucius listed *xin* as one of the four subjects he taught his students (*Analects*, 7.25). In Confucian classics such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, and the *Records of Ritual*, as well as newly excavated manuscripts, *xin* appears numerous times, in most cases referring to sincere, trustworthy, and faithful words, writings, and conduct in dealing with interpersonal relationships and cultivating one's moral character. In the *Xunzi*, the compound *chengxin* appears three times, all of which refer to ethical-moral virtues, with two of them stating that "sincere trustworthiness functions as the spirits" (*chengxin sheng shen* 誠信生神 and *chengxin ru shen* 誠信如神, 3.12, 14.3). This reminds us of the religious-ritual origin of *cheng*[2] and *xin* and the close connection between the two.

Moreover, this ethical-moral virtue also developed into a fundamental criterion in Confucian aesthetics. The classical commentary to the Qian 乾 hexagram in the *Book of Changes* attributes to Confucius the statement, "Refining writings to establish sincerity" 脩辭立其誠, which extended the sincerity and trustworthiness of supplicatory writings to that of a ruler's statements and teachings (Wang and Kong 2000, 1.18a-19b). Liu Xie, however, in citing this statement, returned it to its meaning as a basic feature of supplicatory writings:

> Supplicants and scribes present their trustworthiness,
> relying on the diction of writings.
> In general varied writings blossom gorgeously,
> but to make the spirits descend must be truthful.
> Refining writings to establish sincerity,
> There will be no qualms of conscience.
>
> 祝史陳信, 資乎文辭. . . . 凡群言發華, 而降神務實. 修辭立誠, 在於無愧. (Fan 1958, pp. 176–77)

Clearly, Liu Xie was well aware that the connection between writings and sincerity originated from the supplicatory writings for sacrificial rituals, and so he established sincerity-trustworthiness as a fundamental criterion for this kind of writing. Later, Confucian scholars such as Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), and others extended this criterion to all kinds of discourses and writings (Li 1986, pp. 95.2445; Wang and Gu 2001, p. 18).

4.2. Chengjing

Both Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan, who have paid great attention to the concept of *jing* (reverence), assert that although *jing* appears to denote religious piety, it in fact signifies human subjectivity and rationality (Mou 1984, p. 20; Xu 2009, p. 22). Mou and Xu seem to mix the religious-ritual origin of *jing* with its ethical-psychological extension in Zhou ritual propriety and classical Confucian ethical theory. In sacrificial rituals, with its connection to *cheng*[2], *jing* did denote pietistic emotion and attitude toward heaven and the spirits, as discussed above. This kind of religious emotion and attitude was then extended in Zhou ritual propriety to one's sincere reverence toward elders and superiors (Chen 2006, pp. 343–45). In the Confucian classics, *jing* developed more ethical and psychological implications, such as sincere reverence toward one's parents and devotional reverence toward one's service (Analects, 2.7, 4.18, 13.19, 15.38; Wang 1988, 20.529-33). As a result, *cheng* and *jing* were often used together or combined to form the compound *chengjing* (sincere reverence). For example, Cheng Hao emphasized that *chengjing* was the essential moral emotion and attitude for observing all five of the constant virtues (Huang 1846, 13.5a–6b).

4.3. Chengshi

From the character *shi*, with its structure of a room full of wealth, was later derived the meanings of substantialness, actuality, truthfulness, and reality (An 2004, pp. 121–22; Mcleod 2018, pp. 145–50). With its close connection to *shi* in sacrificial ritual, *cheng* also derived similar meanings of substantialness, realness, and truthfulness, and was often combined with *shi* to form the compound *chengshi*, denoting the meanings of realness and honesty. In the Confucian classics as well as other classics, *cheng* is frequently used as an adverb to denote the meaning of "really" or "truly." Xunzi used the term *chengneng* 誠能 to refer to "true talent" (Wang 1988, 11.209, 218). In the statement of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean) that "*cheng* is the beginning and ending of things, while without *cheng* there is not a thing" 誠者物之終始, 不誠無物 (Zheng and Kong 2000, 53.1694a), *cheng* connotes the substantiality and actuality of things. In his *Lunheng* 論衡 (Doctrines Weighed), Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97 CE) frequently used the compound "shicheng" 實誠, which is the same as "chengshi," to denote the meaning of sincere truth (Huang 1990, 13.609, 19.815, 24.1003; Mcleod 2018).

4.4. Chengdao 誠道 *(The Dao of Sincerity)*

Finally, *cheng*[2] developed from meaning the completion of human-spirit communication to meaning the unity of heaven's Dao with humans' Dao. As Mencius said, "Sincerity is the Dao of heaven, and the pursuit of sincerity is the Dao of humans" 誠者, 天之道也; 思誠者, 人之道也 (*Mencius*, 4A12). The *Doctrine of the Mean* similarly states, "Sincerity is the Dao of heaven, and the attainment of sincerity is the Dao of humans" 誠者, 天之道也; 誠之者, 人之道也 (Zheng and Kong 2000, 53.1689b). Because Cheng Yi 程頤 and Zhu Xi 朱熹 explicated *cheng*[2] as being the "principle of reality" (Zhu 1992, p. 31), many scholars have assumed that classical Confucians regarded *cheng* as the ontological foundation of all existence. Cheng's and Zhu's explication, however, represented only the neo-Confucian reconception of *cheng*[2]. In fact, during the Warring States period it was a common concept that *cheng*[2] represented the movement and virtue of heaven. For example, the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子 (Master of the Pheasant Cap) states such:

> Heaven makes sincerity the virtue of the sun: the sun sincerely emerges and sincerely enters. . . . Heaven makes faithfulness the law of the moon: the moon faithfully dies and faithfully grows. 天者誠其日德也, 日誠出誠入. . . . 天者信其月刑也, 月信死信生. (Huang 2004, pp. 168–69)

The regular, constant circulation of the sun and the moon represents the movement of heaven's course (*dao*) and its virtue of sincerity and faithfulness. A similar statement is also seen in the silk manuscript *Jingfa* 經法 (The Canon of Law) excavated from Mawangdui (Yates 1997, pp. 80–81). The *Xunzi* reads as follows:

> Heaven does not speak, but people infer its height. Earth does not speak, but people infer its thickness. The four seasons do not speak, but people anticipate them. These things have such constancy because they have utmost sincerity. . . . Heaven and Earth are most vast, but without sincerity they could not transform the myriad things. 天不言而人推高焉, 地不言而人推厚焉, 四時不言而百姓期焉. 夫此有常, 以至其誠者也. . . . 天地為大矣, 不誠則不能化萬物. (Wang 1988, 2.46)[6]

Heaven, earth, and the four seasons never speak, but they demonstrate their sincerity through regular, constant movement, which generates and transforms the myriad things. The *Annals of Sire Lü* presents similar ideas:

> If heaven's movements were not faithful, the year could not complete. If earth's movements were not faithful, grass and trees could not grow. . . . Great as heaven and earth are, and as transforming as the four seasons are, they still could not complete things by being unfaithful, let alone human affairs. 天行不信, 不能成歲; 地行不信, 草木不大. . . . 天地之大, 四時之化, 而猶不能以不信成物, 又況乎人事. (Chen 2001, 19.1311)[7]

This also describes the regular movements of heaven, earth, and the four seasons as representing their virtue of sincerity and faithfulness while setting a model for human affairs. Reading all these statements together with the two passages from the *Mencius* and the *Records of Ritual* cited above, we can see clearly that this was in fact a common natural, cosmological view of the Warring States thinkers, without involving the dimension of an ontological "principle of reality."

Prior to defining sincerity as heaven's Dao, both passages from the *Mencius* and the *Records of Ritual* discuss the significance of sincerity in cultivating one's own good virtues and serving one's parents, friends, superiors, and the people. This shows that the authors' concern still lies in the dimension of ethical and political virtues. With its sincere movements and virtues, heaven generates and transforms the myriad things, including human beings. If humans attain *cheng* (sincerity), *chengren* 成人 (completion of consummate humanity; *Analects*, 14.12), and *chengwu* 成物 (completion of things; Zheng and Kong 2000, 53.1694a) through imitating heaven and cultivating themselves, they are assisting heaven in its work of generation and transformation. Thus, the mysterious veil hanging over *cheng* has finally been lifted.

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Notes

1 Translations of all citations from the *Mencius* are adapted from Lau 1970; translations of all citations from the *Records of Ritual* are adapted from (Legge 1994).
2 For a summary of these translations and interpretations, see (An 2004, pp. 117–36; 2005).
3 Unless specifically indicated, all translations of citations from Chinese texts in this essay are my own.
4 Translations of all citations from the *Classic of Poetry* are adapted from (Legge 1994).
5 Jordan Paper cited this poem and other sources to indicate that the sacrificial meal offered to ancestors formed the ritual core of Chinese religion (Paper 1995).
6 Translation adapted from (Hutton 2014, p. 20).

[7] Translation adapted from (Knoblock and Riegel 2000, pp. 500–1).

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Article

Writing and Worship in Deng Zhimo's *Saints Trilogy*

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Abstract: Around the turn of the seventeenth century, the prolific writer-editor Deng Zhimo produced three illustrated books narrating the lives of Lü Dongbin (*The Flying Sword*), Xu Xun (*The Iron Tree*), and Sa Shoujian (*The Enchanted Date*). This article focuses on the textual hybridity of Deng Zhimo's hagiographic *Saints Trilogy* and argues that it offers encyclopedic, practical, and entertaining guidebooks for worshipping the three immortals and pursuing Daoist attainment. The cultic lore woven into the fabric of Deng's *Saints Trilogy* reflects the important contribution of authors and publishers to popular reverence, highlighting the close interplay between "literature" and "religion" in late-imperial China.

Keywords: Chinese religions; Chinese literature; Ming; Deng Zhimo; hagiography; Lü Dongbin; Xu Xun; Sa Shoujian; print culture; Daoism

1. Introduction

In his preface to *The Enchanted Date*, a long prose narrative recounting the life of the immortal Sa Shoujian 薩守堅, the author-editor Deng Zhimo 鄧志謨 stresses that this book is not only intended for adepts who devote themselves to the Daoist path, but also for "those who wish to cultivate their minds and revere the gods". His book, Deng claims, is the fruit of meticulous research whose goal is to present the "true traces of the immortal". Indeed, *The Enchanted Date*, published in 1603, is not only the first comprehensive hagiography of Sa Shoujian, but it is unprecedented in its encyclopedic scope, weaving historiography, hagiography, and ritual practice into the fabric of the immortal's life story.

This book joins two other narratives by Deng Zhimo published around the same time: *The Iron Tree*, devoted to the Daoist patriarch Xu Xun 許遜, and *The Flying Sword*, celebrating the famous immortal-bard Lü Dongbin 吕洞賓. The three books, which I refer to collectively as Deng Zhimo's *Saints Trilogy*, offer informative and entertaining retellings of the three immortals' life stories that serve as vehicles for their veneration. The three books of the *Saints Trilogy* are composite texts that incorporate a variety of materials, ranging from canonical instructions for Daoist inner-alchemy to poems and folktales, within the framework of long "vernacular" narrative-texts (*xiaoshuo*). In its multitextuality (Bisetto 2012, pp. 917–25), the *Saints Trilogy* bridges the realms of book culture and cultic reverence. Similarly to contemporaneous "paraliturgical" narrative-texts that grew out of reverential and ritual contexts, the *Saints Trilogy* should likewise be understood as part of a larger, predominantly lay, hagiographic repertoire, and as such, its book consumption challenges narrow definitions of "reading" (see Cedzich 1995; Meulenbeld 2007, 2015; Shahar 1998, 2015).

This paper examines the multitextuality of the *Saints Trilogy* in the context of late-Ming publishing.[1] I argue that Deng Zhimo's intertextual practices in the *Saints Trilogy* reflect a conscious attempt to produce comprehensive portfolios of the three immortals that would allow readers to "follow in the footsteps of the immortals", as Deng phrased it. By repackaging the hagiographies of the three immortals and reinterpreting the teachings that were associated with their lore, Deng Zhimo presented

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a renewed vision of Xu Xun, Sa Shoujian, and Lü Dongbin as miracle-working masters of inner alchemy who protect humanity from natural and demonic threats. As guidebooks for the immortals' lore and the doctrinal teachings that came to be associated with them, the *Saints Trilogy* offered resources for the immortals' reverence and inspiration for the pursuit of spiritual cultivation. In this respect, the *Saints Trilogy* shines a valuable light on the unique role of the commercial publishing industry in shaping the discourse on the lore and reverence of cultic figures through producing, reframing, and disseminating knowledge in late-imperial China.

2. The Saints Trilogy

The three books I refer to here collectively as the *Saints Trilogy* were published in the early years of the seventeenth century by the Cuiqing tang 萃慶堂 publishing house in Jianyang 建陽, Fujian Province. They are of similar length and share a common format, opening with a handwritten preface by Deng Zhimo, followed by a table of contents and a cover page noting the names of the author and the publisher (see Figures 1 and 2). All three books contain eleven rows of printed text in a single register, as well as several full-page illustrations that depict key episodes (Figures 3–5) and portraits of the immortals (Figure 6). In language and style of narration, the *Saints Trilogy* conforms to the conventions of the Wanli-era (1572–1620) "vernacular" prose-narrative writing mode (problematically referred to as *xiaoshuo* or *zhanghui xiaoshuo*; see Berg (2003, pp. 176–88), Chen (1993, pp. 2–32), Hanan (1981), Hegel (1981), Idema (1974), and Shang (2014, pp. 258–62). The format and themes of the *Saints Trilogy* place it among several dozen late-Ming *xiaoshuo* works classified by Sun Kaidi as *lingguai xiaoshuo*, or "supernatural narratives" (Sun 1933). Shahar divides this category into two groups: hagiographic works centering on one deity, and large-scale narratives sporting an extensive array of divine protagonists (Shahar 1998, pp. 8–11). The books of the *Saints Trilogy* belong to the first category of narratives, which I termed "origin narratives" elsewhere (Ganany 2018), a subgenre whose profound impact on Chinese culture in the past four centuries is yet to be thoroughly explored (a task which I am undertaking in my current book project).

Deng Zhimo's captivating retelling of the three immortals' lives diverges from the lackluster tone of his source-material, dramatizing the events and personages that populate their hagiographical traditions. The chronological "grocery lists" of earlier hagiographies is transformed beyond recognition by the *Trilogy*'s vivid descriptions, flashbacks, dialogs, and verse, the vast majority of which penned by Deng himself. It is unclear whether Deng conceived of the three books as separate projects, a trilogy, or parts of a longer series that he did not develop further. In any case, the three books stand apart from the rest of the corpus of Deng's works as the only full-length narratives that he had authored independently (Bai 2005, pp. 27–31; Chen 2012, pp. 132–39).

The narrative dedicated to Xu Xun was published in 1603 under the title *Newly Carved Narrative of the Jin-era Xu of Jingyang Attaining the Dao and Capturing the Dragon, the Iron Tree* (*Xin qie Jindai Xu Jingyang dedao qin jiao tieshu ji* 新鍥晉代許旌陽得道擒蛟鐵樹記; Deng 1603a) by Yu Siquan 余泗泉 (Yu Zhangde 余彰德), who was a prominent publisher during the Wanli era and a cousin of the famous publisher Yu Xiangdou 余象斗. The book must have won considerable commercial success, as it was reprinted by the same publisher in the following year (1604), and once more in the second half of the seventeenth century by the Zhengsheng tang 正聲堂 publishing house. The commercial success of *The Iron Tree* might be credited, at least in part, to the vibrancy of Xu Xun reverence around the turn of the seventeenth century, particularly in Jiangxi and Fujian. A multifaceted icon, Xu Xun has been worshiped as a local saint and a water deity in the Xishan 西山 region of Jiangxi since the Six Dynasties period at the latest.[2] Xu Xun was gradually appropriated by the Jingming Daoist sect 淨明 (also known as Filial Daoism, *xiaodao* 孝道) and the Lüshan 閭山 Daoist sect, a local movement originating in Northern Fujian that was inspired by Jingming and Zhengyi Daoism and

adopted Xu Xun as one of its leading patriarchs (Akizuki 1978, pp. 248–49; Ang 2016, pp. 197–218; Boltz 1987, pp. 70–78; Huang 1973, pp. 43–75; Li 1997, pp. 14–17).[3]

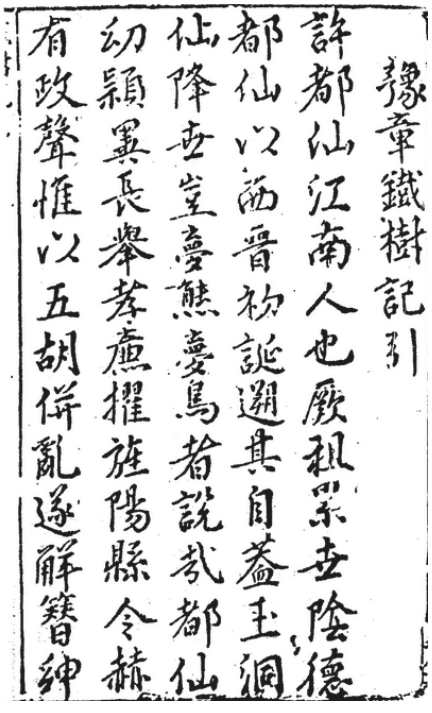
豫章鐵樹記引
許都仙江南人也厥祖累世陰德
都仙以晉初誕遊其自蓋玉洞
仙降世堂臺熊夢鳥着說哉都仙
幼穎異長舉孝廉擢旌陽縣令赫
有政聲惟以五胡倖亂遂解簪紳

Figure 1. The first page of Deng Zhimo's preface to *The Iron Tree*, 1603.

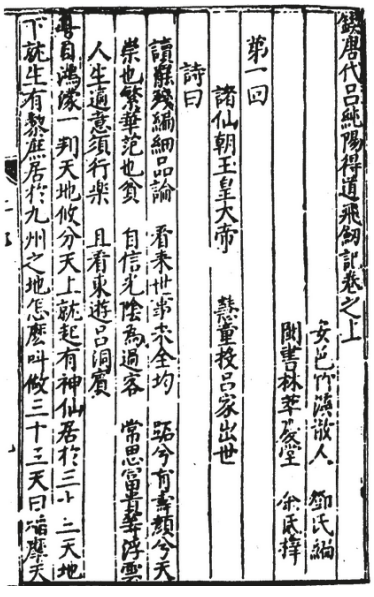
鐵樹記呂純陽得道飛劍記卷之上
女邑竹溪散人鄧氏編
閩書林萃慶堂余氏梓
第一回
諸仙朝王皇大帝　慧童投呂家出世
詩曰
讀罷殘編細品論　看來世事未全均　弱今有喜強今天
榮也繁華苑也貧　自信光陰為過客　常思富貴等浮雲
人生適意須行樂　且看東遊呂洞賓
每自鴻濛一判天地攸分天上就起有神仙居於三十二天地
下就生有黎庶居於九州之地怎麼叫做三十三天曰喜摩天

Figure 2. First page of *The Flying Sword*.

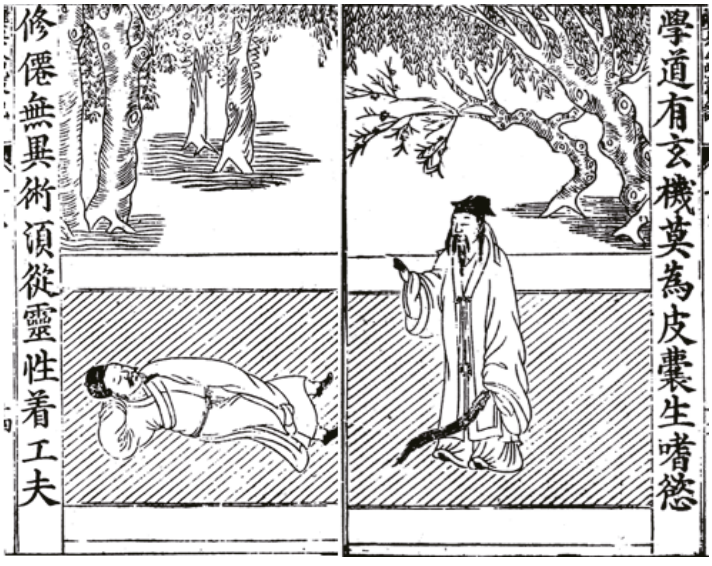

Figure 3. Seeking the Dao in *The Enchanted Date*, 1603.

Figure 4. Xu Xun fights the dragon of Poyang Lake, *The Iron Tree*, 1604 edition.

Figure 5. Lü Dongbin confronts a dragon in *The Flying Sword*.

Figure 6. A portrait of Sa Shoujian in *The Enchanted Date*, 1603.

Xu Xun was the focus of a rich hagiographic tradition in the centuries prior to the publication of *The Iron Tree*. Among Xu Xun's most notable extant hagiographies are the *Xiaodao Wu Xu er zhenjun zhuan* 孝道吳許二真君傳 (DZ 449), *Jingyang Xu zhenjun zhuan* 旌陽許真君傳 by the famous Song-Dynasty Daoist thinker Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾, the *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑑 by Zhao Daoyi 赵道一 (DZ 296), the

episodic *Xishan Xu zhenjun bashiwu hua lu* 西山許真君八十五化錄 (DZ 448), the pictorial hagiography *Xutaishi zhenjun tuzhuan* 許太史真君圖傳 (DZ 440),[4] and the *Jingming daoshi Jingyang Xu zhenjun* 淨明道師旌陽許真君, included in the *Jingming zhongxiao quanshu* 淨明忠孝全書 (DZ 1110). Xu Xun's early hagiographies describe him as a native of Yuzhang County 豫章縣 in Jiangxi who lived during the Jin Dynasty (265–420) and served as magistrate of Jingyang (arguably in Sichuan). His role as a water deity who protects against floods, droughts, and water-borne epidemics eclipsed other aspects of his lore by the Song Dynasty.[5] It was also during this transformative period that Xu Xun's association with the Jingming sect became a key element in his cultic reverence. The geographical proximity of Xu Xun's cult center to the heart of the Jingming sect in the Xishan region of Jiangxi is most likely the reason for his appropriation. The geographical origins of the Jingming Dao in the Xishan area also shed light on its early ties to inner alchemy. The Tang alchemist-poet Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (fl. 820–835) became a part of the Xishan lore along with his preceptors Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, particularly in the *Xishan qun xian hui zhen ji* 西山群仙會真記, the third most important text in the Zhong-Lü corpus, to whom it is attributed.[6] Although a thorough treatment of Jingming Daoism lies beyond the scope of this article, it is noteworthy here that Jingming Daoist practices draw on Shangqing and Tianshi Daoism, especially in its usages of talismans and charms, as well as on Buddhism (Guo 2005, pp. 25, 188). Moreover, from the earliest stages of its formation, Jingming Daoism maintained a close connection to the Lingbao liturgical tradition. Du Guangting concluded his hagiography of Chenmu, one of Xu Xun's spiritual progenitors, by noting that "the ritual of the Way of Filial Piety is little different from that of the Ling-pao [tradition]. The people of Yu-chang have been practicing it for generations" (Schipper 1985, p. 827). Indeed, the earliest hagiography of Xu Xun that survives intact, the supposedly Tang-dynasty *Xiaodao Wu Xu er zhenjun zhuan*, describes the rituals conducted during the anniversary of the ascent of Xu Xun, including lists of important dates and offerings, as a standardized Lingbao ritual. The Southern Song liturgist Jin Yunzhong 金允中 (fl. circa 1224) not only saw the Jingming Dao and Xu Xun worship as an integral part of the Lingbao liturgical tradition, but even regarded it as its crowning achievement.

Late Ming saw a growing engagement of writers, artists, and commercial publishers with the Xu Xun lore and his association with Jingming Daoism. One interesting example from this period is the *Zhenxian shiji* 真仙事跡, an exquisite pictorial hagiography of Xu Xun dating 1546, which was compiled by Zhu Gonggui 朱拱櫃 of Yiyang 弋陽, Jiangxi, and includes sixty paintings by the artist Xie Shichen 謝時臣. This album, which seems to have been prepared as a gift for the Jiajing Emperor, a great patron of Daoism, relies heavily on canonical sources, and particularly the aforementioned *Xutaishi zhenjun tuzhuan*.[7] In 1604, only a year after the first edition of Deng Zhimo's *The Iron Tree*, the writer-editor-publisher Yang Erzeng produced a Jingming collection of texts relating to Xu Xun, titled *Xu zhenjun Jingming zongjiao lu* 許真君淨明宗教錄 (Yang 2007, p. xxiv; Chen and Zou 2009). *The Iron Tree* positions itself as indebted to Xu Xun's existing hagiographical and doctrinal traditions, and as consciously contributing to them. While the impact of local folklore and oral traditions on the composition of *The Iron Tree* remains a matter for speculation, it is very likely that Deng Zhimo, a native of the Poyang Lake region, also drew on his own personal experiences with the Xu Xun cult and lore.[8] As discussed below, *The Iron Tree* stands out in this context in its ambitious attempt to create a comprehensive yet entertaining depiction of Xu Xun and his cult for a lay audience that seeks to consolidate the disparate aspects of his lore, from his role as a water deity and saintly miracle-worker to his post as the righteous magistrate of Jingyang 旌陽 and a paragon of filial piety who is destined to eventually take his place in the divine realm as a Daoist immortal.

The narrative recounting the life of the immortal Sa Shoujian, titled *The Story of the Perfected Sa of the Five Dynasties Attaining the Dao, the Enchanted Date* (*Wudai Sa zhenren dedao Zhouzao ji* 五代薩真人得道咒棗記, Deng 1603b), was likewise published in 1603 by the Cuiqing tang. Sa Shoujian (supposedly circa 1141–1178?) has been revered as a Daoist saint, an exorcist, and a miracle worker since the Song Dynasty, and became especially central in the Xihe 西河 Daoist sect, a branch of the Shenxiao 神霄 school (Boltz 2008, pp. 825–26; Goossaert 2021, pp. 149–62; Li 1997, pp. 207–86; Xiong 2016, pp. 41–49). His cult enjoyed particular exuberance during the Ming, when it was also officially recognized and supported by the imperial court. Although Sa Shoujian was the subject of several brief hagiographies in preceding centuries, none is as long, comprehensive, and engaging as Deng Zhimo's *The Enchanted Date*.[9] Deng's work portrays Sa Shoujian not only as an exorcist who effectively uses Thunder Rites to protect mankind, but also brings his persona in line with the current demands of an immortal-saint, shared by the *Trilogy* and contemporaneous works: the virtuous adept who masters the secrets of inner alchemy on the one hand, and the arts of demonic subjugation on the other. In the course of the somewhat formulaic and repetitive *The Enchanted Date*, Sa Shoujian provides a range of services to the people he encounters, from protection against malevolent spirits and human corruption, through curing hunger and illness, to reviving the dead. Sa Shoujian's holiness is epitomized in his didactic journey through the netherworld, which concludes with his performance of mortuary rites informed by Buddhist and Daoist practices (Durand-Dastès 2016, pp. 53–56; Ganany 2021, pp. 159–67).

The exact publication date of the narrative devoted to Lü Dongbin, titled *The Story of Lü Chunyang of the Tang Attaining the Dao, the Flying Sword* (*Tangdai Lü Chunyang dedao Feijian ji* 唐代呂純陽得道飛劍記, Deng n.d.), is not included in the extant first edition printed by the Cuiqing tang, but judging by its content and paratextual characteristics, it is very likely that it was also produced circa 1603. Lü Dongbin was undoubtedly the most celebrated and versatile among the three immortals of Deng's *Trilogy* at the time of publication, and his lore remains the most extensively researched by modern scholars (see for instance, Ang 1993, 1997; Baldrian-Hussein 1986; Eskildsen 1989; Katz 1999; Ma 1989). A kaleidoscopic cultural icon, Lü Dongbin has been portrayed as a bard, a drunkard, a Daoist adept, a Buddhist, a mendicant ink seller, a calligrapher, a healer, a merchant, an artisan, and a patriarch of the Quanzhen sect and the Zhong-Lü school, among many other images. *The Flying Sword* weaves many of these portrayals into Lü's life story, while asserting his centrality in the Quanzhen lineage and his importance as a master of inner alchemy. The episodic-yet-unified structure of *The Flying Sword* provided a convenient canvas for Deng to include various unrelated legends about Lü. The plotline of *The Flying Sword* centers on the spiritual deliverance (*du* 度) of Lü Dongbin by Zhongli Quan through inner alchemy. Notwithstanding his seemingly successful spiritual attainment under Zhongli Quan's tutelage, Lü Dongbin's divine canonization is conditioned upon Lü's deliverance of others. Lü's attempts to deliver the people he encounters in the course of his journeys in the human realm form the core of the narrative. These encounters, essentially a series of loosely tied tales, showcase some of Lü Dongbin's trademark traits: carefree roaming between heaven and Earth, composing poetry, consuming legendary quantities of wine, making miracles, and carousing with women. Deng Zhimo weaves tales of exorcistic subjugation into this tapestry, thus bringing Lü Dongbin's life story in line with the contemporaneous hagiographic vision of an immortal saint. It is only in the final chapter of the narrative that Lü succeeds in delivering a person, the female immortal He Xiangu 何仙姑, with whom he travels to Zhongnan Mountain 終南山 to join the other members of the Eight Immortals (*baxian* 八仙).[10]

As their titles indicate, the main concern of the *Saints Trilogy* is the attainment of the Dao (*dedao* 得道), or achieving spiritual realization, that is, "transcendence" or "immortality" (*xian*-hood, as Campany aptly refers to it; see Campany 2002, pp. 4–5). The

issue of distinguishing this realized state of *xian*-hood and those who have reached it from the common or mundane (*fan* 凡) looms large in the *Trilogy*. The pursuit of Daoist attainment takes on various forms in the course of the three narratives, but they can be broadly divided into two categories: self-cultivation and altruistic action. "Cultivation" is, of course, a generic term that does not do justice to the range of practices depicted in the *Trilogy*: moments of instruction and master-disciple exchanges, tests and trials, descriptions of inner-alchemical methods, the conversion of others, and divine canonization. In this category, the protagonists of the *Trilogy* offer three different models of *xian*-hood that diverge on the question of asceticism as precondition for attainment. Sa Shoujian occupies one end of the spectrum as the saintly ascetic who completely detaches himself from all worldly associations. At the other end of the spectrum, we find Xu Xun, the virtuous official and devoted family man who eventually ascends to heaven with his entire household (including livestock!). Lü Dongbin of *The Flying Sword* is the most complicated case of the three, as he travels across this spectrum of asceticism, sometimes withdrawing from society but at other times succumbing to temptation and even using sexual intercourse for cultivation purposes. In this case, Deng's attempt to consolidate the different images of the multifaceted Lü Dongbin lore while still striving to create an all-inclusive hagiographical portrait of the immortal reaches its limit.

Notwithstanding their different approaches to the issue of asceticism as a prerequisite for Daoist attainment, all three models are conditioned upon altruistic action, that is, the numerous services the three immortals offer mankind, primarily through miracles, random virtuous acts, and exorcistic subjugation of the demonic.[11] Among them, exorcism is particularly crucial, as it plays a double role as a demonstration of the protagonist's efficacy as a protective deity (hence worthy of worship) and as an allegory for self-cultivation. This duality is corporealized in the objects-cum-emblems that the three immortals' use to help mankind, as indicated in the titles of the narratives: Xu Xun's iron tree, Sa Shoujian's magical date, and Lü Dongbin's flying sword. The successful mastering of both altruism and self-cultivation is the key to Daoist attainment in the hagiographic vision of the *Trilogy*.

The Iron Tree, *The Enchanted Date*, and *The Flying Sword* not only narrate the life-stories of the three immortals in great detail, but also situate them within larger cosmological, historical, geographical, and religious contexts. The basic framework of the *Trilogy* evokes the cosmological outline which characterizes contemporaneous hagiographical narratives around the turn of the seventeenth century (Bai 2005; Ganany 2018; Li 1997; Shahar 1998). Works in this sub-genre begin with a prophecy or a scene in the divine realm that outlines the rationale for the protagonist's descent to the human world, and end with the ascendance or canonization of the protagonist. This framing mechanism builds on the trope of the "banished immortal" (*zhexian* 謫仙) that began circulating as early as the Tang Dynasty and became particularly prominent in late-imperial narrative writing (Li 1993, pp. 6–78; Li 2003, pp. 85–86).

In *The Flying Sword*, for instance, the narrative opens with a creation myth that lists the thirty-three heavens and nine earthly counties, followed by a lengthy description of the palace of the Jade Emperor. Lü Dongbin is introduced briefly as an immortal deity (*shenxian* 神仙) of the Tang Dynasty, before the narrative briskly turns to focus on a divine banquet scene. While his master Zhongli Quan converses with the Jade Emperor, Lü Dongbin, then still a disciple, idles outside the heavenly gates and catches sight of the wonders of the human realm. Overcome with temptation (literally "setting his mind on the mundane", *fanxin* 凡心), Lü descends to enjoy the pleasures of the world of dust. After his long journey on the path toward self-realization through the conversion of others, Lü finally re-ascends to the divine court of the Jade Emperor, who grants Lü Dongbin and He Xiangu celestial posts.

In a similar fashion, the first three chapters of *The Iron Tree* present a "prehistory" of Xu Xun. *The Iron Tree* begins by introducing Confucius, the Buddha, and Laozi and

the Three Teachings while arguing for the supremacy of Daoism. The focus remains on Laozi as the narrative turns to describe a banquet in his honour in the divine realm, in the course of which the gods discuss a prophecy foretelling the emerges of a dangerous dragon in the human realm. Laozi predicts the future arrival of Xu Xun who will be able to subjugate this malevolent demon. Laozi joins other deities in petitioning the Jade Emperor to send a celestial envoy to the human world to set in motion a chain of events that will eventually lead to Xu Xun's predestined vanquishing of the dragon. This opening not only sets the stage for Xu Xun's origin story, but it also highlights the iconic climax of the narrative, the subjugation of the Poyang Lake dragon in Chapter 14, which acts as a rite of passage and paves the way for Xu Xun's canonization in the last chapter.

Using a similar framing mechanism, *The Enchanted Date* begins with a cosmological description of the universe as constructed of three main elements: heaven, Earth, and man. Focusing on the latter category, the first chapter divides humanity by profession, then turns to discuss adepts who pursue immortality through self-cultivation. The rest of the chapter is devoted to Sa Shoujian's previous incarnations, forming a trajectory of gradual spiritual progression toward sainthood.[12] It recounts that in one of his previous incarnations, Sa Shoujian was a butcher who changed his ways and was therefore granted another human lifetime. In this narrative, it is King Yama, presiding over the courts of the netherworld, who recognizes Sa's potential and sends him back to the human world twice to pursue a path of cultivation and virtuous conduct. Unapologetically didactic, the first chapter heralds asceticism and righteousness as critical conditions for spiritual realization. The episodic nature of *The Enchanted Date*, as it follows Sa Shoujian's miraculous and exorcistic adventures, parallels the structure and narratorial style of *The Iron Tree* and *The Flying Sword* and, similarly to Xu and Lü, Sa ascends to take up his celestial appointment in the concluding chapter.

Notwithstanding the importance of the divine framing of these origin stories, it is the historical and geographical settings of the earthly lives of Xu Xun, Sa Shoujian, and Lü Dongbin that take center stage in the *Saints Trilogy*. The *Saints Trilogy* is remarkable in its attempts to trace the local traditions of the three immortals at the same time as celebrating them as transregional icons. Their sacred geographies, namely cult centers and famous sites associated with their lore, occupy an important place in the underlying hagiographical vision of the *Saints Trilogy*. Although Deng drew on a wide range of pre-existing sources in depicting the loci associated with Xu, Sa, and Lü, his interpretation of the significance of these places to their cultic lore and the visual emphasis of his cinematic narration breathed new life into the immortals' geographical "traces" (*yiji* 遺跡).

The Iron Tree, for instance, celebrates the rich heritage of Xu Xun in the Poyang Lake region, particularly in Xishan, Jiangxi, where his cult center is located, yet it also highlights sites in other regions, particularly in Fujian. The emphasis on sites associated with Xu Xun in Fujian could reflect an attempt to appeal to local audiences in northern Fujian, where the book was published, as well as to tap into the growing popularity of Xu Xun worship in the Lüshan sect that proliferated in the region during the Ming.[13] None of the previous Xu Xun hagiographies that Deng might have consulted could match the level of detail of *The Iron Tree* as it draws a map of the Xu Xun lore in narrative form. In a similar vein, *The Enchanted Date* follows Sa Shoujian's journeys in the world of the living and the underworld, before returning to his hometown of Xihe, where he attains immortality and achieves canonization. *The Flying Sword* reads almost like a travel guide featuring numerous famous loci associated with Lü Dongbin, such as the Yellow Crane Tower (*Huanghe lou* 黃鶴樓)[14] and Yueyang Tower (*Yueyang lou* 岳陽樓), where Lü reportedly leaves behind his "traces" in verse, most often in the form of poems inscribed on walls (*tibishi* 題壁詩). In their portrayals of iconic sites, the narratives of the *Saints Trilogy* echo "armchair travel"

literature (*woyou* 卧游) of the Ming that celebrated China's landscape as moulded by historical memory and cultural production (Fei 2010; Wang 2003).[15]

The *Saints Trilogy* is particularly noteworthy for weaving the doctrinal and ritual elements of the immortals' lore into their life stories by integrating canonical, liturgical, and epigraphic texts. These intertextual practices are significant in their dual function as providing access to materials that have hitherto been inaccessible to the vast majority of lay readers, and reinterpreting the relationship between these teachings and the immortals' hagiographic traditions. The unprecedented scale of Deng Zhimo's compilation work—a process of selection, interpretation, and reworking a vast corpus of pre-existing materials into *xiaoshuo* narratives—offered a renewed vision of the immortals and the teachings that came to be associated with their lore. The following section takes a closer look at a few examples to illustrate the significance of the textual hybridity of the *Saints Trilogy*.

3. Composite Texts: The Saints Trilogy as Multi-Layered Hagiographies

Deng's "building blocks", so to speak, were drawn from Daoist canonical and apocryphal texts, Buddhist sutras, *biji* anecdotes, liturgies, and literary works, among many other sources. In the *Trilogy*'s ambitious attempt to standardize the multifaceted myth-cycles of Xu Xun, Lü Dongbin, and Sa Shoujian, Deng had to negotiate the different, and sometimes contradictory, aspects of the immortals' reverence, and their relationships with the ritual practices that came to be associated with their persona. One of the major challenges in this endeavour was molding diverse materials into long "vernacular" prose narrative-texts (*xiaoshuo*). Furthermore, beyond the challenges of consolidating texts of different genres into one uniform mode of narration, Deng had to contend with the episodic nature of his source-material in order to create a single, continuous plot. Although echoes of this episodic division loom large in the *Trilogy*, it breaks new ground in the context of the immortals' hagiographic traditions by creating a unified thread of causally connected moments. The tie that binds this sequence of events into a cohesive narrative is an underlying notion of predestination (*yuan* 緣), rooted in moral causality and steered by a divine concern for the wellbeing of humanity.

The travels of Lü Dongbin in *The Flying Sword* provide a convenient canvas to display numerous legends and personas that came to be associated with his icon, from the immortal bard traveling in disguise to the intoxicated miracle-worker. Lü Dongbin's quest to deliver the people he meets offers a causal framework to these otherwise unrelated episodes, as well as the rationale for his travels. In terms of its multitextuality, *The Flying Sword* presents a rich tapestry of poems, folktales, local lore, and instructions for inner alchemy. Lü Dongbin's famous conversion tale, known as the "Yellow Millet Dream" (*huangliang meng* 黃糧夢), is incorporated into Chapter 2 of *The Flying Sword*, following Lü's encounter with his master Zhongli Quan in a tavern.[16] Although Lü is eager to devote himself to spiritual cultivation, Zhongli Quan is concerned about Lü's worldly attachments, and poses seven tests, which Lü passes successfully. The following chapters depict Zhongli instructing Lü Dongbin in methods of external and internal alchemy (*waidan* 外丹 and *neidan* 內丹, respectfully). *The Flying Sword* draws on canonical and apocryphal sources, particularly Zhang Boduan's 張伯端 *Wuzhenpian* 悟真篇 and texts from the Zhong-Lü school, which exerted immense influence on Quanzhen Daoism. The conversations between Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin in Chapter 3, for instance, draw heavily on the *Zhong-Lü chuan dao ji* 鐘呂傳道集 (DZ 263).[17]

Moreover, the narrative of *The Flying Sword* is dotted with poems attributed to Lü Dongbin (supposedly revealed through spirit writing) that have been previously included in anthologies such as *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 and *Lüzu zhi* 呂祖志.[18] Beyond the central concern of self-cultivation through inner alchemy, the poems attributed

to Lü Dongbin, in *The Flying Sword* as elsewhere, also celebrate the carefree life of the roaming immortal bard and invoke the trope of "recognizing the immortal". Lü's travels provide numerous opportunities to ruminate about the elusive presence of the immortal in our midst. *The Flying Sword* recounts Lü Dongbin's recurring frustration as none whom he meets recognizes him. Upon visiting the Yueyang Tower (Yueyang lou 岳陽樓) in Chapter 10, Lü composes the following poem:

> In the morning I travel to Beihai, in the evening to Cangwu,
> Courageous and irascible, a green snake in my sleeve.[19]
> Thrice I was intoxicated in Yueyang [but] no one recognized me,
> Thus I fly across Dongting Lake.

This poem, one of the oldest and most famous verses attributed to Lü Dongbin, appeared with slight variations in numerous sources since the Northern Song Dynasty, including the *Mengzhai bitan* 蒙齋筆談 and the *Yang wengong tanyuan* 楊文公談苑, according to which this poem was inscribed on the Yueyang Tower itself. During the Ming, this poem also appeared in several poetry anthologies, gazetteers, the Daoist canon, and other *xiaoshuo* narrative-texts.[20] The Yueyang Tower features prominently in Lü's hagiographical tradition; the earliest extant full-length hagiography of Lü Dongbin, included in the *Yueyang fengtu ji* 岳陽風土記 (1104) by Fan Zhiming范致明, not only describes his ancestral origins, his career, and his trademark swords, but also offers a detailed description of a portrait of Lü which—according to this account—was commissioned by the Prefect of Yueyang (supposedly during a visit by Lü Dongbin) and which hanged in the Yueyang Tower for public viewing (Ang 1997, p. 482; Baldrian-Hussein 1986, pp. 141–43, 155, 160; Fan 1104, p. 3; Katz 1999, p. 60). In addition, the earliest extant "autobiography" of Lü, recorded in the *Nenggai zhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄 by Wu Zeng 吳曾 (fl. 1127–1160), was inscribed on stone in Yueyang.

Notwithstanding Deng's reliance on pre-existing sources in composing *The Flying Sword*, the cinematic dramatization of Lü Dongbin's practicing in reclusion provides a descriptive resonance to Lü's cultivation efforts. In other words, Deng's descriptive language parallels the inner alchemical methods that have been associated with Lü's iconic figure. Engaged in meditation in a picturesque mountainside, as the coils of incense smoke engulf him, the natural landscape and the passage of time mirror Lü's meditation. The scene reaches its zenith with an abridged version of one of the most renown and frequently quoted inner alchemical poems attributed to Lü Dongbin, *Yüfu ci* 漁父詞.[21] Remarkably, inner alchemy is not only described directly as a method for attaining immortality and alluded to in the description of the setting, but it is also corporealized in the narrative of *The Flying Sword*. The balancing of yin and yang, often referred to in inner alchemical discourse as the harnessing of the dragon and tiger, is embodied in Chapter 4 of *The Flying Sword* through Lü Dongbin's subjugation of an actual dragon and tiger with a pair of precious swords entrusted to him by a mysterious monk.[22]

Alas, Lü Dongbin loses one of these magical swords (significantly, the male sword) already in the following chapter, Chapter 5, which combines two popular story-cycles in the Lü Dongbin lore: his erotic relationship with Bai Mudan and his dispute with a Chan monk known as Yellow Dragon (Eskildsen 2008, pp. 33–35; Wu 2007, pp. 585–604; Zhang 2006, pp. 193–229). The first half of the chapter describes Lü Dongbin's seduction of Bai Mudan, an elite young woman. In this iteration of the story, Lü Dongbin uses sexual intercourse to extract the yin force from Bai Mudan in order to use it for attainment of immortality, a method known in Daoism as "cooperative cultivation" (*shuangxiu* 雙修), which gradually drains Bai Mudan of vitality. A Chan monk, Yellow Dragon, realizes the reason for her physical decline and confronts Lü Dongbin. In pre-existing sources, the dispute between Lü and the monk received different interpretations by Buddhists (wherein Lü Dongbin is converted to Buddhism) and Daoists

(wherein Lü wins the argument against the Yellow Dragon). *The Flying Sword* shows the Chan monk gaining the upper hand and confiscating one of Lü Dongbin's previous swords. Yet, the narrative frames this scene not as a victory for Buddhism, but rather as another step in Lü Dongbin's path toward (Daoist) attainment, wherein the Buddhist monk joins a line of teachers and divinities that guide Lü toward his predestined re-ascension, in keeping with the notion of Three Teachings that permeates the *Saints Trilogy*.

Even as the three protagonists of the *Trilogy* are presented as Daoist adepts, and the books repeatedly argue for the supremacy of Daoism, Deng Zhimo often draws on other traditions, particularly Buddhism. For instance, in *The Enchanted Date*, Sa Shoujian's spiritual path is frequently viewed through Buddhist lenses. In Chapter 3, as Sa decides to withdraw from society to devote himself to ascetic cultivation, he chants the apocryphal "Leather Bag Song" (*Tan pinang di yu* 歎皮囊諦語) and the *Heart Sutra*, both quoted in full.[23] The incorporation of the *Heart Sutra* here brings to mind Chapter 19 of *Journey to the West* (Bantly 1989; Hui 2015). Whether or not Deng Zhimo attempted to tap the success of this masterpiece, unlike the allegorical significance of the *Heart Sutra* in *Journey to the West*, the sutra seems to be used in *The Enchanted Date* simply to stress Sa's complete withdrawal from human society. The narrative expounds on Sa Shoujian's devotion to the path (*jingxin xiuxing* 精心修行) but it does not delve into a philosophical discussion on emptiness. Instead, the narrative swiftly turns to focus on Sa's encounter with the three Daoist masters from whom he receives the tools he uses throughout the narrative to help others: a fan to cure illnesses, a date to resolve hunger, and Thunder Rites (*leifa* 雷法) to vanquish demons. The cinematic depictions of Sa Shoujian's successful uses of Thunder Rites to exorcize malevolent demons, particularly in Chapters 4, 7, and 10, not only allude to the ritual context that informed the narrative but are also noteworthy here for their potentially instructional functions. Sa's final steps toward attainment are likewise colored by a combination of Daoist and Buddhist motifs. In Chapter 14, after Sa Shoujian completes a revelatory tour of the netherworld, he returns to the human realm to perform a rite to feed hungry souls. Although the ten-day sacrificial ceremony Sa organizes is conducted by Daoist priests, it echoes Yulanpen 盂蘭盆 ritual practices (Teiser 1986, pp. 47–67) and features the bodhisattva Guanyin, who appears disguised as a demon king in order to draw General Ma's *samādhi* fire away from the offerings for the deceased so that the souls of the dead would be able to feast on them (Durand-Dastès 2016, pp. 53–56). The late-Ming discourse on the Three Teachings, permeating contemporaneous narrative texts, looms large in this melange of Daoist and Buddhist elements and its underlying reification of the kinship system.

Among the three books of the *Trilogy*, *The Iron Tree* relies most heavily on Daoist doctrinal texts. Deng seems to draw particularly heavily on the abovementioned Xu Xun hagiography by Bai Yuchan that describes his reverence from both doctrinal and popular perspectives.[24] In his influencial hagiography of Xu Xun, Bai Yuchan not only surveys the history of the Xu Xun cult but also describes its rituals and processions. Furthermore, in essays recounting his personal experiences in Xishan, Bai describes popular reverence and temple murals that presented visitors with pictorial hagiographies of Xu Xun. An expert in the pursuit of Daoist immortality, particularly through inner alchemy, and an enthusiastic follower of the Xu Xun cult who made a pilgrimage to his cult center in Jiangxi, Bai Yuchan offers invaluable accounts of Xu Xun reverence during his time.[25]

Another crucial source for the composition of *The Iron Tree* is the canonical *Xishan Xu zhenjun bashiwu hua lu* ("The Eighty-Five Transformations of the Perfected Xu of Xishan"; hereafter *Eighty-Five Transformations*), which parses the life of Xu Xun into eighty-five brief episodes (*hua* 化), each accompanied by a heptasyllabic poem.[26] *The Iron Tree* draws heavily on the content of this text and sometimes quotes it verbatim, but it radically transforms its mode of presentation. A clear example of this multi-

textuality is the episodes introducing Xu Xun's spiritual progenitors, Langong and Chenmu, in Chapters 2 and 3. Langong and Chenmu were featured in the Xu Xun cycle since the Tang Dynasty at the latest and appear to have been also revered independently (Liu 1985).[27] In *The Iron Tree*, the biographies of Langong and Chenmu are incorporated into Xu Xun's "prehistory", setting the stage for his appearance in Chapter 4. Langong and Chenmu are portrayed as virtuous adepts who are tasked with transmitting to Xu Xun the sacred teachings that will eventually enable him to subjugate the Dragon of Poyang Lake, a mission he is destined to accomplish later in the narrative, and which earns him divine canonization. Establishing this line of transmission is a key component in most Xu Xun hagiographies, including *The Iron Tree*. The biographical information of Langong and Chenmu and their roles in the chain of transmission in Chapters 2 and 3 is identical to that of the *Eighty-Five Transformations*, but in *The Iron Tree* they are described in vivid detail and some aspects of their lore receive more treatment than others.

However, Deng's contribution here is not limited to stylization stemming from the shift in the mode of writing, but it is also a great feat of intertextuality that aims to consolidate disparate aspects of the Xu Xun cult. In *The Iron Tree*, Deng makes some important modifications to the episode from *Eighty-Five Transformations* that tie it closely to other texts in the Xu Xun lore. For instance, the teaching that the divine envoy Xiaotiwang 孝悌王 transmits to Langong is mentioned laconically in the *Eighty-Five Transformations* as the "precious scripture of golden cinnabar, copper talisman, and iron scrolls" (*Jindan baojing tongfu tiejuan* 金丹寶經銅符鐵券), without divulging anything about its contents or origins. Although previous hagiographies of Xu Xun have already mentioned this scripture by name, *The Iron Tree* is the first to directly link this mysterious teaching to the content of a doctrinal text bearing the title *Tongfu tiejuan* (included in the *Daozang tiyao* 道藏輯要 and the *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書). Roughly four quarters of the teaching which is recorded in Chapters 2 and 3 of *The Iron Tree* as the *Tongfu tiejuan* is nearly identical to the doctrinal text bearing this title.

The Iron Tree makes a few additional modifications to the episode. Here, Langong also receives from Xiaotiwang "formulas of the immortals" (*xianjia miaojue* 仙家妙訣), "upper clarity spirit manuscript" (*shangqing lingcao* 上清靈草), and the method of "flying steps for vanquishing demons" (*feibu zhanxie zhi fa* 飛步斬邪之法). While the first two are rather generic terms, the latter relates to a specific method that has become closely associated with Xu Xun and Jingming Daoism, recorded in the anonymous Song dynasty *Jingming dongshen shangpin jing* 淨明洞神上品經 (DZ 1103). Additionally, Deng drops the prophetic heptasyllabic regulated poem that concludes the episode in the *Eighty-Five Transformations*, which focused on Langong's role as transmitter of divine teachings, and instead adds an original heptasyllabic *ci* poem, intoned by Xiaotiwang as he floats away on auspicious clouds, extoling self-cultivation through inner alchemy. *The Iron Tree* goes on to describe Langong studying the scriptures and successfully using the exorcistic methods he had received to subjugate a dangerous dragon, thus demonstrating the efficacy of the teachings. This scene foreshadows Xu Xun's most iconic feat of exorcism at the end of the book—the subjugation of the Dragon of Poyang Lake in the penultimate chapter of *The Iron Tree*.

This iconic scene, a cornerstone of Xu Xun reverence, harks back to his role as a water deity in the early stages of his myth-making. In terms of its textual composition, it is a particularly layered episode. Xu Xun's pursuit of the dragon serves as an effective narrative device, occupying six chapters, or nearly half of *The Iron Tree*. After a series of adventurous, shapeshifting chases, Xu Xun and his acolytes manage to overpower the dragon and tie it to an iron pillar, which they position in a well in Xu's hometown of Yuzhang, along with an exorcistic incantation (*zhu* 祝), which is also recorded verbatim in several other Xu Xun hagiographies:[28]

If the iron tree blooms, and this demon will revive, I shall return.

If the iron tree follows the right path, this demon will be subdued forever.

Water demons are now expelled from this site, towns and villages need not worry.

The scene goes on to quote a poem by Wu Quanjie 吳全節of the Yuan and a record (*ji* 記) which reads:

The iron tree controls the streams, in ten thousand years it will never rest.

(If) the world is in chaos, this place will have nothing to worry about.

(If) a drought pervades the land, this place will receive ample (rain).

The chapter furthermore describes Xu Xun leaving behind a host of other charms and demon-suppressing talismans: he casts an iron talisman (*fu* 符) into Poyang Lake, places an iron cap on Luling yuan Pond 廬陵元潭, and erects a "pacifying office" on the top of Mount Tiaoyao 岩嶢山, all of which echo local legends about Xu and his "traces" in Jiangxi. Due to the importance of this episode in the Xu Xun lore, it is not surprising that it takes center stage in Deng Zhimo's *The Iron Tree*, where it serves as a rite of passage. Xu Xun's subjugation of the dragon proves his efficacy as an exorcist on the one hand, and allegorically alludes to his mastering of inner alchemical self-cultivation on the other hand, thus demonstrating his worthiness of divine canonization (in the following chapter), in keeping with the *Trilogy*'s hagiographic vision of the immortal-saint. Deng's intertextual practices in *The Iron Tree* not only provided unprecedented access to specialized materials that have hitherto been the purview of a limited circle of readers, but also resituated them within the history of Xu Xun and his cultic lineage, and offered his own interpretation of these teachings for a general, non-specialist readership.

Lastly, it is important to reiterate that while most of the materials that Deng incorporated into the *Saints Trilogy* were reworked into *xiaoshuo* prose, the *Trilogy* is also dotted with excerpts quoted verbatim, such as admonitions (*xun* 訓), charms and talismans (*fu* 符, *zhen* 镇), spells (*zhou* 咒), curses (*zhu* 祝), poems by famous men-of-letters, Buddhist sutras, and instructions for inner alchemy. One notable example of this textual conglomeration is the final chapter of *The Iron Tree* depicting Xu Xun's ascendance, which includes divine memorials (*zou* 奏), proclamations (*xuanzhao* 宣詔), and the "Longsha Prophecy" (*longsha chen* 龍沙讖), predicting Xu Xun's re-emergence in the seventeenth century. This textual tapestry would not have been possible without the access to a wide range of texts that Deng Zhimo possessed in his role as an editor and a de facto "house writer" of the Cuiqing tang publishing house (Bai 2005; Chia 2002; Lowry 2003, 2005). In this sense, the multitextuality of the *Trilogy* should also be understood in light of late Ming book culture that ushered a new era of experimentation with the *xiaoshuo* writing mode.

4. The *Trilogy* in the World of Late Ming Publishing

In the course of his career, Deng produced over thirty works for mass publication, the vast majority of which consisted of anthologies and guidebooks at a time when such compilations were in great demand and extremely profitable (Miao 2000, pp. 223–24; Ko 1994, pp. 34–44). Among the works Deng produced are literary anthologies, encyclopedic guides, collections of letters, and narrative texts. Chia notes that Deng's compilations demonstrate "his marketable skill as a quick producer of entertaining middle-brow pieces that sold well in the book markets, especially if they were packaged with some care" (Chia 2002, pp. 160–61). Despite Deng's attentiveness to the demands of the book market, like many of his peers, he considered his work as producer of knowledge as a moral obligation to society. As a "journeyman-editor", as Lowry refers to him, he was keenly aware of the possibilities associated with his position as a propagator of information on a large scale (Lowry 2005, pp. 40–41). The didactic tone that permeates the *Saints Trilogy* is in keeping with that of Deng's other projects, as well as that of contemporaneous works.

Deng's position as writer-editor expanded his personal and professional social network across Jiangxi, Fujian, and the Jiangnan region, and provided him with access to a swath of materials. The anthologies he compiled, or collaborated on with colleagues at the Cuiqing tang, demonstrate Deng's extensive learning and the range of texts within his reach. Among the *leishu* that Deng produced, particularly noteworthy here is *Pangxun siliu gushi yuan* 旁訓四六古事苑, on which he collaborated with Yu Yingqiu 餘應虯 (Chia 2002, pp. 235–36). This compilation, which was published in 1617 by the Side tang 四德堂 publishing house, covers an extensive array of subjects, from astronomy and geography to fashion and plants, mirroring the scope of contemporaneous encyclopedias (Shang 2003, 2005). Volume 8 of this work includes hagiographic sketches of buddhas and immortals (*xianfo* 仙佛), deities (*shenxian* 神仙), Buddhists (*fanshi* 梵释), and spirits (*guishen* 鬼神) that allude to and quote from the classics, Buddhist sutras, and anthologies such as *Shenxian zhuan*, *Liexian zhuan*, and *Soushen ji*.

The *Saints Trilogy* reflects Deng's skills as compiler-cum-writer while betraying his personal engagement with the source material. Deng stresses the veracity of the *Trilogy* by describing the three books as the fruit of meticulous research. In his closing remark at the end of *The Iron Tree*, Deng writes that because he was interested in the way (Dao) of Xu Xun, he "researched the [immortal's] traces, sought and gathered the remnants [of his life], and fused them together to create this book". As he states, the three books should not be regarded merely as historical or hagiographical records of the protagonists' traditions, but rather, as forming living bridges between the readers and the immortals, whose enduring presence in this world is stressed throughout the *Trilogy*. In his preface to *The Flying Sword*, Deng writes:

> "How to see Patriarch Lü? It is by collating the traces of his life (*yishi* 遺事) and his poetry, wherein the patriarch's own voice is preserved. I believe Patriarch Lü is present in his poetry. In the past, Sima Ziwei 司馬子微 [Sima Chengzheng, 647–735] studied the *Master Concealed in Heaven* [*Tianyin zi* 天隱子, DZ 1026] for three years, and received the teachings by which to test those who seek the Dao. Every chapter can be verified. How would it be possible that Patriarch Lü won't reveal himself to those who seek the Dao like Master Sima? To those who admire Lü, he will appear in a dream. If one admires Lü through the real traces of his life and by reciting his poetry, this would be like encountering Patriarch Lü himself. Therefore, it is impossible not to read this compilation (*ji* 集). I named this compilation *The Flying Sword*".

Deng's prefaces also tie the enduring presence of the immortals in our world with the relevance and usefulness of his books. In his preface to *The Iron Tree*, he argues that:

"Although the Jin [i.e., the era of Xu Xun] is far removed from our current generation in the Ming, the immortal [Xu Xun] repeatedly emerges to protect the country, thus in this era the iron tree is still glorious and illuminous. This narrative (*ji* 記) that I composed is not superficial [i.e., not false]!"

If Deng Zhimo's prefaces and concluding remarks are to be taken at face value, as I believe they should be, they suggest that he conceived of the *Saints Trilogy* as informative vehicles for broadcasting his own understanding of the immortals' figures and cults. One might logically argue that Deng's truth claims could be dismissed as either advertisements or authorial practices in late Ming literature that toy with notions of truth and fictionality. However, in presenting the *Saints Trilogy* as contributing to, and consciously engaging with, the hagiographical traditions of Xu Xun, Lü Dongbin, and Sa Shoujian, Deng Zhimo's prefaces strongly echo those of canonical hagiographies. A strikingly similar tone can be found, for instance, in the preface of the Yuan-era Quanzhen master Miao Shanshi 苗善時 to his hagiographical composition devoted to Lü Dongbin, titled *Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji* 純陽帝君神化妙通紀 (DZ 305).

In this respect, I argue that we should read Deng's truth claims in light of the conventions of hagiographical writing that informed his work on the *Trilogy*. The *Trilogy* should also be understood in light of the historiographical and biographical tendencies of seventeenth-century *xiaoshuo* writing practices that render them almost akin to anthologies (Hegel 1977, p. 130). Considering that the late Ming "vernacular" *xiaoshuo* mode is firmly rooted in historical discourse (Berg 2003, pp. 176–78), Deng's choice of this form of writing is not out of the ordinary, and in many ways represents the norm rather than the exception.

Yet it is important to note that the *Trilogy*, which positions itself squarely within the realms of hagiography and reverence, took part in a broader wave of commercially published narratives celebrating the lives of gods and immortals that were in vogue around the turn of the seventeenth century, particularly in south-east China. Notable examples of works in this group include *Han Xiangzi Quanzhuan* 韩湘子全傳 by the writer-publisher Yang Erzeng 楊爾曾, as well as several narratives published (and likely co-authored) by the prolific publisher Yu Xiangdou 余象斗, among other examples from the period (Bai 2005; Ganany 2018; Shahar 1998; Yang 2007). These books share a similar format and narration style, a preoccupation with spiritual realization, and a trove of common motifs. Much like Deng Zhimo's *Saints Trilogy*, Wanli-era hagiographic narratives are focused on the life and cult of a single figure. Although these books vary significantly in quality of writing and were clearly put together with profit in mind, they represent a shared attempt to standardize and propagate the reverence of popular cultural icons. Furthermore, contemporaneous hagiographic narrative texts display a range of intertextual practices, some showing resemblance to Deng's *Trilogy*. The *Han Xiangzi Quanzhuan*, which Clart describes as "a didactic novel that teaches the superiority of Daoism over Confucianism and provides quite practical lessons in Daoist cultivation" (Yang 2007, pp. xxii–xxiv), is likewise a multilayered narrative that functions simultaneously as a hagiography and an introduction to inner alchemy. Its composition is evidently informed by Yang Erzeng's other editorial and anthologizing projects, which also included two other Daoist works (the hagiographical anthology *Xianyuan jishi* 仙媛紀事 and the doctrinal *Xu zhenjun jingming zongjiao lu* 許真君淨明宗教錄). Contemporaneous hagiographic narratives, such as the abovementioned *Tale of the Eight Immortals* produced by Yu Xiangdou, not only offered entertaining retellings of the protagonists' lives, but also supplemented them with appendices that included canonical texts, news about local temples, dedications to donors, messages from the immortals (revealed through spirit writing), and detailed instructions for ritual practices (Ganany 2018, pp. 57–64).

5. Coda

In its textual hybridity, Deng's *Saints Trilogy* shines a valuable light on the interplay between print culture and popular reverence in late Ming. Similarly to contemporaneous experimentations with multitextuality in *xiaoshuo* writing, from *Jinpingmei* to *Xiyoubu*, which Li Qiancheng rightfully describes as "a literary collage" (Li and Hegel 2020, p. xxiv), the *Saints Trilogy* incorporates its source material into the narrative with care. This type of narrative hybridity effectively collapses the categories of knowledge that governed the presentation of information in encyclopedias and anthologies in order to produce a single, coherent, and highly entertaining narrative. As a "literature of canonization" (Meulenbeld 2015) that is firmly rooted in cultic reverence, the *Trilogy* highlights the crucial role of writers-compilers such as Deng Zhimo in reinterpreting and disseminating specialized knowledge—in this case, doctrinal and hagiographical information—to an unprecedently large and diverse lay readership. In this respect, the *Saints Trilogy* should be regarded as attempting to form a kind of "alternative lay canon" (Durand-Dastès 2013, p. 78). In this respect, the *Saints Trilogy* undescores Shahar's point that "in terms of its textual tradition, Chinese religion is inseparable from vernacular fiction and drama" (Shahar 1998, p. 18).

As Deng Zhimo himself reiterates, the primary goal of composing the *Saints Trilogy* was to present comprehensive records of the immortals that serve as guidebooks for their worship and roadmaps for self-cultivation.

The textual layering of the *Trilogy* is closely tied to the vision of the immortal saint that Deng and contemporaneous writers advocated in hagiographic narratives—a miracle-working Daoist adept, whose attainment and canonization is conditioned upon his self-cultivation through inner alchemy and the protective services he provides mankind, from exorcism to curing epidemics. The issue of conversion, or deliverance, underlies the *Trilogy's* dual emphasis on self-cultivation and altruistic action. The quest to convert others not only provides a compelling narrative device, but it also resonates with the overarching aim of the *Trilogy* to inspire the readers to follow in the footsteps of the immortals. As demonstrated above, moments of heightened multitextuality in the *Trilogy* correspond to its hagiographical and doctrinal functions. Episodes of religious instruction, depictions of cultivation practices, and protective action (exorcistic or otherwise) are particularly layered, showcasing Deng's conscious attempt to exhaust the sources at his disposal. The format of *xiaoshuo* narration provided Deng with an ever-expanding canvas to incorporate different types of doctrinal and liturgical materials that make up the multifaceted lore of the three immortals. Within the basic framework of the "banished immortal" trope, the episodic nature of the protagonists' hagiographic traditions looms large despite the narratives' structural unity, while maintaining the tension between the disparate—and sometimes contradictory—aspects of the protagonists' myth-cycles.

Crucially, in striving to form living bridges between the readers and the immortals, either by facilitating reverence or providing models for cultivation, the *Saints Trilogy* draws our attention to the vast realm of cultural preoccupations with the immortals that has been intertwined with their cultic worship for generations, but has often been overlooked. The productive interplay between the various forms of engagement with the immortals—as subjects of worship, as models of spiritual attainment, as vehicles for doctrinal teachings, as literary and dramatic protagonists, as popular artistic tropes, and as cultural icons in a broad sense—has been a key factor in the expansion and endurance of their veneration. The *Trilogy* is best understood as a prominent example of this interrelated network of cultural expressions that has been shaping the lore and reverence of Xu Xun, Lü Dongbin, and Sa Shoujian in the last millennium.

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Notes

1 Throghout this article, I use the term "publishing" when referring to the producers of the works (authors, editors, printers, etc.) and the terms "print culture" and "book culture" to refer more broadly to all those partaking in the production, circulation, and consumption of books (i.e., producers, merchants, and audiences).

2 The local roots of Xu Xun's reverence continued to shape his lore during the Ming, centuries after the rise of his cultic worship. For instance, the local gazetteer *Jiangxi tongzhi* 江西通志 includes over a dozen entries from the Ming alone that describe the local origins of the Xu cult.

3 Some Lüshan temples in Fujian identify Xu Xun with Jiulang fazhu 九郎法主, though in Jianyang this title is often used to designate two figures: Xu Xun and Xu Jia 徐甲. See (Ye and Lagerwey 2007, pp. 10–11, 362–64).

4 The anonymous, supposedly thirteenth-century *Xu taishi zhenjun tuzhuan* is composed of a series of fifty-three units of text and image. Its narrative follows Bai Yuchan's hagiography very closely. This pictorial hagiography opens with two (unillustrated) prefaces: the first is titled Yulong xizhao 玉陛锡詔 ("the imperial order granted on the jade steps") which includes an edict from the Jade Emperor delivered to Xu Xun by two immortals, and the second entitled Zhenjun shenggao 真君聖誥 ("granting the divine title Perfected Saint"), which lists Xu Xun's titles and praises his filiality and humaneness. Akizuki Kanei dates this text around 1295, but Xu Wei argues that it is difficult to ascertain the dating of texts that were later included in the Daoist canon in 1445; see Xu (2011, p. 119).

5 According to Schipper, the cult of Xu Xun was among the most prominent Daoist traditions of the Song and Yuan Dynasties; see Schipper (1985, p. 813). It is noteworthy that alongside Xu Xun's portrayals in hagiographic, doctrinal, and liturgical sources, local gazetteers since the Song dynasty propagated Xu reverence and legitimized his temples, bridging Daoist ritual and popular worship of Xu Xun; see Chen and Wang (2014, pp. 56–64).

6 Schipper argues that the Jingming Dao did not offer any new rituals or liturgies, but was rather a local school within the framework of the Lingbao tradition, whose uniqueness lies precisely in its relationship with a local cult—the Xu Xun cult; see Schipper (1985, pp. 827–28).

7 The album is housed in the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. See Boltz (2004, pp. 191–238) and Wang (2012, p. 69, note 46). On Xie Shichen, see Ju-yu (1997, pp. 1–26).

8 Certain sources describe Deng as a native of Raozhou 饒州, Anren county安仁縣, Jiangxi, whereas other sources claim he hails from Yuzhang, near Nanchang, Jiangxi. The *Sikuquanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 describes Deng as a man of Rao'an (饒安人), though Sun Kaidi, among others, argue that this is unlikely; see Bai (2005, pp. 75–77).

9 Among the pre-existing hagiographic sketches of Sa Shoujian that Deng seems to have drawn upon are found in Zhao Daoyi's *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjia* and Wanli-era editions of *Soushenji*, such as *Xinke chuxiang zengbu soushen ji Daquan* 新刻出像增補搜神記大全 and *Sanjiao yuanliu shengdi fozu soushen daquan* 三教源流聖帝佛祖搜神大全. It is noteworthy that Sa is also celebrated in an anonymous drama that probably dates to early Ming titled *Sa zhenren yeduan bitaohua* 薩真人夜斷碧桃花, as well as in another drama from the period, now lost, titled *Sa zhenren bairi shengtian* 薩真人白日升天.

10 The group known as the Eight Immortals became a recurring theme in storytelling and cultic worship, as well as a staple motif in art, since the Tang Dynasty at the latest. Its members usually include Zhongli Quan 鍾離權, Tieguai Li 鐵拐李, Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, He Xiangu 何仙姑, Lan Caihe 藍采和, Han Xiangzi 韓湘子, Cao Guojiu 曹國舅, and Zhang Guolao 張果老. On the Eight Immortals as a group, see (Clart 2009; Han 1992; Pu 1936; Wu 2006; Yetts 1916, 1922a, 1922b; Zhu 2014).

11 Interestingly, altruistic action is central to the immortals' depiction in contemporaneous, non-"literary" sources as well. For instance, a stele inscription by Chen Wenzhu 陳文燭 (1536–1595), recorded in a Wanli-era Nanchang local gazetteer, argues that Xu Xun became a subject of local worship in recognition for his contribution to mankind, not his celestial status. See "Xu zhenjun miao bei" 許真君廟碑, in the 1588 *Xinxiu Nanchang fu zhi* 新修南昌府志, *juan* 28.

12 This line of narration invokes jātaka stories depicting the virtuous deeds of the Buddha in his previous incarnations (Kleine 1998, p. 328).

13 Local gazetteers describe the popularity of Xu Xun temples in the Jianyang area and attest to the profound influence of his reverence on the region; see for instance the *Jianjing fu zhi* 建寧府志, *juan* 48, p. 2797, and *juan* 50, p. 3042; *Guihua xianzhi* 歸化縣志, *juan* 10, p. 206; *Tingzhou fu zhi* 汀州府志, *juan* 3, p. 701, and others.

14 Regarding Lü Dongbin and the Yellow Crane Tower, see Zhu (2014, pp. 457–58, 481).

15 See for instance encyclopedic projects and geographical compendia in Wanli-era print culture such as *Hainei qiguai* 海內奇觀 by Yang Erzeng and *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 by Wang Qi 王圻 and his son Wang Siyi 王思義, among others.

16 The "Yellow Millet Dream" is not only a mainstay in the Lü Dongbin myth-cycle, but also a recurring trope in Chinese literature and drama, often referred to as "yellow millet" or "life in a pillow" tales. In the Lü Dongbin lore, see for instance the *chuanqi* play *Lü zhenren huangliang mengjing ji* 呂真人黃粱夢境記.

17 Among other instances, Chapter 3 of *The Flying Sword* quotes numerous lines from the *Qiyan* 七言, attributed to Lü Dongbin, included in volume 856 of the *Quan Tang Shi*. Furthermore, in *The Iron Tree*, Deng modeled the conversations of Xu Xun and Wu Meng after conversations about inner alchemy between Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin in the *Zhong-Lü chuan dao ji*.

18 The *Record of Patriarch Lü* (*Lüzu zhi* 呂祖志) was compiled in the late sixteenth century shortly before the printing of the *Continuation of the Daoist Canon* (*Xu Daozang* 續道藏) in which it was included. It remains the largest corpus of texts related to Lü Dongbin in the Daoist canon (regarding poems taken from earlier collections, see Wu 2007, p. 585).

19 The "green snake" refers to a sword (or rather a dagger) which, according to legend, Lü Dongbin carries inside his sleeve. Song-era sources link this double-edged dagger to medical and exorcistic usages. One legend claims that this sword was originally a huge snake which Lü Dongbin encountered in Yueyang and managed to insert it into his sleeve, transforming it into a dagger (Baldrian-Hussein 1986, pp. 140–42).

20 See for instance *Sandong qunxian lu* 三洞群仙錄 (DZ 1248), *Yueyang fu tu ji* 岳陽府土記, *Yuan qu xuan* 元曲選, and *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, and the appendix of *Tale of the Eight Immortals* (*Baxian chuchu dongyou ji* 八仙出處東遊記/*Shang dong baxian zhuan*上洞八仙傳), among others.

21 The *Yüfu ci* also appears in the abovementioned *Lüzu zhi* and *Tale of the Eight Immortals*, among other sources.

[22] The dragon and tiger as a metaphor for the duality of yin and yang in inner alchemy is used extensively in the Zhong–Lü school and in the in *Wuzhen pian* by Zhang Boduan.

[23] The "Leather Bag Song" is also known popularly as the "Dharma Master's Song of the Leather Bag", *Damo dashi pinang ge* 達摩大師皮囊歌.

[24] Bai Yuchan's hagiography, which ties Xu Xun to Jingming or Filial Daoism and especially its politically oriented *zhongxiao* 忠孝 strain, was a particularly important source for Deng's understanding of Xu Xun's role as the patriarch in Jingming Daoism. Explicit references to Xu Xun's filiality are scant before the Ming. The *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 (984) quotes the lost text *Xu Xun biezhuan* 許遜別傳 which portrays Xu Xun's devotion to his family after the death of his father, despite the cruel treatment he suffered from his mother and sister-in-law, whereas another entry from *Taiping Yulan*, quoting the *Youming lu* 幽明録, narrates an encounter between Xu Xun and the ghost of his deceased father, who appealed to Xu Xun's filial duty (*xiaoti* 孝悌) to ensure a proper burial. See *Taiping Yulan*, *juan* 424: 65, p. 2604 and *juan* 519: 9, p. 3139.

[25] Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾, "Jingyang Xu zhenjun zhuan" 旌陽許真君傳 in Bai (2013, pp. 61–72) and Bai (1969, vol. 3, pp. 1013–40). Interestingly, the anthology of Bai Yuchan's writings is titled *Yulong ji* 玉隆集 (preserved in the anonymously compiled *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書), alluding to Xu Xun's cult center, the Yulong gong—the name that Emperor Song Zhenzong bestowed on Xu Xun's shrine. Bai Yuchan dedicated three essays to his visits to Xishan and the Yulong gong: "Longsha xian hui ge ji: Yulong gong" 龍沙仙會閣記: 玉隆宮, "Yulong wanshou gong Yunhui tang ji" 玉隆萬壽宮雲會堂記, and "Yulong wanshou gong Dao yuan ji" 玉隆萬壽宮道院記. Regarding Bai Yuchan's life and writing, see (Liu 2012; Skar 2008, pp. 203–6).

[26] The full title of this text reads *The Record of the Eighty-Five Transformations of the Perfected Lord Xu of West Mountain* (Xishan Xu zhenjun bashiwu hua lu 西山許真君八十五化錄, preface dates 1246). It is attributed to Shi Cen 施岑, a prominent disciple of Xu Xun and a member of the group known as the Twelve Perfected (十二真君).

[27] Hagiographies of Langong and Chenmu also circulated independently from the Xu Xun cycle as early as the Tang Dynasty; a hagiography of Chenmu is included in Du Guangting's *Yongcheng jixian lu* 墉城集仙錄 and a hagiography of Langong is included in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, for instance.

[28] See for instance its inclusion in Bai Yuchan's *Jingyang Xu zhenjun zhuan* and the album *Zhenxian shiji*, among other sources. The use of iron for the construction of Xu Xun's iron tree is rooted in popular practices relating to the subjugation of water-related threats by placing iron pillars or iron oxen near lakes and waterways, in accordance with the theory of the Five Phases. This scene of subjugation also brings to mind the legend of Yu suppressing the god of the Huai and Guo rivers, Wuzhiqi 無支祁, by chaining him to the base of Turtle Mountain 龜山 (see Andersen 2001), as well as the imprisonment of Sun Wukong under the Five Elements Mountain in *Journey to the West*.

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DZ 305 *Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji* 純陽帝君神化妙通紀 by Miao Shanshi 苗善時
DZ 440 *Xu taishi zhenjun tuzhuan* 許太史真君圖傳
DZ 448 *Xishan Xu zhenjun bashiwu hua lu* 西山許真君八十五化錄
DZ 449 *Xiaodao Wu Xu er zhenjun zhuan* 孝道吳許二真君傳
DZ 1026 *Tianyin zi* 天隱子
DZ 1103 *Jingming dongshen shangpin jing* 淨明洞神上品經
DZ 1110 *Jingming zhongxiao quanshu* 淨明忠孝全書
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Article

Ritual, Legend, and Metaphor: Narratives of the Willow in Yuan *Zaju*

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Abstract: Narratives of willow trees in Yuan *zaju* 雜劇, or variety play, largely come in three types, namely, the ritual performance of shooting willows; the deliverance of willow spirits by Lü Dongbin, one of the Eight Immortals of Daoism; and the use of the word willow to refer to women. The willow shooting ritual depicted in Yuan *zaju* was highly reminiscent of the willow shooting ritual popular throughout the Song (960–1279), Liao (916–1125), Jin (1115–1234), and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, with its conceptual origins traceable to the ancient shamanic belief in the willow as a sacred tree prevalent among the Khitans and Jurchens who lived in what is now northeastern China. The legend of Lü Dongbin delivering a willow spirit to immortality is a recurring motif in Han Chinese folklore and Daoist hagiography, which also finds expression in the iconic image of Guanyin Pusa or Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara holding a willow branch with which they cure diseases for people and bring fulfillment to their wishes. The frequent use of "willow leaf-shaped eyebrows" (*liumei* 柳眉) and "willow-like waist" (*liuyao* 柳腰) in Yuan *zaju* as metaphorical references to women can be seen as a continuation of the great literary tradition of *Shijing* 詩經 (The Book of Songs) and also as a dramatic enactment of the fertility cult of the willow and women in Chinese folk religion. Evidence abounds that the narratives about the willow in Yuan *zaju* were not a new creation but an artistic manifestation of centuries-old folk belief and literary tradition.

Keywords: willow; Yuan *zaju*; shamanism; legend; ritual; metaphor

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1. Introduction

It should be pointed out at the outset that the corpus of this paper on the narrative of the willow trees in Yuan *zaju* 雜劇 (variety play) is based on the *Quan Yuan xiqu* 全元戲曲 in 12 volumes, edited by Wang Jisi 王季思 (1906–1996), which is the most complete collection of plays of the Yuan dynasty ever compiled. According to the electronic version of the *Quan Yuan xiqu*, 28 species of trees appear in Yuan drama texts, including willow, peach, apricot, elm, mulberry, osmanthus, Chinese parasol, acacia, pomegranate, and jujube trees. Among them, the willow tree is mentioned about 2000 times,[1] and that is 1.5 times the mentions of all other kinds of trees combined. Narratives of the willow in Yuan *zaju* were created by 48 playwrights. According to our statistics, there are 67 known authors in *Quan Yuan xiqu*.[2] This means that, in *Quan Yuan xiqu*, more than 70% known playwrights had written about the willow in their works. There are three types of narratives related to the beliefs about the willow in Yuan *zaju*, namely, the willow shooting ritual, deities delivering willows to immortality, and willows as references to people. Many Yuan *zaju* plays involve narratives of willows: two plays mention the willow shooting ritual, four involve deities delivering willows to immortality, and almost half of all the Yuan *zaju* plays in the corpus compare willows to people (see Table 1). This phenomenon is not common in the history of Chinese literature and deserves to be explored in depth.

Table 1. Three types of narratives of the willow in Yuan *Zaju* *.

Narratives or Comparisons Related to the Willow	Title	Author	Volume and Page in *Quan Yuan xiqu*
Willow -shooting ritual	*Si chengxiang gaoyan Lichun tang* 四丞相高宴麗春堂 (The Fourth Assistant Director of the Right Entertained at Lichun tang, hereafter *Lichun tang*)	Wang Shifu 王實甫 (1260–1336)	Vol. 2, pp. 324–49
	Fayue wu sheliu rui wan ji 閥閱舞射柳蕤丸記 (Officials Shooting Willows and Playing Balls at the Dragon Boat Festival, hereafter *Ruiwan ji*)	Anonymous (fl.14th century)	Vol. 7, pp. 177–201
Deities delivering willows to immortality	*Lü Dongbin san zui Yueyang Lou* 呂洞賓三醉岳陽樓 (Lü Dongbin Drunk at Yueyang Tower Three Times, hereafter *Yueyang lou*)	Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 (1250–1321)	Vol. 2, pp. 157–86
	Lü Dongbin san du chengnan liu 呂洞賓三度城南柳 (Lü Dongbin Delivers the Willow Tree in the South of the City Three Times, hereafter *Chengnan liu*)	Gu Zijing 谷子敬 (fl. 14th century)	Vol. 5, pp. 295–314
	Lü Dongbin tao liu shengxian meng 呂洞賓桃柳升仙夢 (Lü Dongbin Delivers Peach and Willow Trees through Dreams, hereafter *Shengxian meng*)	Jia Zhongming 賈仲明 (1343–1422)	Vol. 5, pp. 512–29
	Yueming heshang du Liucui 月明和尚度柳翠 (Buddhist Monk Moonlight Delivers Liu Cui the Willow Branch, hereafter *Du Liu Cui*)	Li Shouqing 李壽卿 (fl. 13th century)	Vol. 2, pp. 437–67
Willows as references to females	More than half of the *zaju* plays in *Quan Yuan xiqu*	Not listed here due to space limit	Not listed here due to space limit

* Source: Wang Jisi ed., *Quan Yuan xiqu*, 1990.

Unfortunately, most scholars in China and overseas regard willow narratives in Yuan *zaju* as literary imagery only and tend to explore the topic of willow imagery archetypes, ignoring the connection between these willow narratives and the beliefs in the Yuan context of multiethnic intermingling. For example, Zheng Wang (2013, pp. 108–15) explores the one-to-one correspondence of ritual elements (month, surroundings, and costume of shooters) between willow shooting rituals in Yuan *zaju* and that of the Khitans and the nobles of the Jurgens, but he does not take into account the conceptual link between narratives on willow shooting rituals in Yuan *zaju* and the ancient shamanic belief in the willow of the Khitans and Jurchens in present-day northeastern China. Based on the concept of ghosts, Zhao (2015, pp. 1–31) interprets the ways ghosts and deities appear on stage, the types of ghosts and deities, and the endings of ghostly figures in the narratives of deities delivering willows to immortality in Yuan *zaju* plays. Zhao's focus is the view of ghosts as shown in Yuan *zaju*. The narratives about willows are only a case study to support his arguments. Recently, some young scholars have explored the function of the willow tree in the construction of the imagery of the back garden in Yuan *zaju* as well as the metaphorical function of the willow tree (Zhu 2015, pp. 48–55; Zhang 2019, pp. 32–34). However, limited to their examination of the willow tree *per se*, these studies have not fully demonstrated the role of the narratives of the willow in shaping the literary imagery in Yuan *zaju*.

In short, existing studies on narratives of the willow in Yuan *zaju* are not systematic and have not paid enough attention to the folkloristic implications of the narratives. To fill this lacuna, this paper explores the relationship between the narratives of the willow in Yuan *zaju* and folk beliefs through examining the presentation of folk beliefs about willows as shown in these works as well as the shaping force of these beliefs on the narratives of the willow. The following questions will be discussed in this paper: Why are there so many

narratives on willows in Yuan *zaju*? What roles do these willow narratives play in Yuan *zaju*? What is the connection between these narratives and the beliefs about the willow in China? The tentative conclusion this paper draws is that special narratives about the willow in Yuan *zaju* were not a new creation of the playwrights in the Yuan dynasty but an artistic manifestation of the centuries-old folk beliefs and literary traditions against the background of cultural exchanges among multiple ethnic groups in the Yuan dynasty.

2. Narratives of Willow Shooting Rituals

Two Yuan *zaju* plays include scenes of willow shooting rituals, namely, Wang Shifu's 王實甫 *Lichun tang* (Wang 1990, 2.324–49) and an unknown author's *Ruiwan ji* (Wang 1990, 7.177–201). The play *Lichun tang* tells the story of Wanyan Leshan 完顏樂善, the Assistant Director of the Right in the Department of State Affairs 尚書省右丞相, and Li Gui 李圭, the deputy officer who was responsible for reward and punishment in the army of the Jin dynasty. Wanyan won a willow shooting competition against Li held in the imperial garden. When Wanyan beat won again in a second competition against Li, Li humiliated him, so Wanyan beat Li. For this, the emperor demoted Wanyan to Jinan 濟南, where he spent his days drinking and fishing. Later, Wanyan was recalled by the emperor and greeted by officials at his mansion in Zhongdu 中都. Wanyan was ordered by the emperor to have a sumptuous banquet at Lichun tang, the beautiful place in his mansion house. Li apologized to Wanyan and asked for punishment for the fault. Wanyan reconciled with Li after the latter made a public apology. In this play, the willow shooting ritual is an entertaining competitive event held at the imperial garden where the shooter can receive rich rewards.

The *Ruiwan ji* play is a story about how Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 identified a hero between Yan Shouma 延壽馬 and Ge Jianjun 葛監軍 (an army supervisor) by means of the willow shooting ritual. Yelü Wanhu 耶律萬戶, the Khitan general, was shot dead by Yan with an arrow in a battle, but Ge claimed it was his credit. Therefore, Fan let them compete at the willow shooting ritual held in the imperial garden. As a result, Yan shot the target, while Ge failed. Fan concluded that Yan was the hero. The willow shooting ritual in the play *Ruiwan ji* is a special way through which Fan could tell who the hero who shot Yelü in the battlefield was. Furthermore, it is an entertaining competitive event.

Although not penned by the same author, the two plays, *Lichun tang* and *Ruiwan ji*, portray similar scenes of willow shooting rituals. Based on their descriptions, willow shooting rituals were held at the Ruibin 蕤賓 Festival, and the location was the imperial garden. *Lichun tang* reads: "At the time of the Ruibin Festival, by order of the sage, all civil and military officials went to the Imperial Garden for the willow shooting" 時遇蕤賓節屆，奉聖人的命，但是文武百官都到御園中赴射柳會 (Wang 1990, 2.325). *Ruiwan ji* reads: "Today was the Ruibin or Double-Fifth Festival. As a convention, officials all went to the imperial garden for ball playing and willow shooting. The purpose of this event was twofold: to entertain the troops, and to accompany the Peace Banquet in the imperial garden." 今日是五月端午蕤賓節令，御園中一來犒勞三軍，二來設一太平筵會，衆官慶賀蕤賓節令，都要打球射柳 (Wang 1990, 7.194–95).

The Ruibin Festival no longer exists today, but it is possible to establish that it is another name for the long-existing Double-Fifth Festival (*Duanwu jie* 端午節), which is on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. *Ruiwan ji* directly identifies the festival as "Ruibin Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month"; *Lichun tang* refers to it as the Ruibin Festival. *Ruibin* 蕤賓 is one of the twelve ancient Chinese musical rhythms, and the rhythms correspond to the twelve lunar months and the twelve earthly branches.[3] Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 or 135 BC–86 BC) pointed out in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) (Sima 1959, 25.1246), "The fifth month corresponds to *ruibin* in the musical rhythms. The origin of the term *ruibin* is as follows: *rui* 蕤 [down] hints the lower position of the *yin* 陰; *bin* 賓 [respect] indicates the respective attitude of a guest, who is the *yin* [as opposed to the host as the *yang*]." 五月也，律中蕤賓。蕤賓者，言陰氣幼少，故曰蕤；痿陽不用事，故曰賓. According to this rule, the Ruibin Festival corresponds to the Double-Fifth Festival.

In addition, in Yuan *zaju* plays, the participants of the willow shooting party are the emperor and civil and military officials, and others are not eligible to partake. In *Lichun tang*, among the officials who participated in the willow shooting ritual, the Assistant Director of the Right in the Department of State Affairs aide 右丞相 Le Shan 樂善 and the Assistant Director of the Left in the Department of State Affairs 左丞相 Tudan Kening 徒單克寧 (d. 1191) were the highest-ranked. In *Ruiwan ji*, Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052), the Minister of War and the Grand Academician 大士 of Hall of Heavenly Manifestations (Tianzhang ge 天章閣, one of the palace buildings to which Hanlin Academincians 翰林學士 were assigned), was the highest-ranked official amongst the participants.

The above two Yuan *zaju* plays were penned by two different authors, Wang Shifu and an anonymous author; both described scenes of the willow shooting ritual. This shows that Yuan dynasty playwrights were familiar with the ritual and that they did not make up the scenes out of pure imagination. The scenes in the two plays were quite realistic, closely corresponding to willow shooting scenes in written records. In his book *Yuan gongci* 元宮詞 (Songs on the Yuan Palace), Zhu Youdun 朱有燉 (1379–1439), the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) playwright, offers a wonderful description of the willow shooting ritual in the Yuan dynasty: "At springtime, princes and nobility went out of the inner gates, followed by officials who carried bows and arrows in quivers (*huochi* 火赤). [They] shot willow trees and hit balls in the Eastern Garden, [their] fine horses that ran like shooting stars stirring up red dust" 王子王孫值三春，火赤相隨出內闥，射柳擊球東苑裡，流星駿馬蹴紅塵 (Zhu 2014, p. 797). A similar description of the "willow-chopping ritual" (*zhuoliu hui* 斲柳會) is found in Xiong Mengxiang's 熊夢祥 (1285–1376) *Xijin zhi* 析津志 (*Records of Xijin*):

> Willow choppers at the Double-Fifth Festival . . . The front rows are honor guards; The playground is filled with numerous flags. Upon hearing the order, all the military officers chopped off willow branches, removed the top one *chi*, inserted the truncated branches five *cun* into the soil, and then each marked his willow branch by fastening a handkerchief onto it. Then, led by someone on horseback, the Commander of Wanhu萬戶 (who managed 10,000 households) with his arrow drawn on the horseback, began to march and shoot willows. 斲柳者於端午日，. . . 前列三軍，旗幟森然。武職者咸令斲柳，以柳條去青一尺，插入土中五寸。仍各以手帕系於柳上，自記其儀。有引馬者先走，萬戶引弓隨之，乃開弓斲柳 (Xiong 1983, p. 204)

The willow shooting rituals depicted in the two Yuan *zaju* plays, *Lichun tang* and *Ruiwan ji*, took place in the Jin dynasty and Song dynasty respectively, and their specific procedures are quite similar to those described in literature from the Jin and Song dynasties. During the Song dynasty, willow shooting had become a popular national competitive event. From the royal palace to restaurants and theaters, willow shooting events were held everywhere. Cheng Dachang's 程大昌 (1123–1195) *Yanfanlu* 演繁露 (Illustrating the Luxuriant Dew) records the scenes of a willow shooting event held during a military parade in the Song dynasty:

> On the third day of the third lunar month in the year of Renchen [1172], in Jinling [today's Nanjing], I observed as a participant and watched General Li Xianzhong 李顯忠 (1109–1177) parade his troops. At the end of the parade, he had his soldiers cut willow branches and insert them into the ground, forming a circle, and these soldiers on horsebacks tried to shoot the willows while charging forward. The arrows used for willow shooting, about an inch wide, were wider than the regular ones. When a willow branch was shot, it would break apart, hence the name of this event: willow treading. 壬辰三月三日，在金陵，預閱李顯忠司兵，最後折柳，環插球場，軍士馳馬射之。其矢鏃闊於常鏃，略可寸餘，中之輒斷，名曰蹸柳 (Cheng 2018, 13.909)

Zhou Hui's 周煇 (1126–1198) *Qingbo zalu* 清波雜錄 (Miscellaneous Records of Clear Wave Studio) records scenes of Song dynasty palace maids shooting willows:

> In the fourth lunar month of the fifth year of the Zhenghe reign (1115), the emperor entertained ministers at the Xuanhe Hall. His majesty first stopped at the Chongzheng Hall. There he paraded more than five hundred soldiers shooting arrows on horsebacks, using heavy bows. When they finished, they were offered seats. Then palace maids were led out, lining up under the hall. Some palace maids began to beat drums and watchman's clappers, others shot arrows on horsebacks, hitting willow branches and embroidered balls, or beating the pill that was a special ball used in a competition. Those palace maids were able to pull the heaviest bows. The soldiers all looked ashamed. 政和五年四月，燕輔臣於宣和殿。先御崇政殿，閱子弟五百餘人馳射，挽强精鋭，畢事賜坐，出宮人列於殿下，鳴鼓擊柝，躍馬飛射，剪柳枝，射繡球，擊丸，據鞍開神臂弓，越絶無倫。衛士皆有愧色 (Zhou 1997, 8.364)

According to *Jinshi* 金史 (The History of Jin), the willow shooting ritual of the Song dynasty (960–1279) originated from the Jin dynasty (1115–1234). It says: "Inheriting the old customs of the Liao (907–1125), Jin performed the ritual of worshipping Heaven on the Double-Fifth Festival, the Mid-Primordial Festival, and the Double-Ninth Festival." 金因遼舊俗，以重五、中元、重九日行拜天之禮 (Toqto'a 1975, 35.826).

Details of the willow shooting ritual of the Jin dynasty were similar to the descriptions in Yuan *zaju*. *Jinshi* has the following record:

> On the Double-fifth Festival, when the Heaven worship rituals are finished, two lines of willow branches are then planted into the ground. Arrow shooters, in the order of their official positions, each fasten a handkerchief to a branch, identifying the one assigned to him. They also peel the parts of the branches that were several inches above the ground. One person then rides a horse ahead; another one rides to follow, and shoot the willow with a special horizontal-headed arrow that has no feather. If the arrow breaks the willow branch, and the first person catches the broken willow branch and rides away, it is considered perfect. If the arrow breaks the willow branch but the arrow is not caught, it is considered good. If the willow branch is shot in its unpeeled lower or caught but not broken, or not shot at all, it is considered a failure. Whenever someone is shooting, drums are beaten to cheer him on. 凡重五日拜天禮畢，插柳球場為兩行，當射者以尊卑序，各以帕識其枝，去地約數寸，削其皮而白之。先以一人馳馬前導，後馳馬以無羽橫鏃箭射之，既斷柳，又以手接而馳去者，為上。斷而不能接去者，次之。或斷其青處，及中而不能中者，與不能中者，為負。每射，必伐鼓以助其氣 (Toqto'a 1975, 35.826–27)

Based on this record in *Jinshi*, the willow shooting ritual of the Jin imperial court was a competitive recreational event. In terms of time, venue, and participants, it was quite similar to that described in *Lichun tang*.

However, in the Liao dynasty, the willow shooting activity was called the *sese* 瑟瑟 ritual, and it was a prayer ritual for rain. There is a clear record in *Liaoshi* 遼史 (The History of Liao) on this point:

> If there is a drought, [the court would select] an auspicious day to perform the *sese* ritual to pray for rain. Before the day comes, a huge tent with hundreds of columns is set up. On the day, the emperor offers tributes to the portraits of former emperors, and then the willow shooting begins. The emperor shoots twice, and then princes and the state councilor each shoots once in turn. [Each of the willow branches is identified by someone as "his."] A shooter who hits a willow branch is entitled to temporarily hold the hat and robe of the "owner" of that willow branch. If the shooter fails to get the target, he must have his hat and robe kept by the "owner" of the willow branch. Losers then toast to winners, and the latter return the held garments. On the next day, willows are planted to the southeast of the huge tent. A shaman offers wine and grains as sacrifices, praying. The emperor and empress then offer a sacrifice to the east. After this, young

> members of the royal family shoot willows. Royal family members, brothers of the empress dowager and the empress, and ministers present at the ritual are all granted rewards. 若旱，擇吉日行瑟瑟儀以祈雨。前期，置百柱天棚。及期，皇帝致奠於先帝御容，乃射柳。皇帝再射，親王、宰執以次各一射。中柳者賀誌柳者冠服，不中者以冠服質之。不勝者進飲於勝者，然後各歸其冠服。又翼日，植柳天棚之東南，巫以酒醴、黍稗薦植柳，祝之。皇帝、皇后祭東方畢，子弟射柳。皇族、國舅、群臣與禮者，賜物有差。(Toqto'a 1974, 49.835)

The *sese* ritual of the Liao dynasty was a royal prayer ritual for rain with high specifications, and its details were similar to the descriptions of willow shooting rituals in Yuan *zaju*. For example, the participants of both were the ruling class including the emperor, and the winners were rewarded.

The willow shooting ritual was held at the Double-Fifth Festival and the third month of the lunar calendar in Yuan and in the third and fourth lunar months in the Song dynasty. In the Jin and Liao dynasties, the time of the willow shooting ritual was not fixed. According to *Liaoshi* and *Jinshi,* the willow shooting ritual was held by the emperor in the imperial garden from the fourth to the ninth lunar months. In *Liaoshi,* the willow shooting ritual was held by the emperor in the royal garden in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh lunar months. In *Jinshi,* the ritual was held in the fifth and ninth lunar months. The Jin emperors conducted the willow shooting rituals just for entertainment, while the Liao emperors conducted the rituals both for entertainment and for the special purpose of praying for rain. When the Liao emperors shot the willow in the imperial garden to pray for rain, it was not a game, but a solemn ritual from which, they believed, they could obtain mercy from Heaven. Therefore, it can be confirmed that in Jin and Liao, the willow shooting ritual was held in spring, summer, and autumn. That is, in Liao and Jin, the willow shooting ritual was held in various months. Based on the surroundings and time, the willow shooting ritual in Yuan *zaju* was very close to that recorded in *Liaoshi* and *Jinshi* (Wang 2013, pp. 109–13).

In summary, the works of Yuan *zaju* describe the grand occasion of the willow shooting ritual in the Song and Jin dynasties and that it originated in the *sese* ritual in the Liao dynasty. Certainly, the depictions (surroundings and participants) of willow shooting rituals in Yuan *zaju* were similar to *sese* rituals described in *Liaoshi*. That is to say, the source of the narratives of willow shooting in Yuan *zaju* can be traced back to the *sese* ritual of the Liao dynasty. It should be noted that in the willow shooting events, the willow branch was the key subject of the ritual and the sacred symbol. Hitting the willow tree meant good luck would be handed to the shooter. This raises the question of why the willow tree was sacred in the willow shooting. In other words, what made the rulers of the Liao dynasty treat the willow tree as a special sacred tree?

Fundamentally, the sacredness of the willow tree was directly related to the Khitans' shamanic belief in the willow god. The Khitans were the founders of Liao. Academic definitions of shamanism vary, but the working definition which most scholars are using covers several elements: the shaman's ecstasy, his/her patron gods and helpers, the illusion of receiving gods, the travel of the shaman's soul to another world, and some cosmic characteristics (Meng 2000, p. 14). In the shamanic beliefs of the Khitan people, the willow is a sacred tree with multiple identities and has a very important place. Fu Yuguang's field study shows that in the shamanism of the Oroqen people in northeastern China, when a new shaman learns about the ritual from an old shaman, he/she has to build a *xianrenzhu* 仙人柱 (immortal pillar, referring to an Oroqen-style cottage) with two willow poles standing in the middle. The willow is a sacred tree through which one communicates with the gods. The shaman then hangs sacrificial offerings on it. In the shamanic healing ritual, the willow tree also plays an important role: "When the shaman is about to heal a person, he would make an offering to the gods outside the *xianrenzhu*, and the person in charge of the offerings, 'Cha'erbalaiqin' 查爾巴來欽, kneels or stands next to the offerings, holding in his or her right hand a small willow tree branch with leaves. When the shaman is about to finish reading the spell, the Cha'erbalaiqin would take the leaves off the branch one by one and throw them forward." (Fu 1990, p. 112) The Oroqen people's and the Khitans'

shamanic beliefs both belong to the category of northeastern Chinese shamanism, so the existing beliefs about the willow tree of the former can, to some extent, reflect the cognitive concept of the willow tree in the Khitans' shamanic beliefs.

The idea that the willow tree can communicate with the gods and cure diseases in the above-mentioned rituals is based on the shamanic belief that the willow is a sacred object. In the context of this belief, the willow tree is a sacred tree and a hierophany, as defined by Mircea Eliade: A hierophany is "something sacred that shows itself to us" (Eliade 1959, p. 11). It could be claimed that willows take on this function in the Khitans' folk beliefs, in which the willow tree is transformed from the holy tree to a secular one, and even its branches, leaves, and bark are regarded as the hierophany of the willow god. The resulting perception is that touching the willow tree and its parts is tantamount to encountering the willow god and will bring good luck. This perception is similar to what James G. Frazer ([1922] 1990) called the law of contact, which is based on association. In this way of thinking, shooting a willow branch is the same as touching the divine willow goddess.

In addition, willow trees mostly grow near water, so they are inseparable from water. Therefore, willow shooting symbolizes proximity to water, and thus a drought can be lifted. On this basis, performing the willow shooting ritual to pray for rain emerged in the Liao court. It is hard to tell whether the willow in the *sese* ritual was the Khitans' creation goddess or ancestor goddess. However, it can be claimed that the goddess's hierophany is the willow branch. In this process, people's perception of the willow extended from the sacred to the hierophany and then to the target of the willow shooting ritual. As for the willows in Yuan *zaju*, the Yuan playwrights, on the basis of memory, wrote about willow shooting rituals, and the perception of willows also was transformed from sacred trees in folk beliefs to secular targets of shooting. At this time, the willow in folk beliefs had become a cultural gene, giving birth to the willow narrative in Yuan *zaju*.

The explanation given above helps us understand the complex relationship between willow shooting in Yuan *zaju* and the folk beliefs of the Khitan people. That is, willow shooting in Yuan *zaju* with its conceptual origins is traceable to the ancient shamanic belief in the willow as a sacred creature, which was prevalent among the Khitans and Jurchens who lived in what is now northeastern China. In other words, in Yuan *zaju*, the willow shooting ritual was a secular activity, but the willow branch that was the target for shooting was regarded as sacred. Because of its supposed sacredness, the willow branch was regarded as a symbol of good luck in the willow shooting ritual. Moreover, the willow shooting narratives in Yuan *zaju* drew on willow shooting events of the Song and Jin dynasties, while Song dynasty willow shooting originated from the Jin dynasty; the willow shooting event of the Jin dynasty originated from the *sese* ritual of the Liao dynasty. The perception of willow shooting in the *sese* ritual was based on the shamanic beliefs of the Khitan people, who regarded the willow as a sacred object. Therefore, the willow shooting in Yuan *zaju* was an indirect narrative of Liao dynasty shamanic willow beliefs. It was related to the shamanic beliefs in northeastern China, not an invention of Yuan dynasty playwrights.

3. Stories on Deities Delivering Willows

Four Yuan *zaju* plays involve narratives of deities delivering willows. They are: Ma Zhiyuan's *Yueyang lou* (Wang 1990, 2.157–86), Gu Zijing's *Chengnan liu* (Wang 1990, 5.295–314), Jia Zhongming's *Shengxian meng* (Wang 1990, 5.512–29), and Li Shouqing's *Du Liu Cui* (Wang 1990, 2.437–67). The plots of the first three are somewhat similar, all about Lü Dongbin delivering a willow spirit to immortality. In the Lü Dongbin story of the first three plays, the willow spirit first became a human and then became an immortal; in the fourth play, Buddhist Monk Moonlight delivered a willow branch, who was originally a sacred willow branch in Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's vase and became first a human, then an enlightened being.

Xiaohuan Zhao sees the above-mentioned process of transformation, namely, the transition from incarnation/reincarnation to deity/buddha, as the fourth way for ghosts to

make their appearance onstage.[4] However, as we see it, this is a transformation from ghosts and spirits to deities and immortals. In Yuan *zaju*, the Lü Dongbin story on delivering a willow spirit emphasizes the willow tree's transformation from a spirit to an immortal, and the Buddhist Monk Moonlight's story emphasizes the willow tree's transformation from a willow branch to a woman and then to a willow branch in Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's vase. This theme of deities delivering willows largely originated from the Chinese folk beliefs about willow trees. In these beliefs, the willow tree has multiple faces: sometimes it is a spirit, and sometimes it is a monster; sometimes it can expel evil spirits and even cure diseases. These diverse conceptions about the willow tree fostered the narrations of similar stories in Yuan *zaju* plays. In the following section, this paper interprets the narrations of the stories of willow spirits delivered by Lü Dongbin and Liu Cui and the willow branch that was delivered by Buddhist Monk Moonlight in Yuan *zaju*.

The Lü Dongbin stories in Yuan *zaju* focus on how willow spirits harmed people. For example, in *Yueyang lou*, the willow spirit and the white prune tree spirit appeared at Yueyang Tower to charm human beings every night. This idea came from Chinese folk beliefs. In the three plays mentioned above, willow spirits were all harmful creatures. They were all male, with female tree spirits as their mates. In *Yueyang lou*, the willow tree spirit's mate was a white prune tree spirit. In the other two plays, the willow tree spirits' mates were peach blossom spirits. Both willow tree spirits and the white prune tree spirit harmed people at night. In *Yueyang lou*, a waiter said to Lü Dongbin: "At night, two spirits will come out upstairs, charming and harming people. Customers dare not eat upstairs at night." 如今天色晚了，這樓上有兩個精怪，到晚便出來迷人，酒客晚間不敢在這樓上喫酒 (Wang 1990, 5.299). The idea that spirits, especially willow spirits, come out to harm people at night, was not created by Yuan playwrights. Before the Yuan dynasty, this idea had been commonly accepted by the Han Chinese, and it can be traced back to the Tang and Song dynasties. In Tang dynasty (618–907) folk beliefs, willow spirits already existed. However, at this time, willow spirits mostly appeared as benign humans, and they did not harm others (Liu 2005, p. 106). In the Song dynasty, as systemic beliefs in tree spirits developed, the willow spirit became a notable part of folk beliefs. In the early Song dynasty story anthology, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), some willow spirits were learned scholars (Li 1961, 415.3383–84), but others were evil spirits who harmed people. One of the stories is about an evil willow spirit harming people in an old compound in Luoyang 洛陽 who was finally killed by an official:

> There was a grand old house in Eastern Luoyang. Most of the people who had resided in it met sudden death, so the house had been long left empty and locked. . . . (The owner) always wanted to sell the house. . . . One night, Lu Qian 盧虔 and his officer attendant stayed in the house. Lu ordered his servants to stay out of the gate. The officer attendant was good at shooting, so he brought his bow and arrows, and stayed awake in the lobby. Later that night, someone knocked at the door. The attendant asked who it was. A voice said: "General Liu [lit: willow] has sent me to deliver a letter to Attendant Censor Lu." Later, he came again . . . The attendant shot him in the chest. [He was] startled and fled to the east. At dawn, Lu ordered the attendant to trace him down. [The attendant] went eastwards and saw a hundred-foot-high willow tree, with an arrow through its trunk. That was General Liu. Lu chopped it down. Since then, no more residents in the house were harmed. After a year or so, the house was renovated. During the process, a gourd ladle was found under the roof. It was about a *zhang* 丈 [about 3.3 meters] long, and its handle was penetrated by an arrow. That was what the "general" was holding in hand. 東洛有故宅，其堂奥軒級甚宏特。然居者多暴死，是以空而鍵之且久。... ... 常欲貿其宅而止焉。... ... 後一夕，虔與從吏同寢其堂，命僕使盡止於門外。從吏勇悍善射，於是執弓矢，坐前軒下。夜將深，聞有叩門者，從吏即問之。應聲曰："柳將軍遣奉書於盧侍御。" ... ... 久之又來，... ... 從吏又射之，中其胸。厲驚，若有懼，遂東向而去。至明，虔命窮其跡。至宅東隙地，見柳高百餘尺，有一矢貫其上，所謂柳將軍也。虔伐其

> 薪。自此其宅居者無恙。後歲餘，因重構堂室，於屋瓦下得一瓢。長約丈餘，有矢貫其柄，即將軍所執之瓢也 (Li 1961, 415.3385–86)

In folk beliefs of the Tang and Song dynasties, most of the willow spirits were centuries old. This is a reflection of the notion that "old things grow into spirits" (物老成精 *wu lao chengjing*). This idea and the folk belief that willow spirits were harmful to people largely influenced the authors of Yuan *zaju*, so the authors of the three aforementioned Lü Dongbin stories coincidentally portrayed willow spirits as ones with centuries of cultivation. For example, the willow spirit in *Yueyang lou* introduces himself as follows: "I am an old willow tree under Yueyang Tower. I have been here for more than a thousand years." 小聖乃岳陽樓下一株老柳樹是也。我在此千百餘年 (Wang 1990, 2.162).

Because of their longevity, willow spirits are often referred to as *laoliu* 老柳 (old willow) in Yuan *zaju*. For example, the plum spirit in *Chengnan liu* says: "I am a fairy peach, and that is the willow planted in the south of the city. In the past, when Master Lü Dongbin came here, he intended to deliver the old willow, so he planted me by the neighboring wall, and married me to the old willow. Thus, the old willow became a spirit." 妾身乃天上仙桃，此乃城南柳樹。昔日呂洞賓師父到此，有意度脫這老柳，將我種向鄰牆，與老柳配作夫婦，以此成為精靈 (Wang 1990, 5.297–98). The word old in "old willow" refers to the old age of the willow spirit and therefore is not just a respectful or honorific term for the willow spirit. It is evident that when the Yuan playwrights created the narratives of Lü Dongbin's delivery of willow spirits, they, to a large extent, accepted the folk beliefs about the willow tree in Tang and Song folklore.

The religious connotation of the figure of Lü Dongbin is worth mentioning. A scholarly figure who is both historical and legendary, in folklore, Lü is generally associated with Daoist alchemy and immortality. Among the Eight Immortals (*baxian* 八仙) in Daolist literature, he was the one who most often delivered enlightened people and beings to immortality. As a historical figure, Lü belonged to the orthodox of Daoism (Eskildsen 2016). Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein (1986) has clarified some basic aspects about him in early legends that were created in the Northern Song dynasty, which were mainly hued with the color of Daoism. Other studies have, from different perspectives, showed that stories about Lü were tapped by other beliefs, for example, Buddhism (Capitanio 2016). Artistic and literary representations of Lü are so abundant and complex (as partly shown in (Katz 1999)) that the figure can be viewed as a cultural symbol for the expression of various ideas, mostly associated with religion and folk beliefs alike. In our case, Lü's Daoist practice of delivering enlightened beings to immortality is comfortably combined with the image of willows as spirits in folklore.

Compared with the Lü Dongbin stories on the delivery of willow spirits, the narrative of Buddhist Monk Moonlight's delivering a willow tree was derived from the belief that willows can ward off evil and cure diseases. In *Du Liu Cui*, a willow branch in Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's vase was relegated to the human world and then became Liu Cui (green willow). This plot contains the cultural message that the willow was a sacred object and can cure diseases. Specifically, both the willow branch and the vase were Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's magic tools to help all beings. The willow branch could purify life and therefore was a sacred object capable of healing.

The concept of the sacred willow was not unique to the Yuan dynasty but had been prevalent in the shamanic beliefs of Han Chinese before the Yuan dynasty. In folk beliefs, the willow was regarded as a divine object. Because it was vigorous and grew near water, it was believed to be able to cure diseases and ward off evil spirits. The practice of using willow branches to ward off evil spirits was recorded in Jia Sixie's 賈思勰 (386–534) important work *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術 (Essential Techniques for the Welfare of the People): "If you put a willow branch on your door on the first day of the first month, ghosts will not enter your home." 正月旦取楊柳枝著戶上，百鬼不入家 (Jia 1998, 5.352).

The folk custom of wearing willow branches on the Double-Fifth Festival, derived from the idea that the willow tree can cure diseases, was extremely popular in southern and northern China before the Yuan dynasty. Without going into details, here are just two

examples. In *Jingchu suishi ji*荊楚歲時記 (Chronological Record of the Chu Region) by Zong Lin 宗懍 (501–565), it is recorded that in ancient times, in the Chu region, there was the custom of offering sacrifices to the willow on the 15th day of the first month: "Nowadays, it is a local custom to offer sacrifices to the door. The method is to stick willow branches on the left and right doors, and offer food and drink including wine, jerky, bean porridge, cakes, and meat sauce to the directions to which the branches point." 今州里風俗，望日祭門戶。其法先以楊枝插於左右門上，隨楊枝所指，乃以酒脯飲食及豆粥、糕糜插著而祭之 (Zong 2018, pp. 18–19) Generally speaking, "ancient people used the words *yang* 楊 (poplar) and *liu* 柳 (willow) interchangeably" (Guan 2006, p. 9). Here, *yangzhi* 楊枝 means willow branches. This was the practice of using willow branches to ward off evil spirits on the fifteenth day of the first month, and behind it was the idea that willow branches were sacred.

This concept was prevalent among not only commoners but also the ruling class. During the reign of Emperor Zhongzong (Li Xian 李顯, 656–710) of Tang, he introduced the folk belief that willows could cure diseases and ward off evil spirits in the palace: "On the third day of the third month, he gave his ministers fine willow rings, saying that by wearing them they could be free from insect bites." 三月三日賜侍臣細柳圈，言帶之免蠆毒 (Duan 1981, 1.2) This idea was passed on to the Yuan dynasty and was accepted and inherited by the playwrights, resulting in the Yuan *zaju* plot about Liu Cui being delivered to immortality in *Du Liu Cui*.

The stories about the delivery of willows also clearly contain the Buddhist belief that Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara uses a willow branch to heal the sick and save people. In *Du Liu Cui*, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara rescues sentient beings and uses a willow branch in a purifying vase to heal the sick and save people. Unfortunately, "the willow branch in the vase was occasionally polluted with dust and was therefore punished with reincarnation in the human world. It became a prostitute named Liu Cui who lived on Baojianying Street, Hangzhou". 淨瓶内的楊柳枝葉上，偶汙微塵，罰往人間打一遭輪回，在杭州抱鑒營街，積妓牆下，化作風塵匪妓，名為柳翠 (Wang 1990, 2.438). This narrative contains two ideas: first, that Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara heals and saves people, and second, that the willow branch inside Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's purifying vase is a holy object with healing properties.

One only has to turn to the Buddhist classics to find that this narrative in the play originated from the Buddhist belief that Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara saves people. In the Buddhist sutra, *Qing Guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni zhou jing* 請觀世音菩薩消伏毒害陀羅尼經, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is granted a willow with purified water to heal the sick and save people: "The person from Vaishali then granted a willow branch with purified water to Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara" 爾時毘舍離人。即具楊枝淨水。授與觀世音 (Qing Guanshiyin Pusa Xiaofu Duhai Tuoluoni Zhou Jing 2021, p. 34, c13–14). In the opening section of *Du Liu Cui*, the depiction of how Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara appeared and healed people was derived from the same idea about Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the above-mentioned sutra. The relevant narratives in the play are all based on this Buddhist concept. The image of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara has been modified in the Chinese cultural context: of interest to many, in China, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara has appeared as a female deity since the ninth century (Idema 2008; Yü 2001); she is believed to have ability to heal the sick and protect the weak; she is also understood with concepts from other beliefs—for example, the Confucian idea of filial piety (Dudbridge 2004; Berezkin and Mair 2014). Similar to Lü Dongbin, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was and is also a cultural signifier, whose representations welcomed elements from various religious and folk beliefs.

The above-mentioned stories of Lü Dongbin in the plays are primarily Daoist, and the story of Buddhist Monk Moonlight has to do with Buddhism. The former originated from the belief that the willow can be a ghost and a spirit, added to by the Daoist idea that deities and immortals never die; the latter story originated from the belief that the willow tree could ward off evil spirits and cure diseases, and therefore it was a sacred object. These two types of ideas seem contradictory, but this kind of contradiction is precisely a characteristic

of folk beliefs. This means that the folk beliefs about willows contained in the related Yuan *zaju* works were not univocal but diverse, and some of the ideas were even opposed to each other.

4. Willows as References to Females

In Yuan *zaju*, many words compare women with willow trees, such as *liuyan*柳眼 (willow leaf-shaped eyes), *liuyao* 柳腰 (willow-like waist), *liumei* 柳眉 (willow leaf-shaped eyebrows), and so on. *Liuyan* was used as a metaphor for the slender and beautiful eyes of a young woman. For example, Xiao Tao 小桃, a young lady who was transformed from a peach tree by Lü Dongbin in *Chengnan liu*, had a beautiful pair of *liuyan* (Wang 1990, 5.304). In this mythical text, the word *liuyan* was only used to refer to the beauty of the eyes, which were as narrow and long as willow leaves. In real life, this eye shape was often associated with deities and fairies. Before her incarnation, Xiao Tao had been a peach of immortality. The most prominent female deity in Chinese mythology, the Queen Mother of the West or Xiwangmu, gave the peach as a gift to Lü Dongbin. Lü ate it and dropped the kernel under the east wall of the Yueyang Tower, and it quickly grew into a willow tree. Later, Lü delivered it into a human being (Wang 1990, 5.297). In this text, the function of the word *liuyan* is to highlight the beauty of Xiao Tao with her fairy aura. Since the term does not appear very often in Yuan *zaju*, we will not dwell on it here.

The word *liumei* appears frequently in Yuan *zaju*, mostly used as a figurative reference to a woman's thin and slender eyebrows, especially those of a young girl. Li Yunying 李雲英, a female character created by Li Tangbin 李唐賓 (fl. 14th c.) in *Li Yunying feng song wutong ye* 李雲英風送梧桐葉 (Wind Sends a *Wutong* Leaf for Li Yunying), had attractive willow leaf-shaped eyebrows, and her beauty was enchanting. "Slim and graceful, she just finished dressing up. Her curved willow leaf-shaped eyebrows were light black, and her face was like a peach, fragrant, red, and delicate. Her waist was so small that one could hold around it with one arm, and her demeanor was utterly graceful. Her flower-like face was more beautiful than a painting. She was three times fairer than a fairy." 玉娉婷新梳掠，曲彎彎柳眉青淺，香馥馥桃臉紅嬌。腰肢一捻輕，舉止十分俏，便似畫真兒描不成如花貌。有三般兒比並妖嬈 (Wang 1990, 5.359).

In most cases, *liumei* was used together with other words to describe the pretty face of a young girl. In *Sa Zhenren yeduan bitao hua* 薩真人夜斷碧桃花 (Perfect Man Sa Holds a Night Trial of Peach Flower) by an anonymous author, when Zhang Daonan 張道南 saw Xu Bitao 徐碧桃, a young maid with delicate cheeks and eyes, he was enchanted: "Looking at her with her cloud-like hair, almond-shaped face and peach-like cheeks, her willow leaf-shaped eyebrows and starry eyes, I could not but be touched." 看他那雲鬢霧鬢，杏臉桃腮，柳眉星眼，不由咱不動心也 (Wang 1990, 6.660). In the works of Yuan dynasty playwrights, the charm of women with willow leaf-shaped eyebrows is irresistible to men. In Jia Zhongming's 賈仲明 play *Jing Chuchen chong dui yu shu ji* 荊楚臣重對玉梳記 (Jing Chuchen Met the Jade Comb Again), Gu Yuxiang 顧玉香, a singer, had a pair of curved eyebrows that made her look different. A merchant, Liu Maoying 柳茂英, after seeing Gu, was so enchanted by her beauty: "Her willow leaf-shaped eyebrows and starry eyes were full of emotions, and the white teeth and red lips gave her such a heart-melting look. When she smiled at him, his legs became weak. When she leaned on him, his spirit fled his body instantly." 散春情柳眉星眼，取和氣皓齒朱唇。和他笑一笑敢忽的軟了四肢，將他靠一靠管烘的走了三魂 (Wang 1990, 5.433) Almost all of the beautiful women in Yuan *zaju* had willow leaf-shaped eyebrows.

In Yuan *zaju*, *liumei* is usually used to describe a woman's narrow or curved eyebrows, and its main function is to emphasize the feminine beauty of tenderness. Because willow leaves are long, thin, fragile, and gentle, they give people a very soft impression. The evocativeness of *liumei* is somewhat similar to that of willow leaves, so it can arouse people's feelings of compassion. From the point of view of literary rhetoric, the term *liumei* was used so often in Yuan *zaju* to describe the long and thin eyebrows of women that it became a cliché rather than an original or idiosyncratic description of an author. Trite as

it is, this cliché reflects the collective aesthetics of the Yuan opera writers: women with willow leaf-shaped eyebrows are beautiful. The term *liuyao* is usually used to describe the slender waist of a young woman in Yuan *zaju*. In Wu Changling's 吳昌齡 (fl. 13th century) *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the West), an old man boasts the beauty of his daughter: "I am a widower, lonely and clumsy, but my child is graceful and beautiful. She was born with a waist like a willow and eyes like peach blossoms. She is a piece of fragrant jade that even Bian He would be overjoyed to see" 老漢鰥寡孤獨連拙，俺孩兒風流美麗奇絶。他生得楊柳腰，桃花眼，是一塊生香玉卞和也歡悦 (Wang 1990, 3.450). Similar to *liumei*, *liuyao* is also used with other words to describe women's beauty. For example, in Yang Jingxian's 楊景賢 (1345–1421) play *Ma Danyang dutuo Liu Xingshou* 馬丹陽度脱劉行首 (Ma Danyang Delivers Liu Xingshou), Liu Xingshou 劉行首, a young woman who does not want to be delivered, says to Wang Chongyang 王重陽: "I have a willow-like waist and my face is as beautiful as a begonia flower. I am bedecked with gold and silver and dressed in colorful clothes. Why would I want to follow you and become a monk?" 我楊柳腰肢，海棠顏色，穿金帶銀，偎紅倚翠，我跟你出家有甚麼好處 (Wang 1990, 5.332).

The term *liuyao* is used to describe not only a woman's slim waist but also the waist of a demon or spirit. In *Journey to the West*, Wu Changling used the term on Princess Iron Fan 鐵扇公主 (Tieshan Gongzhu), a spirit: "He was afraid of my beauty—my willow-like waist (*yangliuyao*), my peach-blossom like face, which would be broken with just a gust of wind." 更怕我楊柳腰肢嫋娜，耀武揚威趁逞過，更怕我桃臉風吹得破 (Wang 1990, 3.484). Although Princess Iron Fan is a spirit, her beauty is not different from that of an ordinary girl, i.e., she also has *liuyao*. It is clear that the term *liuyao* had a very broad usage in Yuan *zaju* to describe both humans and spirits.

The term *yangliuyao* in the above text is identical to *liuyao*, the willow-like waist, which seems clear enough and does not need much explanation. *Liuyao* is used to describe a woman who is slim with a willow-like waist, walks gracefully, and is a beauty in the eyes of men. Like *liuyan* and *liumei*, *liuyao* was also a cliché that Yuan playwrights used to describe women. It reflects the aesthetic tendency of Yuan playwrights to see women with slender, willow-like waists as beautiful.

To sum up, it can be said that in Yuan *zaju*, the three words *liuyan*, *liumei,* and *liuyao* are used to figuratively describe the delicate beauty of women, i.e., *liuyan* is used to describe a woman's thin and long eyes, *liumei* to describe her slender eyebrows, and *liuyao* to describe her slender and gentle waist.

It appears that Yuan dynasty playwrights had similar aesthetic standards for women, preferring those with *liuyan*, *liumei*, and *liuyao*. It would seem that the authors mentioned above in Yuan *zaju* use *liuyan*, *liumei* and *liuyao*, three common references to the willow, to describe elements of the female ideal of beauty. This aesthetic was not unique to them, but rather it was inherited from the literary narrative tradition of older generations. The practice of using the willow as a figurative reference to people originated from *Shijing* 詩經 (The Book of Songs). The poem "Caiwei" 采薇 (Plucking the Bracken) says: "Long ago when we started, the willows spread their shade. Now that we turn back, the snowflakes fly. The march before us is long; we are thirsty and hungry. Our hearts are stricken with sorrow, but no one listens to our plaint." 昔我往矣，楊柳依依。今我來思，雨雪霏霏。行道遲遲，載渴載飢。我心傷悲，莫知我哀 (Mao 1982, 9.414).[5] However, only later did *liumei* and *liuyao* become literary vehicles to describe women. Since the two are different terms, we discuss them separately below.

The first writer to use the term *liuyao* was Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581), the poet of the Southern and Northern Dynasties period. In a poem entitled "He renri wanjing yan Kunming Chi" 和人日晚景宴昆明池 (Written at the Evening Banquet by the Kunming Pond on the Seventh Day of the First Month), Yu writes: "The scene of spring is in full swing; Zhao and Li used to pass by. In this gorgeous garden comparable to Shanglin, beautiful women have thin willow-like waists; like the imperial resort Xinfeng, paths here lead to banquets." 春餘足光景，趙李舊經過。上林柳腰細，新豐酒徑多 (Yu 1980, 4.317). The second couplet of this poem seems to be about the willow tree, but the context suggests

that it is an allusion to a beautiful woman of the Han dynasty who was known for her thin waist and who appeared in the Shanglin Garden.

In the Six Dynasties period (220–589), the literary imagery of the willow had already been formed. According to a study, "by the late Southern Dynasties, the imagery of willow had long been on the path of classicization. In this process, Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾 (487–551) and Yu Xin, who were father and son, and the Xiao brothers—Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551), and Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–555)—played major roles." (Cheng 2011, p. 56). One of Yu Xin's greatest contributions was that he coined the term *liuyao* as a figurative reference to the waist of a young woman.

During the Tang and Song dynasties, *liuyao* became a ready figure of speech used to describe the beauty of a woman's waist. Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858), Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), and other poets frequently used the image of a beautiful woman with *liuyao* in their poetry. Han Wo 韓偓 (842–923) depicted the image of a young girl with a "willow-like waist and lotus-like face" (柳腰蓮臉) in his poem "Pinfang Lu Xiucai" 頻訪盧秀才 (Frequent Visits to Scholar Lu) (Zhonghua shuju bianjibu 1999, 682.7895). In "Nangezi" 南歌子 (Nangezi), Wen Tingyun 温庭筠 (812–866) described a young girl with large eyes and a willow-like waist: "Her eyes were as tender as waves, and her waist was as graceful as a willow" 轉眄如波眼，娉婷似柳腰 (Wen 2010, p. 59).

Song dynasty writers were also used to describe women with *liuyao*, but the beauty of these women varied. For example, Yan Jidao 晏幾道 (1038–1110) wrote of such a girl with long, slender eyebrows: "Her eyebrows were long and dark like a distant mountain, and her waist was as soft as a thin willow" 遠山眉黛長，細柳腰肢嫋 (Tang 1965, 1.229). Yang Wujiu 楊無咎 (1097–1169) wrote about a girl with *liuyao*, and she was a smart and tender woman: "[her] willow-like waist and flower-like look were natural and beautiful, [and she was] smart and gentle" 柳腰花貌天然好，聰慧更温柔 (Tang 1965, 2.1199).

Similar to this was the case of the term *liumei*, except that it appeared later in Chinese literature than *liuyao*. The famous Tang poet Bai Juyi used the willow as a vehicle for women's eyebrows in his "Changhen ge" 長恨歌 (Song of Everlasting Sorrow). In describing the beauty of the imperial concubine Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環, he wrote: "Hibiscus looked like [her] face and willows looked like [her] eyebrows. Facing this natural scenery, how can [the emperor] not shed tears?" 芙蓉如面柳如眉，對此如何不淚垂 (Zhonghua shuju bianjibu 1999, 435.4829). In this poem, both hibiscus and *liumei* are figures of speech, personification and metonymy to be exact, used not only to describe a woman's beautiful face and long and thin eyebrows, respectively, but also to refer to a specific person, Yang Yuhuan.

The late Tang poet Li Shangyin combined the words willow (*liu*) and eyebrows (*mei*) into willow's eyebrows (*liumei*) in the poem "He ren ti Zhenniang mu" 和人題真娘墓 (In Response to Poems Written on Zhenniang's Tombstone): "The willow's eyebrows were growing mechanically, and the elm pods were flying like paper money." 柳眉空吐效顰葉，榆莢還飛買笑錢 (Li 2005, p. 115). Although in this case, willow's eyebrows mean willow leaves rather than a woman, it is one of the early instances of joining *liu* and *mei* into *liumei* in poetry.

In the writings of Tang and Song writers, *liumei* could be used to describe both unmarried and married women. In the Tang dynasty, the poet Li Xun 李珣 (855–930) wrote about Xiao Niang 蕭娘, a married woman: "When the dew dropped to the quiet garden and the leaves fell, sorrow gathered on Xiao Niang's willow leaf-shaped eyebrows" 露滴幽庭落葉時，愁聚蕭娘柳眉 (Zhonghua shuju bianjibu 1999, 896.10188). The Song dynasty poet Chao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053–1110) describes a young girl who just reached puberty: "[her] willow leaf-shaped eyebrows were soft, apricot flower-like cheeks lightly brushed, and two lovely dimples as always" 柳眉輕掃，杏腮微拂，依前雙靨 (Tang 1965, 1.576).

It is worth noting that in Tang and Song literature, the term *liumei* referred to a much broader category than *liuyao*; it could be used to describe both commoner and royal women. For example, in the Song dynasty lyricist Zhao Zhangqing's 趙長卿 "Yu Meiren" 虞美人

(Lady Yu), *liumei* refers to an imperial concubine: "To whom did the sorrowful willow leaf-shaped eyebrows unfold? It seems to be to the King of the East; she was happy to see the old friend come. When the sorrow is finally gone, peach blossoms are still blooming as lovely as before. However, where is the concubine now?" 柳眉愁黛為誰開。似向東君、喜見故人來。碧桃銷恨猶堪愛。妃子今何在 (Tang 1965, 3.1772).

This usage is very common in Tang and Song literature, and the Song literatus Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–1229) even used *liumei* as a metaphor for all women who become sentimental in springtime. In his "Shangchun ci ji Ziyuan si shou" 傷春詞寄紫元四首 (Four Poems for Ziyuan about Spring Sentiment): "Why does a sorrowful person become sentimental in spring? The spring rain makes people emotional for no reason. Not only are sorrowful people lonely and sad, but many willow leaf-shaped eyebrows are frowning by the river." 幽人何事苦傷春，春雨無端愁殺人。不但幽人獨愁怨，江頭多少柳眉顰 (Bai 2013, 6.219).

5. Willow Metaphors and Belief about Willow's Fertility in Chinese Folk Religion

As observed, authors of Yuan *zaju* and writers from the Tang and Song dynasties tend to use the three terms about the willow to depict the delicate beauty of women. Our analysis of these rhetorical devices shows that they were closely related to the ancient Chinese folk beliefs about the fecundity of willows.

In northeastern Chinese shamanic mythological beliefs, the willow tree is the goddess of creation, who created all things. For example, in the shamanic beliefs of the Xitala 喜塔拉 clan of Hunchun 琿春 County in northeast China, the supreme god of the universe is Abka-hehe, whose image is the shape of a willow leaf, which looks like the female genitals (Fu 1990, p. 76). In the oracle of the Fucha 富察 clan in Hunchun County, the entire clan was born by the willow tree goddess (Fu 1985, p. 198). There are many other similar mythical stories, which will not be listed here. This shows that in shamanic beliefs in this area, the willow tree represents fecundity, the source of human beings who are her descendants, and hence, a close and sacred relationship between the willow tree and human beings.

Similarly, the Han Chinese in the Central Plains also believe in the reproductive ability of the willow. In today's eastern and southern parts of Henan Province, on the day before a wedding, an essential ritual is to lay willow sticks on the bridal bed so that the new couple will give birth to successful children (Meng 1994, p. 64; Ren 1997, p. 2). The willow tree has many branches, so the willow sticks symbolize many children and grandchildren. It was believed that this ritual would also help the children become successful candidates in the imperial examinations at the provincial level. We can infer that the aforementioned shamanic and Han Chinese beliefs in the willow's fecundity already existed before the Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties and the aforementioned rituals during those dynasties were inherited from earlier times.

The crux of the question is how this folk belief in the fecundity of the willow is translated into the three metaphorical terms in Yuan *zaju*. To put it simply, the rhetorical technique of using the willow as a metaphor for women is an indirect presentation of the folk beliefs about fecundity. The willow tree has a vigorous vitality, and this phenomenon gave rise to folk beliefs about its fertility, while associating the tree with women who have the ability to reproduce. Willow trees mostly grow near water, and their branches are slender and soft, similar to the graceful body of a young female. Literati linked these physical characteristics of the tree to females, so the graceful beauty of the willow is compared to the slender beauty of women.

These associations are based on the reality that willow trees have been commonly grown in China. According to Guan (2006, p. 9), the cultivation of willow trees in China originated in the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BCE), more than three thousand years ago. It developed significantly during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE). In the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) and Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), willows were introduced into royal palaces. In the Sui (581–619) and Tang dynasties, willows were planted on a large scale both in and out of royal residences. They could be found everywhere on riverbanks,

official roads, gardens, and royal palaces (Guan 2006, pp. 8–11). A willow tree consists of branches, leaves, roots, catkins, etc. Long and slender is the intuitive impression of the tree to people. On this basis, words such as *liuyan*, *liumei*, and *liuyao* appeared in Chinese literature to describe the delicacy of women.

However, the introduction of these rhetorical terms to Chinese literature is attributed to the efforts of literary figures of two eras: the court-style poets of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, who explored the expressive power of poetry about women and affection, and the poets of the early Tang dynasty, who expanded the scope of the imagery of the willow (Wang 1987, p. 20). As discussed above, Yu Xin, the poet of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, first introduced the metaphorical term *liuyao* into Chinese literature, while the poets of the Tang Dynasty expanded the use of the terms *liuyan*, *liumei*, and *liuyao*. The writers of Yuan *zaju* inherited these metaphorical figures of speech and did not create any new ones.

To summarize, the three metaphorical expressions that associate the willow with female beauty in Yuan *zaju* originated from the ancient Chinese folk belief that the willow has a powerful reproductive capacity. However, the transformation from folk belief to literary device was not straightforward but accomplished through a complex process. Specifically, this transformation took place at two levels. The first level was analogical association. The second level was aesthetic imagination. The aesthetic imagination was based on the analogical association. The analogical association was formed among the people and its exact origin is difficult to prove. The aesthetic imagination took place in the literary world, beginning with the court-style poems from the Southern and Northern Dynasties and flourishing in the poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties. Thus, it can be said that the ancient Chinese folk belief about the fertility of the willow gave rise to the association of the willow with women, and the aesthetic imagination of the court-style poets in Southern and Northern Dynasties and the early Tang poets created the three metaphorical words of *liuyan*, *liumei,* and *liuyao*.

6. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the three types of willow narratives in Yuan *zaju* were not an original creation of Yuan playwrights but a product of ancient Chinese folk beliefs about the willow tree. In other words, the narratives of the willow shooting ritual originated from the shamanic belief that the willow is a sacred object; the stories of deities delivering willows came from the belief that willows are spirits or creatures; the rhetoric of willows as references to females originated from the belief about the fertility of willows. The three kinds of willow narratives do not play the same role in Yuan *zaju*. The narratives of willow shooting rituals provide backgrounds and plots for the development of the stories in the plays, the narratives of deities delivering willows form motifs, and the rhetorical use of willows as references to females are a means to depict the tenderness of females. While the narrative of the willow shooting rituals is a motif is unique to Yuan *zaju*, the narratives about deities delivering willows and about female beauty are the continuation of the great literary tradition of the *Shijing*. Moreover, the narratives of willow shooting and deities delivering willows are direct narratives based on folk beliefs about the willow, whereas using the willow to describe beautiful women is an indirect narrative based on the belief about the fertility of the willow and filtered through literary aesthetics. Although these three kinds of narratives have different roles in Yuan *zaju*, they all represent, in different ways, the beliefs about the willow that had existed before the Yuan dynasty. This was a conversion process, not only from beliefs about the willow to willow narratives but also from collective common perceptions to individual narratives. In this process, folk beliefs about the willow had a conceptual role in shaping narratives in Yuan *zaju*. The beliefs shaped some *zaju* plots about willows as well as the choice of the object in the willow narratives in *zaju*. Therefore, the folk beliefs about the willow were the source, and the willow narratives of Yuan *zaju* were the offspring. This was also a conversion of folk beliefs

about the willow from collective cognition to individual cognition, or, in other words, a process of folk beliefs in the oral tradition shaping the literary works that were written.

Indeed, this paper shows that the three narratives about willow beliefs were depicted for the first time simultaneously in Yuan *zaju*. Specifically, the three types of narratives on beliefs about the sacred willow, about willow spirits, and about the willow's fertility never coexisted in the same literary genre before the Yuan dynasty. Since the *Shijing*, there have been numerous expressions of beliefs about willows in Chinese literature, for example, the descriptions of *liumei* and *liuyao* in Tang and Song poetry mentioned above. However, these cases from the Tang and Song dynasties represented the belief about the willow from a given perspective. The coexistence of these narratives of willow beliefs in Yuan *zaju* was largely because of the multiethnic interactions and exchanges of the time. The diversified representation of willow beliefs in Yuan *zaju* is not a simple transformation from folk beliefs about the willow to literary narratives of willows. It is actually a rare literary phenomenon created by the combined forces of religion, history, and culture under a specific background.

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Notes

1 The details are as follows: Volume 1, 126 times; Volume 2, 256 times; Volume 3, 282 times; Volume 4, 120 times; Volume 5, 414 times; Volume 6, 95 times; Volume 7, 80 times; Volume 8, 201 times; Volume 9, 79 times; Volume 10, 108 times; Volume 11, 69 times; and Volume 12, 170 times. The total mentions are 2000 times in these volumes.

2 The details are as follows: Volume 1, 2 playwrights; Volume 2, 12 playwrights; Volume 3, 19 playwrights; Volume 4, 8 play-wrights; Volume 5, 22 playwrights; Volume 9, 1 playwright; Volume 10, 1 playwright; Volume 11, 2 playwrights. The total known authors is 67 in these volumes.

3 The twelve musical rhythms are: *huangzhong* 黃鐘, *taicu* 太蔟, *guxian* 姑洗, *ruibin* 蕤賓, *yize* 夷則, *wuyi* 無射, *dalü* 大呂, *jiazhong* 夾鐘, *zhonglü* 中呂, *linzhong* 林鐘, *nanlü* 南呂, and *yingzhong* 應鐘. The twelve musical rhythms were first recorded in the Hanshu 漢書 (Ban 1962, 21.954–55).

4 According to Zhao (2015, p. 15), there are five main ways of ghosts and spirits making their appearance onstage in *zaju*: 1. first as a human, then as a ghost; 2. first as a human, then as a ghost, and finally as a reincarnation; 3. first as a human, then as a living soul that splits from the body, and finally back to his or her former self; 4. first as an incarnation or reincarnation, then finally as an enlightened immortal or a heavenly being; 5. as a ghost throughout the play.

5 The translation is Arthur Waley's (Waley 1987, p. 123).

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The Influence of Daoism on the Dramatization of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju

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Abstract: This study employs a collection of fresh resources of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju (Sichuan opera) to examine the influence of Daoism upon the dramatization of Chinese theatre. In contrast to Buddhism, it has long been supposed that Daoism has exerted only a minor influence on Chinese theatre. Despite some progress after the year 2000, the research into Daoism's influence on Chinese theatre is still in its infancy. Noting the gap in the literature, the study identifies that the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju has provided us with some exceptional insights into Daoism's influence on Chinese theatre. Since 2012, the successive publication of 24 Liaozhaixi scripts of Chuanju allows us to more fully enter the exploration. Reinforced by these fresh resources, the study summarizes the influence of Daoism on the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju into two typical adaptation approaches, "transplantation" and "improvement". By analyzing the two approaches, the study will manifest how Daoism has shaped the dramatization of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju and will employ these approaches to exemplify the confluence of religions and dramas in Chinese folk culture.

Keywords: *Liaozhai zhiyi*; Daoism; dramas; Sichuan

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1. Introduction

Liaozhaixi refers to the plays dramatized from the stories in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異) by Pu Songling (1640–1715).[1] *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (hereafter *Strange Tales*), a collection of almost 500 tales, is one of the most outstanding works of classical tales in Chinese literature history (Mair 2010, pp. 691–93). In Chinese theatre history, Liaozhaixi also ranks amongst the most popular cycle plays, along with Sanguoxi and Shuihuxi, which are historical plays, respectively, adapted from the two great classical Chinese novels of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義) and *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳). The first printed version of *Strange Tales* appeared in 1766, far later than the two aforementioned novels, but its dramatization happened quickly probably because of its high adaptability and popularity (Du 2003, pp. 6–9). Merely two years later in 1768, the earliest play adapted from *Strange Tales* appeared (Guan and Che 1983, p. 1). From then onwards, efforts to dramatize *Strange Tales* have witnessed rapid growth. To date, the number of scripts of Liaozhaixi in the Chuanju amount to more than 130, as well as no fewer than 40 in Jingju or Beijing Opera (Du 2003, p. 6; Zhu 1985, pp. 698–714). Moreover, the influence of Liaozhaixi is so broad that it can also be observed in roughly at least 150 types of traditional Chinese operas (Du 2003, pp. 69–71; Guan and Che 1983, p. 1).

On account of the great number of Liaozhaixi, its popularity, and the cultural interaction behind the dramatization in different areas, the research potential of Liaozhaixi should not be underestimated. However, the potential has not been fully explored for two reasons. The first is the several rounds of castigation of Liaozhaixi from 1963 to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Although almost all types of traditional theater had been banned and criticized during this period, the castigation of Liaozhaixi seems more dreadful because it is heavily loaded with supernatural and religious imagery (Du 2003, pp. 101–2). In 1963, the Ministry of Culture decided to ban all "ghost plays" from stages

(Greene 2019, p. 107), and Liaozhaixi is doubtlessly included. For instance, responding to the policy of the Ministry of Culture, the government of Sichuan province immediately banned 35 "ghost plays" in the same year, while 19 of those banned plays belong to Liaozhaixi (Du 2003, pp. 101–2). Due to the heavy and relentless castigation over this period, it took a quite long time before Liaozhaixi entered the public again and it consequently received little scholarly attention roughly until the 2000s. Besides, although the number of the documented Liaozhaixi is statistically large, very few of them have been published. Though some efforts have been made in this area since the 1980s (Guan and Che 1983), roughly only 20 scripts have been printed. Because of these two reasons, the great research potential of Liaozhaixi has not been fully explored.

Fortunately, the recent research into Liaozhaixi of Chuanju has offered us some notable improvements. The foremost one is a groundbreaking study by Jianhua Du (2003). This study not only elaborately examines the whole development of Liaozhaixi of Chuanju from its birth to today but also sheds light on several significant themes involving its origin, style, and popularity. Du's study saves us many preparatory jobs and sets a fixed starting point for subsequent studies. Furthermore, 24 genuine scripts of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, which are mainly finalized in the 19th century, have been published since 2012. These fresh materials enable us to fully explore the research possibilities of Liaozhaixi. After a meticulous investigation on them, the present study argues that these fresh materials provide us with new and exceptional insights into the influence of Daoism on the dramatization of Chinese theatre. More precisely, these new materials illustrate how Daoism has shaped the dramatization of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju. The insight is so exceptional because very few studies have shed light on this area. Developing this argument will broaden our understanding of the relation between Daoism and Chinese theatre.

2. The Relation between Daoism and Chinese Theatre

Speaking of the influence of religions upon Chinese theatre, Buddhism commonly ranks at the top and has gained the most academic attention. As *The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature* summarizes (Mair 2011, p. 168), the influence of Buddhism on Chinese theatre starts from the earliest stages of development and covers not only the content but also the form and conventions of Chinese theatre, such as role types, gestures, and structure. Many studies have also furthered this discussion. For instance, Victor H. Mair (1989) focuses on transformation texts of the Tang dynasty (618–907) to illustrate the Buddhist contribution to the development of Chinese theatre. Additionally, Baocheng Kang (2004) argues that Buddhism has shaped the form of Chinese theatre in different respects involving theatrical stages, characters, tunes, dialogues, script structures, and rituals.

In contrast, it has long been assumed that Daoism exerted only a minor influence on Chinese theatre, and some important studies in Daoism or Chinese theatre have even overlooked or refused to discuss this issue. For instance, as a foundational study in discussing the relation between religions and Chinese theatre, the study of Yingde Guo (1988) underscores the influence of Buddhism but totally ignores Daoism. The ignorance is not an isolated case and can be seen in some other studies too. For two other instances, Zhaoguang Ge (1987) has examined the relationship between Daoism and Chinese traditional literature, while notably, he has not included dramas in the main discussion but merely mentioned them. Likewise, Zhan Shichuang's study (Zhan 1992), which is believed to be the first comprehensive history of Daoist literature, thoroughly discusses Daoist tales, poems, and prose but barely argues anything about Daoist dramas. The consistent neglection reveals that the relation of Daoism and Chinese theatre has claimed little attention for a long period.

As time goes on, however, we can find some studies in this field. Overall, it has been argued that the influence of Daoism on Chinese theatre cannot be underestimated because of its vital role in Chinese cultural history (Zhan 1997, pp. 3–4). Specifically, more in-depth studies in the area have been published since 2000. For instance, Hanmin Wang (2007) examines several themes of Daoist dramas; and Yihan Tong (2009), retrospectively, examines

the origin and development of Daoist dramas. These works are commendable because they have provided us with a firm starting point in the field. Furthermore, there are some case studies concerning the influence of Daoism on dramas (Wang 2002; Xu 2005). Despite these, on the other hand, the field is still in its infancy because many essential themes in the field have not been examined. For instance, as Wang Guowei demonstrates (Wang 1984, p. 163), the essence of dramas is to narrate stories via music and dances. From Wang's perspective, the adaptation of tales for the theatrical production is a significant research issue in Chinese theatre. Concerning the given issue, the influence of Buddhism has been sufficiently discussed (Zhang 2011), but very few works have shed light upon Daoism.

However, reinforced by the new and exceptional insights derived from the fresh materials of the Liaozhaoxi of Chuanju, the present study would like to fill the research gap. At the outset, the great influence of Daoism on the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju is rooted in the local folklore of Sichuan. As one of the most important birthplaces of Daoism, Sichuan local folk culture has been profoundly influenced by Daoism (Kleeman 2016, pp. 1–51), which can be observed in stone inscriptions, music, and literature (Sichuan Sheng Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 1998, pp. 37–48). Likewise, Chuanju is also deeply imbued with Daoism. Among the approximate 4000 surviving scripts of Chuanju, no fewer than 600 of them are related to Daoism; and dramatists of Chuanju often employ Daoist tales to develop or adapt scripts (Sha 2009, pp. 23–25). Moreover, it has been assumed that the local conviction in Daoism has significantly influenced how the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju adapts the original stories (Du 2003, pp. 134–36). Those new resources now enable us to fully explore how Daoism has influenced the adaption of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju and broaden our understanding of Daoism's influence on Chinese theatre.

3. The Two Approaches: Transplantation and Improvement

At the outset, I would like to briefly clarify the methodology before the main discussion. As the study aims to examine the influence of Daoism in the dramatization of Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, the argument mainly rests on the comparison between the original tales and the adapted scripts. The comparison enables us to clearly recognize how Daoism has shaped the Liaozhaixi's adaption of the original tales.

Moreover, I do not want to reduce the forthcoming argument to an unsorted and simple insertion of some Daoist characters, plots and doctrines. Instead, to highlight how Daoism has shaped the dramatization of Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, the study has sorted the relevant resources and summarized the influence of Daoism into two typical adaptation approaches or manners: "transplantation" and "improvement". Before the main discussion, it is necessary to clarify what the two approaches mean in the study and why they are so important and could contribute to our understanding of the relation between Daoism and Chinese theatre.

Transplantation, in the present study, manifests an attempt at linking or integrating the storyline of the original tale with the beliefs and worships of some inserted Daoist immortals and mythologies. Technically, most scripts of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju have substantially preserved the storyline of the original tale. At the same time, because Chuanju has long been imbued with Daoism, some Daoist characters, most of whom are Daoist immortals, are transplanted into the stories in the adaptation. I term the insertion of Daoist immortals as "transplantation" instead merely "insertion" because the dramatization does not merely insert some Daoist immortals. It emphasizes the seamless incorporation of the belief and worship of these transplanted immortals into the storyline of the original tale. As will be discussed below, the transplantation makes the original stories and the inserted Daoist immortals and the worship of themselves inseparable. The other adaptation approach, improvement, is more straightforward and means that Daoist characters in the original tales, most of whom are Daoist priests, are commonly improved and even refined into flawless figures. As can be seen, the two adaption approaches are likely to be shaped by the local belief of Daoism in Sichuan.

Furthermore, the two approaches are fairly exceptional when it comes to the landscape of Chinese theatre, particularly concerning the period of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1911). For one thing, in Chinese theatre, apart from those plays adapted from Daoist tales, the insertion of Daoist characters in other themes of dramas is not uncommon though, while notably, these dramas more often employed Daoist immortals as a simple tool to convey the esteem of loyalty, filial piety, and richness (Wang 2007, pp. 45–96). Such a plain and unsophisticated insertion hardly makes a significant difference to the adapted story, nor does it reflect an adequate influence of Daoism upon dramatization. The transplantation of Daoist immortals derived from the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, in contrast, is so exceptional because it manifests a deliberate and sophisticated attempt at linking the storyline and Daoist beliefs and worship which will be unfolded in the forthcoming discussion. For another, in Chinese folk literature, the deconstruction and vilification of Daoism and Daoist priests are often observable probably due to the discouragement of Daoism since the establishment of the Qing Dynasty and other reasons (Wang 2007, pp. 45–96). In contrast, the consistent improvement of Daoism and Daoist priests derived from the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju is therefore fairly exceptional and notable. In summary, although it is less controversial to say that Buddhism outweighs Daoism in its influence upon Chinese theatre today, the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, however, offers an exceptional sample in that Daoism outweighs Buddhism. After clarifying what the two approaches are and why they are so exceptional, the following argument is also developed from the two approaches.

3.1. Transplantation Strategy

As far as available resources are concerned, the transplantation is most often observed in dealing with some controversial characters and plots of the original tales. As *Strange Tales* mainly takes shape from folk tales collected by Pu Songling, the origin of those stories is diverse and unrefined (Zhu 1985, pp. 578–79). Some characters in those stories, as a result, are morally controversial. For example, some visit brothels, and some encourage others to commit crimes. Although Chinese theatre is first and foremost a venue for entertainment, moral education becomes an increasingly significant aim of Chinese theatre after the 17th century (Zhang 2014, pp. 66–71). In this context, some of those characterizations are inappropriate for theatre. Therefore, those controversial characters and associated plots should be reconstructed in the dramatization, and the most common solution to this problem is to transplant Daoist characters to replace those controversial characters and, all the while, remove the controversial plots. As a result, the transplantation not only solves these moral contradictions but also seamlessly incorporates the transplanted Daoist characters and beliefs into the storyline. The present study chooses two scripts *Cutting off the Turtle's Tail* (*Zhan guiwei* 斬龜尾) (Du 2003, p. 295) and *The Matchmaker of a Finger* (*Yizhi mei* 一指媒) (Li 2013, vol. 4, pp. 129–76) to illustrate how the transplantation is carried out.

The script *Cutting off the Turtle's Tail* is adapted from the story *The Wife of Shen* (Shen Shi 申氏; Pu 1979, pp. 619–21), and the storyline of the original tale is briefly summarized below:

A man named Shen cannot make a living for his family, and his wife complains and urges him to make money. In a fit of pique, his wife asks him to rob for money. Shen refuses and attempts suicide out of shame, but Shen's dead father appears to save him. Shen's father suggests that Shen hide in a field for a robbery. Following his father's suggestion, Shen takes a club and hides in that field but finds a man already hiding there. Seeing the man climb the wall and enter the house, Shen conjectures that the man is a burglar and plans to rob the burglar later. After a while, on seeing the man jump out, Shen immediately clubs the burglar. Shen, however, finds that the "man" is a monstrous turtle and then punches it to death in panic. It turns out that the monstrous turtle usually impersonates a man and harasses the Kang family next to the field. As a result, Kang's family deems Shen a hero and gifts him a big sum of money.

Although a seemingly happy ending is provided in which the monstrous turtle is killed and Shen obtains some material returns, the story is somewhat morally controversial.

Above all, the story seems to convey that a malicious motive is likely to reach a good outcome. Additionally, the two characters, Shen and Shen's father, manifest no righteous or praiseworthy qualities but spiteful and illegal ideas. Although Shen accidentally kills the monstrous turtle and is thus recognized as a hero by the victims in the end, readers clearly know that his real and unspoken motive is to snatch the loot of the "burglar". Shen's father, moreover, is even more appalling because he encourages his son to commit robbery (Ren 2015, p. 1974). So observed, the two characters and the whole story are morally inappropriate for theatre.

To address the problem, the script *Cutting off the Turtle's Tail* has transplanted the Great Emperor Zhenwu (Zhenwu Dadi 真武大帝) (Anonymous 1990, pp. 33–37; Cook 2008, pp. 1266–67), a well-known immortal in Daoism, to replace Shen's father and reconstruct some controversial plots. In Daoist mythologies, the Great Emperor Zhenwu (hereafter Emperor Zhenwu) is commonly known as "The Heaven Lord of Sweeping Devils" (Dangmo Tianzun 蕩魔天尊) who frequently appears in combats against devils and monsters (Luan 2009, pp. 604–5). The first part of the script remains almost the same as the original tale, and the reconstruction starts from Shen's attempted suicide:

When Shen is just about to commit suicide, Emperor Zhenwu appears and saves him. Handing over Shen a magical sword, Emperor Zhenwu dispatches him to hide in a field to catch a burglar there. When Shen arrives there, he sees a man climbing a wall to break into a house. Soon after, Shen hears cries and shouts from the house and immediately realizes that the man must be the burglar. Seeing the man jumping out over the wall, Shen slashes him with the magical sword. However, Kang's family, the victim, at first captures Shen and believes him to be the monstrous turtle who usually harasses them. At this moment, Shen finds a turtle's tail on the ground and realizes that the "burglar" he had struck had to be the monstrous turtle. Kang's family then recognizes Shen as a hero and appreciates his help.

Comparing the script and the original story, we can see that the transplantation of Emperor Zhenwu has reconstructed the story and cleared away all controversial issues. In the first place, instead of encouraging Shen to commit robbery, Emperor Zhenwu hands Shen a magical sword and sends him to capture a burglar. The rearrangement redirects the theme of the original story, which is morally misleading as discussed before, into an event where an immortal comes to salvage someone honest but temporarily lost to return to the right track. Additionally, the rearrangement reshapes the subsequent plots and makes Shen a respectable hero. As seen in the script, saved and dispatched by Emperor Zhenwu, Shen abandons robbery but follows Emperor Zhenwu's suggestion to catch the burglar. The subsequent combat between Shen and the monstrous turtle, which is a robbery for a burglar's loot in the original tale, now also transforms into a righteous fight for a praiseworthy purpose. As such, this transplantation does not merely solve the moral controversies in the original story but also underscores Emperor Zhenwu's marvelous power and deep compassion for humans.

Regarding the transplantation, a more intriguing question arises as to why the script chooses Emperor Zhenwu instead of another immortal with the same duty and function. Although it has been argued that the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju has been deeply influenced by Daoism, Emperor Zhenwu is clearly not the only one among Daoist immortals who functions as a guardian and combats against devils. For instance, Zhong Kui 鍾馗 (Anonymous 1990, pp. 153–54) and Guan Yu 關羽 (Anonymous 1990, pp. 109–12; Haar 2008, pp. 454–55) are also known for subduing devils and monsters. Therefore, merely the function and duty of Emperor Zhenwu cannot satisfactorily explain why the script chooses him over others.

Concerning the question, I argue that the deeper reason for choosing Emperor Zhenwu is so that the storyline of the original tale could facilitate the worship and beliefs of Emperor Zhenwu. In the original story, the villain is a monstrous turtle, while an intriguing fact is that a monstrous turtle is also frequently observed in the worship of Emperor Zhenwu. Although the identity of the monstrous turtle in Daoism varies in different resources, it is often an evil monster subdued by Emperor Zhenwu (Luan 2009, p. 605). For instance,

according to *The Comprehensive Survey of Deities of Three Religions* (*Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* 三教源流搜神大全) (Anonymous 1990, p. 35), the monstrous turtle is an impersonation of a devil but is trodden and subdued by Emperor Zhenwu in a combat. Studying the cultural worship of Emperor Zhenwu, we can see that the monstrous turtle has become an indispensable symbol. This can be exemplified by the trodden turtle in some statues of Emperor Zhenwu. In doing so, the original story and the worship of Zhenwu could be connected by the monstrous turtle, and this is the reason for the adaption choosing Emperor Zhenwu. Discerning this could also help us understand other reconstructed plots in the script. For instance, the magical sword mentioned in the script can also be seen in the worship of Emperor Zhenwu, as Heaven has delivered a magical sword to Emperor Zhenwu as the weapon against devils (Anonymous 1990, p. 34). The appearance of the magical sword also illustrates an attempt at transplanting the worship of Emperor Zhenwu into the adapted story.

More importantly, if we switch our perspective from the Liaozhaixi to Daoism, the transplantation derived from the script could illustrate another picture. It can be also said that the transplantation successfully uses the worship of Emperor Zhenwu to facilitate the dramatization of the original tale in Chuanju. Seen from this perspective, the original tale *The Wife of Shen* has also been transformed into a new variation about how Emperor Zhenwu subdues the monstrous turtle and, therefore, can be used to strengthen the worship and beliefs of Emperor Zhenwu.

The transplantation approach can be further illustrated and evidenced by the script *The Matchmaker of a Finger*. The script not only transplants Lü Dongbin 吕洞賓 (Baldrian-Hussein 2008, pp. 712–15), one of the Eight Immortals in Daoism, to address some controversial plots but also uses the storyline to facilitate and develop the worship and beliefs of Lü Dongbin. The script is adapted from the story *Ruiyun* 瑞雲 (Pu 1979, pp. 601–3), which is summarized as follows.

Ruiyun is a prostitute famous for her sheer beauty and artistry. When the madam wants Ruiyun to start to serve brothel visitors, Ruiyun pleads that she wants to select the first guest by herself, and the madam agrees. Mr. He, a young but unwealthy man, admires Ruiyun and pays some money to meet Ruiyun. Ruiyun is delighted to see Mr. He and treats him kindly, but Mr. He refuses to spend the night with Ruiyun because he considers himself inferior. One day, a scholar visits the brothel and meets Ruiyun. Before leaving, the scholar taps Ruiyun's forehead with his finger. The spot that has been tapped immediately turns inky black, and Ruiyun's face thus becomes scary and ugly, so no guests come to see her again. Ruiyun is then forced to work as a maid and live a miserable life. When Mr. He hears this, he pays some money to set Ruiyun free from the brothel, and the two get married. A year later, Mr. He accidentally meets the scholar in an inn. The scholar asks whether Mr. He has heard of a famous prostitute named Ruiyun, and Mr. He narrates Ruiyun's experience and their marriage. The scholar is so pleased to hear this and tells Mr. He that he met Ruiyun before and used his magic to blacken Ruiyun's face to protect her. After knowing this, Mr. He asks him to undo his magic, and Ruiyun recovers her beauty.

In the story, the scholar seems to be a positive character who uses his magic to protect Ruiyun from being visited by other brothel guests. Yet, this character has been criticized by some commentators because of his meddling (Ren 2015, p. 1925). From the perspective of moral education through Chinese theatre, however, I consider the character open to question not for his meddling but for two other reasons. First, the scholar's help, most of all, is more of an accidental impulse than a result of his compassion. According to his narration, he had never thought of helping Ruiyun at first until he was shocked by her beauty in the brothel. Therefore, as a positive character, the scholar has not manifested adequate compassion. Second, the scholar's action appears heartless and inconsiderate about Ruiyun. As the caster of the magic spell, he clearly knows that his magic will make Ruiyun ugly and even scary, which consequently leads to Ruiyun's miserableness. If the scholar had attempted to help Ruiyun, he should have also considered when to break his magic spell to return Ruiyun to a normal life; otherwise, his magic could not have helped

her but ruined her. However, in the given context, we cannot see that the scholar has done anything for Ruiyun before meeting Mr. He, so it is likely that he had never thought about undoing his magic at all. If so, the scholar is truly unthoughtful because he never considers the negative consequence of his magic.

As discussed, the scholar seems to be a positive yet unsatisfactory character because of his ruthlessness and unemotionality. That is not to say that such a character should not be allowed in Chinese theatre; however, the character seems unusual and probably contradicts the audiences' common expectation of a helper. One may argue that, in fact, the scholar is a spirit or a magician because Mr. He and Ruiyun have conjectured this at the end of the story. If the conjecture was conclusive, the narration and inconsiderate behavior of the scholar can be regarded as tests for Mr. He. However, the original tale offers no additional clue to support the conjecture. It is therefore inconclusive to assume the scholar as a spirit or a magician merely relying on the hunch of Mr. He and Ruiyun, and we can see that none of the subsequent annotations have taken the conjecture as a solid reference (Ren 2015, p. 1925).

In the script, the character of the scholar undergoes a deep reconstruction. In the first place, the scholar is transformed into Lü Dongbin, one of the Eight Immortals in Daoism, who is far more warm-hearted and considerate in the adapted story of the script. In contrast to the scholar who accidentally helps Ruiyun, Lü Dongbin comes to help Ruiyun because of his compassion for Ruiyun. His first soliloquy in the script clearly demonstrates that he attempts to make Ruiyun meet Mr. He again. The soliloquy also introduces the fact that Lü Dongbin's strategy for helping Ruiyun is that he will use his magic to make Ruiyun ugly at first and then undo this when the time is ripe. As seen from the script, we can see Lü Dongbin has fully carried out this strategy. At first, he uses his magic to make Ruiyun ugly and then visits Mr. He's family to undo his magic after Mr. He and Ruiyun become a married couple. Additionally, the script has rewritten some plots to maintain the respectability of Lü Dongbin. In the original fiction, the scholar visits the brothel and then accidentally meets and helps Ruiyun there. Although numerous dramas in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) such as *Xie Tianxiang* 謝天香 (Li 2003, pp. 153–54) and *A Dream of Glorious Windows* (*Yunchuan meng* 雲窗夢) (Li 2003, pp. 74–75) deal with the concept of scholars visiting brothels, entering a brothel seems morally inappropriate at any rate. More importantly, when it comes to the Qing dynasty, plots concerning prostitutes and brothels become less popular due to the increasing recognition of loyalty and filial piety (Zhang 2014, pp. 66–71). As a script authored in the Qing dynasty, the script therefore discards the plot of visiting the brothel. In the script, when Lü Dongbin comes to save Ruiyun, Ruiyun happens to walk around the gate of the brothel, so Lü Dongbin can cast his magic without entering the brothel. This replacement also addresses the moral contradiction and maintains the respectability of Lü Dongbin.

This transplantation, the present study argues, also transplants Daoist beliefs into the storyline, as Ruiyun is a prostitute, and Lü Dongbin, appropriately, is the guardian angel for prostitutes in Daoism (Liu 2005, pp. 471–72). There are a few identical stories which show Lü Dongbin as the guardian of prostitutes in two primary sources that constitute the worship of Lü Dongbin: *The Biography of Patriarch Lü* (*Lüzu zhi* 呂祖志) and *The Complete Works of Patriarch Lü* (*Lüzu quanshu* 呂祖全書). Furthermore, the script also cites a poem attributed to Lü Dongbin of reality with a slight adaption:

> The internal elixir has been made, while I have not returned to Heaven but stayed in the human world to reveal others. The two heads of my shoulder pole are carrying the sun and moon, and I seclude myself in mountains and rivers with a gourd.[2]

The insertion of this poem is very significant because it clearly demonstrates the dramatist's attempts to firmly link the story with the worship of Lü Dongbin. This also reflects the influence of Daoism.

In brief, the script *The Matchmaker of a Finger* transplants Lü Dongbin to replace the character of the scholar who seems unsatisfactory and seamlessly integrates the story and

the worship of Lü Dongbin. As well, from the perspective of Daoism, the transplantation transforms the tale of *Ruiyun* into a variant describing how Lü Dongbin helps a prostitute, as shown in other stories in *The Biography of Patriarch Lü* and *The Complete Works of Patriarch Lü*.

Furthermore, the transplantation adaption is not merely observed in rewriting some controversial characters and plots but also in some other cases. Despite commonly being much simpler, the transplantations in these cases are clearly not random insertions of Daoist immortals but have considered the context of the storyline. For instance, a script named *Caocao Becomes a Dog* (*Caocao Biangou* 曹操變狗) (Du 2003, p. 280), which is adapted from the tale *Empress Zhen* (*Zhenhou* 甄后) (Pu 1979, pp. 420–22), has inserted the Perfected Person Huatuo (Huatuo Zhenren 華佗真人) into the adapted story.

In summary, the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju often transplants Daoist immortals into the adapted storyline to facilitate and develop the worship of the transplanted immortals and the indoctrination with Daoist beliefs. As a result, the transplantation seamlessly connects the original story with the worship of Daoist characters, and the consistent embellishment of Daoist characters derived from the transplantation clearly contributes to the advocacy of Daoism. This is more obvious when compared to Buddhist figures. The Liaozhaixi of Chuanju shows little interest in transplanting and embellishing Buddhist figures and beliefs (Du 2003, p. 136). Even worse, Buddhist monks sometimes appear as negative characters in the adaption. Two instances in point are the lascivious monk in *The Palace of Ten Lords* (*Shiwang dian* 十王殿) (Li 2012a, vol. 1, pp. 91–150) that adapted from *Judge Lu* (*Lupan* 陸判) (Pu 1979, pp. 58–61) and the villainous monk in *The Marriage of a Dull Son* (*Chi'er pei* 痴兒配) (Li 2012b, vol. 3, pp. 125–211) that adapted from *Xiaocui*小翠 (Pu 1979, pp. 428–33). The two scripts are also popular and well-received at local theater, but the negative characterization of the Buddhist monks sets a strong contrast to the positive Daoist characters. Such an arrangement also underscores the preference of Daoism in the Liaozhaixi of Sichuan.

3.2. Improvement Strategy

The improvement in the study means the elevation of existing Daoist characters in the original stories, most of whom are Daoist priests. As will be discussed below, the consistent improvement of Daoist priests is exceptional.

Daoist priests in *Strange Tales* are not always positive but fall into three types based on their moral standards: positive, neutral, and evil (Zhan 2017, pp. 59–68; Wu 1995, pp. 318–19). The triple classification can be more comprehensible in some instances. The Daoist priests in *Chang Ting* 長亭 (Pu 1979, pp. 577–81) and *Yang Dahong* 楊大洪 (Pu 1979, pp. 536–37) belong to the positive type because they fight against monsters or employ their magic to help civilians. The neutral Daoist priests generally play the role of an erudite consultant, or a mystifying illusionist exemplified by the two in *Yu De* 余德 (Pu 1979, pp. 187–88) and Daoist Priest Shan (*Shan Daoshi* 單道士) (Pu 1979, pp. 140–41). Besides, some evil Daoist priests reach their evil purposes at the expense of other people, such as the two in *A Female in Changzhi* (*Changzhi nüzi* 長治女子) (Pu 1979, pp. 282–84) and *Zhou Kechang* 周克昌 (Pu 1979, pp. 496–97). The triple classification demonstrates that Daoist priests in *Strange Tales* are not always positive.

However, when it comes to the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, according to available resources, very few evil Daoist priests have been observed, if any. After enumerating surviving materials, Du (2003, pp. 135–36) has demonstrated that the Daoist priests in the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju are always positive. Notably, here arises an intriguing issue. Since Daoist priests in Liaozhaixi are always positive, an issue that should be identified is whether the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju dramatizes only the stories containing positive Daoist priests or has elevated the Daoist priests in the original tales. After a meticulous examination, the present study discovers that the Daoist priests who are flawed or even evil in the original stories have witnessed an enhancement in the dramatization of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju. A fundamental reason behind the upgradation is probably the conviction in Daoism in Sichuan, a place where the Daoism originated. However, in Chinese literature

history, Daoist priests are often vilified as shown in *The Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) (Zhang 2009). Thus, the elevation of Daoist priests in Liaozhaixi of Chuanju seems exceptional and worth a deep examination. The present study also chooses two instances to illustrate how Daoist priests have been improved. The first one makes a positive but slightly flawed priest flawless, and the other one elevates an evil priest into an honorable one.

The first instance comes from the script *Drawing the Skin* (*Hua pi* 畫皮) (Li 2012a, vol. 1, pp. 37–90) that rests on the story with the same name in *Strange Tales* (Pu 1979, pp. 48–51). The Daoist priest in the original story is positive but slightly flawed, while the character has witnessed a remarkable enhancement in the script, and the slight flaw in his character is eliminated. This improvement exemplifies that the Daoist priests are always expected to be ideally positive and flawless under the influence of the local conviction in Daoism. Although the story is well-known, a brief introduction is still necessary:

A gentleman called Wang comes upon a homeless girl who claims to be an ill-treated concubine. Because of her attractiveness and his empathy for her, Wang agrees to let her stay in his studio. Although Wang's wife advises him to send the girl away, Wang does not relent. One day, at a marketplace, a Daoist priest warns Wang that he has been enveloped by an evil aura, but Wang deems it a scam and dismisses his counsel. When he reaches home, he discovers that the girl is a monster in painted human skin. Wang returns to the Daoist priest, pleading with the priest to save him. The priest agrees but is reluctant to take the monster's life, and thus offers Wang only a flywhisk to drive the monster away. Wang hangs the flywhisk outside his bedroom, but it has little effect, and the monster comes and rips out his heart. Knowing the tragic event from Wang's wife, the priest vows to subdue the monster and then decapitates it in combat. Later, the priest informs Wang's wife to visit a lunatic beggar to resurrect her husband. The beggar humiliates Wang's wife by coughing up phlegm and asking her to swallow it. To revive Wang, Wang's wife swallows it. Back home, the phlegm hardens and ascends from her stomach to her throat and eventually becomes a heart. She inserts the heart into Wang's gaping chest wound, and he revives.

In this story, we can clearly see that the Daoist priest is righteous and respectable because he helps Wang subdue the monster and informs Wang's wife how to revive Wang. However, the priest, as some commentators have noted, is at times unsatisfactory because his reluctance to save Wang and the powerlessness of his flywhisk are partly the causes of Wang's death (Ren 2015, pp. 123–24). The incompetence is likely to weaken the capability and respectability of the priest, which seems unacceptable to the local patrons of Daoism. Maintaining the storyline of the original story, the script subtly reconstructs some plots to seamlessly elevate the Daoist priest as below:

A Daoist priest, who meditates in Mountain Hua, has sensed that Wang is snared in a monster's vicious scheme and descended to help Wang. At a marketplace, the priest pretends to accidentally crash into Wang to strike up a conversation. The priest first warns that Wang is trapped by a monster, but Wang does not believe this. To make Wang realize his dangerous plight, the priest points out that the girl is a monster in disguise and helps Wang to debunk the deceitful self-description of the "girl", but Wang rebuffs the priest's advice again. However, Wang soon discovers the truth and returns to the priest for help. The priest unhesitatingly agrees to subdue the monster. The priest first hands over a flywhisk to Wang and starts some preparatory works (the script does not explain what those preparatory works are). However, before the priest starts the exhortation, Wang mistakenly supposes that this flywhisk is adequate to drive the monster away, and he immediately goes home without letting the priest know of his absence. On noting that Wang has left, the Daoist priest instantly pursues Wang to save him. Just before the priest reaches his house, Wang is murdered. The priest subsequently combats the monster and subdues it.

Compared to the original tale, I identify that the script makes three enhancements to the Daoist priest. The first lies in the priest's motive for helping Wang. The priest in the original story just discerns that Wang is trapped by an evil spirit when encountering Wang

in a marketplace, while the priest presented in the script is very different. Meditating by himself in Mountain Hua, the priest senses Wang is in jeopardy and immediately departs to save him. In contrast to the original priest, the priest in the script seems more capable because he could remotely sense the monster's viciousness. Additionally, the priest in the script seems so compassionate because he immediately departs to help Wang, while we do not see this with the priest in the original tale.

The second improvement lies in the conversation between the priest and Wang. In the original story, the Daoist priest only warns Wang against his dangerous situation but offers nothing to make Wang trust the warning, so it does not seem inexcusable that Wang takes his warning as a scam. In contrast, the Daoist priest in the script is far more thoughtful and considerate. In addition to a warning, the priest not only points out that the girl is a monster but also counsels Wang to understand why the self-description of the "girl" is untrustworthy.

The third one is the most significant because the priest's responsibility for Wang's death is exempted. The improvement appears when Wang comes to ask the priest for help. The priest in the original story is hesitant to subdue the monster and finally gives Wang only a flywhisk which is too powerless to drive the monster away, and Wang is consequently murdered. In stark contrast, the priest in the script at first shows no reluctance or mercy but unhesitatingly agrees to fight against the monster. Although the priest gives Wang a flywhisk too, it is clear that the flywhisk is not the only assistance offered by the priest. In this context, we can see the priest has determined to accompany Wang to combat the monster when some preparatory works are finished. Wang, however, overestimates the power of the flywhisk and rashly reaches home before the preparatory works are finished. On noting Wang's absence, the priest does not leave him alone but immediately runs after him to save his life. Although Wang is murdered at the end, his death partially results from his rashness or carelessness but has nothing to do with the priest.

While maintaining the storyline of the original tale, the three improvements have not only cleared away the priest's potential responsibility for Wang's death but also made the priest more thoughtful, considerate, and compassionate. The deliberation behind the seamless improvements also conveys the influence of Daoism that Daoist priests should be ideally positive and flawless.

The other instance of the improvement is *The Case of an Antique Zither* (*Guqin an* 古琴案) (Ni 1983, pp. 59–83), which is adapted from a story of *Deceits in Scam* (*Juzha* 局詐) (Pu 1979, pp. 442–46). In contrast to the improvement of a positive but flawed priest that we have identified in the preceding instance, the instance has elevated an evil priest into an honorable one. The original story recounts a scam planned by a Daoist priest:

A man named Li is a good player of the zither, and he has accidentally bought an antique zither and hidden it in secret. One day, the newly appointed magistrate named Cheng calls on Li, and the two become friends. A year later, Li visits Cheng's residence and notices a zither on a table. Both Li and Cheng play a piece on the zither. Li is ravished by Cheng's skills and asks Cheng to accept him as a pupil. The following year, Cheng teaches Li the art of the zither, but Li never discloses the antique zither. One night, Cheng visits Li and plays a rare music piece and tells Li that a fine old zither could make the music even better. On an impulse, Li takes out the zither and asks Cheng to replay the piece, and the music is sheer perfection. After this, Cheng tells Li that his wife is even more proficient in playing zither and invites Li to come to his house with the zither the next day if Li wants to enjoy a great performance. The next day, Li visits Cheng as Cheng's suggestion. Enjoying Cheng's wife's virtuoso performance, Li gets drunk owing to Cheng's overwhelming hospitality. When Li takes his leave, Cheng suggests that Li should come to take the zither the next day because Li is so drunk and the zither would probably be mugged on the way, and Li agrees. Arriving at Cheng's residence the next day, however, Li finds the house empty. After a few years, Li finally realizes that Cheng was not a magistrate but a Daoist priest.

Cheng's scam, which costs him three years, is well-designed and split into four steps. Cheng, at first, fakes an identity to approach Li. Next, Cheng makes Li know and admire his skills in a seeming accident. After worming himself into Li's confidence, Cheng plays a rare music piece to instigate Li to show off the zither. In the final step, Cheng persuades Li to bring the zither to his dwelling to enjoy his wife's performance and then urges Li to drink too much and take the zither away. In the story, Cheng is so thoughtful and patient, and the scam is so well-designed that Pu Songling and some commentators highly praised Cheng and Cheng's scam (Ren 2015, pp. 1454–55).

However, when recontextualized into the cultural context of Chuanju, which has been deeply imbued with Daoism, this evil Daoist priest seems inconsistent and has to be reshaped, regardless of how glorious he and his scam were believed to be. In the script, *The Case of an Antique Zither*, the priest has been reshaped into a positive one. Before discussing how the priest has been elevated, this script itself deserves a further discussion because it is not a traditional play but a modern version authored by Ni Guozhen (1929–2010) in the 1980s. In contrast to the aforementioned three instances that substantially preserve the main storyline of the original tales, the adaption presented in the script is far more thorough because the dramatist reshapes the original story into a detective story (Du 2003, pp. 268–69). On the other hand, although the adapted storyline of the script has been largely reconstructed, the script clearly comes from the story *Deceits in Scam* (Du 2003, p. 272). It is therefore too risky to completely separate the adapted story from the original one, so the study regards the Daoist priest in the script as one adapted from the original tale. The outline of the adapted story in the script can be summarized as below:

A female musician named Yaqin has an old and precious zither, and her family keeps the lute in secret. Zhao, Yaqin's cousin, is a maid of a prince who is fond of playing zither. To please the prince, Zhao visits Yaqin and persuades her to present the zither to the prince. At the same time, a Daoist priest, who is an old friend of Yaqin's family, also visits her for alms. Sensing Zhao's malicious intention after a brief chat, the Daoist priest intimates Yaqin and asks her to secretly deliver the zither to him in the name of alms. Yaqin does this and then places an ordinary zither in the room to confuse Zhao. At midnight, Zhao murders a maid and takes the ordinary zither away. He also shifts the blame onto an innocent relative of Yaqin. After a thorough investigation, the magistrate of the prefecture debunks Zhao's conspiracy and jails him. The zither is then returned to Yaqin.

In contrast to the original story, the script narrates a story with a happy ending in which the villain is punished. Zhao comes to snatch the zither to please the prince even at the cost of murdering a maid. Yaqin does not succumb to Zhao's coercion and successfully keeps the zither. The magistrate, who is impartial and insightful, discovers the truth and imprisons Zhao. Though not a central character, the Daoist priest is a positive character who is thoughtful and honest. Above all, after a brief conversation with Zhao, the Daoist priest astutely discerns Zhao's nasty intention and advises Yaqin to relocate the zither in secret. Moreover, the priest conceals the zither safely until it is returned to Yaqin.

In summary, exemplified in the two preceding instances are the enhancements of the characters of Daoist priests in the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju. Meanwhile, we can see the enhancement is also a result of the local belief of Daoism in Sichuan. The consistent improvement of Daoist priests is fairly exceptional in Chinese folk literature, and also manifests the influence of Daoism on theatre.

4. Conclusions

The two approaches, transplantation and improvement, have illustrated how Daoism has shaped the adaptation of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju. Because of the conviction in Daoism in Sichuan, dramatists of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju usually transplant Daoist immortals to adapt the original tales. For the same reason, it has been argued that Daoist priests are always positive in the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, and many improvements in these characters can be observed in the dramatization. Furthermore, the influence of Daoism upon Liaozhaixi can be more fully understood under the argument of the "eventual

confluence" between religions and dramas in Chinese folk culture (Zhang 1993, pp. 1–10). The term of eventual confluence means that religions and dramas will unite and become inseparable as the final stage of their development because dramas have to rely on religions for survival, and religions also see dramas as an advocacy tool to attract more believers. As regards the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, we can clearly find an eventual confluence of the dramas and religions. For the dramatists of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, an indispensable consideration is how to make their works more popular and acceptable in a new cultural environment. Daoism is probably an excellent tool for the dramatists because it not only frequently appears in *Strange Tales* but also has suffused the folk culture and belief in Sichuan. Therefore, incorporating Daoism in the dramatization is likely to enhance the acceptability and popularity of the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju. In turn, the plots concerning Daoist characters derived from these scripts also embellish Daoism and advocate Daoist ideologies.

Furthermore, the study does not merely argue the influence of Daoism upon the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju but also illustrates the great academic potential of Liaozhaixi, which needs to be further examined. Because of the exclusive conviction in Daoism, the Liaozhaixi of Chuanju, as this study has argued, provides an exceptional insight to broaden the argument of the influence of Daoism upon Chinese theatre. In the same vein, it can be expected that the Liaozhaixi of other operas or other areas could provide some exclusive and insightful research potential as well. Since Liaozhaixi, as discussed at the beginning of the study, spans no fewer than 150 types of traditional Chinese operas, depending on the great number, the research space is also promising. As time goes on, more scripts of Liaozhaoxi could become available to us, and more discoveries can be expected there.

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Notes

[1] The study chooses *Liaozhai zhiyi* published in 1979 by Shanghai guji chubanshe as the primary source, and the base text of the edition is the manuscript of the Studio of Forging Snow (Zhuxuezhai 鑄雪齋). Completed in 1751, this manuscript believed to be the most comprehensive one among the several early versions and has been commonly adopted as a basic reference by modern studies (Zhang 1993, pp. 51–63).

[2] The original version of the poem is "還丹功滿未朝天, 且向人間度有緣. 拄杖兩頭擔日月, 葫蘆一個隱山川" (Peng 2008, p. 9681), and the adapted version derived from the script is "煉丹功滿遂升天, 再向人間度有緣. 拄杖兩頭擔日月, 葫蘆一個隱山川" (Li 2013, vol. 4, p. 157).

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Article

On the Differences between Han Rhapsodies and Han Paintings in Their Portrayal of the Queen Mother of the West and Their Religious Significance

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Abstract: This paper argues that there exist two Queen Mothers of the West (Xiwangmu) in the Han era (206 BC–AD 220): one worshipped as a goddess of longevity and immortality by people from the upper class; the other worshipped by the ordinary people as a seemingly omnipotent deity with divine power over both the immortal world and the mortal world. This argument is based on a thorough comparative investigation of the surviving corpus of Han rhapsodies (*fu*) and Han paintings, the two major genres of art that give form to her cult in the Han period.

Keywords: the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu); Han rhapsody (*fu*); Han paintings; Hantomb stone reliefs; the Wuliang Shrine

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1. Introduction

The Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) played a significant part in the history of Chinese art because its two major art forms, the Han rhapsodies (*fu* 賦), and Han paintings that have come down largely in the form of Han tomb stones reliefs, were not only extremely sophisticated but also influenced the development of literature and fine art in the following dynasties. In the past, most academic investigations of the two forms were concerned with their role in literary and artistic development. If viewed from the perspective of religious development, the Han rhapsodies and Han paintings also made great contributions in that they provide mutually verifiable evidence for the cult of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母, hereafter the Queen Mother), the arguably most popular deity in the Han era.

Han rhapsodies are a form of literary art, whereas Han stone reliefs are a form of visual art. There are not many cross-disciplinary comparisons between the two, and comparisons of them with respect to religious development are even less. This paper aims to fill the gap by examining the Han rhapsodies and Han stone carvings that feature the Queen Mother. In the process of demonstrating the images of the two Queen Mothers, we cross-use textual and graphic materials from the Han era. The texts are from handed-down official classics and modern anthologies of Han literature, and the images come from archaeological excavations and reports. Based on the differences in the appearance frequency and depiction of the Queen Mother in the two forms of Han art, this paper proposes a hypothesis: there were two Queen Mothers in the Han pantheon, one worshipped by people from the upper class as a goddess of longevity and immortality, and the other worshipped by the ordinary people as a seemingly omnipotent deity with divine power over both the immortal world and the mortal world as portrayed in Han tomb art.

2. Literary and Visual Representations of Queen Mother

The Han dynasty witnessed the rise of belief in the Queen Mother and also witnessed the flourishing of the rhapsody. Unfortunately, many Han rhapsodies failed to survive,

which is also the case with other genres of Han art and literature. As recorded in the *Quan Hanfu* 全漢賦 (complete Han rhapsodies), one hundred-odd Han rhapsodies are extant entirely in a readable form (Fei et al. 1993), but a close reading of this complete collection shows surprisingly that only four of them mention the Queen Mother, describing her as a goddess of longevity and immortality. A survey of the archaeological excavation reports published in China in the past seventy years shows that 195 of them are concerned with paintings on Han tomb walls, stones, and bricks. A further examination of the 195 reports shows that fifty-two of them report findings of stone carvings of the Queen Mother. These data strongly suggest that the goddess did not attract so much attention from Han *fu* poets and their audiences as from Han artists, or more exactly, Han artisans and their patrons, although her cult spread throughout the country during the Han period (Yoshikawa 2011, p. 1120). This phenomenon does not escape scholarly attention. In her book on *Picturing Heaven in Early China*, for example, Lillian Lan-Ying Tseng (2011, p. 359) notes, "The belief in ascending to Heaven and the cult of the Mother Queen of the West are rarely recorded in the extant Han texts; it is mostly through images that we gain understanding".

A question arises as to why the Queen Mother is much less represented in Han rhapsodies than in Han pictorial stones. There is no definite answer, but if the question itself is analyzed, a plausible explanation for this phenomenon might be that there existed two Queen Mothers in the Han dynasty, one worshipped as a goddess of longevity and immortality by people from the upper class, for whom and by whom the rhapsody was composed, and the other worshipped by the ordinary people as a seemingly omnipotent deity with divine power over both the immortal world and the mortal world, for whom and by whom the stone carvings were etched. The reasons are as follows.

3. Han Rhapsodies and Han Paintings That Feature the Queen Mother

The Queen Mother was a major deity in the Han pantheon, who features in both rhapsodies and paintings, the two most important art forms of the time. After combing through specific works, the authors of this article have found that there are several differences between the depictions of the Queen Mother in rhapsodies and paintings. First of all, there is a huge contrast in quantity. It should be noted that in the spread of her cult in the Han dynasty, the King Father of the East (Dongwanggong 東王公, hereafter the King Father) appears as her consort. Thus, the following quantitative statistics of the Queen Mother also include mentions about the King Father.

3.1. Han Rhapsodies That Feature the Queen Mother

There are a significant number of Han rhapsodies and they have been sorted and compiled through the following dynasties. The Complete Han Rhapsodies compiled and edited by the contemporary scholars Fei Zhengang, Hu Shuangbao, and Zong Minghua is currently the most comprehensive collection of Han rhapsodies and is the basic reference text used in this paper (Fei et al. 1993). Included in the collection are a total of 293 rhapsodies by eighty-three writers from the Han dynasty, of which one hundred are extant in their entirety and twenty-four known only by title, with the rest being fragments. Among the extant rhapsodies, four have literary depictions of the Queen Mother. Specifically, they are: "Daren fu" 大人賦 (Rhapsody on the Great Man) by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179–118 BC) and "Ganquan fu" 甘泉賦 (Rhapsody on the Sweet Springs) by Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–AD 18) from the Western Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 24); and "Lanhai fu" 覽海賦 (Rhapsody on Viewing the Sea) by Ban Biao 班彪 (AD 3–AD 54) and "Sixuan fu" 思玄賦 (Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery) by Zhang Heng 張衡 (AD 78–AD 138) from the Eastern Han dynasty (AD 25–220) (Fei et al. 1993, pp. 91–96, 230–37, 252, 393–411).

After examining the portrayals of the Queen Mother in the extant Han rhapsodies, several conclusions can be drawn. First, literary works that involve the Queen Mother are only found in the Han grand rhapsody (dafu 大賦). The Han rhapsody has two sub-genres: "the grand rhapsody" and "the minor rhapsody" (xiaofu 小賦), which is also called the "minor lyrical rhapsody" (shuqing xiaofu 抒情小賦) because of its short form and lyrical

content. Sima Xiangru, Yang Xiong, and Zhang Heng were all famous dafu masters, and the four works by them mentioned above all belong to the dafu type. Second, the Queen Mother was a theme for the rhapsody throughout the Han dynasty. There were two periods in the Han dynasty, the Western Han and the Eastern Han. The Han rhapsody flourished throughout the Han dynasty. Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong were Western Han fu writers, while Ban Biao and Zhang Heng were Eastern Han fu writers. They all wrote about the theme of the Queen Mother. Third, the Han fu writers were aware of but not highly enthusiastic about the cult of the Queen Mother. Among the hundred-odd legible Han fu works, only four of them feature the Queen Mother as a mythological figure. The length of relevant passages is limited, some passages only amounting to no more than a line.

3.2. The Image of the Queen Mother in Han Paintings

Thanks to recent archaeological achievements, the amount of Han paintings that we can study has skyrocketed. In total, 195 archaeological reports on Han paintings have been published thus far, sixty-six of which have reported findings of images featuring the Queen Mother, and fifty-two of which are about carved stone reliefs (Table 1). Judging from the data provided by the archaeological reports, we have the following views:

Table 1. Quantity distribution of Han stone reliefs that feature the Queen Mother and the King Father.

Type	Images That Feature the Queen Mother and/or the King Father	Images of the Queen Mother Only	Images That Feature Both the Queen Mother and the King Father	Images of the King Father Only
Quantity	52	31	19	2

First, the images of the Queen Mother are mainly to be found in Han stone reliefs. There are three types of Han paintings: Han stone carvings, Han brick carvings, and Han tomb murals. Han stones reliefs account for about 90% of all images of the Queen Mother. Second, the images of the Queen Mother are concentrated in specific locations. Stone reliefs were common everywhere in the Han Dynasty, but the images of the Queen Mother were mainly found in the Bashu area (including present-day Sichuan and Chongqing, where a total of twenty-one images of the Queen Mother have been found), the Central Plains (including Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan, where a total of twenty-seven images of the Queen have been found), Shandong and surrounding areas (including present-day Shandong, the northern part of Jiangsu, and Anhui. A total of eight images of the Queen Mother have been found in the area). These places are also the same areas where large numbers of other Han dynasty stone reliefs have been excavated. Third, the Han artists of stone carvings showed high enthusiasm for the Queen Mother. In the archaeological reports on the Han stone reliefs, one third report finding images of the Queen Mother, indicating that she was highly valued and welcomed at the time. Moreover, the types of depictions were varied. As for composition, there are three types: the Queen Mother in a singular composition, a combination of the Queen Mother and her consort, the King Father, and the single portrait of the King Father, making up a rich collection of her images (see Table 1 below).[1]

As shown in the above table, there are thirty-one pictorial stones bearing the image of the Queen Mother only, whereas only two pictorial stones known to us bear the image of the King Father only. This shows that the Queen Mother was a deity that was of paramount importance in the human pursuit of longevity in the Han period, as she was in pre-Han China. The appearance of the King Father as the consort of the Queen Mother indicates that the male deity began to be entrusted with the divine responsibility of assisting the Queen Mother in delivering mortal beings into immortality.

Through a statistical analysis of the Han rhapsodies and Han paintings, we find that there is a significant difference in number between the two. There are four texts that feature the Queen Mother in the surviving corpus of the Han grand rhapsody, whereas there are

fifty-two images of her in the Han stone reliefs. Works of both art forms feature the Queen Mother, albeit with a large gap in the quantity and manner of dissemination.

4. Class Discrepancy in Works That Feature the Queen Mother

The significant difference in number between the Han rhapsodies and Han stone reliefs that feature the Queen Mother reflects the difference in attitudes towards the cult of the Queen Mother and the difference in belief in the goddess among different groups of people during the Han period.

4.1. The Class Difference of the Artist Groups

4.1.1. The Writers of Han Grand Rhapsody

Writers of the grand rhapsody were mostly, if not all, members of the upper class, evidence of which can be found in official historical records. First, fu writers always composed their works by the emperor's side all year round. Ban Gu 班固 (AD 32–92) depicted the grand occasion on which writers composed rhapsodies in the preface to his "Liangdu fu" 兩都賦序 (Rhapsody on the Two Capitals):

> The ministers whose duties relied on language skills, such as Sima Xiangru, Yuqiu Shouwang 虞丘壽王, Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, Mei Gao 枚皐, Wang Bao 王褒, and Liu Xiang 劉向, spent entire days composing articles and often offered them to the emperor. The officials who held important positions in the imperial court, such as Ni Kuan 倪寬 as *yushi dafu* 禦史大夫 (Censor-in-chief), Kong Zang 孔臧 as *taichang* 太常 (Minister of Ceremonies), Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 as *taizhong dafu* 太中大夫 (Palace Counsellor), Liu De 劉德 as *zongzheng* 宗正 (Minister of the Imperial Clan), and Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 as the *taizi taifu* 太子太傅 (the Grand Mentor), and so on, all took time to write *fu*. (Fei et al. 1993, p. 311)

Those that Ban Gu alludes to were all representative masters of Han dafu. The view that they were yanyu shicong zhi chen 言語侍從之臣 (the ministers whose duties relied on language) is generally recognized in academic circles. Second, fu writers have their biographies in the official historical records. The four fu writers who wrote about the Queen Mother have their independent biographies in the official history. This is a clear indicator that can show that fu writers were aristocrats who enjoyed a relatively high social status (see Table 2).

Table 2. Biographies of Han fu masters in dynastic histories.

Name of the *Fu* Writer	*Fu* Works that Feature the Queen Mother	Source(s)
Sima Qian	"Daren fu" 大人賦 (Rhapsody on the Great Man)	*Shiji* (117.2999–3057) *Hanshu* (57A.2529–2577) *Hanshu* (57B.2577–2613)
Yang Xiong	"Ganquan fu" 甘泉賦 (Rhapsody on the Sweet Springs)	*Hanshu* (87.3513–3557) *Hanshu* (87.3557–3589)
Ban Biao	"Lanhai fu" 覽海賦 (Rhapsody on Viewing the Sea)	*Hanshu* (100.4167–4235) *Hou Hanshu* (49.1323–1330)
Zhang Heng	"Sixuan fu" 思玄賦 (Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery)	*Hou Hanshu* (59.1897–1951)

4.1.2. The Artists of Han Stone Reliefs

Judging from the available materials, the artists of Han stone reliefs were generally commoners. There are very few records about artists in the official historical records of the Han dynasty. Zheng Wuchang 鄭午昌 (1894–1952) provides statistics on this aspect in *Zhongguo huaxue quanshi* 中國畫學全史 (A Complete History of Chinese Painting): "We have traceable records of six artists of the Western Han dynasty, namely Mao Yanshou 毛延

壽, Chen Chang 陳敞, Liu Bai 劉白, Gong Kuan 龔寬, Yang Wang 陽望, and Fan Yu 樊育; and six artists of the Eastern Han dynasty: Zhang Heng 張衡, Cai Yong 蔡邕, Zhao Qi 趙岐, Liu Bao 劉褒, Liu Dan 劉旦, and Yang Lu 楊魯" (Zheng 2009, p. 30). Among these recorded painters, none were stone relief artists, and this indicates the humble background of stone carvers and their lower social status compared with painters in the Han period. The only information available to us about Han stone carvers is contained in the captions (bangti 榜題) to some stone carvings excavated from Han tombs. They are very brief and contain no biographical information about their creators except their name and occupation, which are given in a very informal or vague way as compared with the biographical accounts of painters in the official histories of the Han dynasty. Based on a close examination of the captions, Wang Jianzhong 王建中 offers a list of Han stone carvers in *Handai huaxiang shi tonglun* 漢代畫像石通論 (A General Discussion of Han Dynasty Stone Carvings). He writes: "To sum up, the known stone relief engravers and painters of the Han Dynasty were: Song Weijia 宋威甲, Song Wenjia 宋文甲, [surname unknown] Yi 口宜, Zhang Boyan 張伯嚴, Wei Zheng 衛政, Wang Shu 王叔, etc." (Wang 2001, p. 483).

Below is a table (Table 3) drawn on the basis of the materials provided by Wang Jianzhong about Han stone engravers known to us through the captions.

Table 3. List of captions with information about stone engravers.

Name	Source	Content	Time
Song Weijia 宋威甲, Song Wenjia 宋文甲	Han Tomb at Yangguan Monastery 楊官寺, Nanyang 南陽 County, Henan Province	Song Weijia, and Song Wenjia	Late Western Han
[Surname unknown] Yi 口宜	Han Tomb at Yangguan Monastery, Nanyang County, Henan province	Yi from Lu, a stonemason	17th year of the Yongyuan reign (105AD)
Zhang Boyan 張伯口（嚴）	Stone Stele with the Portrait of Wang Xiaoyuan 王孝淵 in Xipu 犀浦, Pixian 郫縣 County, Sichuan Province	Zhang Boyan, a craftsman	3rd year of the Yongjian reign (128 AD)
Wei Zheng 衛政	Inscriptions on The Wu Liang 武梁 Shrine, Jiaxiang 嘉祥 County, Shandong Province	Wei Zheng, a good craftsman	Mid- to Late-Eastern Han
Wang Shu王叔, Wang Jian 王堅, etc.	Caption to the Portrait of Anguo 安國 in Songshan 宋山 Village, Mantong 滿硐 Township, Jiaxiang County, Shandong Province	Famous craftsmen such as Wang Shu, Wang Jian, etc.	3rd year of the Yongshou reign (157 AD)

4.1.3. Class Analysis of the Artist Groups

From the historical materials we known that the Han writers of the grand rhapsodies were a small group of literati elites at the service of the emperors. They enjoyed high social status, and even had their biographies written into the official histories. In sharp contrast are Han stone carvers, about whom no mention whatsoever is found in the dynastic histories. They were commoners—a group of nobodies with no official records about them. In alignment with the difference in social statues between the poets of grand rhapsodies and the engravers of stone reliefs is the difference in the level of esteem accorded to the two forms of art, the rhapsody and stone carving in the Han period. Generally speaking, the former was a high form of art created by and for members of the upper class, and the latter a lower form of art created by and for commoners.

Han China was a strictly hierarchical society, in which there was little social interaction between members of different classes, and social mobility for commoners was limited. The theme and subject matter, motifs, images, symbols, and stories presented in these two forms of art, we may safely say, reflect the distinctive tastes, beliefs, imaginations, views,

and needs of their creators and particularly of their audiences/patrons. In his study of Han stone carved tombs, Chen Li (2018, p. 91) correctly points out, "Though not necessarily from their own experiences, it is within the society that people generally acquire and locate their memories. The carved images and their combinations of objects preserve a social context in which the story of the tomb occupants and general trends are placed.".

4.2. The Social Classes of the Patrons

4.2.1. Patrons of Han Dafu

The patrons of Han dafu were aristocrats, and relevant materials in this area abound. First, the supreme ruler of the Han Dynasty empowered fu writers. Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 漢武帝 (r. 156 BC–87 BC) once issued an edict to invite fu writers, including the father and son of the Mei 枚 family, to serve at court. Mei Cheng 枚乘 (ca. 201 BC–ca. 138 BC) received the invitation, though he, unfortunately, died on the way. In Hanshu 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty), Ban Gu offers a detailed record of this:

> When the Han dynasty quelled the Rebellion of the Seven States, Mei Cheng gained popularity for his famous *fu*, the "Seven Stimuli" (*Qifa* 七發), written during this time. Emperor Jing 景帝 (r. 157 BC–141 BC) soon appointed Cheng as the Chief Commandant (*duwei* 都尉) of Hongnong County. Cheng had long been a distinguished guest of the dynasty. He frequently traveled with young talents of that time; getting what he wanted, doing what he liked, he was not particularly fond of being a government official. Eventually, Cheng resigned from his post on the excuse of illness. Cheng then traveled to Liang (Han's vassal state). Liang's resident intellectuals were good at *fu* and writing and Cheng excelled amongst them. After the death of King Xiao 孝王 (r. 168 BC–144 BC), Cheng traveled back to Huaiyin 淮陰. The newly enthroned Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141 BC–87 BC) was an admirer of Cheng since he was a prince. By this time Cheng had reached old age. Emperor Wu invited Cheng to serve the court, sending him a special carriage with tires covered by palm leaves, which stabilized the carriage better than the typical ones of that time. Cheng died on the way. (*Hanshu*, 50.2365)

After that, Mei Cheng's son, Mei Gao 枚皐 (b. 153 BC), entered the imperial court and became a prolific fu writer. Hanshu records:

> When Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty felt emotional, he often let Mei Gao write *fu*. Mei Gao wrote very quickly; he finished the works almost as soon as he received the imperial orders. Therefore, he was very prolific. (*Hanshu*, 20.2367)

There is evidence that aristocrats and nobles from various places enjoyed and patronized fu writing. According to Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian):

> It happened that Emperor Jing was not fond of literature. When King Xiao of Liang came to visit the court, scholars who were good at lobbying also came along, including Zou Yang 鄒陽 from Qi State, Mei Cheng 枚乘 from Huaiyin, and Zhuang Ji 莊忌 from Wu. Sima Xiangru took to liking them instantly and soon resigned from his position with an excuse of illness, and then he lived in Liang state as a sojourner. King Xiao of Liang asked Sima Xiangru to reside with the lobbyists, so Xiangru was able to stay with them for several years. He thus composed "Zixu fu" 子虛賦 (Rhapsody on Sir Vacuous). (*Shiji*, 117.2999)

Third, many fu masters showed great enthusiasm and dedication in making fu for the emperor. Ge Hong's 葛洪 (AD 283–AD 363) Xijing Zaji 西京雜記 (Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital) records how fu masters composed fu in this way:

> When Sima Xiangru wrote "Shanglin fu" 上林賦 (Rhapsody on the Imperial Park) and "Zixu fu", his heart was relaxed and unconstrained, no longer connected with the outside things. He used all things between heaven as the material of his poetry; his spirit traveled between ancient and modern times. He would appear

> listless and dreary at one point, but uplifted at another and continued to compose *fu*. A couple of hundred days later, the *fu* was completed.

Similar descriptions are also found in Huan Tan's 桓谭 (AD 23–56) Xinlun 新論 (New Treatises):

> Yang Xiong also said that Zhao Zhaoyi 趙昭儀, a concubine of Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 33 BC–7 BC) of the Han dynasty, was favored by the emperor. Every time he went up to the Ganquan Palace, Emperor Cheng would order Yang Xiong to compose a *fu*. This exhausted Yang Xiong. He had to rack his brains every time to complete the *fu*. Finally, he was feeling tired and had to rest in bed, during which time he dreamed that his five internal organs were exposed on the ground, and he gathered them back into his body with his hands. When he woke up, he was inflicted with asthma and often could not breathe properly. He fell ill for a year afterward. From this, we can know that it overtaxes one's nerves and spirit to make *fu*.

From these quotes, we can see that the fu writers sacrificed a lot for their work, sometimes to the point of serious illness. Fu experts might be restricted in subject matter and emotional expression when they made fu for the emperor. However, the Han Dynasty was a centralized system, and the Han empire was overwhelmingly powerful (even abroad). Therefore, when fu masters composed dafu, a genre generally aimed at celebrating the power of the empire, they could still maintain emotional consistency with the emperor.

4.2.2. Patrons of the Han Stone Reliefs

The materials for investigating the patrons of Han stone reliefs mainly come from archaeological excavations, which show that the tomb occupants and the tomb construction participants did not have a high social status.

First, inscribed texts from the Han tombs decorated with stone reliefs show that these are low-class burial sites. Yang Aiguo, an expert on Han stone reliefs, conducts a statistical analysis of the stone reliefs used as decorations for Han tombs, concluding:

> The owner of the highest status among the Han stone tombs was a vassal king, and up till now among all excavated Han tombs there is only one such instance, which is the tomb of Liu Chong 劉崇 (r. AD 120–124), King Qing of Chen of the Eastern Han dynasty. Liu Chong's tomb is of a very large scale, but there are not many stone reliefs inside the tomb, with most of them only being used at the entrance gate to the tomb. The original location of another stone relief fragment unearthed in the tomb cannot be determined. It can be seen that the stone reliefs were not the foremost body of the decoration of tombs of the princes and kings of the Han dynasty. The use of stone reliefs as tread stones for the toilet in the murals for the stone cliff-side tomb in Shiyuan, Yongcheng, Henan, may also be proof. (Yang 2006, p. 177)

Below is a table (Table 4) drawn on the basis of the statistical data provided by Aiguo Yang (2006, pp. 183–88).

Table 4. Statistics on the identity of occupants of Han tombs decorated with stone reliefs.

Tomb Occupants	Princes	Prefects	Lower Ranking Officials	Commoners
Number of tombs with stone reliefs	1	5	18	35

As shown above in the table, 90% of the tomb occupants were either junior-ranking officials or commoners, and commoners alone account for 60%, which strongly indicates that the occupants of the Han tombs decorated with stone reliefs basically belonged to the commoner class.

Second, the general lack of jade grave goods indicates that the Han tombs decorated with stone carvings were not of high class. Burial jade was widespread amongst high-grade Han crypts. Burial jade is commonly seen in higher-class Han tombs, but is rarely found in Han tombs with pictorial stones. In addition, according to Lin Xu (2006, p. 138):

> Up till now, among the unearthed 102 tombs of Han vassal kings, more than 1800 pieces of jade artifacts have been found. . . . Among the unearthed jade artifacts, more than 1400 pieces have been unearthed from the tombs of high-ranking vassal kings (*houwang* 侯王), accounting for 79% of the total. Another 380 pieces of jade were unearthed from the tombs of lower-ranking adjunct marquesses (*liehou* 列侯), accounting for 21% of the total. (Xu 2006, p. 136)

No stone reliefs have been found in these elite Han tombs where many jade artifacts were unearthed. All the known archaeological evidence points to the fact that Han tombs with stone reliefs are generally not of high class. More such evidence comes from an Eastern Han tomb in Xingyuan 杏園, Yanshi 偃師, Henan Province. This is a high-class tomb decorated with murals, but the inner walls of the chamber were built inside the tomb chamber, about which there is an archaeological record, which reads:

> The top arch is supported with two kinds of fan-shaped bricks. The four walls have two layers, inner and outer, and the outer layer is covered by 'one and a half bricks' (two horizontal bricks and one vertical brick in each layer). The walls are coated with 0.5 cm thick white plaster, and on the walls, images of carriage processions are drawn. The inner layer clings to the mural with strips of bricks. The top-down single-layer bricks are staggered and flat, stopping at a height of 2.2 m, enclosing the mural completely. Hence, the inner walls were undoubtedly added later. The reason behind it may have been that the content of the murals on the outer layer did not match the actual identity and official position of the tomb owner, so it was sealed. (Huang and Guo 1996, p. 169)

The inner walls of the tomb are more than 2 m high, completely concealing the outer mural that depicts the aristocratic life. This indicates that the occupant of the tomb attempted to cover up the fact that his social status was not high. Of course, the construction of tombs decorated with stone reliefs was relatively expensive, so their occupants/owners may have been wealthy commoners.

4.2.3. Class Analysis of the Patrons

Han grand rhapsodies or dafu were generally popular among members of the upper class and were liked and systematically supported by the supreme rulers, whereas Han pictorial stones were mainly popular among commoners and their use for tomb decoration was systematically restricted by the ruling class. Therefore, Han grand rhapsodies were a creative art of the upper class, and Han pictorial stones were that of commoners.

4.3. The Significance of the Class Analysis of Han Rhapsodies and Han Pictorial Stones

The Han dynasty was the first dynasty in China to have perfected centralized power. An outstanding feature of centralized power is the emphasis on hierarchy. Due to the implementation, maintenance, and operation of the hierarchy, artistic creation was bound to be greatly influenced. When we analyze the texts and images related to the cult of the Queen Mother, it is essential to consider the influence of class and systematic factors.

Han dafu was an art form of the aristocracy. Because of the support of the supreme ruler, fu writers had great zeal for creation and a good environment. Han dafu works are lengthy and contain very detailed descriptions of various social phenomena within the Han Empire. That being said, there is a lack of portrayal of the image of the Queen Mother, although there are many descriptions of gods and deities. "Rhapsody on King Gong of Lu's Palace of Numinous Light" (Lulingguang dian fu 魯靈光殿賦), for example, offers a vivid account of various deities and spirits, such as Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa 女媧, and so on (Fei et al. 1993, pp. 527–30). The reason behind the lack of depictions of the

Queen Mother is complicated. The scholar-official class had a relatively indifferent attitude towards belief in the Queen Mother. Suzanne Cahill pays attention to this particular literary occurrence and tries to put it into its historical context. She believes that the worship of Queen Mother could not enter the mainstream social stratum, probably because "[t]he accounts in the Book of Han [Hanshu] suggests that historians interpreted her cult as an abnormal occurrence that corresponded to heavenly patterns and as an ominous portent for the royal house" (Cahill 1993, p. 21).

Contrary to this, images of the Queen Mother were widespread amongst the Han stone reliefs of the commoner class. They came not only in huge numbers, but also in various types, including portrait and profiles, base, and no base, and various depictions of the celestial and real world. These phenomena all illustrate the enthusiasm of the common people about the cult of the Queen Mother.

4.4. Special Comparison between Han Fu and Other Literary Works

Why do we select from among the literary genres of the Han dynasty the rhapsody for a discussion here about the cult of the Queen Mother? The reason is that the Han rhapsody is the most representative and influential genre of literature that enjoys an unrivalled status in Han dynasty literature.

Recorded in the "Epitomes of Poetry and Rhapsody" (shifu lue 詩賦略) of the History of the Han Dynasty are seventy-four fu writers in the Western Han dynasty who produced a total of 941 pieces of work (Hanshu 30. 1747–1753), but only about 100 of them have survived, and many of them are incomplete. Can these surviving works explain the attitude of the Han literati towards the Queen? To this question, our answer is affirmative.

In his study of the evolution of the Xiwangmu narrative in early China, Du Wenping provides statistics on the occurrence of the Queen Mother in the literature of the Han dynasty. Below is a table (Table 5) drawn on the basis of the research materials provided by Wenping Du (2014, pp. 162–73).

Table 5. Quantitative statistics on the occurrence of Xiwangmu narrative in the literary works of the Han dynasty.

Genre	Book Title	Occurrence Number	Total
Historical Works	*Origins of Things* (*Shiben* 世本)	1	8
	The Great Commentary to the Book of Documents (*Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳)	2	
	Shiji	2	
	Hanshu	3	
Masters' Philosophical Works	*New Writings* (*Xinshu* 新書)	1	5
	Huainanzi 淮南子	1	
	Records of Rites by Dai the Elder (*Dadai liji* 大戴禮記)	1	
	Discourses Weighed in the Balance (*Lunheng* 論衡)	1	
	The Numinous Constitution of the Universe (*Lingiian* 靈憲)	1	
Philological Studies	*Approaching Correct Meanings* (*Erya* 爾雅)	1	1
Han Rhapsodies	"Rhapsody on the Great Man"	1	4
	"Rhapsody on the Sweet Springs"	1	
	"Rhapsody on Viewing the Sea"	1	
	"Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery"	1	

The statistics only cover the stories of the Queen Mother composed by the author of the literary work from the Han dynasty with those quoted from other sources excluded. The table suggests that Han literati, similar to other groups of the upper class, did not seem to show much enthusiasm for the Queen Mother, either. In most cases, the Queen Mother appears only once. The highest frequency of appearance occurs in the History of the Han Dynasty, which mentions the goddess three times. As with the aforementioned four Han grand rhapsodies, the description of the Queen Mother in these works is in general short and simple.

5. The Differences in Functions of the Queen Mother in Han Rhapsodies and Han Paintings

Han rhapsodies and Han paintings came from two different social classes. Understandably, the artists had distinctive perceptions of the Queen Mother. In Han grand rhapsodies and Han stone reliefs, the Queen Mother had different functions.

5.1. The Queen Mother in the World of Longevity and Immortality in Han Grand Rhaposodies

There is nothing but four paragraphs featuring the Queen Mother in Han rhapsodies. These passages fall into two categories: the description of the Queen Mother's living environment, and comments on her.

5.1.1. Passages That Describe the Queen Mother's Living Environment

Ban Biao's "Rhapsody on Viewing the Sea" describe the living environment of the Queen Mother as follows:

> The immortals Chisongzi 赤松子 and Wang Ziqiao 王子喬 sat in the east wing while the Queen Mother sat in the west wing. They asked Han Zhong 韓眾 and Qi Bo 岐伯 to tell and collate the books read by deities. They hoped to be able to make friends with them and be enlightened therein, so as to travel far away from the mortal plane and roam afar. (Fei et al. 1993, p. 252)

> [I] met the Queen Mother at Yintai 銀臺 (the moon) and ate the celestial food *yuzhi* 玉芝 (jade mushroom). She smiled and was delighted, complaining that I was a bit too late. Having brought the fairy maiden (attending the immortals) from Taihua Mountain along with her, she also summoned the Luoshui goddess Mi fei 宓妃 (Concubine Mi). They were both so beautiful and captivating, with their charming eyes and fine and delicate eyebrows. (Fei et al. 1993, p. 396)

5.1.2. Materials That Comment on the Queen Mother

Sima Xiangru's "Rhapsody on the Great Man" and Yang Xiong's "Rhapsody on the Sweet Springs" have comments on the Queen Mother, which are as follows:

> Having wandered and soared in the Yinshan Mountains, I only got to see the Queen Mother with my own eyes today. . . . Gray-haired with a *sheng* 勝 headdress, the Queen Mother lived in a cave. Fortunately, there was a three-legged bird as her messenger. If to become immortal, one had to live forever like her, it is not joyful at all. (Fei et al. 1993, p. 92)

> [When Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 33 BC–7 BC) of Han] thought of the Queen Mother, he happily went to celebrate her birthday and avoided the fairy maidens, Jade Lady and Concubine Mi. They thus had no chance to look at him with their bright eyes, or show him their slender eyebrows. Emperor Cheng mastered the essence of the subtle and strong Way and received the counsel of the gods. (Fei et al. 1993, p. 172)

5.1.3. Discussion of the Function of the Queen Mother in Han Grand Rhapsodies

In the descriptions of the living environment of the Queen Mother, the *fu* writers are consistent with each other. All are full of praises, wistfulness, and yearning when they talk

of the Queen Mother's dwelling place where many ancient sages reside, surrounded by exotic flowers and rare herbs. When commenting on the Queen Mother, the writers fall into two categories. Sima Xiangru raises doubts, while Yang Xiong continues to admire the Queen Mother's living environment. This is how Sima Xiangru expresses these doubts: living in a cave far away from the world, with gray hair and wearing rough clothes—what is the point of being immortal after all?

However, the *fu* writers recognized the identity of the Queen Mother, that is, she was treated as a god who mastered (the function of) longevity and immortality. The *fu* writers described a paradise of immortality and an illusory path to it, which was symbolized by the Queen Mother. In Han *dafu*, the Queen Mother was a god of longevity and immortality.

5.2. The Queen Mother Who Combines the Immortal World with the Mortal World in Han Stone Reliefs

The number of Han stone reliefs that feature the Queen Mother is very large. All the distribution areas of the Han stone reliefs have a large number of such images. This is in sharp contrast to the few paragraphs in Han *dafu*.

5.2.1. The Regional Distribution of the Images of the Queen Mother

Based on the archaeological findings, Han stone carvings of the Queen Mother are usually classified into four categories according to their regions:

> Based on existing archaeological results about images of the Queen Mother, the Han Dynasty stone reliefs are divided into (1) Jiangsu, Shandong, Henan, and Anhui Districts; (2) central and southern Henan Districts; (3) northern Shaanxi District; and (4) Sichuan District. First, in the Jiangsu, Shandong, Henan, and Anhui Districts, the images of the Queen Mother were mostly found in Shandong Province, but some were also found in Jiangsu Province. Most images of the Queen Mother are frontal, with her hands arched together, sitting on her knees. According to the presence or absence of a base, they can be divided into two types: BI [frontal image on a pedestal] and BII [frontal image without a supporting pedestal]. Second, in the Central and Southern Henan Districts, the characteristics of the Queen Mother images can be summarized as: a flowery jade hairdress (*sheng* 勝) worn on the head, holding objects in her hands, sitting on the mountains or a pedestal. Those Queen Mother images fall into two groups: AI [profile on a pedestal] and AII [profile without a supporting pedestal], considering her different sitting postures: one being a three-quarter profile, and the other a regular profile. Third, in the northern Shaanxi District, the basic feature of the Queen Mother images is that she sits on her knees with *sheng* hairdress worn on her head facing the front. These images can also be divided into two types, BI and BII, according to whether they have bases or pedestals. Fourth, in the Sichuan District, the images of the Queen Mother unearthed have obvious local characteristics: the dragon-tiger throne seen in this area's images are rarely seen in other districts. (Cong 2008, pp. 1200–22)

Among the existing remains of the stone reliefs of the Han dynasty, although variations do occur as found in all the sites, such as the presence or the lack of pedestals, and frontal versus profiled images, the Queen Mother is always at the center of the entire picture. All elements of immortality exist around her, thus gaining their iconic significance. Since such a composition with the Queen Mother in the center is highly consistent in different sites, it can be argued that her central deity status was already established at the time. Professor Wu Hung also paid attention to the phenomenon of the Queen Mother as a central deity. He believes that the emergence of the "central deity," and the henceforth establishment of the visual focus and the composition arrangement of the primary and secondary images "was an important breakthrough in the development of the image of heaven in the Han dynasty" (Wu 2005, pp. 255–56).

5.2.2. The Distribution of Subject Types of the Images of the Queen Mother

If the types of the materials about the Queen Mother indicate that her deity status had been established, what kinds of imageries were covered in depictions of such a deity? Nanyang city in Henan Province is the major site for Han Dynasty stone reliefs, images excavated from which are representative of the development of Han stone carvings. Nanyang han huaxiangshi 南陽漢畫像石 (Han Dynasty Stone Reliefs in Nanyang) compiled by Wang Rulin 王儒林 and Li Chenguang 李陳廣 classified the subject matters of Han dynasty stone carvings in Nanyang, and it is now recognized in academic circles. The details are as follows:

> Daily life: including chariot procession, feasting, lecturing, field hunting, pavilion construction, arsenal(s), *Liubo* 六博 [ancient Chinese board game], cockfighting, and hunting with hounds. These are addressed to a variety of local magistrates, and servants. (2) Ancient myths: including Fuxi and Nüwa from the Chinese creation mythology, the Queen Mother, the King Father, Hou Yi 後羿 Shooting Ten Suns, Lady Chang'e's 嫦娥 Flying to the Moon, etc. (3) Historical tales: including Killing Three Generals with Two Peaches, Hongmen Feast (鴻門宴 the banquet where Liu Bang 劉邦 escaped attempted murder by his rival Xiang Yu 項羽), Fan Sui 範睢 receiving the robe, Nie Zheng 聶政 taking his own life, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (First Emperor of Qin) dispatching a thousand men to search for the Nine Tripod Cauldrons lost in the Si River. (4) Astronomical images: the sun and the moon, the sun and the moon harmoniously hanging together in the sky, sun and moon glowing together, constellations such as the Black Dragon 蒼龍, the White Tiger 白虎, Beidou 北斗 (the Big Dipper), Gouchen 勾陳 (the North Star), and so on. (5) *yuewu baixi* 樂舞百戲 ("hundred operas," or ancient acrobatics, music and dance performances in general): various dances including drum and dance, *changxiuwu* 長袖舞 (long sleeve dance), *qipanwu* 七盤舞 (seven-tray dance), etc.; *chongxia* 沖狹 (ancient aerobatics, jumping through a grass ring studded with knives), *feijian tiaowan* 飛劍跳丸 (flying sword and juggling), *nonghu* 弄壺 (balancing a pot on an arm), *tuhuo* 吐火 (spitting fire), *juedixi* 角抵戲 (sports and aerobatics such as wrestling, ancient pod lifting, illusion magic, etc.). (Wang and Li 1989, p. 8)

Among the five major themes, three are real-life themes, namely, daily life, historical tales, and *yuewu baixi*. Two are related to deities, namely ancient myths and astronomical images. Such a distribution of themes shows that Queen-Mother-themed images cover both real life and eternal life and longevity. This is a very important phenomenon, which means that the Queen Mother assumed other functions in addition to bestowing longevity and immortality.

5.2.3. A Discussion of the Functions of the Queen Mother in Han Dynasty Stone Reliefs

In the archaeological findings of the stone reliefs of the Han dynasty, the image of the Queen Mother has different features from that in the grand rhapsody.

Han tomb stone carvings of the Queen Mother show that the goddess has acquired the status of a supreme deity. For example, in earlier Han stone reliefs, portraits of the Queen Mother were profiles, but later and more popular images of the Queen Mother were frontal views. This is very important because all the great gods were shown with frontal images, which was an indicator of their divine status. Along with this, the Queen Mother was centralized in all compositions, positioned either in the middle or at the top. This shows that the Queen Mother had obtained the status of a supreme deity with the ability to fulfill the various wishes of people. In regard to the relationship between the frontal portraits of the Queen Mother and the status of her as a supreme deity, Wu Hung thus writes:

> Sitting on the summit of Kunlun or a dragon-tiger throne, she is portrayed frontally as a solemn image of majesty, ignoring the surrounding crowds and staring at the viewer beyond the picture. The viewer's sight is guided to her image in the center, to be confronted directly by the goddess. (Wu 2010, p. 56)

The images of the Queen Mother cover all daily life scenes. In the iconographic narrative of Han stone reliefs, there are many such daily life scenes. These include banquets, kitchen scenes, travels, sacrifices, wars, hunting, and reproduction. Having such wide scopes of description illustrates the Han people's imagination of living in the other world after gaining immortality. It also shows that the Queen Mother had the ability to cover all scenes of life, and her divinity made her capable of replicating this life in the other world.

5.3. Hierarchical Order and Functional Role as Seen in the Hierarchy of Han Pantheon

The hierarchy of the Han pantheon can reflect the social stratification of the time. The renowned British Sinologist, Lu Weiyi (aka Michael Loewe) notes:

> There also exists the idea about the class of deities. In the *Huainanzi*, we find the two deities acting as representatives of the emperor were on duty throughout the night by walking arm in arm. Many other passages also show that both deities and ghosts are subordinate to the hierarchical order under the emperor. A second century author even differentiated a series of deities corresponding to the hierarchy of the human world. Thus, some deities were prescribed to be worshiped by emperors or nobles, others were said to be in the charge of wizards, and still others were the objects to be prayed, aspired and awe-stricken of lesser mortals. (Lu 2009, p. 31)

Clearly, the spirit world is a hierarchical society as is the human world in human imagination. Accordingly, there are higher deities and lower deities, who are worshipped by people of the upper class and people of lower classes, respectively, as observed by Fuller (1988) in his insightful study of the Hindu pantheon and hierarchical society in India. The same can be said of the cult of the Queen Mother in Han times, when there existed two Queen Mothers, one worshiped by the upper class and the other by the lower classes, as indicated in the difference in the depictions of the goddess in the Han rhapsody—an high form of art, and in the Han stone relief—an lower form of art.

Of course, apart from the hierarchical disparities, there are also differences in their social and theological function. Muchou Poo (1998, p. 120) notes:

> We cannot say that all the religious objects or activities in the official religious sacrifice system are not referred to as the folk beliefs. The religion of the Han Dynasty may be characterized by the entanglement between the official religious system and folk beliefs. This can be regarded as a continuation of the development of ancient Chinese religious beliefs since the pre-Qin era, that is, the cosmology of basically sharing the same religions between the upper and lower societies without any fundamental conflicts, and there are only some differences in application.

We agree with Poo's view on the interrelation between official religions and folk beliefs and judgment, and particularly his view on the existence of "some differences in application", which feature prominently in the cult of the Queen Mother in the Han era, where the same Queen Mother is entrusted with two different yet interrelated responsibilities: to rule over the immortal world as a patron deity of the upper society, and to rule over both the immortal world and the mortal world as a patron deity of the commoners' society.

In summary, the Queen Mother in the Han grand rhapsodies revolves around the immortal world which has a beautiful environment, a path to follow, and an evaluation after successful arrival at it; this is a narrative that is full of mystery, with the Queen Mother as the goddess of longevity and immortality. The Queen Mother in the Han stone reliefs is also centered on this theme, but many real-world scenes are added in addition to the immortal world, and the narrative is full of realistic style and flavor. Here, the Queen

Mother is the goddess of longevity and immortality, but she also makes her power felt in real life as a supreme ruler. As a consequence, she confronts an abundance of social problems that exist in real life. How would she solve them then? The answer is also provided in Han stone reliefs.

6. Special Significance of the Sage-King Images in the Wu Liang Shrine

Among the remains of the Han Dynasty stone reliefs, the Wu Liang 武梁 Shrine is world-famous, and relevant research findings are already very rich. However, from the perspective of conducting comparative studies between Han *fu* and Han paintings, many pieces of important information have been overlooked. For example, the "Sage-Kings Image" (*gu diwang tu* 古帝王圖) or Wu Liang Shrine III (Stone Chamber No. 3) can show that the Queen Mother has the function of ruling both the real world and the world of longevity and immortality.

There are eleven mythical emperors in Wu Liang Shrine III, and thus the image of the relief is also known as the "Sage-Kings Image". Through the relationship between the Queen Mother and the ancient emperors, this stone portrait completely describes how the Queen Mother rules both the real and the immortal worlds. From these contents, we can see how the two worlds overlap. Hence, we can be inspired to look for mutual evidence from the official history, and at the same time confirm that the Han stone relief tombs were owned by the civilian class. Therefore, the "Sage-Kings Image" can be regarded as a paradigm for the cult of the Queen Mother among commoners in the Han dynasty. Of course, this involves the issue of folk beliefs as well (Figure 1).

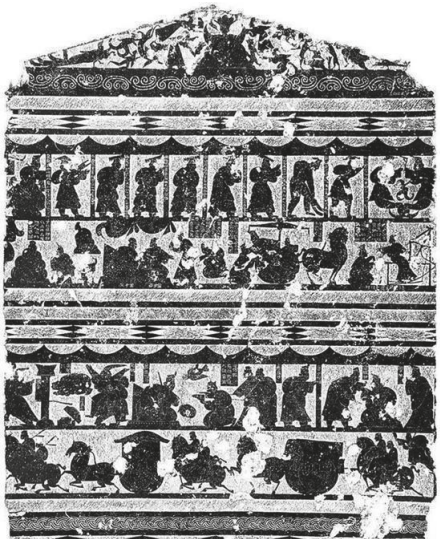

Figure 1. Wu Liang Shrine III (Portrait on the west wall of the Wu Liang Shrine), Jiaxiang County, Shan-dong Province, the first year of Emperor Heng's reign (Yuanjia reign era), Han dynasty (AD 151). Retrieved from: Jiang Yingju, ed. *Complete Collection of Chinese Stone Reliefs*, Vol. 1, *Shandong Han Stone Reliefs*, Jinan: Shandong Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000, p. 29.

6.1. Description of How the Two Worlds Overlap

The name the Wu Liang Shrine is the abbreviation of Jiaxiang Wu Family shrines. It was unearthed in the north of Wudishan Village, Jiaxiang County, Shandong Province. It dates back to the first year of Emperor Heng's reign (Yuanjia reign era) of the Eastern Han dynasty (151 AD) and is a typical work created in the heyday of the cult of the Queen Mother. Among the stone portraits in the Wu Liang Shrine, the most eye-catching is the

"Sage Kings Image". This stone portrait is carved on the west wall of Wu Liang Shrine. The archaeological report describes it as follows:

Carvings on the west wall of the Wu Liang Shrine: The original number of the stone is Wu Liang Shrine III. The upper part of this stone has a sharp arch. The image is divided into five layers from top to bottom with friezes or straight bars that are decorated with curling moire patterns, double diamond patterns, connected arc patterns, and so on. In the arch of the first layer, the Queen Mother sits in the middle, flanked by supernatural creatures and servants such as feathered deities, the moon rabbit, the three-legged toad (transformation of Chang'e), and a human-headed bird. On the second layer, pictures of creation mythology figures Fuxi and Nüwa, as well as ancient emperors are engraved, including Zhurong 祝融 (god of fire), Shennong 神農 (second of the mythical emperors), Huangdi 黃帝 (or the "Yellow Emperor", third of ancient China's mythological emperors), Zhuanxu 顓頊 (or Gaoyang, grandson of the "Yellow Emperor"), Emperor Ku 帝嚳 (or Gaoxin 高辛, one of the Five Emperors, a descendant of the Yellow Emperor, the "White Emperor"), Emperor Yao 帝堯 (second son to Emperor Ku), Emperor Shun 帝舜 (the last of the Five Emperors), Xia Yu 夏禹 (or Yu the Great 大禹, legendary king in ancient China who established the Xia dynasty), and Xia Jie 夏桀 (or Jie of Xia, last ruler of the Xia dynasty), along with their titles from right to left. On the third layer, from the right, there are the tales of four filial sons, with their titles as well: mother of Zengzi throwing away the shuttle after hearing rumors (*Zeng mu tou zhu*), Min Ziqian losing control of the whip and the carriage while driving, hermit Laolaizi finding ways to entertain his parents, and Ding Lan making woodcarvings of his parents. On the fourth layer, starting from the right side are the famous assassin stories including Cao Zi coercing Duke Huan of Qi to return the land to Lu, Zhuan Zhu killing King Liao in a party with a dagger hidden in a fish, Jing Ke's attempted assassination of King Zheng of Qin, all with titles. The fifth layer paints a line of chariots' procession to the left (Jiang 2000, p. 16).

In "Wu Liang Shrine III", two worlds are depicted. The first layer is the world of longevity and immortality that the Queen Mother resides in, and the four layers below are the real world. Although the immortal world has only one layer, while the real world has four, the Queen Mother is located at the top, thus creating a visual effect of her dominating everything from above. The idea is that the Queen Mother can guide the owner of the tomb from the real world to longevity and immortality. It is a deliberate arrangement to elevate her within the picture. The composition of the Queen Mother being high up above everything is also common in other Han stone reliefs. However, there are eleven mythical emperors below the Queen Mother, a phenomenon that also demands our attention.

These eleven mythological emperors held an extremely lofty position in the real world of the Han Dynasty. In addition to being worshipped and respected, they also assumed many specific social governance functions. For example, Fuxi and Nüwa nurtured the human species, and the Yellow Emperor assumed the role of ancestor god. These functions were not directly related to the daily life of the owner of the ancestral hall, but they had a clear logical relationship with the governance of society. If the Queen Mother bore the same function of society governance, then the composition of her being above the mythical emperors was reasonable. Under the emperors, there are also pictures of filial sons, stories of the Warring States period, and pictures of chariot procession, etc., all of which were major events in the real world and hence can also be placed under the scope of social governance.

Scholars have noticed this phenomenon of the Queen Mother residing in two worlds. Professor Wu Hung believes that the images of the Queen Mother, the King Father, and their immortal planes are "iconic," while the parts below the celestial land adopt an "episodic" composition. He, therefore, claims that the two compositional methods "imply two different ways of creating and seeing works of art" (Wu 1989, p. 134). Especially with the elevation of the Queen Mother's religious significance, her established divine status "necessitated a new iconic image to represent such a deity . . . The appearance of this art form reflects a development toward a purely devotional image (that culminates in later Buddhist art during the Northern and Southern dynasties)" (Wu 1989, p. 141). Professor Wu analyzes

the two worlds of the Queen Mother from the "iconic" and "episodic" compositional methods, a method which is not completely consistent with our common understanding of the dichotomy of the real world versus the world of longevity and immortality, but it can remind us of the importance of this dichotomy.

In essence, the image of Queen Mother is placed above those of eleven mythological or legendary rulers is of symbolic meaning, indicating the social and theological function of the Queen Mother as a supreme ruler over mortal beings. This theme does not escape the attention of Michael Loewe or Weiyi Lu (2009, p. 31), who argues:

> The image elucidates this theme in two ways. First of all, the Queen Mother of the West usually wears a unique crown as a necessary attribute. This crown can be interpreted as a symbol of her power to weave the web of the universe, symbolizing the power of perpetuating the human life. Second, the theme of Yin and Yang is often presented in other ways: either as a description or as a symbol.

Loewe's associating "weaving the web of the universe" with "perpetuating the human life" is in agreement with our view that the Queen Mother is entrusted with two different yet interrelated divine responsibilities, that is, to rule over both the immortal world and the mortal world.

6.2. The Mutual Evidence in Official Historical Records

There are materials in the official historical records of the Han dynasty that can serve as powerful circumstantial evidence for the Queen Mother's role or function in social governance. The *History of the Han Dynasty*, for example, records an incident that involved hundreds and thousands of famine victims known as the Queen Mother Incident in its "Aidi ji" 哀帝紀 (Annals of Emperor Ai), "Tianwen zhi" 天文誌 (Treatise on Celestial Patterns), and "Wuxing zhi" 五行誌 (Treatise on the Five Phases), respectively. Below is the description of the incident given in the "Treatise on the Five Phases":

> In the first month of the fourth year of Jianping (3 BC), during the reign of the Emperor Ai of the Han dynasty, people fled in panic, holding a stick of dried-up wood or hemp stalk in their hands, and passing it to one another, which is called "passing edict sticks" (*xing zhaochou* 行詔籌). Thousands of people ran across each other along the road. Some walked barefoot with scattered hair, some destroyed the official pass at night, some went over the wall, and some took carriages or rode on horseback, changing horses at the relay station for fresh ones to continue their journey. It was only after passing through twenty-six vassal states did they arrive at the capital. In the summer of that year, people in the capital gathered in the alleys, streets and squares, and they set up gaming tools and sang and danced to worship the Queen Mother of the West. Then there came a word, saying: "The Queen Mother of the West tells the people that those who carry this amulet shall not die. Those who don't believe what I have said, just look under your door hinge and you will find white hair.". The incident did not stop until autumn. (*Hanshu*, 27.1476)

The Queen Mother Incident recorded in the *History of the Han Dynasty* occurred in the late Western Han era and involved thousands of people. From the *History of the Han Dynasty*, we know that this incident was not only large in scale, lasting in time, but also very influential. In the incident, the Queen Mother's role to solve social problems is highlighted, especially in the religious experience of "those who carry this amulet shall not die (*busi* 不死)". The message is clear that those who believed in the Queen Mother and obeyed her orders would survive the draught and famine. Here, the Queen Mother is portrayed as a savior who has the divine power to deliver people from a severe social crisis caused by natural disasters. This kind of power goes beyond helping people achieve longevity and immortality, thus adding solving the social problem of starvation to the divine role of the Queen Mother. Therefore, the cult of the Queen Mother had both functions of helping to achieve longevity and immortality as well as solving social problems.

The ruling class also acknowledged that the Queen Mother could solve social problems. The *Hanshu* records that Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9 BC–AD 23), who was in power in the late Western Han dynasty, once issued a decree, "Da Gao" 大誥 (Great Announcement), hoping to obtain the blessing of the Queen Mother:

> The Grand Empress Dowager (Empress Xiaoyuan) was with the blessing of the holy land of Shalu 沙鹿 in Yuancheng 元城, as well as the auspicious sign from the deity who represented the *yin* essence and fertility. Consort of Emperor Han Yuan, she gave birth to Emperor Han Cheng. Thus, she was able to show the harmony of the Han family, and also received the blessings and auspicious signs from the Queen Mother, to protect the emperor's clan, stabilize the long-standing and influential families, and continue their lineage to inherit the feats of the Han family to dominate the world. (*Hanshu*, 84:54:3432)

However, Wang Mang's knowledge came after the Queen Mother Incident and had a clear political purpose. *The Hanshu* records one of his edicts as follows:

> During the reign of Emperor Ai of the Han dynasty, rumors about the miracle of Queen Mother's book of immortality were prevalent among the people. Therefore, people worshiped *Xiwangmu* and prayed to her for a peaceful year. This is a sign that the Grand Empress Dowager will become the mother of all generations. How dare I disobey the destiny of heaven! Therefore, I deliberately chose an auspicious day to personally lead the royal family, ministers, and celebrated scholars to present the seal of the empress dowager respectfully to show to the world that I have complied with the will of heaven. (*Hanshu*, 98:68:4033)

Wang Mang held sacrificial activities for the Queen Mother, with the purpose of using her cult to whip up public opinion for himself in order to usurp the power of the Han dynasty. Wang Mang's recognition of the Queen Mother occurred after the Queen Mother Incident. He took advantage of the disaster. He was influenced by the Queen Mother Incident of the civilian class.

In a nutshell, the materials in official historical materials recorded the Queen Mother Incident, which occurred in the civilian class and also had an impact on the ruling class. Therefore, we can make a more comprehensive description of the cult of the Queen Mother. The Queen Mother was not only a god of immortality and longevity but also a god who had the function in social governance.

6.3. Properties of Commoners' Class Characteristic of Han Tombs with Stone Reliefs

Regarding the class attributes of the owners of the Wu Liang Shrine, Wu (1989, pp. 26–27) once sorted out biographical information of the owners of the shrine:

> Wu Ban 武斑 died in 145 at the age of 25. Before his death, he served as a chief clerk to a protector-general of the Dunhuang District.
>
> Wu Ban's father, Wu Kaiming 武開明, died in 148. He once worked in the imperial house as a royal coachman.
>
> In 151, Wu Kaiming's older brother, Wu Liang 武梁, died at age 74. He was a "virtuous man" who became a recluse devoted to learning.

This text provides two pieces of information: First, the owners of the Wu Liang Shrine did not have high social status. They either held low official positions or were in office only for a short time. Second, Wu Liang, the most prestigious owner of the Wu Liang Shrine, was not an official. In contrast, he lived in seclusion for a long time. These two pieces of information indicate that the owners of the Wu Liang Shrine were scholars far away from the imperial court and they belonged to the civilian class. Their tombs should be categorized as low-level tombs.

In a nutshell, the "Sage-Kings Image" or Wu Liang Shrine III is very distinctive in composition. The Queen Mother is high above, and the 11 mythical emperors are placed

underneath. This composition conveys three important messages. First, it shows that in popular belief, the Queen Mother could make the real world overlap with the world of longevity and immortality. Second, the words in *Hanshu* prove that people believed the Queen Mother could govern the real world. Third, biographical information of the owners of the shrine demonstrates that in the Han Dynasty, the civilian class used stone reliefs in tombs. This information makes the image of the sage kings especially precious.

7. Conclusions

The cult of the Queen Mother is a very important phenomenon in the historical development of Chinese religion, and has long been a hot topic for discussion among scholars of Chinese religion and folk beliefs, but few of them study her cult in the Han era from a comparative perspective of literature and fine art. This paper fills the gap by closely comparing the appearance frequency and depiction of the goddess in the Han rhapsodies and Han stone carvings. The comparison of these two different forms of material finds that the image of the Queen Mother appears much more frequently in Han tomb stone reliefs than in Han rhapsodies. This suggests that Han rhapsody writers were less enthusiastic for the cult of the Queen Mother than Han stone carvers. Han rhapsodies were penned by members of the upper class, while Han stone reliefs were created by commoners, from which it follows that the cult of the Queen Mother was not confined to a society but rather spread across societies in the Han period. Our further examination of the Han rhapsodies and Han tomb pictorial stones shows that the former only describes the world of longevity and immortality that the Queen Mother resides in, whereas the latter both the immortal and the real world. The difference between the Han rhapsody and Han tomb art in their depiction of the Queen Mother and her surroundings suggests the difference in divine function or responsibility the goddess was entrusted with by people from different classes of society.

All this points to the fact that there existed two different Queen Mothers in the Han era: one worshipped by people from the upper class as a goddess of longevity and immortality as portrayed in Han rhapsodies; the other worshipped by the ordinary people as an omnipotent deity with divine power over both the immortal world and the mortal world as portrayed in Han tomb art.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Chronology of Portrait Stone Remains that Feature the Queen Mother and/or the King Father in the Han Dynasty (Wang 2018, pp. 391–491).

Composition	Name of the Remain	Location	Period	Source (Archaeological Report)
Composition solely with the Queen Mother	Sarcophagus adorned with pictorial stone carvings from a brick tomb of the Eastern Han Dynasty (Sarcophagus No. 1) 四川郫縣東漢磚墓的石棺畫像 (一號石棺)	Pixian County, Sichuan 四川郫縣	Eastern Han	(Liang 1979)
	Sarcophagus adorned with pictorial stone carvings from a brick tomb of the Eastern Han Dynasty (Sarcophagus No. 2) 四川郫縣東漢磚墓的石棺畫像 (二號石棺)	Pixian County, Sichuan 四川郫縣	Eastern Han	(Liang 1979)
	Sarcophagus adorned with pictorial stone carvings from a brick tomb of the Eastern Han Dynasty (Sarcophagus No. 4) 四川郫縣東漢磚墓的石棺畫像 (四號石棺)	Pixian County, Sichuan 四川郫縣	Eastern Han	(Liang 1979)
	Sarcophagus in cliff-side tomb, Shuanghe Township, Pengshan County 彭山縣雙河鄉崖墓石棺	Pengshan County, Sichuan 四川彭山	Han Dynasty	(Gao 1985)
	Leshan Mahao Eastern Han cliff–side tomb 樂山麻浩東漢崖墓	Leshan, Sichuan 四川樂山	Eastern Han	(Tang 1987)
	Fushun Sarcophagus 富順石棺	Fushun County, Sichuan 四川富順	Eastern Han	(Gao and Gao 1988)
	Hejiang Sarcophagus 合江石棺	Hejiang County, Sichuan 四川合江	Eastern Han	(Gao and Gao 1988)
	No. 12 Luzhou Sarcophagus 瀘州12號石棺	Luzhou, Sichuan 四川瀘州	Han Dynasty	(Xie 1991)

Table A1. *Cont.*

Composition	Name of the Remain	Location	Period	Source (Archaeological Report)
	No. 13 Luzhou Sarcophagus 瀘州13號石棺	Luzhou, Sichuan 四川瀘州	Han Dynasty	(Xie 1991)
	Eastern Han cliff–side tombs, Tuoguzui, Leshan City, Sichuan 四川樂山市沱溝嘴東漢崖墓	Leshan, Sichuan 四川樂山	Eastern Han	(Hu and Yang 1993)
	Hejiang Zhangjiagou No. 2 cliff–side tomb sarcophagus adorned with pictorial stone carvings (Hejiang No. 4 Coffin) 合江張家溝二號崖墓畫像石棺 (合江四號棺)	Neijiang, Sichuan 四川内江	Han Dynasty	(Wang and Li 1995)
	Changshunpo No. 2 Sarcophagus adorned with pictorial stone carvings, Nanxi District 南溪縣長順坡二號畫像石棺	Nanxi, Sichuan 四川南溪	Period of sarcophagus known; patterned bricks date back to Han Dynasty	(Yan 1996)
	Tomb No. 1, Tiantai Mountain, Qijiang cliff–side tombs, Santai, Sichuan 四川三臺鄪江崖墓群天臺山1號墓	Santai, Sichuan 四川三臺	Han Dynasty	(Zhong 2002)
	M3 sarcophagus adorned with pictorial stone carvings in Huzhu Village, Sanhe Town, Xindu District 新都區三河鎮互助村M3畫像石棺	Chengdu, Sichuan 四川成都	Eastern Han	(Chen et al. 2002)
	Cliff-side tomb HM3, Huzhu Village, Sanhe Town, Xindu District, Chengdu 成都市新都區三河鎮互助村崖墓HM3	Chengdu, Sichuan 四川成都	Eastern Han	(Chen et al. 2007)
	Niushihan cliff-side tomb, Luxian County, Sichuan 四川瀘縣牛石函崖墓	Lu County, Sichuan 四川瀘縣	Late Eastern Han	(Luzhou Museum and Chengdu Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2009)
	M6, Area A, Shiziwan cliff–side tombs, Leshan City, Sichuan 四川樂山市柿子灣崖墓A區M6	Leshan, Sichuan 四川樂山	Late Eastern Han to Shu Han	(Chen et al. 2014)
	Eastern Han Tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Yanjiacha, Suide County, Shaanxi 陝西綏德縣延家岔東漢畫像石墓	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Eastern Han	(Dai and Li 1983)
	No. 2 Tomb with pictorial stone carvings, Yanjiacha, Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德延家岔二號畫像石墓	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Eastern Han	(Li 1990)
	Tomb with pictorial stone carvings with Portraits in Wuyequan Village, Suide 綏德嗚咽泉村畫像石墓	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Around the Reign of Emperor He (AD 88–106) and Emperor Shun (AD 125–44) of the Eastern Han Dynasty	(Wu 1992)

Table A1. *Cont.*

Composition	Name of the Remain	Location	Period	Source (Archaeological Report)
	Stone tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Sishilipu, Suide County, Shaanxi 陝西綏德縣四十裏鋪畫像石墓	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Eastern Han	(Cultural Management Committee of Yulin Prefecture and Museum of Suide County 2002)
	M6 Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings, in Huangjiata, Suide County, Shaanxi 陝西綏德縣黃家塔漢代畫像石墓M6	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Han Dynasty	(Li 2004)
	M9 Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings, in Huangjiata, Suide County, Shaanxi 陝西綏德縣黃家塔漢代畫像石墓M9	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Han Dynasty	(Li 2004)
	M3 Eastern Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Dabaodang, Shenmu, Shaanxi 陝西神木大保當東漢M3畫像石墓	Shenmu, Shaanxi 陝西神木	Eastern Han	(Xiao et al. 2011)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Shenliuzhuang, Juxian County, Shandong 山東莒縣沈劉莊漢畫像石墓	Juxian County, Shandong 山東莒縣	Late Eastern Han	(Su and Zhang 1988)
	M2 Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings, Shantou Village, Tengzhou City, Shandong 山東滕州市山頭村M2號漢代畫像石墓	Tengzhou, Shandong 山東滕州	Early Western Han	(Tengzhou Han Stone Relief Museum 2012)
	Brick tombs with pictorial stone carvings at Dazhulin, Taojiazhen, Jiulongpo, Chongqing 重慶九龍坡陶家大竹林畫像磚墓	Jiulongpo, Chongqing 重慶九龍坡	Eastern Han	(Lin and Liu 2007)
	M1 Eastern Han cliff–side tombs in Bishan County, Chongqing 重慶璧山縣棺山坡東漢崖墓群（M1）	Bishan, Chongqing 重慶璧山	Late Eastern Han	(Fan et al. 2014)
	Tomb No. 3 in Bainijing, Zhaotong 昭通白泥井三號墓	Zhaotong, Yunnan 雲南昭通	Eastern Han	(Sun 1955)
	Ancient tombs in Zhaotong, Yunnan 雲南昭通古墓葬	Zhaotong, Yunnan 雲南昭通	Eastern Han	(Yunnan Provincial Cultural Relics Team 1960)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. 1 (Grave of Nine Women) in Chulan District, Suzhou, Anhui 安徽宿縣褚蘭漢畫像石一號墓（九女墳墓）	Suzhou, Anhui 安徽宿州	Eastern Han	(Wang 1993)
Composition with both the Queen Mother and King Father	Eastern Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. 14 in Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石東漢畫像石墓（14號）	Lishi, Shanxi province 山西離石	Eastern Han	(Shang and Liu 1996)
	Eastern Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. 19 in Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石東漢畫像石墓（19號）	Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石	Eastern Han	(Shang and Liu 1996)
	Eastern Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. 44 in Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石東漢畫像石墓（44號）	Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石	Eastern Han	(Shang and Liu 1996)

Table A1. *Cont.*

Composition	Name of the Remain	Location	Period	Source (Archaeological Report)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Shipancun, Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石石盤漢畫像石墓	Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石	Han Dynasty	(Wang 2000)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Shipancun, Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石石盤漢畫像石墓	Lishi, Shanxi province 山西離石	Eastern Han	(Wang 2005)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Mamaozhuang, Lishi 離石馬茂莊漢畫像石墓	Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石	Han Dynasty	(Wang and Wang 2006)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Maomaozhuang, Lishi, Shanxi, fourth year of the Jianning reign period 山西離石馬茂莊建寧四年漢畫像石墓	Lishi, Shanxi 山西離石	AD 171	(Wang 2009)
	Han pictorial stones painted with colors in Liulin, Shanxi 山西柳林漢彩繪畫像石	Liulin, Shanxi 山西柳林	Han Dynasty	(Gao and Kong 2014)
	Han pictorial stones painted with colors in Xipo, Zhongyang, Shanxi 山西中陽西坡漢墓彩繪畫像石	Zhongyang, Shanxi 山西中陽	Han Dynasty	(Qiao and Kong 2016)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. M8 in Huangjiata, Suide County, Shaanxi 陝西綏德縣黃家塔漢代畫像石墓M8	Suide, Shaanxi 陝西綏德	Han Dynasty	(Li 2004)
	Tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. 2 in Guanzhuang, Mizhi County, Shaanxi 陝西米脂官莊二號畫像石墓	Mizhi, Shaanxi 陝西米脂	Mid-Eastern Han	(Ji 2011)
	Wu Liang Shrine 武梁祠	Jiaxiang, Shandong 山東嘉祥	Late Eastern Han	(Jiang and Wu 1995)
	Stone tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Wubaizhuang, Linyi, Shandong 山東臨沂吳白莊漢畫像石墓	Linyi, Shandong 山東臨沂	Late Eastern Han	(Guan et al. 1999)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. M1, Wohushan, Zoucheng City, Shandong 山東鄒城臥虎山M1號漢畫像石墓	Zoucheng, Shandong 山東鄒城	Late Western Han or Early Eastern Han	(Hu 1999)
	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings No. M2, Wohushan, Zoucheng City, Shandong 山東鄒城臥虎山M2號漢畫像石墓	Zoucheng, Shandong 山東鄒城	Late Western Han or Early Eastern Han	(Hu 1999)
	Tomb with pictorial stone carvings from the Three Kingdoms Period in Tengzhou City, Shandong Province 山東滕州三國時期畫像石墓	Tengzhou, Shandong 山東滕州	Cao Wei or Western Jin Dynasty	(Tengzhou Museum 2002)
	Luzhou No. 1 Sarcophagus 瀘州一號石棺	Luzhou, Sichuan 四川瀘州	Eastern Han	(Gao and Gao 1988)

Table A1. *Cont.*

Composition	Name of the Remain	Location	Period	Source (Archaeological Report)
	M1 Han Tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Shengcun, Xiaoxian County, Anhui Province 安徽蕭縣聖村M1漢畫像石墓	Suzhou, Anhui 安徽宿州	Eastern Han	(Zhou 2010)
	Han Tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Wayao, Xinyi, Jiangsu 江蘇新沂瓦窯漢畫像石墓	Xinyi, Jiangsu 江蘇新沂	Late Eastern Han	(Wang et al. 1985)
Composition solely with the King Father	Han tomb with pictorial stone carvings in Liujiatuan, Feixian County, Shandong Province 山東費縣劉家漢畫像石墓	Feixian, Shandong 山東費縣	Late Eastern Han	(Yu et al. 2018)
	Han tombs in Changli Reservoir 昌梨水庫漢墓群	Donghai, Jiangsu 江蘇東海	End of Eastern Han	(Li 1957)

Notes

[1] See the Appendix A (Table A1) for more details about the Han stone carving remains that feature the Queen Mother.

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A Study on Pei Yue and His Poems Written to Monks

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Abstract: Pei Yue 裴説 is a poet who flourished in the Late Tang (618–907) and Five Dynasties (907–960). The historical literature contains relatively limited information about his life, and his poems handed down to this day are also rare. To date, he has not been a major focus in the academic literature. Eight complete poems and two remnants from Pei Yue's existing poems were addressed to monks, including the renowned monk and calligrapher Huaisu 懷素 (737–?), the two outstanding monks and poets Guanxiu 貫休 (832–912) and Shangyan 尚顔 (fl. 881), as well as the lesser known Chubin 處賓, Chumo 處默, Zhiqian 知乾, a nameless monk always in his monastery (*bu chuyuan seng* 不出院僧), and Su Zhan 蘇瞻, who was an advanced scholar (*jinshi* 進士) and planned to become a monk. It can be seen from these poems that Pei Yue often associated with monks: he discussed Buddhist concepts and artistic skills with them, and he both praised and mourned them. Moreover, Pei Yue was strongly averse to worldly life and yearned for a peaceful and pure land. He understood the intricacies of a number of Buddhist concepts, such as "emptiness" (*wu* 無) and "mind" (*xin* 心). He sometimes compared and combined Buddhist theories with poetic creation.

Keywords: Pei Yue; poems; Buddhism; monks; social association

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1. Introduction

No existing historical record reveals the year of Pei Yue's birth or death, and many history books summarize his life in a few words: Pei Yue became the Number One Scholar (*zhuangyuan* 狀元) in the third year of Tianyou 天祐 (906) in the Tang Dynasty;[1] he once served as Rectifier of Omissions (Buque 補闕) and Vice Director in the Ministry of Rites (Libu yuanwailang 禮部員外郎), and he often wandered among "civilian society" (*jianghu* 江湖) because his official career was hindered by war (Jiang 1981, p. 807). Academic circles have paid little attention to Pei Yue thus far due to his lack of reputation as a poet. Only two journal papers take Pei Yue and his poetry specifically as research objects. Shi Shengnan 史盛楠 (Shi 2014) classifies Pei Yue's poems into the following categories, interpreting each category with simple examples: "poems chanting things and depicting ambitions", "poems describing traveling or sceneries", "poems expressing emotions", "poems on history", "farewell poems", "poems showing quiet life in monasteries" and "poems recording communication with friends". Wu Haiyuan 吳海源 (Wu 2018) explores the "contents", "thoughts" and "artistic styles" of Pei Yue's "poems describing traveling or sceneries", "Buddhist and Daoist poems", "poems recording current events" and "mourning poems". He emphasizes that Pei Yue's poems have the characteristics of "thinking hard, polishing words and desiring for novelty". He also laconically analyzes Pei Yue's two poems "Mourn Monk Chumo" (Ku Chumo shangren 哭處默上人, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8267) and "See off Advanced Scholar Su Zhan Who Will be a Monk After War" (Song jinshi Su Zhan luanhou chujia 送進士蘇瞻亂後出家, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8263), which will be elaborated upon by the authors of the present paper in the following text, and he claims that "Pei Yue's Buddhist and Daoist poems are limpid and ethereal, Pei Yue seems to be a person free from vulgarity".

Buddhism was prosperous in the Tang Dynasty; at that time, scholars often communicated with and created many poems for monks. By examining these poems, we can learn more about the causes, process and aims of their association, their lives, beliefs and hobbies, as well as some other notions, such as the political context and current affairs in the Tang Dynasty. Although Pei Yue's existing poems are sparse, those written to monks constitute a large proportion of these. From Pei Yue's poems for monks, we know that he interacted with monks not only because of his religious belief or interest, but also because he regarded monks as intimate friends and even confidants. Therefore, Pei Yue expressed worship, admiration, mourning and pity for monks. He generously eulogized a monk calligrapher, discussed poetry with a monk poet, memorialized a dead monk and interacted with a scholar who would later become a monk and, thus, achieve liberation.

Although some of these poems bear no direct relationship to Buddhist doctrines, they concern monks, and since monks are an indispensable part of Buddhism, all of Pei Yue's poems for monks, in this sense, bear a close relationship with Buddhism. In short, both Buddhist ideas and figures are expressed and embodied in Pei Yue's poems for monks. In addition, Pei Yue compared poetic creation with Buddhist doctrines or dharma practices, which revealed his unique theory of creation and his comprehension of Buddhism. Most importantly, he identified some common ground between poetic creation and Buddhism, proving that the two are similar in some ways. Thus, performing in depth research on Pei Yue's poems for monks represents a good starting point from which to explore the relationship between Buddhism and the poetry of the Tang Dynasty.

2. Pei Yue's Poetic Creation

Pei Yue's poems describe his experiences and characteristics in more detail. Thus, further information about Pei Yue's life, work and thought can be drawn from his poetry.

The 720th *juan* of the *Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Quan Tangshi 全唐詩, Peng et al. 1960, pp. 8260–70) records Pei Yue's fifty-one complete poems and twenty-one remnants; *A Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Quan Tangshi buyi 全唐詩補逸, Sun 1982, p. 229; 1992, pp. 251–52) records one complete poem by Pei Yue; *A Further Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Quan Tangshi xu buyi 全唐詩續補遺, Tong 1982, p. 539; 1992, pp. 444–45) records his one complete poem and two remnants; *A Continuation of the Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Quan Tangshi xushi 全唐詩續拾, Chen 1992, p. 1330) records his two complete poems. Four problems should be noted here.

Firstly, in the *Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry*, Pei Yue's poem "Written to a Like-Minded Friend Under Mount Hua on a Spring Morning" (Chunzao ji huaxia tongren 春早寄華下同人, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8261) and Tang Yue's 湯悅 (912–984) poem of the same name (Peng et al. 1960, p. 8616) are similar in content. According to Tong Peiji 佟培基 (Tong 1996, p. 506), this poem may have been written by Tang Yue.

Secondly, in the *Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry*, the last two couplets of Pei Yue's "A Monk Who Never Goes out of Monastery" (Bu chuyuan seng 不出院僧, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8266) are the same as those of Cao Song's 曹松 (828–903) "Written to Mr. Li Who is a Scholar Without Official Position" (Ji Li chushi 寄李處士, Peng et al. 1960, p. 10011). Tong Peiji (Tong 1996, pp. 506, 529, 681) roughly suggests that these couplets were created by Pei Yue.

Thirdly, Pei Yue's one complete poem, "Cold Food Day (Editor Adds the Title)" (*Hanshi (ti ni)* 寒食(題擬)), in *A Continuation of the Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Chen 1992, p. 1330), includes Pei Yue's two remnants, "Some people gently and leisurely play colored balls, some slender women swing high on the swings" (*Huaqiu qingcu huzhong di, caisuo gaofei zhangshang shen* 畫毬輕蹴壺中地，

綵索高飛掌上身), which are collected in the *Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* and entitled "Tomb Sweeping Day" (Qingming 清明, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8270).

Lastly, *A Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* in the *First Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Quan Tangshi waibian 全唐詩外編, Sun 1982, pp. 264–65) points out that Pei Yue's "Hear the Sound of Pounding Clothes by Hammering Block" (*Wen zhen* 聞砧), also known as "Send Clothes to a Frontier Guard" (*Ji bianyi* 寄邊衣), as presented in the *Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Peng et al. 1960, pp. 8260–61), may have been written by Pei Yuxian 裴羽仙 under the title "Send Warrior's Costume to Husband" (*Ji fu zhengyi* 寄夫征衣). Zhou Zuzhuan 周祖譔 and Jia Jinhua 賈晉華 (cited in Xin 1990, p. 426) believe the author of this poem to be Pei Yue. *A Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* in the *Second Supplement to the Comprehensive Collection of Tang Poetry* (Quan Tangshi bubian 全唐詩補編, Sun 1992), published later, omits this poem.

The authors of the present paper are unable to locate any other poems or remnants by Pei Yue in any other source, so it is concluded that fifty-four complete poems and twenty-one remnants now remain. Nowadays, it can be stated that, compared with other poets who wrote a number of distinguished poems, Pei Yue created only a few and none could be regarded as a masterpiece. However, some poetry reviewers of previous dynasties spoke highly of his work. They praised him for "being famous for poetry" (Ruan 1987, p. 157), and even for "having great poetry fame" (Xin 1990, p. 423); they felt that Pei Yue's poems "think hard about every word carefully" (Ji 1989, p. 1748; 2013, p. 974), "express precisely" (Xin 1990, p. 425) and always "stick to the rules and forms" (Ji 1989, p. 1748; 2013, p. 974). In their opinion, Pei Yue's poetic style is similar to that of Jia Dao 賈島 (779–843) and Li Dong 李洞 (?–fl. 897) (Xin 1990, p. 425). It is worth noting that Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 (1569–1645) (Hu 1981, p. 80) thought Pei Yue's poems "sometimes included unexpected and amazing lines", and Xin Wenfang 辛文房 (fl.1304) (Xin 1990, p. 425) thought Pei Yue's poems "had fantastic ideas". One of Pei Yue's poems written to a monk, "Ode to Huaisu's Terrace" (*Huaisu tai ge* 懷素臺歌), also known as "Written on Huaisu's Terrace" (Ti Huaisu tai 題懷素臺, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8260), which will be explored in detail in the following sections, particularly embodies these two features.

There is only one known poem by Pei Yue, "Visit a Daoist" (Fang daoshi 訪道士, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8264–65), that is related to Daoism. One couplet of this poem, "I have a general understanding of the interest in Daoism and I look forward to frequently talking to you all night" (*Cude xuanzhong qu, dangqi suhua pin* 粗得玄中趣，當期宿話頻), tells us that, although Pei Yue was interested in Daoism, he knew little about it. In contrast, Pei Yue has relatively more poems related to Buddhism and monks. He has six poems depicting his visits to monasteries besides his poems written to monks, which will be examined below. In the six poems, Pei Yue described the scenes surrounding the monasteries, such as "The monk's house is on the birds' path, the shadow of the Buddha statue is in the fish pond" (*Sengju kua niaodao, foying zhao yutan* 僧居跨鳥道，佛影照魚潭) in "Doushuai Monastery" (Doushuai si 兜率寺, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8265). He presented images of several leisurely monks, e.g., "The secular world is outside the monk's monastery, the monk puts down the curtain, lives leisurely until he grows old" (*Duimian fushi ge, chuilian daolao xian* 對面浮世隔，垂簾到老閒) in "Daolin Monastery" (Daolin si 道林寺, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8265), "The monk walks at a leisurely pace, he goes out in the morning and comes back at dusk" (*Gaoseng yin xian (yizuo xian yin) bu, zhouchu xiyang gui (yizuo shi)* 高僧引閒(一作閒引)步，晝出夕陽歸(一作時)) in "Bore Monastery" (Bore si 般若寺, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8265) and "Only the water of Dongting Lake and the old monk's leisure can not be destroyed by war" (*Weiyou liangban shao bude, Dongtinghu shui laoseng xian* 唯有兩般燒不得，洞庭湖水老僧閒) in "Written on Monk's House in Yueyang After War" (Yueyang binghuo hou ti sengshe 岳陽兵火後題僧舍, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8269). Pei Yue also wrote about a moving conversation that he had with a monk: "A monk and

I recite poetry and talk in autumn, river intersects with sky in the distance" (*Yu shi yinlun chu, qiushui jin yaotian* 與師吟論處，秋水浸遙天) in "Written on Monk's House in Yuezhou" (Ti Yuezhou sengshe 題岳州僧舍, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8265). The lines "Why do we care about the generation of afflictions, space is around us" (*Heji sheng fannao, xukong shi silin* 何計生煩惱，虛空是四鄰) in "Lumen Monastery" (Lumen si 鹿門寺, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8265) show Pei Yue's comprehension for "space". In Buddhism, "everything is empty and unreal" (Zhu 1990, p. 4), "all phenomena", "all worlds", "all things", "all actions of sentient beings", "all buddhas", "all buddhas' powers", "all meditation concentrations", "all the principles the buddhas teach", "all buddha-bodies" "are like space" (Cleary 1993, p. 875). Pei Yue had some understanding of these Buddhist concepts, suggesting that, since all the things around us are untrue, then the "afflictions" are also untrue; thus, why concern ourselves with their appearance?

All in all, Pei Yue had a close relationship with monks, and Buddhist culture is embodied in his poetry. In the following section, the authors of the present paper will further explore this topic by interpreting Pei Yue's poems for monks. The authors hope that this paper will arouse the interest of academics in Pei Yue's poetry, especially his poetry for monks, in order to facilitate more in depth investigations and reviews of Pei Yue's literary and ideological achievements.

3. Pei Yue's Poems for Monks

The authors of the present paper are unable to locate any records of Pei Yue's relationship with Buddhism or monks in the historical literature. However, this omission is compensated for in Pei Yue's poems for monks. Eight complete poems and two remnants that remain today were created by Pei Yue for eight monks.

(1) Huaisu in Pei Yue's "Ode to Huaisu's Terrace":
我呼古人名 I call the names of the ancients;
鬼神側耳聽 Ghosts and Divine Beings listen attentively.
杜甫李白與懷素 Du Fu, Li Bai and Huaisu;
文星酒星草書星 Are the poetry star, liquor star and cursive hand star.
永州東郭有奇怪 There are some special things in the eastern suburb of Yongzhou;
筆冢墨池遺跡在 The ruins of the grave of abandoned writing brushes and the inkwell still exist.
筆冢低低高如(一作似)山 The grave of abandoned writing brushes that looks low is as high as a mountain;
墨池淺淺深如海 The inkwell that looks shallow is as deep as the sea.
我來恨不已 I am feeling deeply regretful.
爭得青天化爲一張紙 How to turn the blue sky into a piece of paper;
高聲喚起懷素書 Wake up Huaisu loudly and make him write on it;
搦管研朱點湘水 With a writing brush dipped in ink which is made from cinnabar with water from the Xiang River.
欲歸家，重歎嗟 When I am going to return home, I sigh with emotion again.
眼前有三箇字 Three words are in front of me:
枯樹槎、烏梢蛇、墨老鴉 A dead branch, a black snake and a black old crow.

According to Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329–fl.1412) (Tao 2016, p. 101), Pei Yue was "famous for a calligraphy style between running hand (*xingshu* 行書) and cursive hand (*caoshu* 草書)". Since Pei Yue was an expert in calligraphy, his evaluation of Huaisu's calligraphic skill is of great reference value. In Pei Yue's opinion, Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), Li Bai 李白 (701–762) and Huaisu occupied the highest positions within the domains of poetry, white liquor and calligraphy, respectively. Their fame was so great that even "ghosts and Divine Beings" admired them. The site where Huaisu buried his "abandoned writing brushes"[2] and hoarded ink was located "in the eastern suburb of Yongzhou" and, according to Pei Yue, was worth visiting. "The grave of

abandoned writing brushes" was not as high as Pei Yue imagined, and "the inkwell" was not overly deep. However, Pei Yue believed that Huaisu's calligraphy achievements were unparalleled, like high mountains; his connotations were unfathomable, like the depths of the sea, and they could not be measured by how many writing brushes had been worn out or how much ink had been used up. Considering that he had never seen Huaisu's charm with his own eyes, Pei Yue felt regretful; he imagined allowing the reborn Huaisu to write on the sky. When leaving the site, Pei Yue could not help but sigh again. In the final three lines, by describing a sad atmosphere, with a number of desolate images, Pei Yue expressed his sadness, which was brought by Huaisu's death, and his own imminent departure from this place; secondly, Pei Yue considered that art had reached its acme when it became integrated into nature, and that Huaisu's calligraphy had attained such a state, so that every natural scene and creature that Pei Yue saw at Huaisu's site seemed to be one of Huaisu's calligraphy characters.

As mentioned earlier, the comments that Pei Yue's poems "sometimes included unexpected and amazing lines" and "had fantastic ideas" are well reflected in this poem. In addition, in Huang Tingjian's 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) (cited in Hu 1962, p. 125) view, this poem was "especially witty and weird". In this poem, "the grave of abandoned writing brushes" is both low and high; "the inkwell" is both shallow and deep. While appearing contradictory, with these phrases, Pei Yue deftly contrasted what he saw with what he felt. In order to capture the tremendous power of Huaisu's calligraphy, Pei Yue imagined turning the sky into paper and using the river to make ink. The notion of transforming botany and animals into artistic characters is unexpected and artful.

(2) Guanxiu in Pei Yue's "For Guanxiu" (remnants) (*Zeng Guanxiu (canju)* 贈貫休(殘句), Peng et al. 1960, p. 8269) and "Written to Guanxiu" (Ji Guanxiu 寄貫休, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8267).

There are two remnants entitled "For Guanxiu" attributed to Pei Yue: "(*Shi shi jing jie yi, wei shi hui que nan*) 是事精皆易，唯詩會卻難" state that writing excellent poems is much harder than achieving success in any other task. There also exists Pei Yue's one complete poem, entitled "Written to Guanxiu":

憶昔與吾師 I recall once my master and I;
山中靜(一作精)論時 Discussed in the quiet mountains (or Discussed seriously in the mountains).
總無方是法 Emptiness is the true essence of Buddhism;
難得始爲詩 Only by thinking hard can we create poetry.
凍犬眠乾葉 The dogs shivering in the cold covered themselves with withered leaves to sleep;
飢禽啄病梨 The hungry birds ate rotten pears.
他年白蓮(一作雲)社 One day in the White Lotus (or Cloud) Association;
猶許重相期 I hope we can meet again.

In this poem, Pei Yue recalled conversing with Guanxiu in a quiet location deep in the mountains. If the third word of the second line is *jing* 精 (deeply and carefully), this couplet indicates that Pei Yue and Guanxiu explored a number of topics in depth and in detail. It is worth mentioning that in two other remnants, "(*Kuyin seng ruding, deju jiang chenggong*) 苦吟僧入定，得句將成功" (Peng et al. 1960, p. 8269), Pei Yue states that a person should think hard about his words carefully when writing poems, he can get outstanding work when he achieves an egoless and ideal state, which could be compared to the "concentration" of a monk. The remnants and the second couplet of "Written to Guanxiu" have common features: both of them compare poetic creation with dharma practices, and they consider "thinking hard about every word carefully" as the key to poetic creation. This is consistent with some reviewers' comments on Pei Yue's poems, as cited above, that they have the characteristics of "thinking hard about every word carefully" and "expressing precisely". The second couplet of "Written to

Guanxiu" even compares the importance of "thinking hard about every word carefully" in poetic creation to the significance of "emptiness" in Buddhism. "Emptiness" is the core ideology in Buddhism and the fundamental characteristic of everything.

The Heart Sutra (Xin jing 心經, Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond Sutra · The Heart Sutra 1972, pp. 85, 89, 93) and *The Diamond Sutra* (Jingang jing 金剛經, Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond Sutra · The Heart Sutra 1972, p. 59) state, respectively:

> Here, O Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete. Therefore, O Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: No mind-consciousness element; There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment. Therefore, O Sariputra, it is because of his non-attainmentness that a Bodhisattva, through having relied on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.
>
> Selfless are all dharmas, they have not the character of living beings, they are without a living soul, without personality.

These were what Pei Yue and Guanxiu, being proficient in both Buddhism and poetry, talked about at that time. The "shivering dogs" and the "hungry birds" reflect how harsh Guanxiu's practice environment was. These descriptions express Pei Yue's concern for Guanxiu.

The authors of the present paper believe that the fourth word of the last couplet of this poem should be *lian* 蓮 (lotus) rather than *yun* 雲 (cloud), because *Baiyun she* 白雲社 (White Cloud Association) may have no significant meaning, while a well known allusion can be derived from *Bailian she* 白蓮社 (White Lotus Association). Sun Changwu 孫昌武 (Sun 2000, p. 10) writes:

> It is an important event in the history of Chinese Buddhism for Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) and others to form an association. The *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳) records: "Liu Yimin 劉遺民 (352–410) of Pengcheng 彭城, Lei Cizong 雷次宗 (386–448) of Yuzhang 豫章, Zhou Xuzhi 周續之 (377–423) of Yanmen 雁門, Bi Yingzhi 畢穎之 (fl. 402) of Xincai 新蔡, Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), Zhang Laimin 張萊民 (350–418), Zhang Jishuo 張季碩 (359–423) of Nanyang 南陽 and so on gave up their earthly glory and wealth and followed Huiyuan. Huiyuan held a ceremony to express their longing for Western Paradise in front of the Statue of Amitabha Buddha (Wuliangshou fo 無量壽佛) in the monastery". . . . The names of "White Lotus Association" and "Eighteen Sages" (Shiba xian 十八賢) did not appear in Huiyuan's day. . . . Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) tried his best to publicize the legend of "White Lotus Association". . . . From then on, the allusion related to "White Lotus Association" often appeared in the works of poets and monk poets in the Late Tang and Five Dynasties. . . . The works of Pei Yue, Li Xianyong 李咸用, Li Shanfu 李山甫 (fl. 861), Wu Qiao 伍喬 (fl. 943), Li Zhong 李中 (fl. 920–fl. 974), Li Jianxun 李建勛 (fl. 873–952) and monk poet Guanxiu, Qiji 齊己 (864–fl. 937), Xiumu 修睦 (?–918) and so on frequently used the allusion related to "White Lotus Association".

In the last couplet of this poem, Pei Yue used "White Lotus Association" to refer to the association of monks and common people; here, people from both outside and

inside the secular world could open their hearts to each other. This couplet indicates that Pei Yue was strongly looking forward to seeing Guanxiu again in this place in the future.

(3) Shangyan in Pei Yue's "Written to Monk Shangyan" (Ji seng Shangyan 寄僧尚顏, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8267):
曾居五老峯 Shangyan once lived in the Five Old Men Peak;
所得共誰同 Who can match his achievements?
才大天全與 His great talents are all given by the Divine Beings;
吟精楚欲空 His poetic skill is incomparable in the area once belonged to the State of Chu.
客來庭滅日 Time passes as he chats with guests who come to his courtyard;
鳥過竹生風 Birds fly by the bamboo, which create winds.
早晚搖輕拂(一作金錫) One day in the future, he will shake a light whisk (or hold a golden tin staff);
重歸瀑布中 To return to the waterfall.

Pei Yue passionately eulogized Shangyan's achievements, which, he felt, no one could match. Shangyan lived a leisurely life in the mountains. However, in Pei Yue's eyes, such a leisurely life was not what Shangyan had expected. Pei Yue believed that extraordinary Shangyan would eventually return to the depths of nature and integrate his whole body and mind with nature. Both the "whisk" and the "tin staff" are meaningful in Buddhism. The former is not only an "instrument for flicking away mosquitoes" (Yijing 1990, p. 229), but also a common tool used by prominent monks to admonish ordinary monks and help them learn the dharma (Huiran 1990, pp. 496, 503–4). The *Tin Staff Sutra* (Dedao ticheng xizhang jing 得道梯橙錫杖經, 1990, p. 724) states: "Past Buddhas held tin staff, future Buddhas will hold tin staff, present Buddhas also hold it". This demonstrates that the "tin staff" is an indispensable item for eminent monks. The *Tin Staff Sutra* (1990, p. 724) also states: "The tin staff is called the wisdom staff or the morality staff because it displays holy wisdom (*shengzhi* 聖智) and creates merit (*gongde* 功德)". Pei Yue praised Shangyan for his "holy wisdom" and "merit" by describing Shangyan "holding a golden tin staff". Regardless of whether the fourth and fifth words of the last couplet of this poem are "light whisk" or "golden tin staff", this couplet expresses certainty that Shangyan will return to the pure land with Buddhist items and that he is a true Buddhist master.

(4) Chubin in Pei Yue's "Written to Monk Chubin in the South of Dongting Lake" (Huwai ji Chubin shangren 湖外寄處實上人, Peng et al. 1960, pp. 8266–67):
怪得意相親 No wonder I feel kind to Chubin;
高攜一軸新 He brings a new volume of his poetry.
能搜大雅句 He can use the verses in the *Book of Songs · Major Odes* (*Shijing · Daya* 詩經·大雅);
不似小乘人 He seems not to believe in the Lesser Vehicle.
嶽麓擎枯檜 Withered junipers stand on the Mount Yuelu;
瀟湘吐白蘋 White clover ferns float on the Xiang River.
他年遇同道 If one day we meet on the same road;
爲我話風塵 I hope you can tell me about your travel experiences.

Chubin shared with Pei Yue his new poetry. After reading, Pei Yue immediately felt unexpected and delightful kindness towards Chubin. Chubin could transform and then draw upon the former poets' beautiful lines when creating his poetry. In the Chinese Buddhist tradition, the so called Lesser Vehicle (Hinayana or *xiaocheng* 小乘) is believed to carry oneself only, while the Great Vehicle (Mahayana or *dacheng* 大乘) carries all people.[3] Pei Yue suggested that Chubin "seemed not to believe in the Lesser Vehicle", indicating that Chubin, in his poetry, expressed a desire to save all sentient beings, and that Pei Yue also had the desire to free all the common people. At

this moment, faced with a bleak scene, Pei Yue said goodbye to Chubin: "If we have the opportunity to see each other in the future, we can chitchat again".

(5) Chumo in Pei Yue's "Mourn Monk Chumo":
凄涼繐幕下 In a desolate atmosphere, under the curtain of the mourning hall;
香吐一燈分 Smoke from burning incense is seperated by the candlelight.
鬬老輪寒檜 Chumo lost to the junipers that were unafraid of the cold in comparing who lived longer;
留閒與白雲 What he left to the clouds was loneliness.
挈盂曾幾度 He held his alms bowl several times;
傳衲不教焚 And passed on his frock so that it would not be destroyed.
泣罷重回首 After crying, I turn my head again;
暮山鐘半聞 The faint bells ring from the mountains surrounded by the dusk.

When Pei Yue visited Chumo's former residence and saw a forlorn scene, sadness immediately filled his mind. Pei Yue described how junipers were still there, but Chumo was not; when clouds floated over Chumo's residence as usual, they could not see him again. Chumo visited Buddhist holy sites to seek Buddhist essences a few times and imparted his lifelong learning to others to keep truths alive. After some contemplation, Pei Yue wiped away his mourning tears, turned round and looked out into the distance. The vast twilight surrounded the mountains, and the bells rang faintly. Both the circumstances and Pei Yue's mood were gloomy and dismal.

(6) Zhiqian in Pei Yue's "Written to Monk Zhiqian" (Ji seng Zhiqian 寄僧知乾, Peng et al. 1960, p. 8269):
貌高清入骨 Having natually noble and clear appearance;
帝里舊臨壇 Zhiqian once held Buddhist ceremonies to grant precepts to others in the precept platform[4] of the capital.
出語經相似 Always talking about the similar Buddhist scriptures;
行心佛證安 He cultivates mind to master the truth of Buddhism.

Consisting of only four lines in twenty Chinese characters, this poem demonstrates Zhiqian's appearance, temperament, past experience and ideas regarding the learning of Buddhism. The *Preface of the Collection of the Fundamental Principles of Chan* (Chanyuan zhu quan ji douxu 禪源諸詮集都序, Zongmi 2008, p. 22) and the *Platform Sutra* (Tan jing 壇經, McRae 2000, p. 31) state, respectively:

> Bodhidharma (Damo 達摩, ?–536) received dharma from India. When coming to China, he saw most people learning Buddhism here did not inherit dharma, they only took things with entities as explanations and guidelines. Using fingers to point to the moon is like learning dharma through words, moon symbolizes dharma, and fingers symbolize words which are just tools, not the essences. Moon is not on fingers, dharma is not in words, but in my mind. Dharma should be transmitted from mind to mind, not through words. Exotoric Buddhism (Xianzong 顯宗) says this because it advocates eliminating attachments rather than discussing liberation without words and letters.
>
> If a person of the Mahayana or a person of the Supreme Vehicle hears this explanation of the *Diamond Sutra*, his mind will open forth in enlightened understanding. Therefore, you should understand that your fundamental natures have in themselves the wisdom of *prajñā*. Allowing this wisdom to function of itself in constant contemplation, one therefore need not rely on the written word.

According to the Buddhist classics, the dharma already exists within people's minds. Neither preaching nor practicing dharma should rigidly depend on "words and letters". They also stress that not clinging to "words and letters" does not mean completely abandoning them. Zhiqian was deeply aware of this truth, so he focused

on cultivating his mind to comprehend Buddhist principles. Based on the Buddhist sutras, Zhiqian paid more attention to expressing his self consciousness and elaborating his own comprehension when discussing dharma.

(7) A monk in Pei Yue's "A Monk Who Never Goes out of Monastery":
四遠參尋徧 Seemingly having visited many places;
修行卻不行 The monk who has high Buddhist cultivation never goes out of monastery.
耳邊無俗語 No vulgar words lingers in his ears;
門外是前生 Previous life is outside the door.
塔見移來影 The moving shadow of the pagoda can be seen;
鐘聞過去聲 The bells that represent the passage of time can be heard.
一齋唯默坐 The monk sits quietly in his meditation chamber;
應笑我營營 I should be laughed at for my busyness.

The monk learned Buddhism and sought truth only in his monastery. Although he never went out, his outstanding achievements made him appear to have been to many Buddhist holy sites. All the people around him were extraordinary, and the inside and outside of his monastery were like two different worlds. The "shadow of the pagoda" moved slowly, and the bells rang at regular intervals, these facts revealed that the outside world was constantly changing. The *Platform Sutra* (McRae 2000, pp. 45–46) records:

> Good friends, what is it that is called meditative concentration (*chanding*; *samādhi*)? Externally, to transcend characteristics is "meditation" (*chan*). Internally, to be undisturbed is "concentration" (*ding*). If one concentrates on characteristics externally, internally the mind is disturbed. If one transcends characteristics externally, the mind will not be disturbed. The fundamental nature is naturally pure and naturally concentrated; it is only by seeing the realms and thinking of the realms that one is disturbed. If one can see the various realms without the mind being disturbed, this is true concentration.
>
> Good friends, to transcend characteristics externally is "meditation". To be undisturbed internally is "concentration". Externally "meditation" and internally "concentration" is meditative concentration.

This means that human beings' nature is both "pure" and "concentrated", but it is easily disturbed by "characteristics" and "realms". If a person can keep himself away from external interferences and calm his mind through practicing dharma, he can reach the state of "meditative concentration". In the last couplet of this poem, the monk sat in meditation, and external changes did not bother him at all. Pei Yue could not help but laugh at himself: compared with this distinguished monk, he was merely a busy layman in the secular world.

(8) Su Zhan in Pei Yue's "See off Advanced Scholar Su Zhan Who Will be a Monk After War":
因亂事空王 Serving the King of Emptiness because of chaos caused by war;
孤心亦不傷 Su Zhan felt lonely, but not sentimental.
梵僧爲骨肉 The monks will become his close relatives;
柏寺作家鄉 The monastery will be his home.
眼閉千行淚 Countless tears flows from his closed eyes;
頭梳一把霜 His combed hair is as pale as frost.
詩書不得力 Knowledge is of little use;
誰與問蒼蒼 Who should he ask about the way ahead?

The title indicates that this poem was written to Su Zhan, who once was an "advanced scholar" and would become a monk. Therefore, the authors of the present paper regard this poem as one written to a monk. *The Surangama Sutra* (Lengyan jing 楞嚴經, Buddhist Text Translation Society of Dharma Realm Buddhist Associa-

tion 2019, p. 252) states: "At that time there was in the world a Buddha named King of Emptiness"; the *Meanings of Five Assistance Conditions According to Sutras* (Yi jing ming wuzhong zengshangyuan yi 依經明五種增上緣義, Shandao 2013, p. 212) states: "There was a Buddha named King of Emptiness in the past"; and the *Collection of the Key Points of Some Sutras* (Zhu jing yao ji 諸經要集, Daoshi 1990, p. 2) also states: "There was in the world a Buddha named King of Emptiness a long time ago". It can be seen that "serving the King of Emptiness" refers to converting to Buddhism. The war converted Su Zhan to Buddhism. From then on, he would regard monks as relatives and the monastery as home. According to the last two couplets of this poem, Su Zhan's condition was very depressed; he was tearful and his hair was all white. Learning did not bring him his expected life or allow him to realize his ideals, and he did not know where his future was. The despair delivered in the last couplet belongs not only to Su Zhan and Pei Yue, but also to all scholars who lived during a turbulent time and had no bright future.

4. Conclusions

Pei Yue is a lesser known poet during the Late Tang and Five Dynasties. Despite having a scholarly reputation, he has not attracted the attention of academics because he does not have many political achievements or outstanding extant poems. The historical literature documents Pei Yue's life briefly, and there is no record of his religious beliefs or his relationships with religious figures. However, roughly one seventh of Pei Yue's extant poems were written to monks, which shows that Pei Yue closely associated with monks. These poems narrate Pei Yue's discussions of Buddhist theories, poetic skills and the art of calligraphy with monks. They also reveal Pei Yue's feelings for monks: he sincerely eulogized devout monks and sorrowfully mourned a dead monk. Although these poems cannot exactly prove that Pei Yue was himself a devout Buddhist, they express his understanding of Buddhism, to a certain degree.

Pei Yue's poems for monks are full of admiration for the pure land and express helplessness in being unable to escape from an earthly life. This attitude was common among scholars at that time, many famous scholars, such as Wang Wei 王維 (700–761), Bai Juyi and Li Shangyin 李商隱 (fl. 812–858), expressed their desire to convert to Buddhism and their pains brought by the secular world through their poetry. Most of them, on the one hand, tried their best to achieve a good result in the imperial examination and reach the peak of their official careers; on the other hand, they expected to seek liberation in a hermit life or by their religious beliefs because they were tired of chasing fame and wealth. This feeling might have been exacerbated by dynastic changes and wars, which filled the scholars' poems with sadness. In addition, Pei Yue also conveyed his infinite pity and sympathy for those who would become monks. This kind of emotion is difficult to find in the poems of other scholars in the Tang Dynasty. The expression of this complicated and contradictory feeling makes Pei Yue's poems for monks more unique, typical and of more research value.

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Notes

[1] It is believed that Pei Yue became an advanced scholar, even the Number One Scholar, in "the third year of Tianyou (906)" (Chao 1990, p. 935; Chen 1987, p. 580; Xin 1990, pp. 423–25; Xu 1984, pp. 929–33; etc.), "the sixth year of Tianfu 天復 (906)" (Ji 2013, pp. 974, 986; You 1985, pp. 101–2; etc.), "the first year of Tianfu (901)" (Jiang 2019, p. 592) or "the second year of Tianfu (902)" (Sun 1985, vol. 820, p. 272; Ni 2017, p. 6529). After carefully studying some historical materials, the authors of the present paper conclude with certainty that Pei Yue obtained the title of Number One Scholar in the third year of Tianyou in the Tang Dynasty.

[2] Li Zhao 李肇 (fl. 813) (Li 2021, p. 161) notes: "Monk Huaisu of Changsha liked cursive hand; he claimed to have found the secret of success of Zhang Zhi 張芝 (?–192CE) who was a famous calligrapher in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220CE) and was called the prodigy of cursive hand. Huaisu buried abandoned writing brushes under the mountains and called it 'grave of abandoned writing brushes"'.

[3] *The Lotus Sutra* (Watson 1993, pp. 35–36) records: "The Buddhas appear in the word solely for this one reason, which is true; the other two are not the truth. Never do they use a lesser vehicle to save living beings and ferry them across. The Buddha himself dwells in this Great Vehicle, and adorned with the power of meditation and wisdom that go with the Law he has attained, he uses it to save living beings. He himself testifies to the unsurpassed way, the Great Vehicle, the Law in which all things are equal. If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person, I would be guilty of stinginess and greed, but such a thing would be impossible.".

[4] Huijue 慧覺 (fl. 445) and Weide 威德 (fl. 445) (Huijue and Weide 1998, pp. 69–70): "At that time, Jin Cai 金財 shaved off hair and beard, put on a precept robe (*kasaya*; *jiasha* 袈裟), and became a novice monk (*sramaneraka*; *sramanera*; *shami* 沙彌). He was old enough to receive complete precepts (*upasampanna*; *upasampada*; *dajie* 大戒; *juzu* 具足); some monks were ordered to grant him complete precepts. The monks who *lintan* 臨壇 saluted in proper order", notes: "*Lintan*: means monks and nuns go to the precept platform (*jietan* 戒壇) to hold Buddhist ceremonies to grant precepts to others . . . ".

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The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* in the "Telling Scriptures" Tradition in Changshu, Jiangsu, China

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Abstract: The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* is a newly discovered manuscript (copied ca. 1993), used in the "telling scriptures" tradition in Changshu, which represents ritualized storytelling based on the vernacular narrative texts called "precious scrolls" (*baojuan*). The local tradition of "telling scriptures" can be traced back to the 19th century, though it may have even earlier origins. While it has been generally accepted that precious scrolls had ritual functions in the late imperial period, little research has been done on the local varieties of this type of storytelling in connection with ritual practices. The material of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* from Changshu demonstrates how the Mulian story, widely known in China, has been adapted to the folk ritual of the afterlife salvation of a female soul through repentance of her sin of physiological impurity. While the related ritual in the neighboring Jingjiang on the northern bank of the Yangtze River has been thoroughly studied, the Changshu practice has received little attention of scholars so far. The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* from Changshu demonstrates that the Mulian narrative was also associated with the ritual of "breaking the Blood Pond" in the Jiangnan areas, which also provides a new angle of evaluation of the Jingjiang tradition of "telling scriptures". This article discusses relations between modern ritual practices and several variants of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, mainly using fieldwork materials collected by the author in Changshu and adjacent areas in 2011–2018.

Keywords: *baojuan* (precious scrolls); telling scriptures; scroll recitation; chinese folklore; popular religion; buddhist narrative; ritual

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1. Introduction

The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* is a newly discovered manuscript, used in the "telling scriptures" (*jiangjing* 講經, Suzhou dialect: *kã˥ 51 tɕin44*)[1] tradition in Changshu 常熟, which represents ritualized storytelling based on the vernacular narrative texts called "precious scrolls" (*baojuan* 寶卷).[2] It is the manuscript copied by Li Desheng 李德生 in the *guiyou* 癸酉 year (presumably 1993), as stated in a note at the end of the manuscript; now in possession of Xu Juzhen 徐菊珍 (b. 1950), the female performer of telling scriptures from Weijiatang 衛家塘 village in Zhangqiao 張橋 district of modern Changshu city.[3] One can suppose that Li Desheng represents the older generation of performers in this area, as it is common for the performers to inherit manuscripts of their teachers and older friends. According to the hereditary master of telling scriptures Yu Dingjun 余鼎君 (b. 1942) from the Shanghu district of Changshu,[4] this variant of text is still in use by the precious scrolls performers in Zhangqiao district (Wu 2015, vol. 2, p. 1116).

Though the manuscript by Li Desheng has the title of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* on the cover, it represents an adaptation of the *Precious Scroll of Mulian* (Mulian baojuan 目蓮寶卷), which is a text commonly used in the modern tradition of telling scriptures in Changshu. This is attested not only by the contents of this text, but also its self-reference as the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*. For example, the concluding verses of this variant say: "The *Scroll of Mulian* rescuing his mother has ended . . . " (目蓮救母卷

已滿) (Wu 2015, vol. 2, p. 1131). Still, its labelling as the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* demonstrates the original ritual function of this text.

Here a few words on the history and modern state of development of "telling scriptures" in Changshu are necessary. It is alternatively known there as "scroll recitation" (*xuanjuan* 宣卷, Suzhou dialect: *sɪ44 tɕyø51*), the name common for this type of performative literature in the whole Jiangnan region (Lower Yangtze Valley). It is performed by the "masters of telling scriptures" (*jiangjing xiansheng* 講經先生, Suzhou dialect: *kɑ̃51 tɕin44 sɪ44 sɑ̃44*) who have professional or semi-professional status; besides scroll recitation, they also perform life-cycle rituals for the local believers.[5] Precious scrolls are used as scripts in this type of storytelling, hence its local name is "telling scriptures". While they are commonly perceived as the Buddhist texts (scriptures) by the locals,[6] they narrate stories of deities of different origins, including local heroes.[7]

The exact origins of this tradition are not known, but overall its development can be traced back to the spread of "scroll recitation" in the Wu-speaking areas of the Lower Yangtze Valley in the nineteenth century (Che 2009, pp. 207–33). The earliest exactly dated text that may be associated with telling scriptures in Changshu is dated 1811 (discovered in 2012 in the collection of a local performer) (Wu 2015, vol. 2, p. 1116). At the same time, the modern tradition uses even older texts, which are dated to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries (Che 2009, pp. 394–95). This especially concerns the "funerary" services involving "telling scriptures" that are characteristic for the Changshu area.[8] These materials can prove that this art in Changshu may have even earlier origins, going back to the period of the so-called "sectarian" precious scrolls (sixteenth-eighteenth centuries).[9]

In this article, I use the manuscript by Li Desheng for a case study of a precious scroll functioning in the context of modern telling scriptures in Changshu. While analyzing special features of this text, we can discover more details of the ritual and cultural context of telling scriptures. At the same time, these materials also can demonstrate difference between telling scriptures in Changshu and similar traditions in the nearby localities. In this article, I mainly use materials, collected during my fieldwork in Changshu and adjacent areas in 2011–2018, and also refer to the related fieldwork reports by Chinese scholars.

2. The Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond and Precious Scroll of Mulian Three Rebirths

The contents of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* can be traced back to the traditional versions of the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*, which widely circulated in Jiangnan since the end of the nineteenth century. This is the famous *Precious Scroll of Mulian's Three Rebirths* (*Mulian sanshi baojuan* 目蓮三世寶卷; hereafter abbreviated as the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*), the earliest available printed version of which is dated 1876.[10] It is represented in the variety of woodblock and lithographic printed editions, made by the publishers in the urban centers of the Jiangnan region at the end of the nineteenth–early twentieth centuries.[11]

Although the story of monk Mulian (Skt. Maudgalyāyana; one of the major disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni in the Buddhist scriptures) rescuing his mother's soul from the afterlife punishment in the underworld is of ancient origin; the developed form of this originally Buddhist subject appeared in the vernacular narratives of the eighth—ninth centuries—"transformation texts" (*bianwen* 變文).[12] Later this subject was used in various dramatic and storytelling forms in China.[13] The popularity of this subject in the old vernacular literature is usually explained by its emphasis on the filial piety (xiao 孝), a cardinal value in Chinese society (also regarded as an attempt to reconcile Buddhist precepts with the Confucian values and concepts). The emphasis on the description of the afterlife punishment for sinners, typical of the Mulian narratives, also had important didactic and indoctrinating meanings in traditional society.

There are many common features between the printed recension of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* and manuscript by Li Desheng. The Li Desheng's version preserves the main storyline of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, centered around three rebirths of Mulian, during which he rescues the soul of his sinful mother Liu Qingti 劉青提: as a son

of wealthy landowner–Fu Luobo 傅蘿卜; the rebellious leader Huang Chao 黃巢 and the butcher He Yin 何因. The latter eventually converted to the way of self-perfection and thus achieved his original identity as monk Mulian. The *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* represents the late stage of the development of this story. With the use of additional details of two new rebirths of Mulian, the original Buddhist story propagating vegetarianism and abstinence is intertwined with the historical legend about Huang Chao's rebellion (875–884) at the end of the Tang dynasty and with the propagation of ideas of syncretic religious movements at the end of the Qing period (see Berezkin 2013b). This amplification of the original Mulian story is characteristic of the texts of the system of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* that presumably was compiled somewhere in Jiangnan region in the middle of the nineteenth century.

There are further numerous minor details that demonstrate close relations between the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* and the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*. For example, both texts start with the scene that explains the origins of the Mulian's lay name: Luobo (Turnip). It says that this name was given to the child, because he was a reincarnation of an itinerant monk who received a turnip as alms from Fu Xiang 傅相, the Mulian's father. In the corpus of precious scrolls of the Qing dynasty, this detail is specific of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* and also brings it close to the local dramas of Zhejiang (especially city of Shaoxing 紹興), performed in the areas close to the locality where the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* apparently was written down in the middle of the nineteenth century (Berezkin 2017, pp. 140–41). This detail demonstrates the interaction between precious scrolls and local dramas on this subject, which is also expressed in other aspects of the contents of precious scrolls (see Sections 3 and 4).

Another detail testifying to the common origins of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* and the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* is the scene, where Guanyin tests the sincerity of Mulian's intentions, when he travels to the Western Heaven in search of his mother's soul. Even several poetic parts of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* demonstrate close proximity to the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*. For example, it also contains an aria on repaying of ten great mercies of the mother, a special piece dedicated to the necessity of children's gratitude towards the mother. All these details can prove that the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* from Zhangqiao originated in the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*.

On the basis of this comparison one can conclude that *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* is an abbreviated adaptation of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*. The supposition also may be substantiated by the printed copies of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* discovered in possession of the masters of telling scriptures in Changshu. For example, Yu Dingjun possesses the lithographic edition of this text, printed in Shanghai in 1907. One of the performers in the Baimao district of Changshu, interviewed by Qiu Huiying, kept a xerox copy of the woodblock edition of this text, printed in Changzhou in 1886 (Qiu 2010, p. 214). One can suppose that such printed copies also were circulated in the Changshu area in the earlier period.

The version by Li Desheng also continues the original discourse of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, in which didacticism and religious proselytizing is combined with the entertaining element of numerous narrative details (including some comic scenes) and well as the ritual function of the major narrative line (connected with the message of afterlife salvation for pious followers) (see Berezkin (2013b)). Still, there are some details that demonstrate modification of the original text of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* in the Li Desheng's version. Significantly, many details of the story have been abbreviated in the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*. For example, such an important episode as the interference of Liu Jia 劉假, Mulian's maternal uncle,[14] who persuaded Liu Qingti to break vegetarian fast and start killing animals, is only briefly mentioned in the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, while it is narrated with some details in the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*.

It is important to note that many episodes in the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* are narrated in verses, which breaks the usual principle of repetition of the contents of prosaic parts of a precious scroll in following verses. This tendency is typical of the precious

scrolls of the late period (late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries), which in general can be characterized by the developed literary qualities, such as smooth flow of narration, entertaining elements, prolonged descriptions, etc.

Many modifications of the text in the folk variant apparently were caused by copyists' mistakes. For example, in the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* the surname of Fu Luobo and his father is written as 父, which is a borrowed character with the same pronunciation.[15] At the same time, there are also significant deliberate alternations in this text. For example, it says that Fu Luobu goes to the monastery and becomes a monk before his mother's death, while in the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* he does this only after Liu Qingti's death. This detail appears similar to other precious scrolls versions of the late nineteenth century as well as several local dramas.[16]

Other varying details appear in the episode of Huang Chao's rebellion. While the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* narrates in some details the story of Zhu Wen 朱温 (852–912, historical founder of the Later Liang dynasty, 907–923),[17] his name does not appear in the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*. The *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* says that Huang Chao after the capture of the Tang dynasty capital Chang'an was defeated by Li Cunxiao 李存孝 (?-894), the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* mentions another famous general of the Five Dynasties period (907–960), Wang Yanzhang 王彦章 (863–923), in this episode instead. As both these military leaders are famous in Chinese history, here we apparently see the impact of different historical narratives on these two recensions of the precious scroll.

Some details of the underworld description in both texts also vary. This part has been significantly abbreviated in comparison with the standard recension of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*. Here, one does not find the regular scheme of description of each hell compartment, as can be seen in the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*. This rigid scheme of alternation of prosaic passages with verses is characteristic of the precious scrolls of the early period of development and therefore can be regarded as the vestige of the original features of the genre in its late specimens.[18]

Still, comparatively detailed description of hells in the Li Desheng's version continues the didactic discourse of the standard version of this precious scroll. We also can find some new details there, which also hint at the use of other sources by the local storytellers. For example, in the place, where the sinners are cut by saws in two parts it is said that these are infidel widows, who in this way are punished for re-marrying. This detail is absent from the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, but is known in modern Chinese literature.[19] This detail also betrays the extremely conservative outlook of the editors of this version of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* that may be taken as a testimony of its comparatively early origins.

Several special features of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* are related to the performative context of the narrative. Needless to say, the text uses words and expressions of the local dialect, a variety of the Wu group of dialects, prevalent in southern Jiangsu.[20] In this way, it appears more comprehensible to the local audiences, which are constituted mainly by people with a low level of education.

The ritual function of recitation also is emphasized in this variant of precious scroll. Its ritual meaning is clearly expressed in invocations of Bodhisattva Dizang's name, who in popular beliefs is regarded as the Lord of Underworld.[21] The introductory verse in this text says:

> Incense in the burner is burning and emits bright light,
>
> It broadly shines in ten directions and penetrates the high vault [of heaven].
>
> Above we invite all buddhas to arrive to our assembly,
>
> Below we pay respect to King Dizang of the Netherworld,
>
> He is accompanied by the guardian of law, Squire Fu,
>
> And sage monk Mulian, who rescued his mother . . .
>
> 爐内乍熱放毫光，普照十方透上蒼。

上請諸佛來赴會，下敬幽冥地藏王。

帶領護法父員外，目蓮聖僧救娘親。 [22]

The text closes with the invocation of Dizang's name: "Namo Reverend Bodhisattva Dizang wang (repeat one thousand times)" 南無本尊地藏王菩薩 (Wu 2015, vol. 2, p. 1132). According to the text of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, following the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, Mulian and his father Fu Xiang were appointed the assistants of Dizang in the netherworld (Wu 2015, vol. 2, p. 1132). This emphasis on the connections with Dizang is especially important in the ritual context of telling scriptures, which usually also includes narratives on the previous lives of Dizang (see the next section).

Thus, the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* can be characterized as a modified version of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* used in the ritualized setting of telling scriptures in several areas around Changshu.

3. The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* in the Religious Practice of Changshu

The emphasis on the Buddhist interpretation of the filial piety and women's salvation made precious scrolls devoted to Mulian very suitable material for recitation during funerary rites for women in Jiangnan region, where Buddhism for a long time has had a strong impact. The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* and *Precious Scroll of Mulian* are usually regarded as two different texts that are recited for the salvation of female souls in the Changshu area.[23] They appear during the funerary rituals known as "[the recitation] of the *Scroll[s] of Hell*" (*Diyu juan* 地獄卷) on the occasions of funerals for the mothers of families[24] as well as during the so-called rituals of the "thirty-fifth [day]" (*wu qi* 五七).[25] In both cases, telling scriptures with the hell topics has the purpose of rescuing a human soul from the torments in hells through the means of "journey through the underworld", when the protagonist of the narratives is passing through all hells observing sufferings of sinners there.[26]

The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* was recited during the assembly of the "thirty-fifth day", witnessed by Professor Che Xilun in the Gangkou area of Zhangjiagang city in 1997 (Che 2009, p. 391). I have observed recitation of both *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* and *Precious Scroll of Mulian* during the rituals of the "thirty-fifth day", performed in the very traditional mode for a deceased female relative of a young master of telling scriptures in a rural house of the Yushan 虞山 district of Changshu on 7 September 2017 (not far from the old county city of Changshu).[27] At the same time, the contents of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* used on that occasion in 2017 were completely different from the contents of the Li Desheng's version.[28] Though it mentioned the story of Mulian rescuing his mother, it did not have as developed narrative part as in the Li Desheng's version.[29]

Other narrative precious scrolls performed on these occasions in Changshu are the *Precious Scroll of Dizang* (*Dizang baojuan* 地藏寶卷), *Precious Scroll of the Earth God* (*Tudi baojuan* 土地寶卷), *Precious Scroll of the Ten Kings* (*Shi wang baojuan* 十王寶卷), and *Precious Scroll of the Penitence Rites of the Liang King* (*Liang wang fa chan baojuan* 梁王法懺寶卷; a variant of the *Precious Scroll of the Liang King*, very popular in the Wu-speaking areas of Jiangnan since the nineteenth century). While the first two are devoted to the origins of deities functioning in the underworld (considered to be deified historical figures, as is typical for Chinese popular religion); the last two (along with the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*) tell the stories of afterlife retribution and salvation.[30] A "telling scriptures" service for the dead also includes a number of salvation rites, which differ according to the occasion: a funeral or the "thirty-fifth day" assembly (Yu 2015, pp. 2589–93). For example, during the assembly that I witnessed in Yushan, the *Precious Scroll of Dizang* (the variant with the female rebirth of Dizang), *Precious Scroll of the Ten Kings*, *Precious Scroll of Mulian*, and *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* were recited, along with the special litanies accompanying rituals of offerings to the soul of deceased, Ten Kings of Underworld, and receiving the soul at home on the "thirty-fifth day" day (*Precious Scroll of the Five Watches* [*Wu geng baojuan* 五更寶卷]). The masters of telling scriptures also usually recite the *Scripture of the*

Blood Pond (*Xue hu jing* 血湖經), which makes an important addition to the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*. This text has the Daoist background: for example, one of its variants collected in Zhangjiagang has the complete title of the "Wondrous Scripture of Releasing from Sins in the Blood Pond of Fengdu Pronounced by the Celestial God Taiyi, Rescuing from Sufferings" (*Taiyi jiu ku tian zun shuo ba zui Fengdu Xue hu miaojing* 太乙救苦天尊說拔罪酆都血湖妙經).[31] This Daoist coloring of scripture also is related to the history of the Blood Pond beliefs in China (see Section 3).[32] This feature also reflects the syncretic religious background of the "telling scriptures" practice in Changshu.

The *Precious Scroll of Mulian* is one of the major texts recited during funerary and memorial services for dead women.[33] There are multiple variants of this text in the Changshu area. The most expanded variant that I have seen is the one transmitted in the family of Yu Dingjun, titled the *Precious Scroll of Mulian Rescuing His Mother from Hell* (*Mulian jiu mu diyu baojuan* 目蓮救母地獄寶卷).[34] Ritual actions accompany every nineteen sections of the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*, into which the second part of the first fascicle (*juan*) of this text is divided. They describe nineteen compartments of the underworld (hells) through which Mulian passed in search of his mother, following the relevant part in the standard recension of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* (see Section 2). Accordingly, masters of telling scriptures kneel nineteen times and burn nineteen certificates for each compartment. Thus, they imitate the pattern of the similar ritual actions accompanying the *Precious Scroll of the Ten Kings* and *Precious Scroll of Hell* (the latter is now performed in Changshu exclusively for the deceased men, not for women).[35]

As attested by my observations on the site as well as interviews with the performers, recitation of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* on the contrary, is not accompanied by any ritual action. Thus, it appears very dissimilar from the Daoist ritual of "breaking the Blood Pond", which is usually performed on the next day after the telling scriptures service. Unlike funerary telling scriptures, usually performed at night, the Daoist service (*daochang* 道場) takes place in the daytime, following telling scriptures.[36] This was the case which I witnessed on the "thirty-fifth day" occasion in Yushan in 2017. The Daoist ritual of "breaking the Blood Pond" also was performed, but it was centered on the ritual action, involving the destruction of the symbolic picture of the Blood Pond, drawn on the floor with the use of rice grain as well as the bowl representing the pond itself. The descendants of the deceased women are expected to drink some red water, which represents the mother's blood from the pond. As the emphasis here is not on the Daoist ritual, I will not describe it in detail. What is important here is its completely different form from the recitation of the relevant precious scroll in the tradition of telling scriptures. In this perspective, Daoist ritual in Changshu appears complementary to telling scriptures with the hell thematic.

Thus, the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, in the manuscript by Li Desheng, represents the combination of two ritual texts–*Precious Scroll of Mulian* and *Scripture of the Pond of Blood*–into one. Here, the story of Mulian rescuing his mother's soul from hell is used to substantiate the traditional ritual of "breaking the Blood Pond" (*po xue hu* 破血湖), still commonly performed in the traditional rural environment of Changshu. On the other hand, the emphasis here is not on the ritual action, but on the narrative component, which in the traditional environment of Changshu had entertaining aspect.[37]

4. Blood Pond Beliefs and the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*

The concept of the "Blood Pond" that apparently developed out of the symbol of Blood Bowl in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist literature has been an important notion in the literature about Mulian since around the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. It also has been related to the ritual practice of the salvation of a female soul from afterlife sufferings.

According to Chinese popular beliefs, mainly spread at the bottom levels of traditional society (the origins of which are not clearly documented), after death women are imprisoned in the Blood{ XE "Pool of Blood" } Pond, which is formed in the underworld (Chinese equivalent of hell, or sometimes interpreted as "purgatory" in comparison with the Western beliefs){ XE "hell" } from blood they lose during childbirth and menstruation. One can find

the earliest mention of these beliefs in the Daoist ritual text dated to 1194 (Soymié 1965, p. 132). Sometimes the confinement in the Blood Pond is presented as a punishment for violation of post-partum taboos (as in the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* and its derivatives in the scroll recitation traditions of southern Jiangsu);[38] however, more often it is described in the ritual texts as the inevitable consequence of female ritual impurity. It is the duty of pious descendants to perform the ritual of the salvation of their mother's soul and in this way to repay the mother's mercy of "birth and nurture of children".

These beliefs have foundation in the Buddhist notions of the physiological impurity of a woman's body as well as in the principle of one's filial duty towards one's mother (Cole 1998, pp. 197–214). They also are propagated in the *Blood Bowl Sūtra of the True Teaching in Great Canon Pronounced by the Buddha* (*Foshuo Dazang zhengjiao Xue pen jing* 佛説大藏正教血盆經, hereafter *Blood Bowl Sūtra*), a short Chinese scripture of the unknown date (ca. the twelfth century). It belongs to the category of indigenous (or apocryphal) Buddhist scriptures that though generally were not credited by elite monastics still constituted an important aspect of functioning of Chinese Buddhism (see, e.g., Buswell (1990)). In this case, the *Blood Bowl Sūtra* serves the scriptural foundation of a popular ritual practice. Another important aspect of this text in connection with the later precious scrolls with the Mulian subject is that it explicitly refers to the story of Mulian rescuing his mother from the Blood Pond (*Xue pen jing* 1967, p. 414). Therefore, filial children perform rituals of their mother's salvation from the Blood Pond, following the example of Mulian.

The elaboration of the Mulian story with the inclusion of the Blood Pond mythology became the core of the Buddhist ritual practice of salvation of ancestors, in this case specifically females. Since the early period (twelfth–thirteenth century) the rituals of the Blood Pond were also used in the Daoist tradition (Soymié 1965, pp. 132–33). The earliest mention of the Blood Pond and the ritual assembly aimed at the salvation from it in the precious scrolls dates back to the second half of the fourteenth century. It appears in the *Precious Scroll of Mulian Rescuing His Mother [and Helping Her]* to *Escape from Hell and Be Born in Heaven* (*Mulian jiu mu chuli diyu sheng tian baojuan* 目連救母出離地獄生天寶卷, also abbreviated as the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*), which is considered to be the earliest specimen of precious scrolls that survives now.[39] This text mentions the Victorious Meeting of the Blood Bowl of Ullambana (*Xue pen Yulan sheng hui* 血盆盂蘭勝會), which helped Mulian to rescue his mother from the rebirth as a dog (after she had already escaped from the imprisonment in hell and rebirth in the form of a hungry ghost): [40]

> The World Honored One said: If [you want] your mother to escape the dog's body, you should select the day of Zhongyuan festival on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and hold the Victorious Meeting of the Blood Bowl of Ullambana on this day, organize the ritual assembly. Only then your mother will be able to leave the dog's body and be reborn on the higher path" 世尊説：若你母脱離狗體，揀七月十五日中元節。今日修設血盆盂蘭勝會，啓建道場。汝母纔得脱狗超昇。(Yoshikawa 2003, p. 131).

In this passage, the ritual Meeting of the Blood Bowl is combined with the Ullambana assembly, an important Buddhist festival around which the ritual concerning Mulian and his mother originally developed in the sixth–ninth centuries (see Teiser (1988); Wang (2010)).

The practice of recitation of the *Sūtra of the Blood Bowl* (and similar texts) during special rituals for the redemption of the sins of women still living (as well as during funerals) is mentioned in the literature of the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries (Wang 2010, pp. 261–63). The Blood Pond as one of the hell compartments also appears in the act "Looking for Mother in the Third Hall" (*Sandian xunmu* 三殿尋母) of the *Newly Compiled Drama Exhorting Goodness of Mulian Rescuing His Mother* (*Xinbian Mulian jiumu quanshan xiwen* 新編目連救母勸善戲文) compiled by the Anhui literatus Zheng Zhizhen 鄭之珍 (1518–1595) on the basis of earlier recensions of this drama (first printed ca. 1582).[41] Expanded versions of the Blood Bowl scriptures from the later period (Ming and Qing dynasties) usually have the form of

"penitence books" (*chanfa* 懺法) and serve the direct function of cleansing all woman's sins. Several texts of penitence books that deal with the salvation from the Blood Pond (one of them dated to the end of the Ming dynasty) that are very close in contents and form to precious scrolls have survived.[42] They continue to circulate in the modern period: a text of one of such penitence books, the *Precious Penitence of the Merciful Blood Bowl* (*Cibei Xue pen bao chan* 慈悲血盆寶懺) has been printed in Taiwan until now. As was mentioned above, the ritual text of such form also was collected from performers in Changshu.

Besides, the symbol of the Blood Pond also was incorporated in the ritual systems of the sectarian teachings of the sixteenth – seventeenth centuries and appears in precious scrolls compiled by their followers. An example is the *Precious Scroll of Reverend Maudgalyāyana Rescuing His Mother [and Helping Her] to Escape from Hell and Be Born in Heaven* (*Mulian jiu mu chuli diyu sheng tian baojuan* 目犍連尊者救母出離地獄生天寶卷), which most probably is an adaptation of the early *Precious Scroll of Mulian* (1373 manuscript) by the followers of the Teaching of Non-Interference (*Wuwei jiao* 無為教) in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It has a special section on the Hell of the Pool of Blood (*Xue hu diyu* 血湖地獄, no. 55).[43] Several sectarian groups employed the rituals of salvation from the Blood Pond in the propagation of their teachings.[44] For example, there is a scripture of the Teaching of Vast Yang (Hongyang jiao 弘陽教) with the title of the *Precious Penitence on the Blood Pond of the Vast Yang of Chaotic Origin* (*Hunyuan hongyang xue hu bao chan* 混元弘陽血湖寶懺) dating back to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century that explains the origins of the Blood Pond and the ways to escape from it. It tells that in 1594 patriarch Piaogao 飄高 (original name Han Taihu 韓太湖, 1570–1598), the founder of Teaching of Vast Yang, established the Glorious Assembly of the Blood Pond (*Xue hu sheng hui* 血湖勝會) in response to requests of his followers (Pu 2005, vol. 106, pp. 117–18).

At the same time, the ritual of the salvation of deceased women from the suffering in the Blood Pond makes an important part of the ritual practice of common folk in China until now. In many places of southern China (including the island of Taiwan), this ritual has been performed together with the dramatic pieces on Mulian (see, e.g., Seaman (1989); Duan (1999, pp. 152–60); Wang (2010, pp. 164–66, 181–82)). The Blood Pond also is often mentioned in the precious scrolls of the nineteenth century, including the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirth of Mulian*, which also can be related to the contemporary ritual practice in the southern part of Jiangsu (see Berezkin (2017, pp. 163–67)).

The episode with the Blood Pond plays an important role in the recension of Li Desheng, following the original text of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*. In this episode when Ms. Liu is brought to the Blood Pond after death, the verse says:

> Women who came before you will tell you, listen [to us]!
>
> While alive, we gave birth to sons and daughters and thus committed grave sins.
>
> Before the completion of the full month, we passed in front of the [family] hall,
>
> And thus insulted the god of hall and six deities of the household.
>
> Before the completion of the full month, we passed through the skywell, [45]
>
> And thus insulted the three lights of sun, moon, and stars.
>
> As soon as Ms. Liu heard about these sins,
>
> She wailed and cried, enduring these torments.
>
> 初來婦人講你聽，在生未生男育女造孽深。
>
> 未曾滿月堂前過，觸犯家堂與六神。
>
> 却來滿月天井過，觸犯三光日月星。
>
> 劉氏一聽如此罪，啼啼哭哭受災辛。 [46]

Then women in the Pond address their sons and daughters, asking them to perform offerings to Yan-wang (King Yama),[47] so that he can forgive their sins (Wu 2015, vol. 2,

p. 1119). In this way the topic of the salvation from the Blood Pond is fully revealed in the recension of Li Desheng.

Thus, the association of the Mulian narrative with the rituals of the Blood Pond can be traced back to the late imperial period and appears in the forms of ritualized storytelling (scroll recitation) as well as the ritual drama. It can explain the survival and development of scroll recitation with this subject in the modern period, despite general decay of precious scrolls and persecutions of their recitation in the second half of the twentieth century.

5. Comparison with the Jingjiang Practice

One can find a similar case of the use of the Mulian narrative in the "telling scriptures" (Jingjiang dialect: ka˩35tɕi˩44) tradition of the nearby city of Jingjiang 靖江, located on the opposite bank of the Yangtze River from Changshu and Zhangjiagang. Similarly with Changshu, telling scriptures in Jingjiang takes place at religious assemblies, mainly arranged in the believers' houses nowadays. Presumably, recitation of precious scrolls originally was introduced to this area from the lands south to Yangtze (Suzhou area), where many settlers in Jingjiang, originally an island in Yangtze, came from.[48]

The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* is a prominent text of "telling scriptures" there.[49] Similar with the variant, represented by the manuscript of Li Desheng, the Jingjiang version of this text combines the Mulian story with the references to the ritual practice aimed at the salvation of a female soul. At the same time, many details of the narrative in the Jingjiang version are different from the version of Li Desheng's manuscript.

In this connection, one needs to note that the texts of precious scrolls performed by professional storytellers in the Jingjiang area (locally known as "fotou" 佛頭 [Jingjiang dialect: v2di31; lit. "the Buddha's head"])[50] in the modern period (1950–2000) existed primarily in the oral form, originally transmitted from masters to their disciples through oral instruction.[51] This implies the existence of multiple varying recensions of the same text as recited by individual performers. For example, the text of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, labeled as been recorded from an audio tape of a live recitation session, was deciphered and published by the local scholars.[52] Besides, the performative context of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* in the Jingjiang practice is different from the Changshu ritual assemblies.

In Jingjiang, telling scriptures is not performed during funerals or memorial days of the dead. Instead, it takes place during the assemblies held for living people, usually on occasions of anniversaries (sixty or seventy) and thus is known as the "assembly of prolonging one's life" (*yan sheng hui* 延生會). The repentance of sins of physiological impurity is performed for a still living woman, but also with the aim of preventing her from falling down into the Blood Pond after death. The reason for such difference with the Changshu area is not clear; it may be explained by the special features of local culture. In the modern period, the funerary (and memorial) rituals in the Jingjiang area are conducted by the local Daoist priests, but it is not clear whether this situation was the same in the past. The Daoist priests in Jingjiang also perform the ritual of "breaking the Blood Pond" on the female funerals (similar with their colleagues in the Changshu area), but in this case it is considered to be an afterlife ritual in comparison with the "present-world" ritual by the performers of "telling scriptures".

As I have witnessed both forms of this ritual in the Jingjiang area, I can describe their main difference as "narrative" (didactic) versus "action" (spectacular and dramatic). While performers of precious scrolls obviously emphasize didactic meaning of the Mulian story, the Daoist priests concentrate on the physical destruction of objects, symbolizing the Blood Pond (special scheme of hell drawn on the ground and the bowl placed in the middle of it). While the precious scroll is understandable for the local audience, the Daoist ritual spells are not, and the meaning of the Daoist ritual is mainly embodied in the "action" part. Still, "telling scriptures" with the topic of destruction of the Blood Pond also involves ritual action; which makes two rituals variants of similar practice of a woman's soul salvation.

Despite the significant textual differences between two narrative variants of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* from Jingjiang and Changshu that I have mainly consulted for this research, they presumably have the common source, namely the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths of Mulian*. Though, as has been already noted, the texts of telling scriptures in Jingjiang have been transmitted primarily in the oral mode in the modern period, there have been suppositions of the original existence of written texts in Jingjiang. Chinese scholars Che Xilun and Lu Yongfeng, who specially studied the modern variants of precious scrolls in Jingjiang, have supposed that the majority of texts there with the religious contents (the so-called "sacred scrolls" [*shengjuan* 聖卷]),[53] originally were adapted from the written texts of precious scrolls, transmitted to this area either in the form of printed copies or manuscripts (Lu and Che 2008, pp. 436–37). Leaving aside the discussion of whether this hypothesis is correct, we can note that several major texts in the Jingjiang tradition, including especially the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, indeed can be traced back to the written versions.

First, comparison with the old printed editions of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* demonstrates their close affinity with the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* (Jingjiang version). Of course, many elements have been added by the local performers, especially as concerns the ritual practice with which this text is associated in Jingjiang. Second, written materials in possession of modern *fotou* can prove that these printed copies may have reached Jingjiang quite long ago. For example, one *fotou* owned the printed copy of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, the lithographic edition made by the Hongda Morality Bookstore (宏大善書局) in 1922.[54] It is unclear, though, when this copy was transmitted to the Jingjiang area, similarly with the copies of the old printed texts of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, discovered in the Changshu area.

6. The *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* in the Ritual Practices of Southern Jiangsu

Comparison with the Jingjiang materials demonstrates that the story of Mulian, embodied in its late precious scroll version, has been widely used in the ritual practices of the southern Jiangsu areas. This is further collaborated by other data on the precious scrolls recitation in the Suzhou area in the first half of the twentieth century. While nowadays "masters of scroll recitation" (*xuanjuan xiansheng* 宣卷先生) in Suzhou suburbs mostly do not recite either the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* or *Precious Scroll of Mulian* and even do not participate in the funerary (memorial) rituals, like their colleagues in Changshu; the situation must have been different in the past – the period before 1950. Besides, the available historical evidence on scroll recitation in the Suzhou area suggests an alternative performative context for the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* and *Precious Scroll of Mulian*, namely collective ritual assemblies organized by local women praying for their afterlife salvation "in advance".

According to the information from the old master of scroll recitation Jin Wenyin 金文胤 (1926-?) from Shengpu 勝浦, a town near Suzhou,[55] such "assemblies of the Blood Pond", known under the name of "submission of the Blood Pond" (*jiao Xue hu* 繳血湖) once were comparatively common in the broader Suzhou area.[56] They were organized on the village basis and required participation of the majority elderly women in these communities. These communal assemblies usually took three days, including performance of various rituals; and in the evening recitation of precious scrolls in the individual households took place. Unfortunately, not much evidence of these assemblies is available now. No doubt, texts devoted to Mulian once were widely used on these occasions. Such texts also circulated in the Suzhou area. For example, the manuscript of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* by Gao Zhuqing 高竹卿, dated 1922, was preserved in the collection of Suzhou Museum of Chinese Drama (Guo 2018, p. 258). Precious scrolls in the collection of this museum (mostly manuscripts of the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries) were gathered from local scroll recitation performers during expeditions in the early 1960s. Among them, there is also a considerable number of manuscripts titled the *Precious Scroll of Mulian*, mostly closely following the contents of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* (Guo 2018, pp. 121–22).

According to the evidence of Jin Wenyin, the big assemblies of the Blood Pond declined since the 1930s because of the damage caused by the Japanese aggression; but some relevant ritual elements, including recitation of precious scrolls, were transferred to the meetings in private houses that are usually dedicated to the anniversaries of old women (mothers of families). Still, the tradition of communal assemblies in the Changshu area can be regarded as a vestige of this old tradition. According to Yu Dingjun, such "assemblies of the Blood Pond" (*Xue hu hui* 血湖會) are still occasionally held in Changshu. These are also communal rituals, in which all elder women in a community take part (Yu 2015, pp. 2584–85). These also involve recitation of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, *Penitence of the Blood Pond*, *Precious Scroll of Mulian*, and *Precious Scroll of the Penitence Rites of the Liang King*. Apparently this assembly has to do with the preservation of custom of "telling scriptures" during communal "Buddhist assemblies" (*Fohui* 佛會), including temple celebrations for various deities, which still survives in the Changshu area.

Similar to the Jingjiang tradition of the private assemblies of "prolonging one's life", as well as the big assemblies in the Suzhou suburbs, these assemblies of the Blood Pond represent the "advance" performance of the rituals of post-mortem salvation, which are followed by the Daoist rituals of the "destruction of the Blood Pond" during funerals of local women. Such assemblies are similar to the "advance rites" performed for the women in rural areas of southern China, including Guangdong and Fujian (e.g., Ma (2007); Cheung (2008)). In traditional society, these rituals also have meaning of purification and protection of women who have reached the menopausal age. However, in southern China these assemblies do not involve recitation of precious scrolls. The form of "telling scriptures" (or scroll recitation), which combines the vernacular narratives of precious scrolls with the ritual action, seems to be peculiar of southern Jiangsu areas, now best preserved in the Changshu, Jingjiang, and Wuxi areas.

Despite the great popularity of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* and its derivatives in the Suzhou area in the modern period, one should not overemphasize its impact on the local culture. This is well observed in the discrepancy between local ritual practice and values propagated in the written texts. While the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* by Li Desheng, same as the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, encourages audiences to keep vegetarian diet,[57] this prohibition does not have much impact on the real-life practice of "telling scriptures". Though it is common in Changshu to abstain from meat on the day before the ritual assembly, funerary recitations of precious scrolls usually use meat offerings, which contradicts mainstream Buddhist practices.[58] Apparently, though the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* was adapted for ritualized recitations in the Changshu area, the religious injunctions of this text were not accepted by the local society in Changshu. Major religious values and symbols of this text were not absorbed in the local ritual practice of "telling scriptures".

7. Conclusions

The manuscript of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* by Li Desheng demonstrates the use of an old narrative text in the modern practice of folk storytelling for ritual purposes. While not typical of the practice of funerary "telling scriptures" in Changshu, this manuscript presumably represents one of its local variants; it embodies combination of a vernacular narrative of precious scroll devoted to the Mulian story and a ritual text on the destruction of the Blood Pond (Bowl). Though apparently not reflecting the ritual action, this variant of precious scroll directly refers to this popular ritual of the woman's salvation. This text was apparently adapted from the famous text of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, which was transmitted in southern Jiangsu in the form of printed editions and manuscripts since the end of the nineteenth century. In its own turn, the printed recension of the late nineteenth century must have been rooted in the storytelling and ritual practices of the Jiangnan (Lower Yangtze Valley) region.

The manuscript by Li Desheng represents survival of the old Buddhist literary subject in the modern ritual environment of southern Jiangsu. While originating in the ancient

narratives (basically starting with the "transformation texts" of the Tang period), this subject still attracts the attention of local believers, as it propagates the Buddhist form of the filial piety concept, so important in traditional China. Thus, it is especially appropriate for the funerary and memorial days' services for the salvation of mothers' souls—an important element of local ritual culture in Changshu. The combination of ritual meaning (escape from the Blood Pond hell) with the didactic and entertaining elements of storytelling in the vernacular language forms the unique feature of this type of folk practice.

The manuscript by Li Desheng contains additional information on the use of the *Precious Scroll of Mulian* (in its southern variant of the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*) and the area of its transmission. It demonstrates that the Mulian story, adapted from the text of precious scroll edited and printed in the cities of Jiangnan at the end of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries, has been used for ritual assemblies centered at the "breaking of the Blood Pond" not only in Jingjiang, but also in Changshu (and more broadly, in the Suzhou area in the past). This gives one a new perspective of evaluation of the "telling scriptures" tradition in Jingjiang that presumably was related to the culture of the Jiangnan area. Some common points in the subjects and ritual background of precious scrolls in these areas contributes to the study of connections between telling scriptures (scroll recitation) practices in the territory in between Suzhou, Changshu, and Jingjiang. The reconstruction of exact history of transmission and adaptation of these texts (if even possible, given the paucity of credible historical data now) still awaits further research.

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Notes

1 I express my gratitude to Prof. Sheng Yimin 盛益民 (Fudan University) for the help with the transcription of the Suzhou dialect.

2 For a general introduction to precious scrolls, see. e.g., Sawada (1975); Overmyer (1999); Che (2009); Berezkin (2017, pp. 3–34).

3 I am using the variant reprinted in the collection of precious scrolls in Changshu, see Wu (2015, vol. 2, pp. 1116–32). Xu Juzhen started to study telling scriptures at the age of forty-five; originally she participated in the amateur entertainment troupe and also can sing Wuxi drama (*xiju* 錫劇), see Wu (2015, vol. 3, p. 2549). Professional female performers in the Changshu tradition of telling scriptures appeared around the beginning of the 1980s; originally this job was exclusively male, as only men were allowed to conduct related rituals, Yu Dingjun, personal communication 2 June 2011. Xu Juzhen's husband is a Daoist (local ritual master), which also can explain her interest in the ritual texts of precious scrolls (masters of telling scriptures often cooperate with Daoist priests in the ritual services).

4 The father and brother of Yu Dingjun were performers of telling scriptures; on his background and activities, see Berezkin (2013a, pp. 173–200).

5 On Changshu "telling scriptures", see, e.g., Qiu (2010); Yu (2015); Berezkin (2013a).

6 Hence, the name of the "Buddhist service" (*fo shi* 佛事) is also applied to "telling scriptures" in Changshu.

7 Here I do not go into details of performative manner of "telling scriptures" in Changshu and vicinity. Just suffice to say it alternates prose narrative with the singing of verses, as typical of "precious scrolls" genre; mainly simple percussion instruments accompaniment is used, see Berezkin (2013a, pp. 198–200).

8 On them, see also Berezkin (2017, pp. 155–63).

9 See also Lu and Che (2012, pp. 98–105).

10 The copies of this edition are available in the Shanghai City Library and Harvard-Yenching Library, for the digital copy, see https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:23707586$1i (accessed on 1 May 2021). For the reprinted copies of this text (two different woodblock edns. of the late nineteenth century), see Pu (2005, vol. 11, pp. 134–72); (Huang et al. 2002, vol. 352, pp. 199–305). There is a complete English translation of this text (the 1885 Yidezhai—德齋 edition made in Nanjing) by Wilt L. Idema, see Grant and Idema (2011, pp. 35–145).

11 For the list of printed and manuscript copies, see Berezkin (2017, pp. 181–83).

12 On the origins and development of this story, see e.g., Teiser (1988, pp. 43–195); Mair (1989, pp. 14–15, 17–18, 123–27); Liu (1997, pp. 1–64); et al.

13 On the evolution of this subject in precious scrolls, see Berezkin (2017, pp. 48–170).

14 In the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* his name is written with another character 賈.

15 This character is never used in Chinese surnames; this is an obvious mistake by substitution of characters.

16 See e.g., *Mulian jiu mu youming bao zhuan* (Anonymous 1900, pp. 41a–42b).

17 In the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths*, this whole episode was borrowed from the novel dating back to ca. late sixteenth—early seventeenth centuries, see Berezkin (2013b, pp. 86–93).

18 See Berezkin (2017, pp. 127–28).

19 See, e.g., famous short story by Lu Xun (1881–1936), "A Prayer for Happiness" (*Zhu fu* 祝福): Lu (2005, vol. 2, p. 8).

20 For the sake of volume, I do not go into details of its linguistic characteristics.

21 On the development of the cult of Dizang in China, see Zhiru (2007).

22 Wu (2015, vol. 2, p. 1116). On the ritual aspects of introductory and concluding verses in precious scrolls of the late period, see Berezkin (2017).

23 This notion also includes some areas of modern Zhangjiagang city. In 1962, northern areas of former Changshu county were transformed into the new Shazhou 沙洲 county (also including a part of Jiangyin 江陰 county). In 1986, Shazhou was transformed into Zhangjiagang 張家港 city. Both Changshu and Zhangjiagang cities are under the jurisdiction of Suzhou 蘇州 city now. On "telling scriptures" in the Fenghuang 鳳凰 (Gangkou 港口) area of Zhangjiagang, see Yu (1997); Che (2009, pp. 386–419).

24 There is a service on the first day after a person's death, called "immediate hell" (*suishen diyu* 隨身地獄).

25 On this day a soul of the deceased is believed to return home to enjoy offerings and rituals of salvation.

26 The topic of underworld travels is common in precious scrolls since the early period of history of this genre, see Sawada (1975, pp. 66–68); Overmyer (1999, pp. 38–47, 240–47); Che (2009, pp. 65–89); Grant (1989).

27 For the sake of volume, I will not go into detailed ethnographic description of such assemblies; for some details see Yu (2015, pp. 2587–93).

28 I also have a copy of the similar manuscript of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* copied by Yu Baojun 余寶均 in 1991, which is now in possession of his brother Yu Dingjun. Another variant of this precious scroll was preserved in the Changshu City Library (undated manuscript of ca. first half of the twentieth century), published in Wu (2015, vol. 2, p. 1109–15). It also might have been collected from a local performer. This demonstrates that several versions of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* have been widespread in the vicinity of Changshu.

29 The similar text, also titled the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond* (marked as property of Zhou Sulian 周素蓮, dated by wuchen year [1928?]), not containing the developed narrative part of the Mulian story, belongs to the earlier period. It was reprinted in the 2005 collection of precious scrolls by Pu (2005, vol. 14, pp. 156–69). Its place of origin and remains unknown, but it also certainly comes from the southern part of Jiangsu.

30 For the narratives of Dizang in the Changshu tradition, see Wu (2015, vol. 3, pp. 974–1006).

31 For the published text, see Liang (2007, vol. 2, p. 1361).

32 Another variant of this text, also related to the Daoist ritual tradition, is the *Penitence of the Blood Pond* (*Xue hu chan* 血湖懺), for the published variant, see Wu (2015, vol. 3, pp. 2277–80). According to Yu Dingjun, it was borrowed into telling scriptures from the Daoist ritual.

33 According to Yu Dingjun, the second part of this text also can be recited during the ritual assemblies aimed at praying for babies (in case of couple barrenness or miscarriage), when this text is connected with the ritual of expulsion of the "Heavenly Dog" (*tiangou* 天狗): Yu (2015, pp. 2565–66). However, many other local masters of telling scriptures do not use it on such occasions, so this cannot be considered a usual function of this precious scroll.

34 For the published text, see Wu (2015, vol. 3, pp. 1033–55).

35 Its complete title is *Precious Scroll of Explicating and Clarifying [Origins] of Hell* (*Xiaoshi mingzheng diyu baojuan* 銷釋明證地獄寶卷); this is a Ming-dynasty text used in the modern ritualized recitation of Changshu, see Che (2009, pp. 394–95).

36 On cooperation between masters of telling scriptures and Daoist priests in Changshu, see Qiu (2010, pp. 201–2); Yu (2015, pp. 2573–74, 2587).

37 According to recollections of old performers, telling scriptures on such occasions attracted multiple listeners from among relatives and neighbors of the family, especially women and children who came to listen.

38 According to traditional beliefs, women were required to stay in confinement for a month after childbirth ("doing the month": *zuo yuezi* 坐月子), see Pillsbury (1978).

39 It is an incomplete illustrated manuscript, now mounted as an album (originally presumably an "accordion-style" book–*jingzhe ben* 經摺本), that is dated to 1373. It belonged to the famous scholar of Chinese literature Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958) and now is held by the National Library of China. The Japanese scholar Yoshikawa Yoshikazu (Yoshikawa 2003, pp. 123–34)

has published the transcription of the surviving part of this text. The similar manuscript entitled the *Precious Scroll of Reverend Maudgalyāyana Rescuing His Mother [and Helping Her] to Escape from Hell and Be Born in Heaven* (*Mujianlian zunzhe jiu mu chuli diyu sheng tian baojuan* 目犍連尊者救母出離地獄生天寶卷) and dated 1440 has been preserved in Russia (originally in a private collection, later purchased by the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg); see Berezkin (2017, pp. 48–71).

40 This detail, which can be traced to the early Mulian narratives (transformation texts, eighth–ninth centuries) is absent from the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* and its derivatives in the scroll recitation traditions of southern Jiangsu, including the Li Desheng's version.

41 See Zheng (2005, pp. 371–79). The drama on this subject has been known in China since the twelfth century, but the early versions did not survive, see Liu (1997, pp. 32–50).

42 See for example Li (2012, pp. 157–62, 363–92).

43 Originally in possession of Fu Xihua 傅惜華 (1907–1966), now kept in the Library of the Research Institute of Drama in Chinese Academy of Arts{ XE "Library of the Research Institute of Drama in Chinese Academy of Arts" } (Beijing{ XE "Beijing" }). On this text, see Che (2009, pp. 491–96).

44 Followers of these teachings usually offered ritual services to the commoners, see Berezkin (2017, pp. 114–16).

45 A house yard.

46 (Wu 2015, vol. 2, p. 1118). The similar verse can be found in the *Precious Scroll of Three Rebirths* (*Mulian san shi baojuan* 1876, pp. 8a–10a).

47 One of Ten Kings of Underworld, usually interpreted as the main one among them in the popular traditions.

48 This is substantiated by the fact that telling scriptures in Jingjiang still uses a variety of the Wu dialect, also originating in Jiangnan, see Lu and Che (2008, pp. 9–12).

49 For its study, see Che (2009, pp. 348–63), see also Berezkin (2017, pp. XV–XXIV).

50 On the origins and use of this term in Jingjiang, see Lu and Che (2008, pp. 120–24).

51 This has been one of the major special features of "telling scriptures" of Jingjiang in the contemporary period, making it look very different from other traditions of precious scrolls recitation in China.

52 You (2007, vol. 1, pp. 407–30). This is a recension by *fotou* Wang Guoliang 王國良; considerable editing by local scholars also took place.

53 As opposed to the "entertaining scrolls" [*cao juan* 草卷], mainly using "secular" subjects, many of them adapted from other forms of storytelling.

54 For the modern critical edition of the text, see You (2007, vol. 1, pp. 379–405).

55 Once the head of the performative team that enjoyed considerable popularity in the eastern suburbs of Suzhou; he resumed his performances in the 1980s.

56 As reported by Che Xilun, who interviewed him in 1995 and 1998, see Che (2009, pp. 364–65).

57 It is clearly pronounced in the concluding verses of the *Precious Scroll of the Blood Pond*, see Wu (2015, vol. 2, p. 1131).

58 While Yu Dingjun insists that only vegetarian offerings can be used on this occasion, it contradicts the usual practice in this area Yu (2015, p. 2587); the same for the Fenghuang area, see Yu (1997, p. 76).

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Incorporating Folk Belief into National Heritage: The Interaction between Ritual Practice and Theatrical Performance in *Xiud Yax Lus Qim* (*Yalu wang*) of the Miao (Hmong) Ethnic Group

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Abstract: *Xiud Yax Lus Qim* or *Yalu wang* 亞魯王 (Ode to the King Yalu) is a type of oral performance inherited verbally and transmitted orally by *dongb langf* (*donglang* 東郎, chanters of *Yalu wang*) at funerals and festive occasions. As one of the most representative cultural sets of the Miao (Hmong) ethnic group located in southern China, *Yalu wang* is embedded in Miao sorcery beliefs and practices, and serves as a vehicle to unite the community and maintain the identity of the ethnic group. However, since *Yalu wang* was "discovered" as a heroic epic by scholars in 2009 and entered the government's "List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage" two years later, different agencies have been vying to appropriate its cultural resources. Not only do local government authorities use it as a tourist attraction, stage performances have also produced various versions of *Yalu wang* to portray an emblem of what are presumed to be "authentic Miao cultures". This article explores the interactive relationship between Miao sorcery and folk traditions in the oral performance of *Yalu wang* and their enactment and re-enactment in theatrical performances under the aegis of a state-endorsed tourism policy. In so doing, the discussion sheds new light on the bidirectional dynamics that not only remold the style of performing culture, but also facilitate religious synthesis.

Keywords: China; *Xiud Yax Lus Qim* (*Yalu wang*); Miao (Hmong) ethnic group; oral performance; ritual practice; sorcery and witchcraft; collective memory; cultural heritage; state presence

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1. Introduction

Xiud Yax Lus Qim (*Yalu wang* 亞魯王, literally "Ode to the King Yalu") is a type of oral performance and ritual practice associated with traditional Miao (Hmong) funerals and festivals in southern China. In approximately 20,000 lines, this story narrates the creation of the world and the history of Miao ancestors, centering on the life trajectory of the eighteenth king, Yalu—his success, defeat, exodus, and finally leading a Miao renaissance.[1] *Yalu wang* is circulated in numerous subdialect groups of the Miao ethnic group, but in most cases it appears as scattered fragments and none are as well preserved as that performed by the Mashan subdialect group. The Mashan area is centered in the city of Anshun, Ziyun county in Guizhou province, and also includes parts of Wangmo, Changshun, Luodian, Huishui, and Pingtang counties (See Figure 1). The better preservation of *Yalu wang* in this area can be attributed to its geographical location in a typical karst topography, which for centuries has left its people in a relatively isolated state (Tang 2010, p. 89). As cultural contacts with the outside world have historically been extremely limited, many traditional customs, including the oral performance of *Yalu wang* and its related ritual practices, are well preserved and are still practiced in a more authentic way.

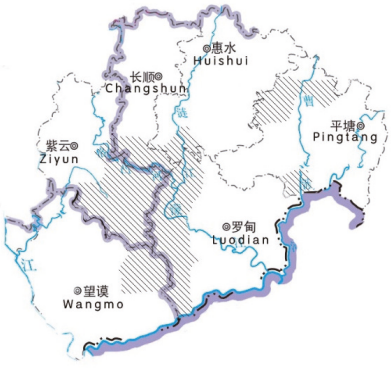

Figure 1. Range of the Mashan Region.

Official discourses on *Yalu wang* first emerged in 2009, soon after it was "discovered" by Yu Weiren 余未人 (b. 1942), the then deputy chair of the Chinese Folk Literature and Art Association (CFLAA), through ethnographic fieldwork in southwestern Guizhou. Following the efforts by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadres to collect folkloric literature that was launched in Yan'an in the 1940s, and extensively promoted after the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, earlier scholars of *Yalu wang* quickly defined the text as a "heroic epic" (*yingxiong shishi* 英雄史詩) dating back to 2033–1562 BCE. They made parallels with other well-known ethnic epics, such as those associated with the Tibetan cultural hero King Gesar, the *Jangar* story of the Mongols, and *Manas* of Kyrgyz ethnic groups (*Yalu wang*, pp. I–188).[2] Later, Chao Gejin 朝戈金 (Chao 2012) redefined *Yalu wang* as a "composite epic" (*fuhe shishi* 複合史詩) since it combines "the characteristics of the three sub-types of epics—heroic epic, creation epic, and migration epic—that circulate in China". Chao's argument broadens the definitional aspects of *Yalu wang*, but is still confined to the specific field of the epic.

It is salient to argue that the official discourses that define *Yalu wang* as an epic (in any form) obviously suggest a type of bias from a literary perspective. With more scholars in other disciplinary fields showing an interest in *Yalu wang*, its ritual aspects have more recently begun to draw greater scholarly focus. Yang Liu 楊柳 (Yang 2016, p. 147), for example, points out that *Yalu wang* is commonly used for the ritual practice of *jangz ghad* (*kailu* 開路, literally "paving the way") at traditional Miao funerals. In the same vein, Xu Xinjian 徐新建 (Xu 2014, p. 81) argues that *Yalu wang* is not limited to a "heroic epic" but is a "combination of oral and ritual performances". As a type of ritual practice, *Yalu wang* uses oral performance as the vehicle for the Miao sorcery belief in ancestral spirits. Because *Yalu wang* is a ritualized performance at Miao funerals, some scholars take *Yalu wang* to be a cultural phenomenon that conveys the cognitive aspects of the ethnic group, and refer to the entire ritual practice of *Yalu wang* as "Yalu culture" (Tang 2012, p. 49; Zhang and Peng 2013, p. 83).

Drawing on the theoretical framework of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Clyde Kluckhohn, and John Middleton, Zhao Xiaohuan 趙曉寰 (Zhao 2013, pp. 134–35) sheds light on three complementary patterns in the study of *wugu* sorcery (or *wu*-shamanism)—loosely rendered as "black magic"—in China: (1) The explanatory, which uses witchcraft to account for misfortunes; (2) The functionalist, which resorts to witchcraft as a means to release unbearable emotions and as a form of social control; (3) The structural, which is concerned with how witchcraft reflects tensions between different social groups and how it is related to the overall social structure. Confirming that *Yalu wang* is central to the ritual acts embedded in the sorcery beliefs of the Miao, the discussion here examines it within the context of funerals. It takes as a starting point Jack Goody's denial of Durkheim's well-known claim of the "dichotomy of the universe into the sacred and the profane" (Goody 2010, p. 16), where Goody goes on to define ritual as "a category of standardized behaviour (custom)"

(ibid., p. 36). Understood as a manifestation of Goody's category of custom, *Yalu wang* can be said to be "the sum-total of certain rules and cultural achievements, [it] embraces . . . both Profane and Sacred" (Malinowski 1948a, p. 41). Based on the embrace of the sacred *and* the profane, we observe in *Yalu wang* at least two layers of Miao philosophy. First, the ritual acts of *Yalu wang* are built on the Miao belief in *wugu* sorcery, which, as Goody (2010, p. 36) suggests in a different context, is a type of irrational or nonrational behavior used to handle the affairs after death. Second, it echoes what Richard Schechner (1993, p. 4) refers to as "the efficacy of ritual acts", which, in our case, is achieved by the oral performance of *Yalu wang*. In terms of ritual, then, the performance of *Yalu wang* fulfils its functions on the unity and identity of the ethnic group (ibid., p. 20).

Within the terms of Zhao's threefold framework, the analysis in Section 2 elaborates on the content of *Yalu wang* and the role of *dongb langf* (*donglang* 東郎, chanters of *Yalu wang*), disclosing their function as the agents bridging the mourners and Miao ancestors at funerals. Section 3 deepens the examination of the cultural connotations behind *Yalu wang*, discussing how the Miao belief in sorcery functions to frame a common history and collective memory that help unite the community and maintain Miao identity in Mashan. Section 4 looks at how this form has dealt with a more intrusive state presence over the past decade, as *Yalu wang* is increasingly and inevitably involved in tensions that have emerged between the local ethnic community, the cultural elite, and state authorities. Bereft of localized features as a manifestation of ethnic knowledge, *Yalu wang* has become a state-sanctioned form of "cultural heritage" and a touristic spectacle. The state's endorsement certainly secures resources for its protection and promotion, and yet the engagement with state power and local government also means a certain kind of disfranchising of *Yalu wang*, a situation that leads to a new and pressing need to retain its traditional forms and cultural connotations in the face of dynamic processes of modernization that carry within them both secularization and urbanization.

The data used in this article come from a research trip to Ziyun, Guizhou, in 2021 and fieldwork reports by other scholars, including observations on Miao funerals and interviews with *dongb langf* (Yu 2011; Cao et al. 2012). For convenience, the texts of *Yalu wang* cited here are taken from an edition titled *Xiud Yax Lus Qim*, collected by the CFLAA and published by the Zhonghua Book Company (CFLAA 2011).[3] Using this version for reference does not imply that it can be considered a standardized or definitive form of the text. In fact, there is no single authoritative text; since *Yalu wang* is transmitted orally, the chanting of which is relatively flexible as long as it follows a "main narrative". Within this framework, not only do different individuals have the freedom to alter details, the same *dongb langf* can also include ad lib or improvised elements to vary his performances.

2. *Yalu Wang* and *Dongb Langf* at Funeral Scenes

Chronologically narrated, the oral performance of *Yalu wang* consists of three major topics—*Xiud yangb luf chef* (*genyuan* 根源, ancestral origins), *Xiud yangb luf qif* (*shengping* 生平, life stories), and *Langb bangb suob* (*puxi* 譜系, the offspring) of Yalu, and finally the chanting comes to the family lineage of the deceased. It can be further subdivided into 11 major parts (CFLAA 2011; Cai 2019, p. 40):[4]

Part 1. Lines 1–1176: Creation of the world by ancestral immortals;
Part 2. Lines 1177–1344: Childhood stories of Yalu;
Part 3. Lines 1345–2870: Battle of Naf Njinb and Pel Jinb. Yalu defeats King Lus Wox, former subordinate of Yalu's father Haed Xix Wus, seizing his land Naf Njinb and Pel Jinb;
Part 4. Lines 2871–4020: Battle of the Dragon's Heart. Yalu kills a dragon and obtains its heart. His elder brothers, Saem Yangd and Saem Nblam, are jealous and launch a war. At first, they are defeated by Yalu, but later they use Yalu's consorts, Bob Nim Sangd and Bob Nim Luf, to seize the dragon's heart. Without the dragon's heart, Yalu is defeated and driven away from his territory;

Part 5. Lines 4021–5174: Battle of Salt Wells. Yalu flees and leads his followers to Blak Jongt Yind and finds salt wells there. Saem Yangd and Saem Nblam feel jealous and launch another war. Yalu has to lead his followers across the river to find new places to settle;
Part 6. Lines 5175–8086: Exodus. Yalu leads his followers to flee across 30 places, and finally takes refuge at Heid Buf Dok's kingdom;
Part 7. Lines 8087–9254: Taking Heid Buf Dok's kingdom by strategy. Yalu and Heid Buf Dok have a duel of wits for dominance over the kingdom. Yalu defeats Heid Buf Dok, drives him off, and takes over his land;
Part 8. Lines 9255–10,819: Reconstructing the new kingdom. Yalu leads his followers to construct his new territory, creates the sun and the moon, and orders his 12 sons to conquer 12 lost places so that these places would inherit the Yalu family lineage;
Part 9. Children of Yalu;
Part 10. Grandchildren of Yalu;
Part 11. Family lineage of the deceased.

Due to successive defeats and the forced exodus of Yalu and his clansmen, the oral performance of *Yalu wang* is full of melancholic and grief-stricken motifs, intended deliberately to agitate the collective and affective memory of its audiences. For instance, after the defeat at the Battle of the Dragon's Heart, the text is replete with images of suffering and resilience (CFLAA 2011, lines 3977–3984):

Yax Lus jex meinl hah doud (Yalu rides on horseback)
Yax Lus zod kom hah hlongb (Yalu wears black iron footwear)
Yax Lus deib buf dongb nyid lid luok nid lid luok (Yalu's children cry, boo-hoo boo-hoo)
Yax Lus deib buf waf nyid lid luf nid lid luf (Yalu's babies cry, waah-waah waah-waah)
Yax Lus njengs soab angt fub lwf (Yalu burns down his homeland, taking field rations along the way)
Yax Lus njengs rongl angt xongm lwf (Yalu breaks apart his kingdom, taking glutinous rice on a long journey)
Yax Lus jongx buf lwf hud heih (Taking his sorrowful clansmen, Yalu sets out on a long road)
Yax Lus jongx buf lwf heid hul (Taking his heartbroken followers, Yalu sets out on a long journey)

His two consorts, Box Nim Sangd and Box Nim Luf, who are cheated by Saem Yangd and Saem Nblam, and whose actions lead to Yalu's defeat, voluntarily bring up the rear in order to pay witness to their transgressions (CFLAA 2011, lines 4003–4006):

Box Nim Sangd deib ntox lah meik rum lah qengl (Box Nim Sangd's blade becomes blunt and she is tired)
Box Nim Luf deib mud lah lod rum lah qengl (Box Nim Luf's spear is broken and she is exhausted)
Box Nim Sand lah hol zad pwl nyod (Box Nim Sangd falls in a pool of blood)
Box Nim Luf lah hol zad pwl songx (Box Nim Luf falls on a pile of bones)

The circular, repetitive structure of these lyrics generates a sense of deep sorrow, which is further enhanced by the mournful melody of the chanting. Generally, the melody of *Yalu wang* simply consists of the notes *mi*, *la*, and mi^2, and each phrase ends with *la*, either as half notes or crotchets. This conforms to the *yu* mode (*yu diaoshi* 羽調式) in the *gongche* notation (*gongche pu* 工尺譜) method of traditional Chinese music that uses characters to represent notes. The tonic of the *yu* mode melody, *la*, creates a minor mode or scale which is often used to convey sentimental and sorrowful emotions in Chinese music—for instance, in *The Butterfly Lovers* (*Liang Zhu* 梁祝), *The Moon over a Fountain* (*Erquan yingyue* 二泉映月), and *Autumn Moon over Han Palace* (*Hangong qiuyue* 漢宮秋月). The solemn timbre of the drum and *lusheng* 蘆笙 (a bamboo wind instrument with multiple pipes fitted with free reeds), two typical instruments used for Miao ceremonies and festivals to mediate between the ritual professionals and ancestral spirits, also adds to the mournful emotions of the chanting.

When a Miao dies, their family members fire rifles into the air as a way of signaling their mourning, and then deliver messages to relatives of the same clan. One day before the scheduled date of the funeral, at least 20 to 30, over 100 at most, relatives come to pay

respects to the deceased and offer financial support to the bereaved, before listening to the chanting of *Yalu wang* at the wake (Tang 2010, pp. 92–94; Tang 2012, p. 49). These funerary rituals are not only confined to China. In the Hmong community in the United States, for example, what is referred to as a "traditional full-service funeral" is still partly preserved (Xiong et al. 2020, pp. 2–3, 7–8).[5] While the details of a Miao funeral may vary according to the cause of death and economic status of the deceased, *Yalu wang* is the constant core that is chanted in turn by a group of four to eight *dongb langf* at the *jangz ghad* ritual, which often lasts from the sunset of the funeral ceremony to the following dawn when relatives carry the coffin onto the mountain for burial. The funeral scene suggests *dongb langf*'s identity as a type of ritual professional, whose *mana*, or communicable supernatural power, is not an endowment, but comes from "reference to ancestors and culture heroes" (Malinowski 1948a, p. 55)—in our case, the ability to chant the story of Yalu. Among their number are "big *dongb langf*" and "little *dongb langf*", categorized as such by the amount of *Yalu wang* they have learned. An extremely experienced big *dongb langf*, who is able to chant the full *Yalu wang*, is a necessity for funerals, and is for this reason often considered to be the elder in local society (Yu 2014, p. 304).

Another type of shaman-like ritual professional, other than *dongb langf*, is *bot muf* (*baomu* 寶目). Only able to chant fragments of *Yalu wang* (Yu 2014, p. 303), they primarily use the words as curses in exorcising or divining witchcraft (Yang 2015, p. 77; Tang 2012, p. 48). The identities of *dongb langf* and *bot muf* sometimes overlap: *dongb langf* can perform *bot muf*'s exorcising and divining roles, but *bot muf* cannot preside over funeral rituals in place of *dongb langf*. Further, *dongb langf* commonly receive no payment for their performance at funerals, and are only given "half or one kilo of meat, a few kilos of rice, and some glutinous rice" (Xu 2011b, p. 270) as a present; meanwhile, *bot muf* often receive payment for exorcising or divining witchcraft. Currently, however, the host family also reimburses *dongb langf*'s work in the form of a cash renumeration. Around 2010, the rate of each *dongb langf* in Zongdi was 120 CNY (Tang 2012, p. 55).[6]

3. Cultural Connotations behind the Performance of *Yalu wang*

As shown above, while *Yalu wang* is defined by folkloric scholars as a heroic epic, this fails to make sense of its central presence at traditional Miao funerals. The Miao vernacular refers to the performance of *Yalu wang* as "*angt Yax Lus*" (*zuo Yalu* 做亞魯, literally "doing Yalu"). This cultural context means that *Yalu wang* is not limited to an oral form of folkloric literature. An equally, if not more, important aspect is that the oral performance of *Yalu wang* has to be understood as an entire ritual practice manifesting local knowledge. What, then, is the function of *Yalu wang*, and in what way is this function realized from the emic point of view?

Yalu wang contains two related cultural connotations which are located at different layers of Miao cognition. Drawing on Erving Goffman's (1959, pp. 106–40) theory of interaction ritual, discourses on the cultural function of *Yalu wang* often stand out on the "front stage", while *wugu* sorcery, as the schemata of Miao belief, hides in the "back stage". As Mary Douglas (2001, p. 65) puts it, "Ritual focusses attention by framing, it enlivens the memory", while Bronislaw Malinowski (1948a, p. 64) suggests that ritual "unchain[s] the powers of the past and cast[s] them into the present". The mortuary routine performed by *dongb langf* creates a liminality that juxtaposes the existence of Yalu (the past) and mourners (the present). Just like Confucian rites that draw on emotive criteria to influence reality (Kertzer 1988, pp. 13–14), the oral performance of *dongb langf* forms and reinforces a shared cultural memory at the funeral scene, on the basis of the Miao's common identity as Yalu's offspring. Therefore, the history of Yalu is never a dead one. On the contrary, it represents the Miao's cognition of the external world and forms an ethnic spirit of the group which is, in Malinowski's (1948b, pp. 102–3) designation, "a statement of a bigger reality still partially alive", and which "rule[s] the social life".

In this way, *Yalu wang* interweaves a "commonwealth" in the Miao ethnic group by "keeping up the memory of its kinship by means of common ceremonies in common places

of worship" (Tönnies 2001, p. 240). How, then, does *Yalu wang* successfully convey and sustain this collective memory of the group? Key to this function are the interactions between *dongb langf* and mourners based on the oral performance in funerary services as a means of ritualizing memory and kinship. By means of specific and repeated oral performances of *Yalu wang* at funeral scenes, this ritual practice is what Paul Connerton (1989, p. 14ff.) refers to as a form of "historical reconstruction", a mnemonic means of performativity that serves to confirm and reinforce the Miao's collective memory of what is believed to have taken place in history. In this sense, the reminiscent reiteration of Yalu as a deified ancestor and cultural hero at funeral scenes unites the Miao community as an ethnic group and maintains this identity by interweaving emotional interaction and cultural consensus among all the individuals as Yalu's offspring. This emotive agitation is preeminently important for the legitimacy of an ethnic group or cultural community that may be being hollowed out or threatened by decline. As a representation of Miao ethnic culture, *Yalu wang*, as an oral textual artifact, is likely to have become a condensed manifestation of that culture. This caters to the necessity to articulate the Miao's "otherness" in terms of both geographical and geopolitical issues, as a means to maintain their distinctiveness since the time they dwelled in the barren lands of Mashan during the Ming and Qing eras.

"Public *mise en scène*" or "collectiveness of performance" are central to the ritual of *Yalu wang* (Malinowski 1948a, pp. 48–49). In funeral scenes, *dongb langf* and relatives of the deceased are not in a one-sided "performer–audience" matrix. Drawing on what Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, p. 43) defines as "the transformative power of performance", all those present at the funeral are emotionally engaged in a "chain reaction". The Miao funeral is thus a field of performativity, where relatives of the deceased cry out of grief to the oral performance of *dongb langf*, who, in return, feel moved and sometimes become tearful due to the mourning of relatives that adds to the solemnity of the ritual practice. Yang Guangwen 楊光文 (b. 1958) and Chen Xinghua 陳興華 (b. 1945) both have experienced crying while chanting due to the influence of relatives, and Chen even exhorts them not to cry, as he would be too sorrowful to perform the ritual (Cao et al. 2012, p. 399; Tang and Ma 2015, p. 72). Therefore, the mutual affect of all parties in the performance plays a central role to the advent of Yalu in the secular realm, and funeral participation thus reinforces the ties in the clan and the ethnic group.

In particular, the historical construction of *Yalu wang* enhances the cohesiveness of the Miao ethnic group in two dimensions. On the one hand, the cult of the heroic ancestor Yalu is bound up with the unity of the ethnic group. Part 6, Yalu's exodus, delineates the migration of Yalu after he is defeated by his older brothers Saem Yangd and Saem Nblam in the Battle of Salt Wells, and this part is formed from the repetition of one passage (CFLAA 2011, lines 5175–5178):

Yax Lus jex meinl hah doud (Yalu rides on horseback)
Yax Lus zod kom hah hlongb (Yalu wears black iron footwear)
Yax Lus deib buf dongb nyid lid lok nid lid lok (Yalu's children cry, boo-hoo boo-hoo)
Yax Lus deib buf waf nyid lid lul nid lid lul (Yalu's babies cry, waah-waah waah-waah)

Part 6 repeats this formulaic passage 30 times, each consisting of 78–80 lines of lyrics, with only the names of places differing (for example, Had Rongl Raen Nogh, and Had Rongl Raen Lim). It takes up a total of 2911 lines—over a quarter of the entire text. The circular structure of this passage generates a sense of vastness and vicissitude, and as such the shared history of encountering and overcoming adversity and suffering interweaves a type of unity among the Miao as Yalu's offspring. Furthermore, the cohesiveness is achieved by the clan's sense of shared history. Part 11 of *Yalu wang*, the family lineage of the deceased, is a one-hour element in which a *dongb langf* chants the Miao names of the clan ancestors for as many as 30 generations (Yang 2011, p. 249; Tang 2012, p. 50; Yang 2015, p. 77). As a Miao custom, the son inherits the last character of his father's name as the first character of his own name. In this way, *Yalu wang* locates an individual in the blood network of his clan.

As the *dongb langf* Liang Darong 梁大荣 (b. 1952) claims, *Yalu wang* functions to "help his clansmen to find their origins" (Xu 2011b, p. 263).

In extensive interviews, *dongb langf*'s belief in *wugu* sorcery frequently comes to the fore. This deviates from the argument advanced by Malinowski (1948a, p. 43) of the cultural expectation of funerary rites to maintain "the bond of union between the recently dead and the survivors", which is "of immense importance for the continuity of culture and for the safe keeping of tradition". In fact, *Yalu wang* is directed precisely at the Miao's fears and doubts in the face of death. In short, it expresses the hope of salvation and immortality (ibid., p. 42). The oral performance of *Yalu wang* is therefore understood as a way that *dongb langf* exert their communicable supernatural power to direct the deceased to take a journey back to their lost home, as is well reflected in the name of the ritual *jangz ghad*, which means "paving the way". Therefore, before the funeral takes place, relatives of the deceased must prepare "straw shoes, food and drink, bow and arrows, and a rattan helmet" (Ding 2014, p. 25), which are obviously necessities for a voyager. These can only be sent to the deceased via *dongb langf*'s divine power as the agents between the Miao ancestors and the living.

Dongb langf often believe that their supernatural power comes from enacting *Yalu wang*. While there is no shamanic trance for the possession of Yalu's spirit, *dongb langf* temporarily assume the identity of Yalu during the *jangz ghad* ritual, where they must wear formal blue clothing and a broad-brimmed straw hat to stand in front of the coffin, while holding a long saber. This costume represents the historic attire of Yalu during war campaigns—the formal dress imitates his coat of armor, and the straw hat represents his helmet (Xu 2011a, p. 143; Yang 2014, p. 245). In Miao terms, death is either referred to as *lwf bjied* (*huijia* 回家, literally "returning to the homeland") or *jinb xiangb* (*jinxiang* 晉相, literally "assuming the position of prime minister") (Ma 2014, p. 94). These two terms are somewhat intertextual in that they echo the closing sections of *Yalu wang*, where Yalu dispatches his sons to seize their lost home—Naf Njinb, Pel Jinx, Nax Buf, and Mix Gux. As the oral performance goes (CFLAA 2011, lines 9499–9510):

Yax Lus lul jongx qws juf box nyab hoh (Yalu leads his 70 spouses)
Yax Lus lul jongx qws juf box nyab lud (Yalu leads his 70 consorts)
Jongx wes lwf paed nongx (Leading them to burn millet)
Jongx wes lwf paed nbaex (Leading them to burn bran)
Jongx wes lwf paed qws bat nboh njux (Leading them to burn 700 *nboh njux*)[7]
Jongx wes lwf paed qws juf meid dwd (Leading them to burn 70 straw shoes)
Yax Lus blaeb mud qws bat lwf qws nongh diah (Yalu throws 700 spears in the direction where the sun rises)
Yax Lus blaeb neind qws juf lwf qws nongh mos (Yalu shoots 70 arrows in the direction where the sun sets)
Yax Lus buf pef qws juf nblah nzal rangx lwf qws nongh diah (Soldiers of Yalu beat bronze drums 70 times in the direction where the sun rises)
Ndangd ndongx ndangd daeb ndangd dwf hlah (Shaking Heaven and Earth, *taratatat*, *taratatat*)
Yax Lus jangk plod guf baeb rah gongb dwf hlwb lwf qws nongh mos (Generals of Yalu blow white horns in the direction where the sun sets)
Ndangd ndongx ndangd nzwl ndangd dwf wom (Shaking Heaven and Earth, *tarantara*, *tarantara*)

Burning these items is similar to offering sacrifices at funerals, while beating drums and blowing horns are similar to playing solemn funeral music for fallen soldiers. Therefore, in the context of *Yalu wang*, funerals and campaigns are one and the same. Each funeral restores the scene of a campaign where *dongb langf*, now in the role of Yalu, promote the deceased as the prime minister and order them to return to their ancestral wonderland.

While most *dongb langf*'s front stage narratives suggest that their costume is an imitation of Yalu, to highlight their function of maintaining Miao identity and uniting the community as an ethnic group, the back stage expressions of some *dongb langf* present a powerful affirmation of the belief in witchcraft during funeral rites. According to Tang Na's 唐娜 (Tang 2012, p. 51) fieldwork report, *dongb langf*'s costume is one in which they

arm themselves with "instruments that help separate this world from the world after, such as holding a long sabre, and wearing a straw hat (commonly with an ear of rice on top of it) and iron shoes. Before chanting *Yalu wang*, the *dongb langf* flourishes the sabre around himself as a means to avoid following the deceased to the world after". Another case is the iron shoes. *Dongb langf* often wear them back to front, and this connotes that they can come "back" afterwards.[8] Chen Xinghua has said that most *dongb langf* are afraid to perform the closing session of a *jangz ghad* ritual where the deceased is sent off on a journey, as they believe if not properly maneuvered the ritual will lead the performer to madness. To separate themselves from the spirit, *dongb langf* must declare a departure from the deceased, returning to the world of the living from the liminal space of *jangz ghad*:

> I am getting farther away from you. You can hear me but can't see me. I have to tell you this across mountains and rivers: now you have to go to the place you are bound for, but I can't go any farther. Your shoes are made of cloth and straw and can lead to all the places, but mine are made of iron so I can't cross the river. (Tang and Ma 2015, p. 72).[9]

Some *dongb langf*'s narratives of their costumes also question the validity of functionalist front stage arguments of "imitation of Yalu's equipment during war time", and suggest instead the Miao's *wugu* belief in ancestral spirits. Drawing on the statements of "old-timers", the *dongb langf* Wei Zhengrong 韋正榮 (b. 1952) declared that "*dongb langf* did not wear a sabre at *jangz ghad* ritual". The reason is that:

> once, a *dongb langf* was chanting *Yalu wang* while the watchmen were slumbering. As he chanted on, the dead suddenly jumped up and chased him . . . into the field. He had no place to hide, so had to use straw to cover his head. . . . As a result, now *dongb langf* all wear a straw hat. Later, for fear that this might happen again, *dongb langf* began to wear a sabre to protect themselves. (Wang 2011b, p. 296)

However, the discrepancy between the varying, or even conflicting, accounts from *dongb langf* cannot be simplified to a matter of either correct or incorrect; honest or dishonest. Their narratives reflect different levels of cultural connotation in *Yalu wang*: while most *dongb langf* suggest that *Yalu wang* is a condensed ritual central to the ethnic identity of the Miao, few are aware of the historical construction behind this master narrative at the front stage. As part of the Miao's perceptions of the external world, elements of *wugu* sorcery normally concealed at the back stage may sometimes come to the fore in an unconscious way, hence the "inharmonious voices" that deviate from the master narrative. Furthermore, the narrative of *Yalu wang* evolves around a fixed main narrative, and details of the chanting are sustained by some formulaic sentences or passages, just like the improvisation of a *canovaccio* theater form, due to the flexibility of oral performance. However, while the *dongb langf* Chen Xinghua argues that "[You should] grasp the main body in the first place, and then add content in accordance with the situation" (Tang and Ma 2015, p. 71), others are keen to stress the stability in their oral performance (Cao et al. 2012, p. 144). This "duplicity", where *dongb langf* delineate *Yalu wang* as "absolutely inalterable and inviolable", shows their strategy of convincing, the covert reason of which is to maintain the authority of this oral convention and the authenticity of the cultural construction behind it (cf. Malinowski 1948a, p. 49). This is certainly somewhat a result of *dongb langf*'s desire to maintain their mastery as ritual professionals in local communities but also as spiritual agents in Miao culture. However, they are not necessarily aware of the historical construction that is internalized in *Yalu wang* as a cultural set.

4. Increased State Presence and the Status of *Yalu wang*

Resulting from the successive social and political movements after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, an increased state presence has led to the more aggressive engagement of external forces in the ritual practice of *Yalu wang*. In the process, where Mashan, once a closed area, was incorporated as an integral part of the Chinese nation-state, the

traditional cultural apparatus has been progressively disenfranchised by pervasive state power. Not only were the cultural resources that *dongb langf* once held overshadowed by political power, the cultural connotations of *Yalu wang* also faced the predicament of appropriation. Specifically, *Yalu wang* has been denuded of its structural function as a foundational element of cultural memory that had, in the past, secured the identity of the Miao as an ethnic group. It has been engulfed by the transforming sociocultural projects of the state due to the politicization of social life after 1949. From its decline, since the 1950s to its return as "cultural heritage" in the new millennium, *Yalu wang* has become a dynamic signifier that is constantly narrated and renarrated by the urgent requirements of the state.

As an embodiment of its determination to depart from the maladies of what it perceived as China's morbid, moribund past, the CCP called for "eliminating all ghosts and spirits in feudal superstition", including *Yalu wang* and Miao funerals. The *dongb langf* Yang Guangxiang 楊光祥 (b. 1936) claims that, during the Great Leap Forward in 1958, "the leaders in the [People's] Commune did not allow us to perform *jangz ghad* ritual for the deceased elderly, declaring that leftovers of the old society were not allowed in the new society" (Li 2011b, pp. 277–78). Later, in 1966, the onset of the Cultural Revolution witnessed the intensification of this practice, and the *jangz ghad* ritual was forbidden: "[Any *dongb langf* who] violated this was to be denounced in a struggle session (*pidou* 批鬥)" (Tang and Ma 2015, p. 69). For example, Liao Changhua 廖長華 and Liao Yousheng 廖友生 were sent to the city to attend a "learning class" (*xuexi ban* 學習班) of Mao Zedong thought and were only allowed to return home six months later (Gao 2014, p. 371). Tang Na (Tang 2012, p. 56) describes this tension as "the apex of the conflict between folk belief and state ideology", in which "*dongb langf* were forced to choose between *Yalu wang* and Chairman Mao". However, these two choices were not as straightforwardly exclusive as Tang suggests. In fact, folk belief showed a strong sense of malleability and adaptability in the face of state ideology. Secret practices of traditional funerals were frequently performed. Not only would *dongb langf* venture a performance of *Yalu wang*, some local party cadres also chose a laissez-faire attitude toward folk belief and considered inspections of ritual practices a mere formality.

The end of the Cultural Revolution did not mean a return to *Yalu wang*'s prior status. Quite the contrary, for rather different structural reasons, it underwent a more serious decline after the launching of the reform and opening by Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) in 1978. Due to China's modernizing program, featuring a distinctively Chinese variant of the market economy, the state partially withdrew from people's private lives, while the vigorous pursuit of profits and personal wealth became a new challenge to folk beliefs in local society. In the cultural domain, the homogenizing tendencies of modernity also threatened to remove all differences, ethnic differences included. Since the mid-1990s, young people have left Mashan to become laborers in Guangdong and Guangxi for better pay. According to the *dongb langf* Yang Baoan 楊保安 (b. 1952), "Very few people come to see us chanting [*Yalu wang*] now, primarily because there are fewer people in the village. Many young people work outside. Often, at *jangz ghad* rituals just a few of us—*dongb langf*—accompany the host family at the wake" (Li 2011a, p. 183).

Before *Yalu wang* was "discovered" by Yu Weiren in 2009, it had never been interwoven in a more intricate nexus of wider social forces, which would have accelerated its acculturation. The dubious and one-dimensional discourse that presented *Yalu wang* as an ethnically particular historical epic was in fact a projection on the part of the state to renarrate its core meaning. As noted above, at least five decades before Yu Weiren declared her discovery of the "heroic epic", *jangz ghad* performed by *dongb langf* at Miao funerals had already been identified by the CCP and "forbidden", as it was deemed a manifestation of outmoded superstition. The only difference is that, while in the 1950s, *jangz ghad* was considered a ritual, the central content of *jangz ghad*, *Yalu wang*, is now extricated from its integrated ritual practice and is bestowed with a brand-new and more palatable cultural-political label as an "epic" in the corpus of ethnic literature. In 2011, the state added *Yalu wang* to the "List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage" (DMCNICH 2011, I–118). While

this approbation secured protection and promotion from the state, this close engagement and indeed oversight of the state turned *Yalu wang* into a more secularized emblem of the state's cultural confidence. As various official discourses suggest, the state has renewed the historical narrative that the Miao ethnic group does indeed possess an epic genealogy, a noted addition to the treasury of world literature. At the same time, however, this officially sanctioned endorsement deliberately disconnects *Yalu wang* from its cultural context as a funerary ritual practice that is central to Miao identity formation and maintenance.

This process of silencing is even more evident in the case of the local governments of Ziyun and Anshun, the agencies directly responsible for *Yalu wang*'s protection and promotion. Their foremost concern is *Yalu wang*'s value as a tourist attraction and as a means for generic cultural promotion, ultimately with the instrumental aim of securing economic benefits. After 2011, *Yalu wang* became a cultural trump card of Anshun, and the official account of the Publicity Department of the CCP Ziyun Committee on WeChat is named "Yalu Ziyun". The form and discourse officially promoting *Yalu wang* is, in every substantive meaning, a form of disenfranchisement—it was deliberately removed from its traditional context of funerary rites while catering to an outsider audience's voyeuristic curiosity to peep into the lifestyle of so-called "ethnic minorities" (*shaoshu minzu* 少數民族).

Taking advantage of the "discovery" of the epic, the Ziyun authorities have been focusing on the construction of the Getu River Scenic Area, hidden in the mountains south of Anshun, as its economic engine and cultural showcase. The strategy of the local government clearly shows a desire to rely on *Yalu wang* as a means of tourist advertising. In May 2018, Ziyun launched a 560 million CNY project called "Yalu Wang City" (*Yalu wang cheng* 亞魯王城) in Getu, aiming to use *Yalu wang* to develop its cultural attraction as a form of "ethnic tourism". Yalu Wang City is located at the foot of a mountain, and includes a royal court, a sacred city, and a living area. In October 2018, a burlesque performance of *Millennium of Yalu Wang* (*Qiannian Yalu wang* 千年亞魯王) was presented in Yalu Wang City as a tourist attraction three times a day. One other very obvious, and slightly bizarre, manifestation of this "reinvention of tradition" illustrates the primacy of the pursuit of tourist income. Huang Xiaobao 小寶 (b. 1962), a *dongb langf* and expert in free climbing, has performed at the 108-meter cliff face in Getu since the 2000s (Cao et al. 2012, pp. 337–38). Moreover, in October 2010, the local government of Ziyun first created a connection between Getu and *Yalu wang* through the "*Yalu Wang* cultural tourism festival and Getu River rock climbing challenge". As the advertisement suggests, "welcome to the hometown of *Yalu wang*", Getu now receives official empowerment as the representation of *Yalu wang*.

What should be clear is that these activities in the name of *Yalu wang* are merely scattered cultural fragments removed completely from their traditional cultural context of Miao funerals. *Yalu wang* is historicized, that is, it is bereft of all its deep-seated functions as a historical construction that maintains a distinctive ethnic identity. In 2011, Ziyun county performed a tailor-made program, "Yalu Wang Crosses the Mountain of the Knife and the Sea of Fire" (*Yalu wang zhi daoshan huohai* 亞魯王之刀山火海), at the ninth National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities. As its name suggests, performers climbed a bamboo ladder barefoot, with each rung made of blades. Another group of performers walked across a burning iron plate, also barefoot. While presented in the name of *Yalu wang*, this performance was not Miao in any shape or form. Technically, the program comes from the Knife-ladder Climbing Festival (*Daoganjie* 刀杆節) of the Lisu ethnic group (DMCNICH 2006, X–27). The *Yalu wang* elements were added arbitrarily to the program, which is more of a dazzling acrobatic performance chosen as an emblem for Guizhou in the national pageant.

Even more egregiously, some local performance agencies have distilled the funeral chanting into stage performances which synthetically embrace instrumental music—drum, *suona* 唢呐 (double-reeded horn), and *lusheng*—oral/vocal performance, and choreography. With different forms of programs, various agencies are competing for the cultural resources of *Yalu wang*. Currently, there are two established programs: one is *Millennium of Yalu wang* and the other is a "choral theater" production titled *Yalu wang*, which debuted in

December 2018. These two performances show the different perceptions of two groups—Miao scholars and the (Han Chinese) cultural elite—on what elements in *Yalu wang* can stand in for the Miao ethnic group.

Elements of traditional resources and tourist attractions coexist in *Millennium of Yalu wang*. Performed on a temporary stage at the central square of Yalu Wang City, this program is directed by Yang Zhengjiang, who is a *dongb langf* contributor to the 2011 version of *Yalu wang*, and currently a cultural cadre of Ziyun. The performance area is divided into three major parts: three *dongb langf* upstage, six percussionists downstage, and several groups of dancers take turns to perform center stage. Starting from a series of queries into "who am I, where am I from, where are my ancestors, and where is my hometown?" the 20-min program evolves around the main narrative of the *Yalu wang* stories, from the creation of the world to Yalu's success, love, defeat, exodus, reconstruction, and renaissance of the Miao regime. In each section, *dongb langf* chant an excerpt from *Yalu wang* in Miao vernacular, with a narrator summarizing the story in Mandarin Chinese. Generally, this program seizes the cultural context of *Yalu wang*, following its main narrative to show the Miao ethnic group's remembrance of their hometown. Moreover, while not clarified, in the second scene, "Ritual", a screen behind the *dongb langf* plays a video of a traditional Miao funeral ceremony, which, to some extent, suggests the original funeral scene of *Yalu wang*. However, this program is more a theatrical performance than a ritual practice, so it adds showbusiness elements to the chanting of *Yalu wang*. While it resorts to the acrobatics of knife mountain climbing and fire-eating to attract tourists, other performances are choreographed with reference to Miao dances. For instance, in the scene "Exodus", a performer and a *lusheng* musician would stand on their heads while performing. This is a fragment absorbed from the Small Flowery Miao (*Xiaohua miao* 小花苗) ethnic subgroup and their "Little Dance of Migration" (*Xiao qianxi wu* 小遷徙舞), a dance that also derives from the retreat of Yalu during a battle. Hence, the past is accumulated in the performers' bodies.

In deep contrast to *Millennium of Yalu wang*, the choral theater production *Yalu wang* is performed by a chorus of 400 vocalists at Guiyang Grand Theater, after half a decade of collaboration with more than 30 well-known artists. As a project fully funded by the CCP Publicity Department of Guiyang, this choral theater reflects the cultural elite's desire to dominate the discourse of ethnic culture. This theater piece has hardly any melody derived from the chanting of *Yalu wang*. As the music director Xiao Bai 肖白 and the conductor Fang Ling 方玲 declared, the reason is that folk music (the chanting of *Yalu wang*) in Ziyun is not representative of the Miao ethnic group, so they used a series of modes and scales distilled from Miao music to create a new melody (Yue 2019). While they argue that the melody is "undoubtedly Miao", it is absurd (and arrogant) to think that a reinvention is more Miao than the Miao culture embodied in *Yalu wang*. In fact, the vocal performance of this theater piece basically follows the principles of the bel canto lyrical style used in operatic arias and accompanied by an orchestra and chorus. The *yu* mode of *gongche* solfège that features sentimental and sorrowful emotions is removed, and in its place now is an epic scene recreated via the timbre of bel canto. The panegyric of "the first music theater of the Miao's epic in China" (ibid.) shows an official endorsement of the cultural elite vying for *Yalu wang*'s cultural resources, which are finally and fundamentally turned into a disconnected, disembodied "heroic epic" in official discourses.

This juxtaposition of the practices of various actors clearly shows a tension between an ethnic legacy as an *organic* form of local knowledge and the *reinvented* ethnic heritage by the cultural elite. As the title of a report, "What Can Represent the Miao Ethnic Group?" (ibid.) suggests, the cultural elite believe that they are representatives of ethnic cultures. In this sense, if performance agencies only take fragments of music and theater out of the ritual practice of *Yalu wang*, the cultural elite's brand-new creation dislodges *Yalu wang* from an ethnic culture embedded in folk belief and sorcery, relocating it within an acceptable and commercialized framework of state-sanctioned cultural heritage.

5. Conclusions

Originally, *Yalu wang* was a type of oral performance, a central element of the ritual practices at Miao funeral rites. From an emic point of view, the *dongb langf* have divine powers to direct the deceased to the lost home of their progenitors. The content of *Yalu wang* includes Yalu's role in Miao warfare, their exodus, and the lineage of his offspring. As a cultural artifact, it creates a liminality at funeral scenes that juxtaposes the past and the present, which in turn recreates and reinforces the collective memory through a form of performativity participated in by all. In sum, the *Yalu wang* funerary rituals serve as a means to maintain ethnic identity and unite the local community. This functionalist framework is built on the Miao's *wugu* belief that the interactions between the living and ancestral spirits can be properly mediated and controlled by the witchcraft of *dongb langf*. These two dimensions speak to two layers of the Miao's cognition of the external world, and are both confirmed in the front stage and back stage narratives of *dongb langf*.

After it was officially "discovered" in 2009, *Yalu wang* has been woven into the nexus of diverse and sometimes contradictory discourses articulated by various forces that vie for its cultural resources. Even the term "*Yalu wang*" itself is a new cultural construct. While state observation—and prohibition—of the performance of *jangz ghad* rituals has been a reality since the 1950s, Yu Weiren's appropriation of the ritual has cleansed it of all elements of sorcery and has redefined it as a straightforward heroic epic. This process is merely one more example of the state-driven epic collection project that has been in train for the past six decades. *Yalu wang* is therefore endorsed in the official discourse as a gap-filling discovery that has rewritten a historical narrative that previously posited that the Miao have no epic of origins. As we have seen, in 2011, *Yalu wang* entered the "List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage", which secured financial support for its protection and promotion at the state level. While the state uses *Yalu wang* as a demonstration of its own cultural confidence, the local government of Ziyun cherry-picks its cultural elements as a tourist attraction to obtain economic benefits or to present Guizhou's "ethnic culture" in national pageants. The fact that some (Han Chinese) artists believe their contemporary performance is more Miao than traditional Miao performances is an example of a desire to seize elements from ethnic cultures in order to develop a commercialized creative industry.

While on the surface all these actions are said to preserve, protect, and promote *Yalu wang*, in fact they threaten to hollow out *Yalu wang* from its core cultural context, since few if any of these activities and programs directly mention *Yalu wang*'s function at funeral rites. Either way, the reinvented *Yalu wang* has lost its meaning in the local community for the Miao, becoming fragments bereft of cultural context. The fate of *Yalu wang* is representative of the paradoxical status quo of all ethnic cultures in a rapidly globalizing and commodifying China (and we may add elsewhere too). As modernization, urbanization, and secularization ultimately lead to a kind of cultural homogeneity, almost all these ethnic cultural practices, as with *Yalu wang*, face the plight of erosion, dilution, or even elimination. "Intangible cultural heritage" affords them a means of survival, yet at the cost of being divorced from their cultural contexts. This shift from local knowledge to national/universal culture in fact severs its ties to the ethnic group that gave birth to it.

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Notes

[1] Initially "Yalu" was not a person's name but a title that means "old grandfather" or "old ancestor", used as "an honorific title for a prestigious leader". Due to the long use of honorific titles and the difference in Hmong dialects, the meaning of "Yalu" was gradually blurred until it was treated as a person's name (Wu 2012, pp. 34–37).

[2] While some elements of the funeral rituals were likely to have been formed in very early times, the formation of *Yalu wang* was no earlier than the late first millennium CE, because the Hmong migration only arrived in northwestern Guizhou and northeastern Yunnan around 1000 to 700 years ago (Wu 2012, p. 40).

[3] The Romanized writing system used in the 2011 version was created by one of the collectors, Yang Zhengjiang 楊正江, a scholar of Hmong origins in Mashan. The Hmong language has long had only a phonetic system but no written script. In 1956, the survey group of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences created a Roman alphabet for some dialects and subdialects of the Hmong language, and revised it twice, in 1958 and 1980, but this project did not include the Mashan subdialect. In order to accurately record the text of *Yalu wang*, Yang Zhengjiang used the 1956 romanization format to create a separate system for the Mashan subdialect, which he then employed for the text of *Yalu wang*.

[4] The 2011 version of *Yalu wang* only includes the first 10,819 lines of the story. Later sections of *Yalu wang* narrate the renaissance of the Yalu kingdom and its lineage.

[5] While Xiong et al. (2020, p. 8) do not describe the details, "the Show the Way recitation [that] can last for 4–5 h" is likely the same as the *jangz ghad* ritual in Mashan. However, due to constraints of time and for financial reasons, there has been a decline in the number of traditional full-service funerals in North America. This suggests a similar plight of acculturation that is also on the rise in Mashan.

[6] According to an interview with Wei Laowang 韋老王 (b. 1937), a *dongb langf* in Zongdi, "the cash payment for each funeral is 160 CNY, plus some rice, meat, wine, and cigarettes, the value comes to a total of 200 CNY" (Cao et al. 2012, p. 138).

[7] *Nboh njux* is a type of dark blue or black cloth decorated by embroidery of motifs of the sun. It is believed to have been Yalu's army flag and is often used to cover the face of the deceased.

[8] The iron shoes worn by *dongb langf* are not really shoes, but the iron blade of a ploughshare.

[9] In the narratives of other *dongb langf* they arrive at a slippery mountain. The *dongb langf* have to turn back because they cannot climb the mountain in iron shoes (Wang 2011a, p. 158).

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Zhuiniu Water Buffalo Ritual of the Miao: Cultural Narrative Performed

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Abstract: The zhuiniu 椎牛 ritual is one of the most elaborate of the Miao people of western Hunan, China. Zhuiniu means "kill the buffalo with a spear" and traces its origins to the worship of spirits and natural elements. Sponsored by a family to repay the spirits, the ritual was a village-wide event that culminated with the sacrifice of a water buffalo and a community celebration. The zhuiniu, estimated to be several thousand years old, is rapidly vanishing from cultural memory. In July and August of 2018, six master badai-spiritual specialists of the Miao—were gathered in La Yi 腊乙, a village in the Wuling Mountain by the cultural bureau of the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province to reenact and document the ritual. Using performance ethnography as research methodology, the author employs on-site observations, interviews, field notes, audio, and video to document the reenactment and describe its significance in the words of its practitioners. This essay argues that the zhuiniu has no definitive expression but is an adaptative and interpretative cultural narrative adjusting to circumstances and practice. The ritual exists today as it had historically, in many and varied expressions and interpretations shaped by local need, geography, and subject to the vagaries to orally transmitted forms of practice. Although fragmentary in performance expression and interpretation, the zhuiniu ritual narrative serves as a mythologically-based script that organizes a series of dramatic events that invites community awareness and interaction. In so doing, this sacred ritual has sustained its importance in conveying, embodying, and encoding a spiritual, social, and cultural record of Miao cosmology, culture, and history. Performatively conveyed—using song, music, costumes, dance and movement, props, and set pieces—the zhuiniu has been efficiently and sensorially reimagined in order to reiterate and reaffirm cultural knowledge. With rural modernization, dissolution of cultural context and need, and the aging of its practitioners, the traditional role of the zhuiniu is now in question.

Keywords: Miao culture; ritual; performance studies; performance ethnography; indigenous studies; folk traditions; mythology

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1. Contexts

In late July 2018, in the village of La Yi 腊乙, deep in the Wuling Mountains of the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hunan, China, six Miao badai gathered to enact the zhuiniu 椎牛 ritual. The ritual, one of their most complex and sacred, culminates in the sacrifice of a water buffalo and is considered the penultimate offering to the gods. Once commonly practiced, it is today quickly fading from cultural memory. Orally transmitted for hundreds of years, the ritual and traditional narratives it encodes and reaffirms have proven to be no match against the prevailing forces of modernization, urban migrations, and the shift to a cash economy.[1]

Massive commercial and aestheticized versions of the ritual have been governmentally sponsored to stimulate the local economy, create jobs, and stem migrations to crowded industrial cities. Museums and various Miao cultural heritage parks have been developed to draw domestic tourists to the region, employing hundreds of Miao dancers, musicians, and

artisans (Figure 1). Theatricalized badai shows worthy of Las Vegas are what is presented. A large-scale zhuiniu ritual, which included a sacrifice, was part of the local government's tourism and employment initiatives. These initiatives were shaped as sensationalized entertainment yet careful to downplay "superstition" or ethnic identity, two issues the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has deemed anathema to its efforts to modernize and unify the nation under party rule.

Figure 1. A theatricalized performance depicting Badai. Created and presented by actors for tourists and without any spiritual or ritual significance. Shanjiang Miao Tourist Village in Fenghuang County. 2018. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

> Annual Miao festivals are a central component of the region's widely promoted tourism attractions. All festivals are organized and overseen by government offices or representatives, from elected village committees for the village-based events to prefectural or provincial cultural affairs bureaus for large-scale parades and performances. Ethnic tourism, cultural heritage preservation, and rural development intersect in the state, provincial, and prefectural-level programs for the region and play a hyper-visible role in evidencing the projected beneficence and desired successes of national, ethnic policies and agendas (Chio 2019, p. 541).

The most recent theatricalized tourist rendering of the zhuiniu ritual in impoverished Fenghuang County failed to sustain interest or profitability despite best efforts. Heavy rains, rising costs, and poor attendance the previous years forced the cancelation of the event in 2018 and 2019, with the pandemic indefinitely halting future plans.

Knowing my interest in the ritual, Ma Mei, the director of Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province Cultural Ministry and longtime research collaborator, organized a gathering of six respected badai in her home village of La Yi. A five-day re-enactment and documentation project of the zhuiniu ritual was prompted by the rapidly transforming and threatened ritual.[2] The gathering of the six badai was unprecedented, serving as an ad hoc summit to discuss, pool, and exchange knowledge through the step-by-step re-enactment of the zhuiniu ritual.

Each step of the ritual was re-enacted, explained, and discussed to identify each action's details, meaning, and significance. What emerged, and what this paper documents, was a unique scholarly opportunity offering a vivid and considered examination of a ritual from the perspective of its practitioners. Extensive discussions, documentation, and interviews allowed for a thorough examination of the ritual, Miao culture, and badai practice.

Badai practice is orally transmitted, with practitioners adhering to the dictates of their training. For the most part, badai work in isolation or with similarly trained badai. To openly share their ways of working and understanding of the zhuiniu, its meaning, mythology, and importance were revelatory. As diverse understandings emerged, so too did a cosmological narrative of Miao culture that the ritual contained and conveyed. The zhuiniu is essentially an immersive sensory retelling of Miao history, values, beliefs, and society. The zhuiniu is a medium and embodied cultural text that performed and encoded the Miao way of being in and with the world. The zhuiniu has survived to this day by adapting and adjusting. How far it will continue before it passes into history remains to be seen. This paper is a record of an event occurring from 26 July to 1 August 2018.

2. Miao Spiritual Practice

Miao spiritual practices are comprised of animism, ancestor worship, and characteristics common to shamanic practice. "The belief in this unity of nature, spirits and human being makes them very dependent, emotionally and psychologically, on their land. It also points to an internal mechanism of a defensive landscape and a symbolic boundary that resists the outsiders' interference" (Wang 2011, p. 122).

Animal sacrifices and other forms of propitiation are central to these practices. Ritual experts known as badai are the Miao tradition keepers. Badai are formally trained in ritual performance, chants, animal sacrifice, and the making of scared objects. The badai engage in various practices, among them healing, exorcism, thanksgiving, and life-cycle rituals. Their spiritual role is complemented by the xianniang, who use trance and serve as spirit mediums. The third type of Miao spiritual practitioner works surreptitiously and sorcerer-like, using so-called *gu* sorcery in which they control others through harm inflected by poisons gleaned from insects (Schein 2000, pp. 53–54).

Each village has a Badai, often more than one, serving their community's spiritual and ritual needs. The position adheres to traditional practice but is shaped to the abilities and personality of the individual badai. In addition to their spiritual role, many badai are also herbalists, fortunetellers, and healers. Being a badai is a calling transferred from father to son. On rare occasions, those not of a lineage line may become badai if they show a spiritual inclination and are taken on as a student by a master badai. The training is extensive and can take many years without guaranteeing an apprentice becoming accepted as a master.

The term badai encapsulates their role: "ba" means father and master, "dai" means the offspring, meaning they are the ones the pass the culture on with a sacred charge.

> To keep alive and develop the invisible aspect of the Miao culture, ritual, and society is the duty of the badai. The Miao developed rituals for all functions: physical, political, artistic, mythological, literature and poetry, ritual, social organization, and relationships. Anything and everything to heal and balance their community and carry out the ancestors' original culture. Badai culture is the encyclopedia of the Miao people (S. Shi 2016).

Badai are male. However, there are rare instances of women, the daughters of a master badai, becoming badai. Female badai are also *xianniang* (spirit mediums) 仙娘 and are also referred to as *zimei* 紫梅; they are aligned, but separate, in the spiritual practice of the badai. Most commonly, xianniang are female; unlike the badai, their primary cultural function is to enter a state of trance and access a parallel spiritual reality, often channeling family ancestors to enable a dialogue with their living descendants. Male mediums are generally known as xianshi 仙師. (Katz 2022, p. 15) and serve a similar role and relationship with badai.[3] In their role, they confer with ancestors to identify the source of sickness in the

family or the spirits[4] that haunt, guide, or protect the family. The xianniang is consulted by the badai for the setting of ritual dates. "The xianniang is the female energy and the badai the male, serving as a yin-yang for the balance and well-being of the community. The Badai is the male energy" (S. Shi 2016).

> But unlike the zimei, who can include women, the badui spirit officials must be male. Their title and authority are inherited through male filial lineage (father to son, or father-in-law to son-in-law). As spirit officials, they have a superior status compared to zimei practitioners. During rituals, the badui actually controls his familiar spirits and is not possessed by them. Moreover, the badui beat drums and wear red gowns during the performance. Therefore, I conclude that the badui spirit officials are shamans, in contrast to the zimei mediums. Spirits may reveal their will and speak to worshippers through the zimei, who have been selected for communicating with spirits for humans. During rituals, the zimei are possessed by spirits, and they function as mediators between yangjian, the living world and yinjian, the spiritual world (H. Wu 2010, p. 34).

All the badai I interviewed adamantly denied entering a state of trance, an ability that is central and classically defines the shaman's function worldwide. The relationship of the badai to their community is comparable to that of a classically defined shaman in every function except the use of trance to communicate and mediate the material and spiritual worlds. The badai is unique and best described as a spirit mediator or officiator of forms. Rather than entering a state of trance to access the spirit realm, the badai and all their actions, settings, and props serve to unlock what can be described as a code. The badai is the master of forms, and it is when enacting a sequence of performative codes that they open, access, and communicate with the spirit realm. Their rituals are best understood as dramatic narratives, theatrically expressed, that reference, reiterate, and reaffirm the Miao worldview which is held and revealed by way of ritual forms and actions. In this way, ritual serves as a reiteration and reaffirmation of material and spirit world interaction and order.

In January 2016, I interviewed Shi Shougui, a badai master and descendent of thirty-two generations of badai and master in three different schools of badai practice. A man in his 60s, he is, unlike most badai, literate and educated. In addition to being a recognized and sought-after practitioner, the indefatigable Shi has devoted his life to archiving badai culture and Miao history. He is the author of several books, and we met in his self-financed museum and library in the village of Dadongchong Village, Dongmaku Township, where he explained how the badai evolved with the needs of the Miao people. The badai can trace its origins and influences from ancient Tibetan and Chinese shamanism, which serves as the "Root, spirit, energy and inheritance of the Miao people" (S. Shi 2016).

The badai draw upon many traditions and apply a wide variety of time-tested and culturally codified tools—actions, gestures, movements, dance, music, settings, ritual and narrative sequences, divination, song, chant, objects, and animal sacrifice—to open pathways to the spirit world. Their elaborate system of hand gestures, for instance, is used to "open" passageways to a parallel world and to call up and communicate with the gods and spirits (S. Shi 2016).

The Miao zhuiniu has a close correspondence with the ritual practices of other cultures from Southeast China.

> [. . .] in both the structure of the ritual sequence and in terms of how the buffalo is handled, are particularly significant. [. . .] The rite is preceded by various preparations and begins with the invocation and invitation of the deities and ancestral spirits. Then follows the sacrifice of the buffalo, and the division of the buffalo body into a number of portions, often corresponding to the number of either tutelary deities of the locality or of ancestral spirits. Finally, there is a feast in which the entire community, however constituted, takes part (Holm 2003, p. 214).

The badai I have interviewed over the years uniformly agree that the mastery of ritual forms enables them to communicate with the spirits. They see their role as functional and pragmatic, addressing spiritual needs through the material world.

> From the very beginning of the world, we need the badai as a medium between the spirits, gods and human beings to communicate and help us when gods have problems with people or do something harmful to the people. You need the badai to heal the problems. If human beings do something wrong with the environment, the natural world, they need the badai to ask the gods to help. They hold the tradition and are responsible for learning everything from their teachers. They have the responsibility to do everything, to memorize everything. Only after they have memorized all the rituals, the songs of their master and teacher, are they permitted to practice rituals independently (Tian 2018b).

My fieldwork with various indigenous groups—the Yup'ik and Athabaskan of Alaska, the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen of the Kalahari and the Sakha of Siberia, among others—suggests that the deep structure of badai culture is Cosmo-centric. For the Miao, the world is animistic, conscious, and dynamic, with

> All things having souls [. . .] natural phenomena and ancestors were given supernatural power [. . .] natural phenomenon include ancestors, forefathers, five-grain ghosts, mountain, river, stone, tree, wind and thunder ghosts (Li Wu 2017, pp. 80–81).

The initiate becomes a practicing badai after extensive training and passing through a series of skill and ability tests. Once the initiate is deemed ready, master badai conduct an examination; if satisfied, the initiate is presented to the village and recognized as a legitimate practitioner. The process of training and certifying a new badai can vary widely, and in addition to recognition by the presiding badai master, the village must accept the initiate. The announcement of a new badai is considered a blessing for the village. Badai Wu Xiankun from the village Niuyan explains:

> My close master was my grandfather, who taught me skills, singing different songs, reciting in different languages and sacred poems and fighting. Not physical fighting, fighting ghosts and evil. This is what you learn from your close master. There must be four different masters to receive and teach you. These four masters taught me special skills, hand gestures, ritual props and sacred objects, making ritual decorations, Nuo masks, and different ceremonies. These masters were not from my school. During the training, I had to prove I was a good person, and people asked for help, that I could help them, be equal and generous, and do no evil. When my close master said I was qualified and ready, I had to be approved by all the villagers and went to each house asking for approval. There were examinations and demonstrations on a special day, and I showed myself in public at the market. This special day is called Qianjie, the day I prove to all the villagers to be authentically a real master. That is a special ceremony for a would-be Badai to become a real badai, and there must be five masters to approve and decide (Z. Wu 2015).

3. Six Badai

Each of the six badai gathered in La Yi village had varying knowledge of the zhuiniu ritual, the narrative sequence of events, and the spiritual process of altar settings, objects, meaning, and mythology. The zhuiniu was traditionally practiced by badaixiong (Miao tradition), but through the years, many badaizha (Chinese tradition) elements were interpolated into the ritual.[5] This is partly due to the dwindling and aging number of badaixiong and the appropriation and exchange between practices that were once distinct.

The La Yi reenactment project also served as a skill and knowledge exchange with badai learning from one another and with younger badai benefiting from elders. Only two of the six badai were badaixiong; they were 72 and 85 years old. Given the vagaries of

orally transmitted ritual traditions, each knew parts of the ritual with variations. There was never a definitive ritual but rather a composite derived through collaborative agreement (Ma 2018a). The objective of the unprecedented gathering was to produce a written record of the zhuiniu ritual and a documentary film. This essay is offered in tribute to the life and efforts of the participating badai and Miao people.

The zhuiniu ritual varies from region to region and is in a constant state of transformation.[6] This is so for a few reasons: (1) it is orally transmitted and subject to the vagaries of memory and transference; (2) being sacred knowledge, it must be kept secret; (3) government suppression and persecution of Miao "superstitious" practices during the Cultural Revolution disrupted generational transmission and disrupted practice; (4) modernization and economic migrations have upended traditional village life, profoundly altering Miao society and cultural transmission; (5) many badai are willfully illiterate, preferring to remain closer to the immediacy of the world unfiltered by written words; (6) it has been increasingly difficult for the ritual to obtain community effort and interest; (7) the ritual is cost- and time-intensive; and (8) when combined with the distractions and economic pressures of modernization, it is challenging to organize. The world has evolved beyond the need and ability to enact the ritual (Ma 2018b; X. Wu 1990, p. 104)

The badai and zhuiniu ritual traditions are dying. "Few people practice these rituals because people believe more and more in modern medicine and technology. If they have problems, they go to the hospital, and some people may not know their traditional healing practices" (Tian 2018c).

The last time badai Tian, at eighty-five years old, the eldest of the gathering, conducted the ritual was in 2012. As a badai, he has only conducted two and assisted in three zhuiniu rituals. For intricate rituals such as the zhuiniu, it is not uncommon to have several badai facilitating, a master and two to four assistants. The Huan Nuoyuan thanksgiving rituals I documented (in 2015 and 2016) (Riccio 2019, p. 85) had three and seven badai, respectively. Some badai never reach master status and remain assistants; others are in training and participate under the tutelage of a master badai.

Badai are broadly categorized as either badaizha 巴代扎 or badaixiong 巴代雄. Badaizha, the most practiced tradition, is the "mixed" or "Chinese style" because it is performed in Mandarin and borrows heavily from the Han, Buddhist, and Daoist ritual traditions. All sacred badaizha books and writings, including letters written to the spirits, are in Mandarin (Z. Wu 2015). Red robes distinguish badaizha and their crown-like headpieces, made of leather and called the *san qing fa guan* 三清法冠 (Figure 2), that depict Daoist and Buddhist deities; the performances use "both local dialect and standard Han Chinese" (Katz 2017, p. 158). "In Miao culture, almost all gods and ghosts do not have facial design or detail, so they have been borrowed from Buddhism and Taoism" (Yang 2018a).

> In the earliest times the Chinese and the Miao were one family. The Miao was the older, the more powerful, and the more respected brother, and the Chinese was the younger [. . .] But in the centuries that followed the decedents of the two brothers grew apart and forgot their common ancestry, and so the Chinese have forgotten it all together. Moreover, the Chinese descendants have grown more and more powerful and numerous, so that the Miao are now the younger and weaker brothers, the Chinese are the older and stronger brothers. (Graham 1955, p. 27).

The practice and regalia worn by badaizha bear many similarities with those of other Chinese ethnic groups such as the Tujia, Dong, Yao, and Jingpo. All of these are similarly borrowed from the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions.[7] They were

> [. . .] quite routine on the eighteenth-century frontier, where many locals had taken to the Manchu-style queue or Han Chinese-style clothing as a mark of status [. . .] much later these Miao were to adopt religious practices that they

called guest rituals and practice them alongside their 'Miao' ritual (Sutton 2003, p. 125).

Figure 2. Badai Shi Shougui, wearing a san qing fa guan with twelve Daoist and Buddhist gods depicted, marking his status as a master badai. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

In addition to their spiritual practice, it is essential to recognize the badaizha as a multi-disciplinary artist. Their training and work required the making of props and settings, singing and chanting, storytelling, drama, dancing, performance, musicianship, and drawing (writing notes, calligraphy, and images to the spirits).

The other Miao badai tradition is badaixiong, distinguished by white, blue, or black robes and a traditional cloth head wrap. Badaixiong is referred to as the "Miao tradition." Unlike the Zha School, badaixiong use the Miao language only to tell the stories of the Miao ancestors. Although Miao, most badaizha either do not know the Miao language or have an imperfect knowledge of it.

> Those ancient stories cannot be told because they do not know the Miao language. Each story holds a ritual. The difference between badaizha and badaixiong is language. Badaixiong uses the Miao language, and badaizha uses the Chinese language. Badaixiong is for language. Badaizha for military things, the generals and soldiers. Badaixiong are officials and storytellers (Tian 2018b).

The badaizha and badaixiong traditions both recognize thirty-six houses of gods. The badaixiong conduct rituals for sixteen houses of god, the Zha for twenty houses of god. Each house represents a god, which constitutes a unit that is in turn divided into thirty-six different categories of different gods. There are many thousands of categories of gods (Tian 2018c). "Gods" for the badaizha and badaixiong are legendary, mythological, or spiritual figures associated with an archetypal role, task, or need. "Spirits" are more vaguely defined as ancestral (familial, community, or cultural) or as beings that are a form created by a feeling or emotion and are generally negative or evil. If, for instance, a neighbor harbors ill will, it is manifested as a harmful spirit that may inhabit a family's house and instigate harm or mischief. Like other animist traditions, a thought, feeling, or word has agency, can become a presence, and can accumulate power to affect the physical, mental, or emotional

health and well-being of a person or family. "Ghost" refers to lost spirits, often of an unknown origin.

Within the broadly defined badaizha and badaixiong traditions are several practice variations defined by linage lines or regions. The overwhelming majority of badai are Zha; however, those initiated and recognized as practitioners are of both the Zha and Xiong schools. With fewer men interested in becoming badai, both schools are challenged and are aging into obsolescence. Many generational inheritors have opted not to continue their hereditary lines. Badaixiong are critically endangered because of the reliance on the Miao language, which has declined among those 40 years old and younger.

Of the six badai attending the zhuiniu ritual, four were exclusively badaizha: Hong Shuyang, Yang Guangquan, Wu Zhengnian, and Yan Zaiwen. One badai practiced both Zha and Xiong: Shi Changwu. One badai exclusively practiced Xiong: Tian Zhanliang.

Badai Shi Changwu was the only badai trained in both traditions; he was most familiar with the zhuiniu ritual and grew into the role of ritual organizer. The respected seventy-two-year-old was trained in both traditions by his father and grandfather beginning at the age of five and became recognized as a badai in his teens. He is articulate and personable and from a long line of badai extending back many generations. "During the Cultural Revolution, I continued to practice in secret because there was much sickness" (C. Shi 2018b).

4. The Miao and Han

The Miao are dispersed over a large geographical area in south-central China, with significant numbers in the Hunan and Guizhou provinces. The Miao are not homogenous, which gives rise to variations in ritual and cultural practice. The Miao badai culture is best understood as the foundation of cultural themes, myths, customs, and social practices that share similarities and variations. Variance is due to the centrality of the Miao village in determining the social, cultural, and economic organization and expression and, in turn, spiritual and ritual practice. Many Miao villages remain isolated and autonomous entities shaped by the geography and historical founding of the village. The Miao are pragmatic functionalists who identify and share a culture wellspring. Each village is specific and unique to its history, location, and geography.

> The traditional bedrock of Miao society is the *cunzhai* 村寨 (village). The village is the most critical form of Xiangxi Miao social organization, for it is not only a natural grouping but also an economic community. Some villages have dozens of households; others have hundreds. The affiliations within a village are not organized by blood lineage but rather by clan surnames. People living in a village are treated as brothers and sisters (H. Wu 2010, p. 8).

The Miao migrated southward from central China beginning 2000 years ago and increased in waves to the Xiangxi region six hundred years ago (Diamond 2021 https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/asia/chinese-political-geography/miao, accessed on 3 June 2021). The Miao, pushed by advancing Han seeking land and opportunities, could not settle until reaching the rugged Wuling Mountains. The region was undesirable, challenging, and isolated, which provided a respite from the advancing Han. They brought their subsistence, agriculturalist, and herding lifestyle, which required a community effort to survive.

Villages are best understood as micro-units of Miao culture, many of which remain organized by a clan or group of families. Each village worships different animals and shapes their "belief and customs to maintain best ecological balance and biodiversity" (L. Wu 2017, p. 82).

Unmolested isolation lasted for three hundred years, and during this time, the village as a social, cultural, and economic unit evolved. The badai became a significant spiritual, cultural, and civic leader for their community.

> The Miao people were on the run and defeated. To protect themselves, the badai became a significant conduit of cultural transmission. The Miao people were illiterate, and the badai had to carry out the physical manifesting, making visible and felt the Miao culture. We had to hide our culture from the Han. The Miao developed two faces, a surface face and something behind and beneath. The badai is the one who reveals the two features, the seen and behind" (S. Shi 2016).

Today, isolated villages remain characteristic of the Miao. Cities like Jishou and Fenghuang, which were founded to serve as military, trading, and political centers, have, to this day, Han-majority populations. The Miao essentially remain village-based as extended families or as a grouping of families generationally cooperating to eke out their existence. They can best be understood as subsistence social units organized to sustain a limited capacity of people who survive as farmers, herders, and gatherers who occasionally hunt and trap.

Historically, each village identified an auspicious tree, which they saw as a sign and called "founder." "The villagers regard it as the 'divine tree' of understanding, which can protect the happiness and well-being of the people in the village and is a spiritual sustenance" (Chen and Bao 2021, p. 102). Such large and older trees (generally maple) are still found on the road just outside a village. "Great trees are the symbol of life, death, marriage, ancestors, and descendants. They symbolize almost all aspects of life and reproductive continuity" (Wang 2011, p. 129). They are considered the "guiding spirit" of the village and revered as an ancestor surrounded by stone altars and worshiped (S. Shi 2016). During my field research (2001–2018), I have encountered a wide range of village identities. Each is recognized and organized by what they grow, the geography, economy, and climate, which directly influences dialects and cultural practices.[8] "Human activities and material environment together constitute the overall landscape of Miao villages in Qiandongnan and become the symbol of Miao identity" (Chen and Bao 2021, p. 103).[9]

The cultural complexity of the Miao was shaped in no small part by their historical interactions with the Han, who initially expanded into present-day Miao areas seeking land in the 17th century. Early encounters went quickly from interactions to suppression, war, and colonization.

Governmental mandates imposed on the Miao and other ethnic groups have made for an uneasy relationship with the Han-dominated central government. There were Miao rebellions in 1795–1806 and 1854–1874, with uprisings occurring in 1936 and 1942 (Katz 2017, p. 133) and resistance to governmental policies occurring into the 1950s. All rebellions were about land and control. The Miao were quelled and forced to accept the Qing imperial rule and its inheritors, the Republic of China and then the People's Republic of China.

> Republican leader Sun Yat-sen prescribed: 'We must facilitate the dying out of all names of individual people inhabiting China, i.e., Manchus, Tibetan, etc. . . . uniting them in a single cultural and political whole.' Place names in non-Han areas were renamed in Chinese, and people were encouraged to adopt Han surnames. Miao women had their topknots cut off and their pleated skirts shredded by Republican troops; women in Guizhou recalled having their red headdresses removed and fastened to dogs' heads. Meanwhile, the opening of roads to minority areas brought cholera and more aggressive tax collection. Han immigration and appropriation of minority lands were supported by the government (Schein 1989, p. 72)

The PRC established autonomous areas for several minority ethnic groups in 1951, purporting "home rule." During the Cultural Revolution, the Miao were persecuted for expressing their "superstitious" and "harmful" customs, which sent many badai underground and had a chilling effect on cultural expression.

> There were many hardships during the communist takeover and the Cultural Revolution; the Miao people ate grass, roots, and tree bark. Those who believed in ghosts and spirits were persecuted. My family's ritual materials were destroyed.

> Others secretly hid anything suggesting they were badai. My grandfather and father were persecuted in the 1940s and 1970s and called professionals of superstition and shamed by the community. I trained at the risk of political and personal life. It was a difficult time, and I would learn at night because to become a badai requires person-to-person teaching. It is an apprenticeship, learning by doing. Now the climate has changed and is more accepting. But certain kinds of persecution continue. Four books of mine were published—but I was the second author, the government assigned another writer as a censor. My other materials were not allowed to be published (S. Shi 2016).

The single most destructive force affecting Miao culture and its spiritual practice was the Cultural Revolution, an event from which it may never recover. Rural development and anti-poverty programs have gone far to quell ethnic tensions, but resentments and distrust remain. Ultimately, time and the progression of modern technology, social media, tourism, and a burgeoning cash economy transformed Miao culture, bringing it closer to the Chinese government's values and objectives.

The influx of Han settlers into the Miao region in the 18th and 19th centuries initiated an informal cultural exchange, resulting in an adjustment of Miao spiritual practice. In particular, the badai culture interpolated Han spiritual practices, mythology, cosmology, and deities. Most prominent was the introduction of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, as well as the *Yijing* or *Book of Changes*,[10] which was adapted and interpolated into badai practice in the Fenghuang area. The Miao adapted regalia, ritual objects, deities, and organization, which were highly developed and characteristic of the Han.

> Miao cosmology is very similar to Chinese cosmology. Chinese folk religion divides the cosmos into three interconnected realms: heaven, the world of the living, and the underworld. Here, heaven is equal to the upper realm; the world of the living is equal to earth, and the underground is equal to the spirit world. Indeed, in most of the eastern and southeast Asian areas, this three-part view of the universe is common (H. Wu 2010, p. 35).

In creating a syncretic spiritual belief, the Miao did what so many other world cultures have done. They responded to a changing social and political condition through spiritual adaptation. Their syncretic spirituality evolved in a manner that persists to this day and can be viewed as a theatrically performed expression of their historical journey and evolution. Syncretic adaptation was key to the Miao ability to process humiliation and subjugation by providing a means to assert agency. It was a means to take ownership, transform, empower, and mitigate the trauma of defeat. This assertion will vividly reveal itself in reference to calling on martial implements, such as swords and flags, and protectors in the form of generals and soldiers to do battle on their behalf—all of whom are of Han origin.

"Interestingly, some Han settlers adopted Miao cultural lifestyles during the 18th and 19th centuries. In the changing frontier of western Hunan, the main flow of influence can go either direction" (Sutton 2003, p. 109). The Han settlers were taken by the Miao lifestyle and welcomed into the Miao community. Today, several hundred years after Han settlers arrived, certain villages are known as "Han Miao" in recognition of their historical origins, acculturation, and subsequent Miao "otherness" (Cheung 2012, p. 152).

The six badai gathered to re-create the zhuiniu ritual exemplified the rich, varied, and syncretic Miao culture, making it difficult to assess and document the ritual. "They are not culturally homogenous, and the differences between local Miao cultures are often as great as between Miao and non-Miao neighbors" (Diamond 1996, p. 473).

5. Zhuinui Overview

Unlike the one-day government-sponsored tourist rendering of the zhuiniu ritual, the traditional ritual was an elaborate, multi-faceted village-wide event requiring months of preparation and organization, which financially obligated the sponsoring family. Although

a family-initiated event, given the extended family socialization of traditional villages, the participation of the entire community was an understood given.

When I arrived at La Yi village, the six badai were gathered, discussing the sequence of events to begin the ritual the following day. They had just finished a three-day fast with a meal of vegetables and rice. "To begin, we must have no blood in our body and be pure for the gods. We must not even swat a mosquito, which can draw blood. You must instead shake it off" (Yang 2018a).

They were seated around a central open pit with a low fire burning. Ma Mei's brother's rough-hewn, barn-like home was a high, open structure of wood darkened by the smoke from the fire pit, used for warmth and gathering. A wood-fed "stove" was in the adjacent kitchen area. The stone and concrete floor was wide and open to accommodate the drying, sorting, and storage of harvested items. Large rice and grain sacks were piled next to farm tools in the corners. The ceiling was hung with hundreds of ears of corn drying. Nearby was a ladder to a sleeping loft. The sounds of pigs, chickens, and goats could be heard from the interconnected barn area. The house was typical of rural houses throughout the region. The zhuiniu would occur in the adjacent house belonging to the parents, which was similarly arranged and larger.

With me were Wheeler Sparks, my assistant and videographer; Megan Evans, my former student and now a professor at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand; Yang Bingfeng, a former Ph.D. student of mine and translator; and Peng Jinquan, a dear friend, filmmaker, and translator, and activist for Miao cultural preservation. As the six badai spoke, a silent flat-screen television flashed a sporting event in the background. Ma Mei, the event organizer, a government official and Miao scholar and cultural activist, welcomed us.

Such a gathering was unprecedented. Badai generally work alone or with those from their school.[11] All six badai were known and respected masters. Except for badai Tian, who was from the hosting La Yi village, the others were from nearby villages. Ma Mei had chosen well.[12]

The excitement of the six badai was palpable.

> They enjoy meeting and talking with the other badai and being hosted. There is food, and people take care of them, and they are paid. If they, do it quickly, it will end quickly, and they will be back home. For them, this is a great pleasure" (Peng 2018a).

None had met before but knew of the others by name and reputation. Each day, during and after dinner, the badai spent hours going over the details for the following day. Although the reconstruction of the zhuiniu was why they were gathered, their discussions were often opportunities to reflect, exchange, compare, and reaffirm their tradition and lives as badai. Used to conducting all-night rituals, they talked well into the night about a range of issues revealing their roles as spiritual and cultural guides.

> These days are an extraordinary situation. We come from different schools, but there is cooperation. Usually, only badai from the same school work together. The badai knows those in his line, the same system, only those masters. We are not familiar with their practice and learning different ways (C. Shi 2018b).

6. Preparation

Traditionally the zhuiniu ritual begins with the family's announcement of intent at the beginning of the Chinese lunar New Year, usually in January or February. Before that, the family consulted a xianniang (spirit medium) who enters into a state of trance to speak to the family ancestors and determine whether it is an auspicious time for the ritual. "Ancestors are particularly revered and are worshipped as though they possessed god-like qualities. Some Miao believe there are spirits everywhere" (Wang 2011, p. 119).

Once approved, a fortuneteller—a badai with fortunetelling ability or a specialist—is then consulted. According to the Chinese calendar, fortunetelling is based on the birthday

of the head of the sponsoring family (Hong 2018a). Using the *Yijing*, the five essential elements of the universe are consulted: fire, water, metal, wood, and earth. The days for the ritual are set, as is the day to purchase the water buffalo and the day it should be sacrificed. Then the preparations begin (Yang 2018c).

The zhuiniu is considered the highest way to give thanks to the gods. The reasons for having a family to sponsor the ritual include: (1) someone in the family is seriously wounded or ill, (2) the family have experienced a disaster or some great bad luck (e.g., house burnt down), (3) having a problem with children birthing or no children, (4) giving thanks for a great fortune bestowed on the family, and (5) the need to gather money for the family (Hong 2018b). According to badai Tian and Shi, the last reason was most prominent. Other, smaller and less expensive rituals, such as the Huan Nuoyuan, addressed similar issues.

To sponsor a zhuiniu ritual is expensive, often requiring the sponsoring family to make long-term financial arrangements, often borrowing money. Badai Shi estimated the total cost to be CNY 19,500.00 to 22,500.00 (approximately USD 3000.00–3500.00), which for those living in poverty-blighted rural areas can equal their income for six months (Ma 2018b).

Most rural Miao presently live at or below poverty levels, eking out a subsistence living. Since my first visit to the region in 2001, the PRC has focused a great deal of attention and funding on improving roads, education, and employment opportunities. Like others living with generational poverty, it is a continuing process with the Miao, looking for opportunities to better their lot. Money and wealth become preoccupations with gambling, investing, and lotteries, fueled by hope, these being the few opportunities. For the Miao seeking to better their economic standing, the zhuiniu—like divination, astrology, belief, religion, and luck—was an expression of hope and aspiration.

The zhuiniu offered an opportunity to interact with the "god of the treasury" and was viewed as a proactive way to manage the family's money and wealth. For the Miao, the gods, ancestors, and spirits are responsible for the wealth and well-being of the family. Reciprocity and interaction with the spirit world was the conceptual context anchoring the cosmological narrative the zhuiniu articulated. "The family sponsoring the water buffalo killing must be very rich or want to become rich to maintain their wealth by this ritual. People will ask you, 'How did you become rich?' And you respond, 'Because of the gods'" (Yang 2018b).

The La Yi village demonstration of the ritual condensed into five days what traditionally would have taken eight or nine months of preparation and culminating during harvest season (generally on or around a full moon) in September or October of the same year. "In the fall, the meat will be good for a long time. The fall is also when the weather is cooler. Summers in Hunan are notoriously hot and humid. Even today, there is little refrigeration in Miao villages, and meat will become rotten" (Peng 2018c).

7. House Cleaning

With the announcement of intent, an ox is sacrificed according to the badaizha tradition. The badaixiong tradition sacrifices a sheep and a cock (Yang). The ox sacrifice must happen before the house cleaning and is a "payment" to the gods to protect the sponsoring family. "Once you begin the ritual process, the spirits, both good and bad, are awakened (C. Shi 2018a; Yang 2018b).

Water buffalos were traditionally (as is the case today) expensive, requiring the hiring of guards to travel a long distance and carrying money for the purchase. The sacrifice of the ox is also necessary to feed those who will, in traditional times, travel to purchase a water buffalo. Once purchased, the water buffalo was brought back to be fed and groomed until the fall sacrifice. As part of the house cleaning ritual, which occurs in the family's home, the god of the treasury is called upon to protect the family, the guards (which include family members), and those who travel with money to purchase the water buffalo.

It is important to remind the reader that the circumstances and requirements for the zhuiniu ritual were shaped in an earlier era. It was a time when travel beyond one's village was fraught with danger, when highwaymen, robbery, and death were real threats, and when evil and hungry spirits played on the imagination of the isolated and poorly educated. The zhuiniu was encoded as a ritual during this era.

The ox sacrifice and house cleaning serves several functions: (1) it announces to the community and the spirits the onset of the zhuiniu and the family's intent; (2) it is a house cleaning, cleansing the home of evil spirits and preparing for the events to come; (3) it calls upon the god of the treasury to protect the family financially and to assure their ability to fulfill the complete ritual financially and to protect the money sent to purchase the water buffalo; and (4) it calls upon the gods with spirit armies to protect those who will be traveling (Hong 2018b).

The zhuiniu begins, as do all house-located rituals, with the "house cleaning," a ritual used for various purposes (Peng 2018a).

Agreeing on the house cleaning details, Badai Yang was charged with enactment.

> For each segment, a leading master decides what is to be done. It is the one who has the most knowledge of that part. They ask for our experiences, and they determine everything, all the details, including props and movements. They are the master and determine the process and the ritual (C. Shi 2018b).

Badai Yang was the master of the house cleaning ritual, which was required to clear out the evil spirits. Evil spirits are especially fond of doors, corners, windows, and beds to influence those sleeping. Essential to the house cleaning was the liu jin 绺巾 (Figure 3), a ritual device adopted from the Han and "used to sweep ghost and any disaster or weirdness away" (S. Shi 2016). It is a stick (made from the commonly found Chinese fir tree) hung with strips (24, 33, or 36 strips) of richly varied cloth, often embroidered, to represent the various branches of Miao clans. Each strip of cloth is made and contributed by the village households and given to the village Badai to symbolically affirm that he is empowered and protector of the families and village. The badai repays each family with wine or sugar when given the cloth strip. "It is also called the cloth of the dragon or phoenix. It represents the coming of the Han from the north, where dragons from the time of the ancestors. Using it honors the influence of the Han, but when the people see it, they know it is Miao" (S. Shi 2016).

If a badai sees an evil form or group of bad spirits walking around the house, a rooster will be sacrificed by a procedure that entails going behind the house cleaning altar with his back to the people. Then he bites the rooster on the neck, killing the rooster, flinging its body over the altar and the heads of the family. This "crossing over the people" is to protect them from evil and bad spirits because the blood of the rooster has magical power" (Yang 2018c). Yang told me he could see the spirits, but not always. When conducting a house cleansing ritual the previous year, an evil spirit reached to take an altar sacrifice. Using his *shidao* 司刀—a ritual knife used historically as a battle weapon—he fought to take the sacrifice back. Shi recounted that he returned home after a ritual to find a ghost sitting at his feet. The ghost was lonely and had followed him, remaining at his house for several days. During that time, the family living next to him died in a car accident (C. Shi 2018c). Badai Tian related, "When I see them, they are just a shape you cannot see. Clearly, they do not look like a person. I do not tell other people, because they might take it as a curse" (Tian 2018c).

A xianniang, when in a state of trance, is often asked by the badai to identify and locate the evil spirits affecting the family. The xianniang, channeling the family ancestors, names all the evil things present in the house, where they are hiding, and words to attract and kill the demons.

> Because we will do the ritual, it is necessary for this cleaning to be done. It is a necessary part of the ritual. The cleaning of the house is required for all the major rituals. It is to prepare the house for all that follows, and the host family

must clean all the persons, animals, take baths, and change the mattress's clothes. Everything must be clean (Yang 2018a).

Figure 3. A liu jin used by badai to sweep away evil spirits. Each cloth was embroidered by families from the village and given to the badai to protect the village. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Badai Yang Guangquan, 56 years old and from Tang Jia village in the adjacent county, was, like the others, a farmer. He descended from four generations of badai and was taught by his father (a badaixiong and badaizha)[13]. Beginning at 12 to be a badai and healer, not all Badai can heal.

> During the day, I studied at school and at night, I learned to be a Badai and began to practice at the age of twenty-five. I have traveled to many places in this province and the next province. I am not a fortuneteller, but I can help villagers choose the dates and the place for marriages and help with funerals. The busiest time of the year is the fourth month of the lunar system. This time of the year, the summer, there is not much to do. If you come other times, you will not find me (Yang 2018a).

Badai Yang had conducted the house cleaning ritual many times that year for several families. The ritual is not specific to the zhuiniu and is often conducted independently with variations by both badaixiong and badaizha. "There is no limitation. The ritual can be done anytime of the year and for many reasons if the family needs it" (Yang 2018a). Generally, pigs or other meat (chicken, goat) are sacrificed to satisfy the spirits. However, the sacrifice of the ox is specific to the zhuiniu "because it is special and more expensive than pigs, sheep or roosters, but the ritual is the same. Usually, house cleanings are one hour, for the zhuiniu, it is much longer, depending on the gods and spirits, they must be made happy" (Yang 2018a).

Yang had never participated in a zhuiniu ritual before. Using his knowledge of housecleaning under the guidance of the badai Shi and Tian, he shaped his experience to the requirements of the zhuiniu. The physical demands of the house cleaning required a younger man to perform it. When asked why the ox sacrifice for the zhuiniu house cleaning, he replied, "It is more treasured that is why the spirits want it. The meat is practical and necessary for their travel to get the water buffalo" (C. Shi 2018b).

The house cleaning ritual made the house into a sacred space to perform the ritual, and strict adherence to detail had to be followed. Form and sequence adherence was

essential for efficacy, with patterns, words, and actions considered sacred and necessary for communication with the spirit world.[14] The house cleaning that prepares for the zhuiniu moves beyond cleaning and into the calling of the spirits of the five heavens to prepare for the most elaborate and spiritually intensive Miao ritual.

8. Altars and Armies

During the two days before my arrival, the six badai gathered what they needed for the ritual from the nearby fields and forest. The forest surrounding the village is sacred, hosting several spirits, including the "seven fairy daughters"[15] and some animal spirits, known as "gold" spirits because of their glistening appearance. In this way, the forest becomes a living and ongoing host of the Miao cosmological narrative. The world is charged with meaning, with the zhuiniu reiterating and reaffirming their worldview.

The ritual items sought in the forest were wild-grown peach tree branches, essential for house cleaning. The peach tree is said to have originated in China and produces a beautiful blossom. Sweet fruit is symbolic of driving out evil spirits.

Two badai were charged with going to the mountains and cutting peach tree branches, which were boiled. This created reddish water used by all six Badai to wash their face and hands, who then rinsed their mouths to protect them from evil spirits and ghosts (Hong 2018c). As the badai are gathering, the family prepares "fast" cakes, rice cakes made with tofu offered in respect to the gods. This is the only food eaten by the family before the ritual.

From here forward, the zhuiniu ritual comes into focus with each subsequent step in the sequence of events leading to the sacrifice of the water buffalo.

On the morning of the house cleaning, all six badai assisted in setting up two altars (also referred to as temples) at the main entrance and room of the house. The larger altar, also known as the "left altar," was set against the far wall at the house's interior for the god of the land (Hong 2018a) (Figure 4). The Miao believe that each piece of land has a god, and the land altar is in honor of the overseeing "land god". Often conflated with the god of the treasury is *Caishen* 财神, a god personification borrowed from the Chinese.[16] The god of the treasury, depicted as corpulent and generous, is evoked to help the host family afford a water buffalo, protect the family from the evil spirits, and help those traveling to buy the water buffalo. Badai Yang, speaking on behalf of the god of the treasury, thanked the host family and, in turn, announced the household's support of the god of the treasury.

The left altar was elaborately arranged, hung on three sides with two rows of hanging paper cut to look like fencing and serving as a defense against evil spirits by protecting the altar and creating a sacred space. "You need to go to create this altar in the house, to make a temple to protect the family and to communicate with the god of the treasury" (C. Shi 2018b). On the table were arranged (1) rice cake offerings, (2) a rice bowl with incense, (3) a shidao (a brass knife-like implement with a round handle and dangling metal), (4) a gao (two pieces of bamboo used for divination), and (5) three bowls of peach water, one for each kingdom of heaven.[17] The inviting in of the water spirits to make holy water was necessary to establish the presence of the gods. It was essential that protocol be followed and that the guardian spirits be positioned correctly on the altar and given respect and comfort. The last item on the altar was (6) a rolled scroll, the shenxiang juan 神像卷 depicting the spirit army (Yang 2018b).

The second, smaller altar was at the house's main entrance (Figure 5). This altar was known as the "right" altar to call the "armies" to protect the journey and the ritual. The god that oversaw the armies and this altar was *qiaoshi*, or *qiaoshen* 神, bridge god or bridge master, who facilitates the crossing of distance (Peng 2018a).[18] This altar is sparse, arranged prominently with beeswax incense—burning wax wrapped in paper—and it was constantly burnt throughout the house cleaning. Located at the doorway, the altar advances the belief that gods should come and go as they please and travel (like bees) to and from heaven more easily with the beeswax smoke (Peng 2018c).

Figure 4. Badai Yang inviting in the spirits and armies. He dances the hexagon in front of the left altar. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Figure 5. Badai Shi Changwu at the right altar in front of the main door to the family's home. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Traditionally, this ritual began at midnight. For the La Yi re-enactment, it was conducted mid-day.[19]

9. Inviting the Gods and Spirits

Next came the introduction of the badai participating in the ritual to the spirits and gods. The introductions were done using a complex system of hand gestures (C. Shi 2018a), which linked ordinary and spirit realities. Hand gestures, numbering in the dozens, serve various functions, most notably communicating with the spirits, mythical animals and soldiers, magical powers, and master badai to assist (J. Shi 2001); the hand gestures were used throughout the ritual. Then, Yang and the other badai changed into their regalia.

> Gestures are ways to communicate with the spirits and ancestors. There are many gestures from the ancestors, and they are used for different reasons. Some are used to communicate and move with the spirits. Some gestures are used to hide your body from those evil spirits so they cannot get into you. Sometimes the masters make mistakes with the hand gestures, and the ancestors come and help (Yang 2018a).

The introduction of the Badai and invitation to the spirits was repeated twice to avoid any confusion in communication. Special consideration was given to inviting the god of the "doors and gates" because entrances and thresholds are where evil spirits often linger and hide. The function of the ritual is first to clean out the devils and evil spirits: "some must be driven away, others are locked up," and then I ask for guidance and protection of the good spirits (Yang 2018a).

Peach water was offered to each of the spirits. To verify their acceptance Yang threw his gao, a palm-sized ritual object typically made of bamboo or wood split in two and thrown as a form of divination. The gao is thrown on the floor midway between the two altars. If the gao lands with both sides down, the spirits have accepted the water and will participate. If both sides land up, it is an absolute refusal. If one up and one down, it is a negotiable refusal. The gao is thrown repeatedly, each time with a vocal request, plead, or persuasion until the offering is accepted. Once accepted, the peach water is offered and poured onto the earth.

Throwing for an agreeable response to multiple questions and wishes required multiple throws of the gao and is considered dialogue and negotiation with the spirits. With discussions taking place and propitiations offered as necessary in the form of chant or an additional offering of "fortune money" or "spirit money," gold-colored paper (typically 8×8 inches square) is burnt and sent to the gods.[20] Smoke is considered a pathway to heaven. The money sent to the gods, specifically the god of the treasury, is never a burden but seen as communication, opportunity, and blessing. "Human beings send money to gods so the gods can send back real money—so you give money to gods, and they will give to you. Yin money is sent to the gods, and yang money is sent to the family (Ma 2018b). Spirit money burning occurs throughout the ritual and is an integral part of all Miao rituals. The white paper is symbolically "silver," and the yellow paper is gold (Peng 2018b).

Negative gao responses provoke the badai to ask if the gods have changed their minds or require more spirit money, rice cakes, further cleaning of evil spirits, or animal sacrifices (Yang 2018a). The gao throwing continues going through a step-by-step checklist of wishes asked of the gods to assure a successful zhuiniu ritual. Daoist rituals inspired the checklist of wishes, and depending on the school of badai practice, were either written (text) or spiritual (visually conveyed via scroll). Yang's school used the visual scroll form.

The asking of the gods concluded with a rooster sacrifice; its spirit is believed to protect those who travel.

For the sacrifice, the rooster's mouth is stuffed with rice cakes, and its beak tied with thread to protect the travelers from any bad words. "When they are on their trip to look for a water buffalo, people may say bad things about the journey. Not the local people, but people along the journey. Tying the mouth will protect them from bad words" (C. Shi 2018b).

The ritual proceeds to a more intimate interaction as badai Yang moves with the gods and dances to "open up heaven."

The horn is blown again for *Yuhuang* the Jade Emperor, the highest of the gods.[21] There are two distinct types of horn blowing. "For the Jade Emperor," sounds like, *Who EE Who EE Who EE* and is blown to fulfill the family's will and respect to the Jade Emperor. The second type is used more generally as an announcement and in various contexts is identified as *Laojun* in honor of the Daoist god Laozi and sounds like *Ho Ye Ho Ye Ho Ye.* The blowing of a water buffalo horn serves as an announcement to the heavens that the section is complete.

Yang sang and chanted exclusively in Chinese. The dance steps were in nine parts or "states" called the "nine ancient steps." Based on hexagram readings of the *Yijing* (Figure 6). With this action, Yang "danced" to evoke the "Kingdoms of Heaven" (Yang 2018b). The function of the dance is twofold: (1) to connect the human world with heaven by way of ritual and (2) to symbolically travel to each kingdom of heaven. The dance steps opened each of the five heavens (one in each of the four directions and one for the center axis), following a dance step pattern unique to each direction and center axis. "Dancing the hexagram" required nine repetitions of step patterns, with each consisting of two steps followed by four steps performed nine times. The dance can be viewed as a danced drama that culminates with a nine-step repetition of an eight-step pattern for the center. The dance step pattern of nine (2×4) for each direction and then eight for the center each equaled nine when accounting for each direction and center as one. The dance opens each heaven (Hong 2018c) and retraces the cosmological structure of the Miao worldview.

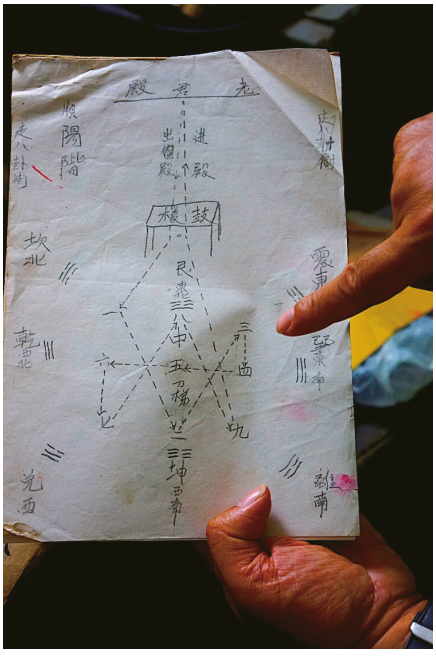

Figure 6. A diagram of the *Yijing*-inspired dance steps that evoke the "Kingdom of Heaven." (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

The Miao believe that the *Yijing* originated with the Miao and not with Confucius or Daoism, who came after the Miao were historically established in central China. The Miao maintain that others formalized the *Yijing* into a written culture and a belief system. When pressed for details, Yang said he did not understand nor was it important to know the reason for the dancing, only that he must strictly adhere to the form to preserve its sacred meaning and open each heaven (Yang 2018c).

While visiting heaven, he encountered eighteen sacred gods and four officials—gods in charge of each specific heaven (Yang 2018c). While traveling to each heaven, Yang verbally invited the gods, ancestral spirits, and badai masters from his school that resided in each heaven. His song and chant declared why he was there and what he needed from each heaven. By so doing, he linked the material world with the cosmological, becoming the embodiment and articulator of the Miao mythic narrative.

His hand gestures, vocalizations, and actions (such as tapping the buffalo horn) varied according to his interaction with the various heavens. Tapping the horn signified the invitation of his school's ancestral teachers. Once they accepted, Yang persuaded them to eat from the altar table, talked with them, and then released them before he moved on to another heaven.

After visiting the heavens, the spirit army, which resides at the center, was called upon to support the ritual and chase away the devil and evil spirits. "It is the army sent from heaven to help the host family. There are many gods and soldiers in each heaven that gather at the center. There are 99,000 soldiers and horses" to protect those traveling long distances carrying cash to purchase the water buffalo. "This ritual is about what you should do before you go into battle (Yang 2018a). The soldiers are called to protect against three types of bad people, spirits, or gods: (1) enemies of the host family, (2) those who may be friendly but say bad things, and (3) those that could do harmful things. There are three types of evil spirits: (1) natural spirits, like a tree or rock (anything in nature can potentially be an evil spirit), (2) ghosts from unnatural death (murder, accident, or suicide), and (3) those that come from relationships (people or spirits) that fight or kill each other. Evil spirits are always close at hand, with the best protection being working together, respect, and communication. If that does not work, one must fight with the armies (C. Shi 2018b). Traditionally, it was at this point in the house cleaning when the intestines and butchered body of the ox were brought and piled between the two altars and equally offered to the two altars. The uncooked ox head was placed at the center, midway between the two altars with the oxtail facing the left altar of the land god, Tudigong 土地公, which is borrowed from the Han. Once the offering is accepted (determined by throwing the gao), the head is cooked. "It must be an ox because this is an offering for the Water Buffalo killing ritual. The head must be cooked for the gods to eat" (Yang 2018c).

No ox was sacrificed for the La Yi demonstration, and only the ox head was used, purchased at a local slaughterhouse earlier that day. The badai interpreted the ready availability of the ox head (which are seldom slaughtered) as a sign from the gods. "Without it, even the demonstration could not proceed" (C. Shi 2018b).

Every aspect of the ox sacrifice and cooking was important. Traditionally, a host family member oversaw the ox killing and preparation. "It is not a badai. It is another one who will kill the ox and then take it away to clean it and cook it and bring it back to the altar" (C. Shi 2018b). In keeping with tradition, the demonstration charred the ox head then separated the meat from the skull (Figure 7). An ax was used to split the horns from the skull. The meat was then distributed into five bowls to compliment five bowls of corn wine altar offerings. Every aspect, from the type of basin, towel, and fire used to the process of how the head must first be boiled in a pot without blood being split, was strictly observed. Throughout the process, a devotion to the thunder god, *Ji Leishen* 祭雷, and jade god *Yuhuang Dadi* 玉皇大帝, was held foremost in the minds of those doing the preparation of the ox head and its meat.

Figure 7. The flaying of the ox head by members of the host family to make the meat an offering to the gods. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Yang then sang to the armies. The armies are "From the past, from the very beginning of ancient times and do not use modern weapons, only spears and shields" (Hong 2018c). The soldiers from five different directions/heavens are asked to gather at the center between the two altars where the "barracks" are located.

Once gathered, the shenxiang juan—the scroll placed on the altar—is unfurled. It is extended to create a pathway from the altar to the house entrance to invite the army. As Yang chanted the invitation, he walked with a dance step along the side of the scroll. By moving back and forth with the "army," he symbolically walked with the soldiers serving as their guide to the material world. When Yang walked on the cloth, he "walked on clouds" between heaven and earth. While doing so, he gave the army the names and information needed to protect the host family. Then the armies "must take the sacrifice and be sent back because they do not belong here. When you learned to be a badai, you have a right to call those armies and lead them" (Yang 2018c). The shenxiang juan scroll is canvas, approximately twelve inches wide and twelve feet long and colorfully painted with martial figures.

Walking on the clouds is a trained specialization worthy of note in that it reveals the intricacy of badai ritual training. Badai Shi outlined the training,

> For forty-nine days, you are trained for that kind of walking. Every morning at daybreak, I washed my face and went on the roof and practiced the walk. You must walk on the house roof barefoot with a cup of wine in hand, an offering to the teachers. For forty-nine days, you cannot pause. Each day, you must do it and chant sacred words to the elements five times very fluently without any pause. You are walking on the roof, and after practicing, you learn to walk on clouds. If you pause, you must begin again and do another forty-nine days. You say those words, and that finishes that day's practice (C. Shi 2018c).

During the call of the army, Yang described how he saw gods riding horses and how he "invited them to get off their horses and drink corn wine." The army "took away food" with some "hanging over the table after finished eating. I must invite the gods to get their horses or vehicles (chariots) and go back to heaven with their army otherwise they will stay". Often Yang would drink from the bowl of corn wine and gesture towards the heavens, so that the gods do not drink alone. Sometimes the gods enjoy themselves too much and are reluctant to go and must be persuaded by giving them spirit money for their travel (Yang 2018c).

Once Yang's visits to the heavens were complete, he cleaned the altar and all the ritual implements with incense and prepared it for sacred writing, a process by which he wrote on paper a list of each altar element, thereby making them sacred. He did this to ensure that "everything is done correctly, and then I check again" (Yang 2018c). Satisfied that all was in order and done correctly, the ritual of inviting the gods and armies was complete.

That evening, when the badai had their dinner of ox meat (the first meat they had in several days), they chanted to invite the god of the treasury to come to the house and share in the sacrificial meat. For breakfast the next day, they ate ox head meat from the night before. Once dinner was complete, they chanted again, asking the god to go back because he belonged in heaven.

10. Fall: Preparing the House and Family

Traditionally, the house cleaning ritual, inviting the gods and armies, and ox sacrifice all occur in February during the lunar New Year.

The following sequence of rituals occurred in October, after harvest season, and climaxed with the water buffalo sacrifice. The eldest son of the sponsoring family invited his uncle-in-law (his mother's eldest brother) to the ritual. A flag was hung at the house's main entrance "for the water buffalo" (Tian 2018b), identifying the family's ritual intent.

The Miao are not strictly defined as matrilineal in classic, anthropological terms. However, throughout my fieldwork with the Miao, I have observed a high degree of gender equity. Women are empowered and enjoy social, economic, and cultural respect, status, and autonomy. This may be attributed to the equanimity, and shared burden required by hardscrabble farming life, where women are "visible contributors to the regional culture and economy" (Faure and Siu in Oakes and Schein 2006, p. 44). "Since ancient time, the Miao have kept a matrilineal tradition and sense of respect for women, which put women before men. Our culture has no derogatory words for women. The divorce rate is nearly zero" (S. Shi 2016). When asked why the importance of women in Miao culture, badai Tian replied, "All comes from our mother. We all come from our mother" (Tian 2018b). The mother's brother is also part of the family, that origin. "Married women and their relatives are key figures in Western Hunan Miao family and communal life, especially maternal uncles, *mujiu* 母舅; mother's brothers and brothers-in-law *qijiu* 妻子的兄弟 wife's brothers, often guests of honor at major ritual events like the oxen sacrifice and zhuiniu" (Katz 2022, p. 40).

Miao men are protective of their women, which may have originated at the time garrisoned Han soldiers came to the region several hundred years ago and sexualized Miao women. The eroticization and objectification of Miao women is a perception persisting to this day. Their vigorous, primal, and sensual dancing of Miao women, along with their dialogic love songs, are, in comparison to Han culture, considered sexually alluring and permissive (Rack 2005, p. 59).

The importance of the uncle-in-law is one of many expressions recognizing the importance of women in Miao society.

> Miao society today keeps this system. The mother's family is vital, and the uncle represents the mother's family showing respect to the mother's family. Even now, the mother is very important. So, when we say mom, as we Miao do, we always say father and mother as 'baba.' We do not say mama and papa. They are the same. (Peng 2018c)

Once the invitation is sent, the house is prepared for rituals. White fortune paper, representing silver, was burnt outside the house entrance to notify the gods of the family's ritual intent. A goat and rooster, their necks tied with rope, were then led through the house and outside the house's main entrance. "We must let the spirits know. Because we do not know where the spirits are, we take the animals to be where the spirits might be inside to prove the animals are alive and will be offered to the spirits (Tian 2018a). A ritual altar, called the "tali tree," is then set up outside the house's main entrance.

11. The Tali Tree

The function of the tali tree ritual was to dispel the evil spirits and curses that haunt the family (Figure 8). Unlike the house cleaning ritual earlier in the year, this and the following ritual delve into the historical and ancestral curses. The evil spirits and all the curses they embody must be called up and purged before a water buffalo sacrifice. This tree is also considered sacred because of its function and is part of a cultivated forest of spirit trees. "It also takes a long time to establish an intimate spiritual relationship with the mountain by worshipping the spirits and for the integration of the 'implanted' spirits and the naturally living spirits of the land" (Wang 2011, p. 133).

Figure 8. Badai Yang during the first part of the tali tree ritual. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

The locally found tali tree is an evil attractor because the Miao consider it accursed. After all, it is rare, difficult to burn, and has no fruit or practical application. "If you see that kind of tree in the woods, you need to cut it because it is cursed, you must not let it grow. It is a symbol of the cursed and that is why it is used" (C. Shi 2018b).

An altar table was set with a rice bowl stuck with incense offerings (Figure 9). On either side of the bowl were two empty bowls face down, later filled with rice offerings. At the edge of the table facing away from the house was a series of paper flags of different colors, representing protecting spirits and serving as a fence for the altar against evil spirits.

A hemp rope hung with more flags and anthropomorphic figures extended from the table, representing evil spirits and protecting gods (Figure 10a). The rope was attached to a tali tree branch (approximately three meters high) and symbolized a bridge that linked present and ancient generations of the family (Figure 10b). Also on the rope, interspersed between the paper figures and flags, were looped "hooks" made of bamboo and meant to capture evil.

Figure 9. The table altar setting for the first phase of the tali tree ritual. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

> In ancient times, many generations ago, there was a curse. It is said that the curse would continue for ninety-nine generations. But we do not know when that curse started, so we do not know the duration, and so we do not know if we are in that curse or not. It is to protect the family. To ensure that that curse will not hurt them, we need to do the tali ritual to protect the family. Since we do not know which generation has the curse, we use the rope as a symbol for all ninety-nine generations and use the hooks on the rope to separate the curse's effects because you do not know which generation is affected by the curse. The hooks are to block the effects of the curse from ancient times. At the end of the bridge is the altar, the paper symbolic of protecting spirits, so today is completely separated from the ancient time (Tian 2018b).

If the ritual is practiced at night, as few as five flags are required. If performed during the daytime, more flags are required to attract evil spirits, which are said to travel more at night and require fewer flags and hooks to attract them.

The tali tree altar is built outside the house to prevent spirits from entering the house. Yang took the animals into the house again during the ritual to attract evil spirits with a living sacrifice. "When the spirits are ready, they will make the sacrifices at the altar" (Yang 2018b).

While Yang was inside circling with the goat, Shi posted bamboo sticks topped with red flags around the altar to further entice and capture evil spirits. To make sure the spirits do not escape the boundary of the altar, he sets a trap. Yang then circles clockwise around the altar, ringing a bell with a low chant, "whispering to attract the evil spirits." This action is consistent with the Miao preoccupation of "possible invasions, attacks and interventions on all sides, and it points to the tension with their neighbors. This spiritual boundary is maintained through worship in daily life and important festivals. Worshipping and the relevant rituals not only cultivate Miao's intimate relationship with the land but also strengthen the spatial boundary and their ideas of resisting outsiders" (Wang 2011, p. 132).

The bell is symbolic of the uncle-in-law who witnessed the ritual and will oversee the sacrifice of the goat. The goat's throat was slit, and its blood drained at the altar. The final action of the ritual was an offering of rice followed by the cleaning of the rice bowls with peach water. The rice and the water used to clean the bowls were contaminated and

dumped in a nearby wooded area. The table was then wiped with peach water and deemed clean and safe.

(**a**)

(**b**)

Figure 10. (**a**,**b**) The tali tree altar. (**b**) Note the tali tree branch and the anthropomorphic figures symbolizing spirits. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

12. Jiuixi

After the tali tree, a follow-up ritual to expunge any lingering and unaccounted evil spirits attracted to the house. This ritual segment was called *jiuixi*, a Miao word meaning "reasons." Badai Tian, wearing badaixiong regalia, chanted an invocation inside the side door nearest the family dining area (Figure 11). Tian performed the ritual to expunge unaccounted evil. Once completed, he began calling the gods and good spirits to come. However, the elderly Tian grew tired and asked Shi, a badaixiong, to assist.

Figure 11. Badai Shi Changwu playing the zhutuo and chanting to call and welcome helping spirits into the house. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Throughout the ritual, Shi played the *zhutuo* 竹柝, a long, hollow wooden traditional instrument with three strings, as he and Tian chanted. "The instrument played is of the Miao people from ancient times to bring the people together. And it is the only instrument to call the god and spirits. When it makes sounds, they know they are speaking. We use it so the spirits will come. It pleases them and gets their attention" (C. Shi 2018b).

At the "door altar," Tian and Shi chanted rounds of repetitive, trance-like invitations. "This ritual begins with inviting spiritual teachers and the gods to this family. It is also to tell the ancestor teachers what they need to do for this ritual. When the spiritual teachers are agreed and we are together, we know what we need to do" (Tian 2018c).

Then the ritual moves into its primary concern, asking questions and the reasons for the curses against the family. The jiuixi segment of chanting of questions can last for several hours; this demonstration lasted well over an hour. The chanting asks the spirits by whom and why the family has been cursed. Tian called spirits by their name and asked who made the curse. "If you do the altar, you need to do this part by asking questions. I ask each spirit

and offer a goat to take the curse away" (Tian 2018c). Tian told me there was no verbal response from the spirits. Instead, "I know when I call their name" (Tian 2018c).

> The chanting could be longer if you need to call more spirits. It is an ancient poem and is rhymed just like poetry to please the gods and spirits. Each rhyme has the same number of characters, and the words are precisely what I learned from my father and grandfather. I did not add one character (Tian 2018b).

13. For the Heavens

Next, on the altar located in the house's interior—the inside altar—were food offerings to the gods and for "the heavens". The function of this altar and ritual was to invite and please the gods and convey the family's wishes (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Badai Tian making food offerings for the gods at the inside altar. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

The inside altar was a low table with several bowls, one filled with rice for the female god, the other filled with millet for the male god. A third bowl was filled with peach water. Twenty-one bowls surrounded these three centrally placed bowls. Three each were filled with the harvest of the season, buckwheat, ramie, soy, maize, wheat, sorghum, and oats, each a crop the gods enjoy. Each crop filled three bowls and, when multiplied by seven, equaled twenty-one, which was numerologically auspicious for receiving the gods from heaven (Tian 2018b).

Tian chanted invitations in the Miao language, which was punctuated with the ringing of a bell. Only badaixiong use the bell. The chants ask the gods to "come peacefully and don't worry about anything. We will serve you as you like" (Tian 2018b).

14. Three Brothers

An altar was established after a long break, replacing the tali tree altar. Yang performed this "outside altar" at the house's main entrance under the advisement of Shi and Tian.

The altar table was surrounded by three chairs and set as a mnemonic of the "Three Brothers" narrative, also known as the Three Generals or Three Heavenly Kings. In all variations of the mythology, the three brothers were surnamed Yang *Tianwang* 天王; their full title historically was White Emperor Heavenly Kings or *Baidi Tianwang* 白帝天王 (Katz 2022, p. 61) and was the basis of a widespread cult originating during the Ming dynasty (if not earlier) and flourishing in West Hunan during the Qing or Republican periods (Sutton 2000, p. 448).

The mythology of the Three Heavenly Kings was a Miao myth developed in the face of conflict with the Han. Ironically, it was adopted by the Han and other regional ethnic groups, becoming widespread and popularized regionally. As a myth, it has undergone transformations reflecting its social, cultural, and political journey and serving and adjusting to local needs. However, the myth, in all its various tellings, is central to Miao culture and mythological origins of its families, and historical injustices endured.

> The three brothers were generals of the Song dynasty [960–1279], who were full of wisdom and courage. After the Miao came out in revolt they led forces to attack them. They knew the Miao always craved drink and food. Since the weather happened to be severely cold, they slaughtered many oxen and pigs, cooked them and suspended them in the trees. The Miao mob fought each other to drink and eat. They [the brothers] surprised them and inflicted a severe defeat. Thereupon the Nine Creeks and the Eighteen Caverns were opened up, and only five surnames of the scattered Miao survived: these are the Wu, Long, Shi, Liao, and Ma clans of today. Later some disobedient people were jealous of the [brothers'] exploits and presented them with poisoned wine, giving it as if by royal command. The brothers drank it and died simultaneously. It was just at the Small Summer Festival. (Sutton 2000, p. 461).

The telling of the myth specifically referenced by the zhuiniu adds detail and nuanced meaning to the ritual performed.

> The Emperor gave the brothers three flagons of wine, telling them to drink them when they arrived home. But the wine was poisoned, and all three died when they stopped to drink en route. Since the first drank only one cup, this god's face is white. The second drank two cups and turned red, and the third three and so his image has a black face. (Sutton 2000, p. 486)

The ritual began with a rooster sacrifice. As with other ritual segments, it was essential that the sacrifice—a goat, rooster, or pig—be alive and presented at the altar prior to sacrifice "to demonstrate it is fresh. This is necessary to show they are alive before killing and sending them to the gods" (Yang 2018b).

The setting and all props and actions of this ritual were shaped and referenced, and together they constitute a retelling of the mythic narrative of three brave and loyal brothers who were generals (Figure 13). The story's telling reaffirms Miao's ethical forthrightness and is held up as a moral model for the zhuiniu. Association with three powerful generals also references martial prowess and protection of the family and the Miao people. The myth portrayed heroism in the face of betrayal, an analogy for the Miao condition at the hands of the Han—historical occurrences interpolated into the cosmological narrative.

Figure 13. Badai Yang at the altar for the three brothers. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

The narrative, in another variation of telling demonstrates its mailability:

> In ancient times there were three brothers who were loyal generals of the emperor. After fighting courageously and wining great battles and a war for the emperor, they returned to Beijing. The success and popularity of the generals worried the emperor, and he saw them as a threat. The emperor lavished gifts on the three brother generals, including poison wines, and they died. However, they died in different ways. The poison directly killed one—his face turned black, the second saw his brother die and died of anger—his face was red. The third, discovering his two brothers poisoned and dead, died of fright—his face was white. Because of their loyalty, courage and betrayal at the emperor's hands, they became gods. The name of the three brother-generals were, Fujin, Fuyin, and Fuya (Tian 2018b).

Historical events and atrocities remain vivid in the minds and hearts of the Miao to this day. The narrative builds on the tali tree ritual by tracing the generational haunting of the Miao people, a succession of betrayals and injustices perpetrated by Han invasions and occupations. The three brothers are a widespread, dynamic, and easily digested story of injustice and betrayal. It is not Miao in origin. The myth was appropriated, enabling the Miao to revisit historical wounds, grieve, and identify with the dutiful, moral, and honorable superiority exampled by the brothers. Their elevation to god status offered some comfort and restored some degree of self-respect, taking the sting out of the Miao defeat and colonization at the hands of the Han.

The altar table was surrounded by three chairs representing the three brothers. An open umbrella rests one chair, representing the brothers' elevated status—in ancient China, an umbrella shielded high-ranking persons from the sun. At the fourth side of the altar, Yang knelt and officiated.[22] On the chairs were paper flags (white and gold) on sticks stuck into rice cakes, symbols of the armies each brother led.

On the table were arranged offerings to the three brothers: a large square container of rice stuck with burning incense sticks and seven bowls, each representing the gifts of the seven harvest gods portrayed by the earlier, inside altar ritual. Three bowls offered rice, meat, and wine as the inside altar. The seven bowls multiplied by the three bowls represent the brothers, equating to the numerologically auspicious number of twenty-one.

Yang's chants follow an established invocational pattern to send the sacrifices to their proper palaces in heaven. The sequence of the ritual is as follows: (1) inviting spiritual teachers for assistance, (2) telling the three bothers their intention, (3) identifying the family seeking assistance and reason for the offerings, (4) presenting the sacrificial offerings to the three brothers, (5) describing the offerings, (6) asking the three brothers to send the offerings to the palace inhabited by female gods, (7) declaring the family's intention of sending the water buffalo sacrifice to the second palace in heaven (more on this below), and (8) sending the helping spiritual teachers back to their proper place in heaven and closing the ritual.

Sending offerings to two distinct palaces in heaven spoke directly to the mythological origin of the zhuiniu. Each segment of the zhuiniu is part of a narrative progression. The ritual served to integrate participants into Miao mythology. The ritual takes the family on the journey. The zhuiniu constitutes a participatory reiteration and reaffirmation of the Miao worldview. The myth, in brief, may be recounted thus:

> In the old times, there was a poor family. A boy from a poor family was sent to another family to bring an ox. When the boy returned, he took care of an ox for his family.
>
> Many years later, when the boy grew into a man up, and the ox was getting old, his family would like to pay him, but the man said, "I don't want to be paid. I just want that ox." And they gave him the ox, and he took it to start his own family and get married. The ox told him that he must go to a specific place, a path, where the spirit women come wearing green cloth and there, he will find his wife.
>
> The boy married a spirit woman, and they had a baby. Several years later, the spirit woman returned to the place, the path to heaven and took the wife and baby away. The man missed his wife and his baby and wanted to go to heaven, but he was a mortal and could not go to heaven. The water buffalo god saw this and wanted to help the man. He said, "Just stand on my horns and I would send you up to heaven."
>
> The man did so, and he came close to heaven and saw a palace. He was at the edge of heaven, and the spirit women knew he was there because he was mortal and smelled terrible, and they drove him away without seeing his wife and baby. Then the bull offered another way. 'The only possible way is for you to kill me and send me as a sacrifice to the gods. And then you will have a chance to get to heaven to see your wife and son. But because I, the god of water buffalos, do not belong to that palace, I belong to the other heaven palace, when you kill me, you need to send me to another palace. Because I need to go back to my palace when I die but you can use my body, as a gift to send to the relatives of the other gods coming from your wife's family' (C. Shi 2018c).

Tian commented on the importance of the myth and how the zhuiniu enacts it.

> This is the highest level of ritual. It is how the man got the chance to see his wife and son. For the Miao, it is the highest possible ritual for a mortal because they can visit heaven. That is why there are two different altars. One is to invite the gods where his wife and boy were living. That is represented by the participation of the uncle's family—the maternal part of the family. The other altar is to send the bull spirits back to his palace. (Tian 2018c).

15. Big General Doll Ghost

The last house altar ritual segment was positioned on the floor at the main entrance as an "indoor and outdoor offering" from the badai and the host family. The threshold altar is symbolic of how the Miao co-exist as both material and spiritual—worlds inside and outside (C. Shi 2018b).

This strategically placed altar establishes the "other palace" where the water buffalo will be offered.

Each Miao house has a stone square set in the floor opposite the main entrance, the *Long Jia Kou Shuo*, which symbolizes a family's connection to the village well. The altar is placed in relation to the stone square which connects metaphorically to the village well. A dragon is said to live in the village well, and each household's connection to the well assures the dragon's protection.[23] The altar is placed between the house's main entrance and the long jai shou, "Dragon Family Mouth", because it is powerful (Long 2018).

At sunset, the Big General Doll Ghost ritual was initiated at the altar and continued with the sacrifice of a rooster in an adjacent field (Figure 14). If practiced otherwise, it can bring bad luck and damage the ritual's effect (C. Shi 2018b).

Figure 14. The Doll Ghost, which is performed in nearby woods. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Shi conducted this segment following badaizha protocol. He began by calling upon the "Big General," also known as *guan tou da jiang*, 大將軍, the highest level of official dealing with disputes or legal issues. "He is a god and great general evoked to protect the family from quarrels and legal troubles. The ritual seeks to determine possible problems, arguments, recent infractions, or causes of difficulty" (C. Shi 2018b).

The Big General supervises the Doll Ghost as a ritual within a ritual. As with other ritual segments, both are modular and can be presented as stand-alone or combined. Both were traditionally presented at night. For the La Yi demonstration, both were conducted in the afternoon. The Doll Ghost, also referred to as du *jiao da wang* 角大王, the One Horn King, was represented by a crude grass and rope totem with paper for a head and hat and a face drawn on it. When asked, Shi could not explain the meaning or origin of the Doll Ghost or One Horn King.

> It is just the meaning of that ghost. The One Horn King is responsible for carrying away whatever they need in the ritual. He is the carrier of bad things away from the family. The One Horn King is one of two brothers. Both have a horn on their head. They appear in "Journey to the West" (Hong 2018c).

The altar was arranged on the floor and grass matting, "We use grass so much for the rope it is the most convenient material we have" (Ma 2018b). In addition to the Doll Ghost—One Horn King—there was an empty bowl and rice cake offerings, bowl offerings of rice, corn wine, and water, and a wooden box of rice to hold incense sticks. Unique to this altar was a large basket containing an egg and later the head of the sacrificed rooster. A series of white paper spirit figures and flags hung to either side of the altar. One set of anthropomorphic forms signified the ghosts called upon to accompany the Big General. The other flags signified the armies under the general's command.

Using a whistling style of chant—a "dragon voice"—Shi punctuated his call by tapping and rattling the empty bowl with the sidau knife; the bowl would later contain the rooster's meat. The ritual moved through seven steps, all of which required gao acceptance by the spirits and gods.

1. Invite teachers and gods;
2. Inform the teachers of what they are going to do;
3. Enlist teachers to ask the gods to protect the families;
4. Inform the Big General and One Horn King of the sacrifices prepared for them;
5. Move to a nearby field to sacrifice a rooster, removing evil from the house and family;
6. Return to the house to inform the Big General god of what they have done;
7. Smear the rooster's blood onto a little ghost (a doll-like figure made of paper) to carry any curses against the family to the Big General, who will cut it off from the family. The ghost carries the curses, which concludes the day's sequence of rituals. The house is prepared for the zhuiniu (Yang 2018b).

The Doll Ghost is foolish in behavior and appearance but respected for being effective. He tends to dream, and when he awakes, he is without clothing. It is forbidden to laugh at his plight, appearance, or interactions during the ritual because his function is serious (Peng 2018b). However, at the end of the ritual, all are encouraged to laugh at his effective yet foolish ways. The relationship between the serious and comedic is evident in other Miao rituals and is best explained as a tension release after a long day of ritualizing.

Under the supervision of Tian and Shi, Yang conducted the rooster sacrifice ritual in the nearby woods (Figure 15). The wide, shallow altar basket contained an egg and an empty bowl and was taken to the pre-dug hole where the rooster was sacrificed and decapitated.[24] The egg was also buried. The rooster's feathers were plucked and stuck on the burial plot, and the rooster's body was thrown to the spirits to signify the sacrifice. After a procession back to the house, the rooster was thrown at the altar. Shi took over the ritual and sprayed peach water in the four directions and then wrote to the spirits in the air with the knifepoint of his shidao. Blood from the rooster was smeared on the doll and then thrown out of the house. The doll signifies removing those that would quarrel or bring legal problems to the family (Tian 2018b).

Figure 15. L to R: Badai Yang, Tian, and Changwu sacrificing a rooster in the woods near the family home. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

A wooden bowl and meat cleaver are brought, the rooster is butchered near the altar, and its meat is put into the bowl. The altar's paper flags and figures are then burnt.

The ritual concluded, the six badai and the host family ate dinner together to mark the Big General's success and acceptance of the day's sacrifices. "We are eating and sitting with the big general, the one horn king and the other gods and spirits that have come today to help us. We eat with them to make sure the gods share the sacrifice, and they enjoy the fresh meat and offerings" (C. Shi 2018c).

16. Two Couples

The highest level of welcoming the gods and protecting spirit women from heaven occurs on the next day. This ritual built on the ritual events and was necessary to bring them to a positive conclusion with a successful water buffalo sacrifice (Tian 2018b).

Two young couples, the sons or daughters of the sponsoring family and their spouses, sat reverentially at the kitchen table dressed in their finest traditional clothing. Their presence, signifying the future, demonstrated the family's willingness to welcome the gods and spirits into the family. The two couples show "the heavens that the host family is using their highest level of humans to show the highest respect" (C. Shi 2018b). Ideally, to be the highest representatives of the family, the couples are married and parents with healthy children. The ritual presentation of the couples reiterates the mythology of the man separated and longing for his wife.

The two couples, signifying the family's most valued offering and future, are held up to the gods as proof of the family's intent, commitment, and devotion. "We are sending four guests. So please, the people say come" (Tian 2018c). The gao is thrown several times until the offerings are accepted.

Tian rang the *xiong* bell as he sang and chanted an announcement and reported to the gods outlining the family's intention (Figure 16). He then recited a list of gifts the family was sending. This was followed by the arrival of the uncle-in-law, who had been waiting outside. The four young people chanted and received the uncle-in-law to the family, joining the couples at the table. The uncle's arrival prompted the telling of ancient stories and

songs by Tian in Miao. Traditionally, telling stories was an opportunity for oral transference and could go on for hours with the family and community listening nearby. For the La Yi demonstration, the storytelling lasted nearly three hours.

Figure 16. Badai Tian in badaixiong regalia and ringing a bell to offer the spirits the two couples. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

The stories are the history of the Miao people from the very beginning: how they came into being, how they traveled to different places, where they had a battle, and how the twelve different branches of the people are history. The twelve branches are from the bee and eggs and turned into butterfly (Tian 2018c).

Tian told me it had been about fifty years since he last recited some stories and songs and that he had to sit quietly for many hours and practice until his memory came back to him. The process, he explained, "Made me glad and young to do this" (Tian 2018b). The other badai were similarly grateful for the unusual opportunity. "This is a rare situation, and I am happy I could practice something that I had no other chance to do" (Hong 2018b), remarked Hong Shu Jin, who was one of the six badai assisting. "The process was a good chance to communicate with other masters. It's rare but good" (Yang 2018b).

The badai rehearsed their performances each night before they slept to allow the "spirits to help them in their dreams." Rituals are held psychophysically as mind–body–spiritual memory, "I go to a quiet place to recall from my memory the movements, something that has long been lost. If I cannot remember the spirits are saying I should not do it" (C. Shi 2018b).

The reciting of stories and songs, which includes repetition and affirmations, served to encode an oral transfer of traditional knowledge, critical to a culture that is not text-based. The chorus-like responses of the uncle-in-law and the couples exemplified how storytelling was traditionally encoded and passed through the generations. One of the stories told by Tian was about the maple tree, which is sacred to the Miao. "Maple is the totem tree of Miao people, also known as grandmother tree. It is said that the mother butterfly, the

ancestor of the Miao people, grew from the heart of maple. Miao people's feelings for trees not only come from the worship of ancestors but also can be understood as a kind of respect for nature" (Chen and Bao 2021, p. 102). In one popular version of the Miao origin myth, a butterfly finds a home with the maple tree and births twelve eggs and the origin of culture. Each egg represents the origin of one of the Miao family names, with Wu, Ma, Luo, Long, Shi, Yang, and Yang being the most prominent.

In another telling of the butterfly myth, the creator figure Butterfly Mother (HudieMama 蝴蝶媽媽) "lays her eggs in a sweet gum tree. After being hatched by a mythical bird, the culture hero Jang Vang emerges from his shell. Industrious, but something of a trickster, Jang eventually gets into a tiff with the Thunder God over an ox, resulting in rains that flood the earth. Jang Vang and his sister survive the flood inside a giant calabash. [. . .] the brother and sister reluctantly marry, and the world again is repopulated" (Bender and Mair 2011, p. 276).

An interview with Long Ting Meng, a house builder, living in the Miao village of Xing Gueng, revealed how the former telling of the myth of the butterfly and maple tree influenced house building and daily life in the Fenghuang region. Each Miao village in the region historically identified a maple tree on the road just outside its borders—a descendant of the original maple tree—to protect the village. Consequently, each Miao house must have a main post made of maple wood. A central maple post is structurally and spiritually essential, and other posts may be made of maple or not. How a house is arranged and when it is built must be determined by the village badai, who use Feng Shui and fortune-telling (Long 2018).

> Today, maple is easy to find but difficult to find big enough to be a house post. It is best to have two maple posts: the 'dragon' post and the 'grand' post. The maple post in a house represents a family's cause and the Miao people's cause for good fortune and to protect the family and food stored in the house. The pole used for the water buffalo killing is maple and sacred, like the house and the village tree (Long 2018).

17. Community Dance

Traditionally, the community was invited to participate in a dance to entertain the gods from heaven on the night after the couple's ritual. Received by the gods, the couples bring the gods to the community, which is a reason to celebrate. The sponsoring family and the uncle's family serve as hosts of both gods and the community, who are entertained by the dancing which takes place at the site of the water buffalo sacrifice. Traditionally, the dance lasted the entire night, culminating the following day in a series of rituals and leading to the sacrifice of the water buffalo followed by a community feast.

For the La Yi demonstration, the community dance occurred during the day in a field surrounded by forest, which is considered sacred, next to the site. "Miao villages surrounded by mountains are arranged along the mountains and rivers with winding forms, thus forming the characteristics of the integration of ancient villages with mountains, forests and water sources" (Chen and Bao 2021, p. 102). Community members, dressed traditionally, excitedly gathered at the family house then moved collectively to the site. All were eager to participate in the ritual, which had last occurred in the village in 2012. A large traditional Miao drum on a stand was positioned in the field. However, the village women who facilitated the drumming had limited skills and had to be shown the correct way to drum by the few older women. Most community members had only a general understanding of the dances, and with the drumming being so uncertain, many stood by helplessly. "Much of the dance has been lost but could be found in Guizhou province (Peng 2018b).

Traditionally, the community dances all night in a communal celebration, with revelers taking turns drumming and dancing when inspired. The evening is filled with "Many different songs, jokes, so many types of songs, there is much entertainment" (Peng 2018b).

The celebration was then carried to the family home at daybreak for a meal. The community returned to their homes to rest.

18. Fight Singing

Later in the day, a storytelling competition, called the dui gu ge, takes place between the officiating badai and the uncle. Using a talk-singing style of poetry, the badai and uncle compete with their knowledge of ancient songs and stories in the Miao language. Each song provoked a challenge for the other to respond with something better. As one sings, the other responds by singing questions to stump the singer, and so it goes on back and forth to the community's delight.

The following is an example of the La Yi exchange:

> "Where does our nation come from?"
>
> "Our nation originated east of Yellow River. And when we came here, many, many years ago, we fought many battles bravely against people who would destroy us and take our lands. We lost the battles in the war, but we are here today."
>
> "How many names in our nation?"
>
> "We have twelve names!" Then he proceeded to sing each family name and point to those in the audience that may bear those names.
>
> "Well, who is my original mother?"
>
> "Our mother is a butterfly. Uh, oh (singing) My mother comes from the maple tree, and she gave birth to the twelve brothers. Our brothers are very strong, very healthy, look at them!"
>
> They can go on for many hours if you don't control them. They will continue for a month. They cannot finish. There are so many stories. If you got it printed, it would be three volumes. All of them are story songs. It is a fighting-singing duel to see who knows the mythology better. We must deliver the culture with singing in ancient a Miao for all the people, especially the young people, to know the stories. The best way is through fighting-singing (Peng 2018b).

Miao mythology, the substance of their storytelling, also expressed their mettle. They are people who fought, survived, and became stronger as they migrated from north to south to settle in the formidable and unforgiving mountains. Their storytelling style is called "fighting-singing" because it is done actively and with competition to prove themselves better and more knowledgeable than their opponent. Often the uncle brought his badai to help him in the knowledge duel—his badai whispering responses in his ear. For the La Yi reconstruction of the zhuiniu, Hong served in this capacity.

19. Bringing the Water Buffalo Home

After the storytelling competition, the water buffalo is led into the family home, which is a form of divination. If the water buffalo enters the house freely and calmly, it is a poor sign. An unruly and difficult entrance is considered a good sign and interpreted as the animal's willingness and impatience to return to heaven. If the water buffalo enters and looks to the right, it is considered a poor sign. Looking to the left is good, with looking upward the most auspicious. The water buffalo was then brought to the sacrifice area, a nearby clearing next to woods (Figure 17). The animal is tied to a decoratively carved pole of maple (Peng 2018b). Adjacent to the sacrifice site, a ritual altar was established.

Figure 17. Badai Shi Changwu and offering the water buffalo to the spirits at the outdoor altar. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Traditionally, the sacrificed water buffalo had to be male and taken care of by the family since the spring. "Today, you can buy a water buffalo and bring it from another place in one day" (Peng 2018b). The water buffalo used for the La Yi demonstration was from Fenghuang County, approximately forty miles away, and borrowed from a friend of Ma Mae for the day. "Water buffalos are very valuable and used for work this time of year, and we were lucky to find one" (Ma 2018b).

The young bull was two years old, beautiful and powerfully built. In choosing a water buffalo to sacrifice they had to adhere to specific criteria to ensure acceptance by the gods.

The criteria are that the buffalo

1. Must not be common; instead, it must have a specific shape and appeal;
2. Its forefeet must have muscle;
3. It must have a square head;
4. It must be neither too fat nor too skinny;
5. It must have five colics (hair swirls on body)[25];
6. It must have a head colic that is pleasing;
7. Each rump should have a colic;
8. The horn should be warm to the touch;
9. Its hair must be slightly oily (healthy) and smooth (Hong 2018b; Peng 2018c).

20. Sending the Spirit to Heaven

Ritual themes and actions initiated during the house cleaning and ox sacrifice are reaffirmed. Before the physical body of the water buffalo is sacrificed, the animal's spirit is sent to its heavenly palace. The *sending the spirit* ritual reiterates the myth of the water buffalo offering of the man wanting to see his wife and child in heaven.

The ritual segment and altar at the sacrificial site was the final, longest, most complex, and sacred, requiring the participation of all six Badai. Shi, Yang, and Wu Zhengnian shared the leadership of the ritual that alternated between the Zha and Xian schools of

practice. The Badai, dressed in the regalia of their respective schools, often performed side by side and would change clothing to address school-specific parts of the ritual.

A long rectangular board was placed on the ground at the edge of the field at the sacrifice site. This altar held nine bowls with chopsticks across each to symbolize the offerings of water, wine, sacrificial meat, and rice. Traditionally, the bowls were filled. For the reenactment, they were left empty, serving as placeholders. Behind the altar were five rows of nine paper flags hung on a string and sticks, representing the army called upon for the water buffalo's travel to heaven. As in previous rituals, a square vessel full of rice and stuck with incense was at the center of the altar. Gold-colored spirit money was burnt as an offering and a communication channel to the gods.

The left side of the altar was for the army—the right for the land god to help the water buffalo on its journey. A paper and grass totem doll wearing a farmer-style hat and painted face hung among the army flags, representing the mythological man who sought to see his wife and child in heaven (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Badai Yang addressing the army of the general, which are represented by the paper flags. At the center of the altar is the Doll Ghost. To the left are ten spears representing those that will be used to sacrifice the water buffalo.

Dancing the hexagon enabled a passageway between the material and spiritual worlds to offer the land god the sacrifice. Throughout the liu jin was used to sweep away evil spirits. Since the site was outdoors in a less controlled environment, evil spirits could be more freely attracted and must be constantly swept away (C. Shi 2018b).

With Badai Wu officiating, the host of the zhuiniu (Ma Mei's father) knelt before the altar and was blessed and thanked by the spirits. The water buffalo harness was presented and blessed, as were the maple spears to be used in the water buffalo killing. The water buffalo was then brought to the altar and presented to the gods. Through chant-stylized dialog, the Wu and Yang communicate the family's intent and ask the gods if they are satisfied with the animal and accept it as a worthy offering. Throwing the gao confirmed the acceptance of the gods. Two gods were invited, yushe 神, the Miao god of fish and the god of the land (tudi zhi shen 土地之神)[26] (Peng 2018c). Yushe was enlisted to help the host family with the ox in spring to help protect the family and drive away evil spirits while

traveling. Now the travel is not physical but spiritual. The water buffalo sent to heaven implies the family's connection and the "traveling" of wishes to heaven—the penultimate goal and rationale for zhuiniu. The function of the god general of the army is "to fight devils and evil" (C. Shi 2018c).

The general of armies is depicted with a large army flag. Like those used historically by Miao farmer combatants, maple sticks cut as spears were presented, blessed, and placed on the bushes behind the altar.

A sacrificial rooster is brought in and its beak stuffed with rice cake and tied with a thread to protect the ritual from "any problems caused by those who would have bad words. The rooster was waved over the altar to show it is alive, then sacrificed to protect the people who will kill the water buffalo" (C. Shi 2018c).

After this, three human-sized straw figures were constructed opposite the altar serving as symbolic reminders of forces that might prevent entry into heaven.

As noted earlier, there are three sources of evil spirits, (1) those bad spirits that live in nature, (2) unnatural spirits and ghosts that haunt, and (3) those caused by those that speak poorly of others or that fight or kill each other. The three straw figures anthropomorphize these types of evil.

To assure the success of the sacred and precarious journey to heaven—whereby the spirit of both the water buffalo and the family's wishes must travel—the badai "walk the clouds" and take the spirit personally.

As fire located twenty meters from the altar heats nine-iron plow blades, the scroll of the armies (the shenxiang juan, used in the spring ritual) is unfurled in parallel with the altar. Yang and Shi walked barefoot on the scroll to "walk the clouds with the army to heaven" (C. Shi 2018c).

The shenxiang juan is rolled up and replaced by the heated iron plow blades, which are placed in a row in front of the altar. Yang and Shi then walked barefoot over the hot metal several times, symbolizing the dangerous and precarious path to heaven. Once completed, the badai carried the plow blades with their shidao and piled them before the straw figures and blows the buffalo horn to mark success (Figure 19). Doing so demonstrated that the Badai have successfully walked the clouds to heaven, demonstrating to the family, community, and guardians of heaven that they are capable and worthy (Hong 2018c).

Several blows on the sacred water buffalo horn (used as a battle call) announced their assault on the straw figures. Using the maple sticks, which would be used as spears to kill the water buffalo, the two badai attacked and destroyed the straw figures as a final gesture of overcoming all barriers and entering heaven with the spirit of the water buffalo and the will of the family. The will of the family, embodied in the delivery water buffalo spirit, was delivered and announced in heaven; the buffalo horn was blown again, and firecrackers were set off. The ritual occurred over two hours and included rounds of chanting and singing accompanied by drumming and gong playing interspersed with dialogs with the gods. The goa was thrown several times until the offerings were accepted, signifying that the spirit of the water buffalo was taken to heaven (Figure 20). With the soul of the water buffalo received into heaven, all the paper flags, the totem, and other temporary altar items are put into a pile and burnt.

Figure 19. Badai Shi Changwu blowing the water buffalo horn to announce the assault on the straw figures. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

Figure 20. Badai Yang with a shidao knife in front of the sacrificial altar. The shidao also serves as a noise maker to attract the spirits. (Photo: Thomas Riccio).

21. Receiving the Spears

The following sequence dealt with accepting the spear carriers who will enact the sacrifice. The spear-carriers, led by the uncle-in-law, were his from the matrilineal side of the family. Three generations were represented, the uncle-in-law (the first-born male and all brothers of the host's wife), the sons of the wife's brothers (her nephews), the wife's uncle(s), and if alive, any great-uncle(s). Traditionally, Miao farm communities were known for large families, with the spear carriers numbering from a few to more than a dozen.[27] For the La Yi demonstration, neighbors were enlisted to play the "uncles" and spear carriers.

Historically, spears had metal heads atop maple poles. The La Yi reenactment did not sacrifice the water buffalo and instead performed the actions with non-lethal maple poles (Peng 2018c).

As the community gathers for the killing, a ritual "joking" between the host family and the uncle's family occurs for the community's entertainment. It releases tension before the taking of a life. The uncle's family pretends they want to kill the bull, and the host family will not let them do so. "It is a kind of joking, pretending, a kind of performance before it is killed" (Peng 2018c).

The host family pulls the bull away from the uncle's family, and then each pulls the bull in opposite directions with a pretend verbal fight ensuing. The host family threatens to take the animal back to their house, and the uncle's family threatens to take it away to theirs, and a performed physical challenge, fighting, and verbal sparring occurs. Other Miao rituals, such as the Huan Nuoyuan, include similar comedic tension breaks and distractions before or following sacrificial actions or moments of seriousness. *Before the sacrificial killing, the water buffalo was then brought back to the altar and the gods*.

22. The Water Buffalo Sacrifice

The Three Brother ritual was recalled overseeing and protecting the process of the water buffalo killing and the host family from any evil (C. Shi 2018c). The reason for so many spiritual precautions was out of fear of attracting evil spirits. A smaller table, the "general's altar," is established on which were placed "weapons" for the army. Five flags representing the five barracks of the spirit army were attached to the base of an umbrella. On the table were a *niu jiao* 牛角 buffalo horn and the shidao knife, which generals used and later adopted for badai spiritual practice. Chant singing told how to prepare for battle against evil people, spirits, or gods. There are three types of evil: (1) an enemy of the host family and thus one who had or has problems with you, (2) those who may be friendly but behind your back say things about you, and (3) unknown and predatory outlaws. "People or it could be spirit people or gods that could do harmful things" (C. Shi 2018c).

The spear-carriers circle the animal that is closely tied to the maple pole. Because the bull can fight violently and potentially injure the spear carriers, the bull was traditionally circled as wild prey and repeatedly stabbed until dead.

> When the time comes for an oxen sacrifice to be staged, Miao masters are invited to commence preparations, including choosing a date, preparing all required sacrificial and other ritual items, etc. During this time, they also recount the history and significance of the oxen sacrifice to benefit the family that has chosen to stage it. A temporary altar is set up, and guests are invited to witness and participate in the rites. The water buffalo is said to shed tears as it is being led to its death, with the actual killing being done with a spear wielded by matrilineal kin. The direction the buffalo falls at the moment of its death is critical in divining the host family's future fortunes (Katz 2022, p. 93).

If the animal fell with its head in the host family's home direction, it was most auspicious, if away from the house and in another direction, less promising. If the bull falls in the opposite direction of the house, it is considered a bad omen, and the entire ritual thought a failure (Tian 2018c).

> The people try to make the head fall in the host direction and even fake it. When the buffalo falls, they direct it to go in the direction of the host. But you cannot control everything you do. Like life, you must see where it naturally falls, or it is only a lie (Peng 2018c).

The gods, satisfied by the ritual and receiving the spirit of the water buffalo, oversee the dividing of the meat and the community feast that follows. The meat is not a sacrifice but a gift from the gods on which the people must feast.

The La Yi reenactment went through each ritual sequence in detail without sacrificing a water buffalo. The buffalo's body would be divided before the community feast if that were to have happened. The head and front legs go to the uncle's family. The oldest uncle takes the left front, the second uncle the right front leg, the third uncle, and the fourth the meat above the legs. "The remaining meat is divided and cooked for the community, with everyone feasting and given meat to take home" (Peng 2018c).

After the feast, the uncle and host family negotiate over the head; traditionally, the uncle takes the head. When the uncle's family is back home, the next day, the host family fell the pole that tied the water buffalo. Soon after, the head, considered a good luck charm, is gifted back to the host family. The skull is then stripped of its meat, dried, and hung on the family house as a trophy. At the time of the skull hanging, another small ritual thanking the buffalo's spirit takes place, marking the ritual's conclusion. The number of skulls a family had on its house elevated its reputation and was a source of pride that signified their ability to sponsor the ritual (Tian 2018c).

23. Conclusions

The zhuiniu ritual documentation project at La Yi village in 2018 was a unique opportunity to access the collective memory of six influential badai from the region to reenact the ritual and cultural narrative. The gathering was a response, motived by dire circumstances. Miao traditions are threatened and need to be recorded before they vanish.

The zhuiniu ritual is a narrative embodied and conveyed through performance. It has survived to this day by being adaptative and modular as it served the practical and spiritual needs of a culture that has been historically besieged by war and colonization. Adaptability and functionality have been key to the Miao, a tenacious people who survived by cultivating the uninhabitable into fertile lands, making them their own, and flourishing. With a history of conflict and subjugation by the Han and interaction with other ethnic groups, they adapted to a diversity of social and cultural conditions, becoming a layered complexity of cultural influences. Miao belief, ritual practice, and the cosmological narratives they reference encode and bespeak their spirituality, history, and identity. Miao rituals also entwine and serve as an implicit form of political resistance by reiterating and reaffirming their distinction as place-based Cosmo-centric people.

The broadly shared cultural patterns and cosmology of Miao are best understood as an outline articulated and shaped to local contexts and expressions. Each village shares the narrative and the culture in its way to serve its own needs and conditions. Consequently, their rituals and cosmological narratives are, as the La Yi reenactment vividly demonstrates, as complex and varied as the forests, mountains, lakes, and rivers of the Miao homelands. There is no definitive zhuiniu, which perhaps explains why it has survived into the 21st century. It is personalized and shaped to local and individual need.

Pragmatism, resourcefulness, resilience, and adaptation remain essential for the Miao character and survival. How, what, and if rituals and traditions forged by historical circumstances will survive in a global world is uncertain. By considering the zhuiniu ritual we are like archeologists piecing together pottery shards. We get a glimpse of fragments, speculating on what was and possibly what the future will bring.

24. Outline of the Zhuiniu Ritual Sequence

24.1. Spring

24.1.1. Announcement

A family consults a xianniang (spirit medium) to determine if it is a good time to sponsor the ritual. If yes, the zhuiniu ritual begins with the family's announcement of intent at the beginning of the Chinese lunar New Year.

24.1.2. Ox Sacrifice

An ox is sacrificed shortly after the announcement to pay the gods for the protection of the sponsoring.

24.1.3. House Cleaning

The ox is offered, and the house is cleansed of evil spirits in preparation for the ritual. The ritual intention is announced to the god of the treasury, who is called upon to assure the family's ability to financially complete the ritual and protect the money sent to purchase the water buffalo.

24.2. Fall Harvest Season

24.2.1. Occurring over Three Days

Altars and Armies

Peachtree branches are brought from the mountains. Two altars are established in the family's home, one inside and one near the door representing inside and outside. The ritual calls the spirit armies to battle evil spirits and protect the family. The peachtree branches are boiled, and the officiating badai wash their face and hands and rinse their mouths to protect them from evil spirits and ghosts attracted to the ritual. The god of the treasury is again invoked and thanked, with support from the god and armies solicited.

Inviting the Gods and Spirits

The badai "walks the cloud" and visits heaven, where he speaks with the Gods, spirits, mythical animals, generals, and their spirit armies, asking them to serve, guide, and protect the ritual. The invitation is repeated twice to avoid any confusion. Special consideration is given to inviting the god of the "doors and gates" because entrances and thresholds are where evil spirits linger and hide. Devils and evil spirits are driven away, and some are locked up.

The Tali Tree

For dispelling historical and ancestral curses haunting the family. This ritual addresses curses at an outdoor altar hung with hemp rope, flags, and anthropomorphic figures representing evil spirits and protecting gods. The rope has looped "hooks" made of bamboo and is meant to capture evil. The rope symbolizes a bridge linking present and ancient generations of the family and is attached to a tali tree branch.

Jiuixi

A follow-up to finding and expunging any lingering and unaccounted evil spirits attracted to the house or ritual making. Jiuixi, a Miao word meaning "reasons."

For the Heavens

An altar in the house's interior is for food offerings to the gods and is meant to invite and please the gods and convey the family's wishes to the heavens. Bowls with rice, millet, and peach water surround twenty-one bowls filled with the season's harvest, buckwheat, ramie, soy, maize, wheat, sorghum, and oats. Each is a crop the gods enjoy.

Three Brothers

An outdoor table altar with three chairs reenacts the "Three Brothers" mythology. An open umbrella rest on one chair, representing the elevated status of the brothers. The mythology of the Three Brothers developed in the face of conflict with the Han and is central to Miao culture and identity and reiterates the mythological origins of the Miao, its families, and the historical injustices endured. The retelling calls upon the Three Brothers to assist in the ritual.

Big General Doll Ghost

An altar at the house's threshold is an "indoor and outdoor offering" to the spirit beings living inside and outside—domestic and nature. A rooster is sacrificed, and peach water is sprayed in the four directions, followed by writing messages to the spirits with a knife in the air. A doll made of paper represents the Big General, who will oversee the water buffalo sacrifice. Blood from the rooster is smeared on the doll to feed the Big General.

Two Couples

Two young couples, the sons or daughters of the sponsoring family and their spouses, sit at the kitchen table dressed in their finest traditional clothing. Their presence, signifying the future, demonstrates the family's willingness to welcome the gods and spirits into the family. The two couples show "the heavens that the host family is using their most valued representatives, married couples and parents with healthy children.

Community Dance

An all-night, community-wide celebration with drumming, singing, and dancing occurs. The couples, received by the gods, bring the gods to the community, which is a reason to celebrate. The celebration is then carried to the family home at daybreak for a meal. The community returns to their homes to rest.

Fight Singing

Later in the day, a storytelling competition between the officiating badai and the uncle. Using a talk-singing style of poetry, the badai and uncle compete with their knowledge of ancient songs and stories in the Miao language. Each song provokes a challenge for the other to respond with something better. As one sings, the other responds by singing questions to stump the singer and educate and entertain the community.

Bringing the Water Buffalo Home

The water buffalo is led through the family home for divination. If the water buffalo enters the house freely and calmly, it is a poor sign. An unruly and difficult entrance is considered a good sign and interpreted as the animal's willingness and impatience to return to heaven. If looking to the right, it is considered a poor sign. Looking to the left is good, with looking upward the most auspicious. The water buffalo is then brought to the sacrifice area, a nearby clearing next to woods. The animal is tied to a pole of maple. Adjacent to the sacrifice site, a ritual altar is established.

Sending the Spirit to Heaven

Before the physical body of the water buffalo is sacrificed, the animal's spirit is sent to its heavenly palace.

The general of armies is called upon to lead in the sacrifice. Maple sticks cut as spears are presented, blessed, and placed at the outdoor altar.

Receiving the Spears

Family members sacrificing the water buffalo accept the spears blessed by the heavens.

The Water Buffalo Sacrifice

The spear-carriers circle the animal closely tied to the maple pole. Because the bull can fight violently and potentially injure the spear carriers, the bull was traditionally circled as wild prey and repeatedly stabbed until dead. If the animal falls with its head in the host family's home direction, it is auspicious, if away from the house and in another direction, less promising. If the bull falls in the opposite direction of the house, it is considered a bad omen, and the entire ritual thought a failure.

The Division of Meat

A mock argument about the division of meat takes place. The water buffalo is then butchered and divided between the host family, the brother-in-law's family, and other family members. A celebration marks the end of the zhuiniu, with the community sharing in the feast.

The Water Buffalo Head

Weeks after the zhuiniu ends, the skull of the water buffalo is hung on the exterior of the family's house. It is a sign of honor and prestige on display for the community to see.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study. Jishou University determined the ethnographic research was exempt and posed a minimal risk to the participants and required no regulatory involvement. The author took every precaution with the participants to assure communication of information, comprehension of information, and voluntary participation.

Informed Consent Statement: All participants were fully informed and agreed to the objectives of the research project and gave either oral (for those illiterate) or written informed consent for interviews, photographs, and video documentation. All project documentation is held by the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province Cultural Ministry, Jishou, China. Ma Mei, director.

Data Availability Statement: All interviews, photographs, and video documentation are available through the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province Cultural Ministry, Jishou, China. Ma Mei, director.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 This paper is presented from the perspective of performance studies and performance ethnography. The author is a not a scholar of Chinese culture nor an anthropologist by training and does not read or speak Chinese. He has worked internationally with a variety of ethnic and tribal groups documenting performance and ritual practices and traditions.

2 My first visit to the region was in 2001. Since then, dirt roads have been paved with asphalt, bridges, and major highways now exist with a regional airport in the offing. Electrification is ubiquitous, along with television and cell phones. Many young people have left the region to work in urban areas, and the region is relatively prosperous, educated, and aware of the larger world. These advances have brought profound economic, social, and cultural change that has rapidly eroded and challenged Miao traditions and village life.

3 The term zimei means divining person and can be applied to male or female practitioners.

4 For the Miao, all sickness is related to the spirits.

5 More on the distinction between badaixiong and badaizha will be discussed below.

6 There are several historical accounts of the Miao zhuiniu ritual dating from the 1930s and 40s and as recently as 2000. David Holm's *Killing a Buffalo for the Ancestors* is informative; however, it depicts the buffalo killing ritual of the Zhuang people, and to compare these rituals in detail is beyond the scope of this paper.

[7] Many Miao badai insist that their practices, beliefs, and cosmology pre-date Daoism and were historically appropriated and popularized by the literate Daoists who could extend their influence far beyond the orally transmitted traditions of the Miao. Separate analysis and comparative study of the exchange and influences of Miao and Daoist ritual practices are extensive and beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] A frequent difficulty when conducting field research in the region was the variety of Miao dialects, which were sometimes unintelligible to my translators.

[9] The author first visited the region in 2001. At that time, the roads were poor, few homes were electrified, televisions were given to each family by the government only to sit inert in barn-like homes, and there was no access to digital communication of any sort. Villages today have been transformed by an influx of money from Miao working in urban areas. Televisions, cell phones, farm machinery, new homes, and automobiles are standard.

[10] The use of the *Yijing* by the badai is not primary, but rather best understood as one of several tools adapted and applied to their divinatory and ritual practice. A further, in-depth study of the relationship between the *Yijing* and badai spiritual practice is beyond the scope of this paper and the author's research.

[11] The term "school" was used by the badai to identify a body of knowledge and set of techniques associated with a localized practice. Traditionally, badai knowledge passed from father to son. Today, it is no longer an exception for a badai master to take on a worthy student apprentice who may or may not be related.

[12] All badai were paid by the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province in association with the Ethnography and Anthropology Department at Jishou University, Luo Kanglong, chair. My salary was covered by my employer, the University of Texas at Dallas and the Center for Asian Studies, Dennis Kratz, director. All participants gave human subject permission for interviews and the use of their image (photographic and video) for documentation. Releases are held by the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province Autonomous Prefecture Cultural Ministry.

[13] Badai Yang did not master the Miao language, which is necessary to become a badaixiong.

[14] The origins and meanings of many patterns, actions, and words are often only vaguely known. However, their sacredness is never challenged. Adherence and exactitude of ritual execution are unquestioned. I found the exact unquestioning adherence to ritual patterns, sequences, and forms while working with various indigenous groups, among them the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen of the Kalahari, the Inupiat of Alaska, and the Sakha of central Siberia. In nonliterate cultures, ritual is considered a "text" bespeaking the ancestors.

[15] Seven Fairies are seven daughters of the mythical Jade Emperor (Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝), the venerable god who rules the whole universe. Like an emperor of the human world, he is second only to the Three Pristine Ones, who are the most venerable gods of Daoism (Yin 2005, p. 1).

[16] The Miao do not personify their gods; however, when needed, they use Han representations.

[17] The Miao believe the peach fruit was first cultivated in China and that it is therefore sacred.

[18] *Nggiaox* is a bridge in Miao that is specific to the Miao culture god. The term has no Chinese equivalent cosmologically.

[19] For the La Yi demonstration, the ritual began mid-morning.

[20] Incense is burnt throughout the ritual.

[21] Two types of horns are used by badai; one is made from a water buffalo horn, and the other, in the shape of a horn, is made of brass. Both were historically used in battle; only the water buffalo horn was used during the ritual I attended. "There are thirty-six ways to blow the horn which must only now be used for ritual purposes because it has much spiritual power" (S. Shi 2016).

[22] In an alternative telling of the story, one of the brothers discovers the emperor's plot and escapes having only enough time to take an umbrella.

[23] For the dragon ritual, the community gathers at the village well and parades in a human line holding umbrellas to the family home of the zhuiniu sponsor. This ritual is often interpolated into the zhuiniu. The ritual can also be performed separately as part of a village celebration. The details of this ritual are extensive and deserve separate consideration beyond the scope of this essay.

[24] At this point, badai Yang's phone rang with a country-western song as a ringtone—the event paused as he talked to a relative. Afterward, the three badai discussed what to do next.

[25] Adhering to the five essential elements.

[26] Ghunb Mloul is a Miao name of yushe, the fish god.

[27] The Miao and other rural populations were exempt from the CCP's "one child policy" because of the need for farm labor.

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Form Follows Function in Community Rituals in North China: Temples and Temple Festivals in Jiacun Village

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Abstract: *Yingshen saishe or saishe* is a general name for all types of temple festivals held to offer sacrifices to deities of local communities. With its roots traceable to ancient shamanic beliefs and practices, *saishe* demonstrates itself as a closely integrated form of religious ritual performance and musical/theatrical performance and proves to be instrumental in the development of Chinese theatre from ritual to drama. Based on my fieldwork on Jiacun Double-Fourth Temple Festival in May 2016, this paper offers a close examination of Jiacun temple culture and temple theatre with focus on the religious ritual performance and musical/theatrical entertainment presented during the festival. In so doing, this paper provides an enhanced understanding of the highly dynamic, interactive relationships between temple and theatre and between efficacy and entertainment.

Keywords: ritual; temple festival; temple theatre; Jiacun Double-Fourth Temple Festival; the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds (Bixia yuanjun); Shangdang

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1. Introduction

Yingshen saishe 迎神賽社 or *saishe* 賽社 is a general name for all types of temple festivals and temple fairs (*miaohui* 廟會) held to offer sacrifices to deities of local communities and to entertain them with musical and theatrical performance. Also known as *shehuo* 社火, *saishe* is a living tradition that originated from an ancient community ritual known as 'spring prayer and autumn thanksgiving' (*chunqi qiubao* 春祈秋報) (Tanaka 1998, pp. 37–40; Zhu 2018, pp. 25–32), which itself developed from the earlier 'Three Big Sacrifices', namely, the rain-seeking ritual of *yu* 雩, the year-end thanksgiving ritual of *zha/la* 蜡/臘 and particularly the exorcism ritual of *nuo* 儺 (Zhao 1988, pp. 184–89; Yang 1992; Han 1992; Han et al. 1999; Zhou 2016, pp. 2–9). The word *sai* 賽 in *saishe* is written in early Chinese texts as *sai* 塞, meaning 'offering sacrifices in gratitude to deities' (e.g., *Shiji suoyin* 9.14b; *Lunheng* 24.17a), whereas *she* 社 in *saishe* is a polysemous word that may refer to the Lord of the Soil (*Liji* 25.221a; *Shuowen jiezi* 1.6a–b), a shrine to the Lord of the Soil (*Chunqiu zuozhuan* 11.85c, 11.86c), and a ritual community or a community worship association bound up with the Lord of the Soil (*Chunqiu zuozhuan* 51.408b; *Liji* 25.221b). As for the meaning of *huo* 火 in *shehuo*, no consensus seems to have been reached among scholars: some of them trace it to a Shang (ca. 1600–1046 BC) oracle-bone script that has been identified as *liao* 燎, referring to the ritual of 'burning sacrifice in the shrine to the Lord of the Soil' (Chao 1995, p. 72n); some treat it as a phonetic loan character of *huo* 夥, meaning 'crowd/multitude' as in the *Yilin huikao* 藝林匯考 or *Collected Evidential Studies in the Forest of Art* (*Yilin huikao* 36.2a), from which is derived the meaning of 'lively/bustling' (*honghuo* 紅火/*huobao* 火爆) (Zhao 1999, p. 134); some interpret it as referring to the ancient ritual of 'burning sacrifices on firewood and offering them up to heavenly deities' (*chai* 祟) (Wang and Lü 2007, p. 61). While all of these interpretations make sense in one way or another, a more plausible etymological explanation of *huo* in *shehuo*, in our view, lies in *nuo* exorcism, in which *wu* 巫-shaman priests/exorcists hold torches made from reeds to expel diseases and demons as denoted by *jue* 爵 and *guan* 爟 (*Shuowen jiezi* 10a.25b, 10a.26a–b; see also *Lüshi chunqiu*

14.5a). Significantly, this ancient form of *nuo* exorcism can still be seen today in Nanfeng 南豐, Jiangxi province (Ji 1998).

The annual ritual of 'offering prayers in spring and giving thanks in autumn' (*chunqi qiubao*) emerged in the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BC) (*Maoshi* 19.333a–335b),[1] evolved into a community festival in the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) (*Baihu tong* 2.4a; *Hanshu* 24.8a) and integrated with *nuo* and *baixi* 百戲 (lit. 'hundred entertainments') in the Song dynasty into a variety show of ritual, musical and theatrical performances known as *shehuo* (*Dongjing menghua lu* 8.758; *Xihu laoren fansheng lu* 1.10–12; see also Zhang 2014, p. 62; Zhao 1999, pp. 140–41). Musical and theatrical entertainments (*xi* 戲) are not mere appendages of but integral to rituals of offering sacrifices to deities (*sai*) during community or temple festivals, hence *saixi* 賽戲 (temple theatre). Temple theatre demonstrates itself as a closely integrated form of religious ritual performance and musical and theatrical entertainment and proves to be instrumental in the development of Chinese theatre from ritual to drama (Zhao 2022a, 2002b).

This paper attempts an ethnomethodologically informed study of *saishe* with focus on the *sai* ritual and *xi* performance presented during temple festivals in Jiacun 賈村 village. Originally called Nanjiacun 南賈村, Jiacun is located about three kilometres southwest of the urban centre of Lucheng 潞城 in southeastern Shanxi province. Historically under the jurisdiction of Shangdang 上黨 Commandery, Southeast Shanxi covers roughly the area of modern-day Changzhi 長治, a prefecture-level city that comprises four districts and eight counties including Lucheng, Tunliu 屯留, Zhangzi 長子 and Pingshun 平順. Among various Shangdang village festivals, the most famous and representative is perhaps Jiacun temple festival, which is widely acclaimed as the 'number one folk *shehuo* in North China' (Qu 2006; Wang 2006) for its long, well-documented history and also for its highly developed temple culture and deep-rooted theatrical tradition. Based on my fieldwork in Jiacun village in May 2016, I examine the Double-Fourth Temple Festival (*Siyuesi miaosai* 四月四廟賽) held to celebrate the birthday of the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds (Bixia yuanjun 碧霞元君). I focus on the religious ritual performance and musical and theatrical entertainment presented during the festival with a view to presenting the highly dynamic, interactive relationships between temple and theatre and between efficacy and entertainment in a real-life setting.

2. Literature Review

Much research has been conducted on local folk religions in rural North China in the past two decades. Somewhat different as these studies are in geographic focus and temporal scope, they tend towards adopting an ethnographic bottom-up approach, aligned with fieldwork-informed case studies, to cultic worship, ritual performance, community participation and socioreligious organisation, demonstrating a shift of focus in religious and cultural studies from elite culture to popular culture and from the organised religion to local cults, cult festivals and cult associations.

Most notable among them are Overmyer (2009) and Johnson (2009), both drawing on a wide range of sources from earlier studies in Chinese, Japanese and Western languages to dynastic and local histories to legendary and anecdotal accounts to fieldwork reports by local scholars to newly discovered, annotated liturgical texts. Significantly, Overmyer (2009, pp. 4–5) regards Chinese local religion as 'the mainstream of Chinese religion', which, he argues convincingly, 'has always been community-based, inclusive and non-sectarian' and which, he notices, has long been 'ignored or disparaged by both Chinese and Western scholars as a confused congeries of diffuse superstitions, a residual category without any integrity of its own, discussed only in relation to the better-known traditions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism'. While both of them have focus on community rituals and festivals in North China, Overmyer (2009) aims to provide a comprehensive survey of the structure, organisation and institution of local community religions in the vast rural areas of Hebei, Henan, Shandong and Shanxi provinces in the twentieth century, thus covering a much broader geographic and thematic scope than Johnson (2009), who, in

contrast, is primarily concerned with 'temple-based liturgical rituals' or 'rituals in honor of the birthday of a local god' in pre-communist Shanxi that 'were very heart of the symbolic culture of the countryside, the bedrock of mainstream Chinese popular religion' (Johnson 2009, p. 145).

Particularly noteworthy is his study of 'The Great Temple Festivals of Southeastern Shanxi' (Johnson 2009, pp. 177–320). Selected for his case study are three temples—namely, the Temple of the Divine Mother of the Ninth Heaven (Jiutian shengmu miao九天聖母廟) in Pingshun county (Johnson 2009, pp. 187–234), the Houyi 后羿 Temple on Mount Longquan 龍泉 (Johnson 2009, pp. 235–82) and the Houyi Temple of Big West Gate (Daxiguan 大西闕), both in Zhangzi county (Johnson 2009, pp. 283–301). Through his fine-grained description and analysis, Johnson offers an excellent example of historical–empirical enquiries into village festivals in the Shangdang region.

Shangdang has attracted much attention of scholars of Chinese popular religion, culture and theatre since the 1980s when more than twenty liturgical manuscripts from the late imperial period were discovered in this area (Yang 2000; Yang 2006; Johnson 2009, pp. 180–84). Among them are *The Transmitted Records for Welcoming the Deities and Worshipping the Lord of Soil, with Forty Melodies in [Twenty-Eight] Keys* (*Yingshen saishe lijie chuanbu sishi qu [ershiba] gongdiao* 迎神賽社禮節傳簿四十曲［二十八］宮調, hereafter *Lijie chuanbu)*, which is alternatively titled *The Diagram of the Musical Asterisms of the Zhou Dynasty* (*Zhou yuexing tu* 周樂星圖) (Du 2011b, pp. 236–83); *The Diagram of the Musical Asterisms of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tang yuexing tu* 唐樂星圖) (Li 1993a; Yang 2000, pp. 419–98); *The Exemplary Texts for Offering Sacrifices during Temple Festivals with a Catalogue of Melodies for Offering Cups* (*Yingshen saishe jisi wenfan ji gongzhan qumu* 迎神賽社祭祀文範及供盞曲目, hereafter *Jisi wenfan*) (Han et al. 1991a); and *Manuscripts from the Mound of the Locust Emperor for the Eight Big Village Worship Associations* (*Huanghuanggang badashe chaoben* 蝗皇崗八大社抄本, hereafter *Huanghuanggang*).[2] They were compiled by and for ritualists as liturgical manuals and are therefore extremely valuable for the study of folk religion and temple theatre in Shangdang.

There is evidence that temple festivals prevailed in the Shangdang area during the period of transition from the Northern Song (960–1127) to the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115–1234).[3] Temple festivals that had been held for centuries since then were banned during the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945). The ban continued to be placed on them into the Maoist era (1949–1976) until after China started to reform and open up to the outside world in the 1980s. During the half-century ban, many ritualists and village elders who had been personally involved in performing or organising temple festivals died without passing on their knowledge and experience to younger generations. Had it not been for the discovery of these liturgical texts, it would have been hardly possible to revive and reconstruct Shangdang temple festival and temple theatre.

The newly discovered liturgical texts attracted immediate attention from local scholars. Some of them such as Han Sheng 寒聲, Li Tiansheng 李天生 and Yang Mengheng 楊孟衡 were also engaged in searching for and collecting these materials and editing them into readable form for research. Numerous punctuated, annotated ritual manuscripts, journal articles, book chapters and scholarly monographs have been published by local scholars since then as shown in Han et al. (1987a, 1987b, 1999), Li (1993b, 1993c), Zhang and Pu (1993), Yang (1992, 1997a, 2006), Feng (2000), Du (2011a, 2011b) and Wang (2012). These works are mostly ethnographically oriented and grounded in participant observation, personal interviews with locals, memories of old villagers, temple stone stelae inscriptions and liturgical manuscripts. Most noteworthy among them are Du (2011a, 2011b) and Wang (2012). The former, compiled by Du Tonghai 杜同海 (a local farmer–scholar and ritualist), is the most comprehensive collection available so far of primary sources on temples and temple festivals in Jiacun; the latter, written by Wang Xuefeng 王學鋒, a native of Shanxi, based on his PhD thesis completed in 2007 at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, is the first and also the hitherto most systematic study of Jiacun village temple festivals.

Of particular interest to the present study is that Wang (2012) provides a historical survey of the restoration, revival and reform of Jiacun temple festivals over a period of ten years from 1996 to 2006, followed by a close examination of various factors contributing to the modifications made to the ritual and theatrical performances over these years with special reference to the 'large-scale re-enactments of ancient temple festivals' (*fanggu biaoyan dasai* 仿古表演大賽) held for 'outsiders', respectively, in May 1997 and August 2006 (Wang 2007, p. 69).[4] The outsiders are local government officials, scholars, journalists and tourists, and they are so called because they are people from outside the local worship community or ritual association. Such re-enactments of temple festivals performed for outsiders, as commonly seen in the officially or semi-officially sponsored presentation of traditional performing arts and religious rituals in contemporary China (Mackerras 2011; Bruckermann 2015), are a double-edge sword: they help enhance the reputation of Jiacun as a centre for village temple festivals in Shangdang but at the same time inevitably spoil festival spontaneity and religiosity (Wang 2011; Yao 2019).

It is now difficult to pinpoint the distinction between what is original and what is not in Jiacun temple festivals, nor is it important or necessary, actually. What matters is that temple festivals, albeit reconstructed and modified in corporeal form, remain at the very heart of the spiritual life of village people, and more importantly, they still maintain their original dual functioning as a religious ceremony to offer sacrifices to local deities and as a sociocultural tie to bind villagers as a community (Du 2016; Song 2016a,). A case in point is the Double-Fourth Temple Festival in Jiacun. Arguably the oldest surviving village festival in Shangdang, the Double-Fourth Temple Festival retains more of the original form and function of *shehuo* than any other village festivals in southeastern Shanxi, hence its reputation as 'the number one folk *shehuo* in North China'.

3. Temples and Shrines in Jiacun

I had read a lot about Shangdang *saishe* but had not had an opportunity to conduct observations there until early May 2016, when I was invited to give a seminar talk on ritual origins of Chinese theatre at Changzhi University as a Guest Professor—an honorary title bestowed on me by Professor Ru Wenming 茹文明, President of Changzhi University. After the seminar, I carried out the long-awaited fieldwork along with Professors Che Wenming 車文明, Yao Chunmin 姚春敏, Wang Luwei 王潞偉 and several other colleagues from Shanxi Normal University, where I serve as a Distinguished Overseas Professor of Chinese Drama and Theatre. Our fieldwork on Jiacun *shehuo* was very fruitful thanks to the arrangement of the Changzhi University's Research Institute of Shangdang *Saishe* Culture. In Jiacun, we visited temples and shrines, observed the famous Double-Fourth Temple Festival and also interviewed worship community heads and elders, and ritual specialists and organisers. These people are all farmer villagers rather than professional ritualists who are engaged in ritual performance as their main paid occupation.

Jiacun village covers a land area of 5267 *mu* 畝 (approx. 352 hectares), which is largely a flat plain suitable for farming except for two small hills, the Phoenix Hill (Fenghuangshan 鳳凰山) and the Shadowless Mound (Wuyinggang 無影崗), which are located on its western and southern borders, respectively. Jiacun has a population of 2870 in 785 registered households (*hu* 戶) and is divided into eleven village groups as of 2016. The villagers are all Han Chinese. Dominant among the fifty-five family names in Jiacun are Wang 王, Cao 曹, Zhang 張, Song 宋, Niu 牛, Li 李 and Cui 崔. These six big families account for more than 60% of the total households in the village and enjoy a preponderant influence in village affairs and temple festivals.

Jiacun is one of the thirteen villages in the local government area of Zhaidian 翟店 township. To the northwest of Jiacun are Heyi 河移, Beishe 北舍 and Nanshe 南舍, to the west Chongdao 崇道, to the southwest Xiaotiangong, Dongtiangong 東天貢, Xitiangong 西天貢, Nantiangong 南天貢 and Guocun 郭村, to the south Kangcheng 羌城[5] and Zhaishang 寨上, and to the southeast Zhaidian. All of them, with the exception of the northwesternmost Heyi and the southwesternmost Nantiangong and Guocun, are members of the

aforementioned Eight Big Village Worship Associations. Each member village has its own village temple festivals to celebrate and has also a shared responsibility with other member villages for organising and holding the Festival of the Eight Big Worship Associations—namely, the Festival on the Mound of the Emperor of Locusts (*Huanghuanggang sai* 蝗皇崗賽) (Du 2011a, pp. 242–43).

Jiacun is an ancient village noted for its deep-rooted temple culture. 'There first came the Palace of the Morning Clouds (Bixia gong 碧霞宮), then Lucheng county,' as a popular local saying goes. Jiacun alone has three big local community worship associations (*dashe* 大社)—namely, the Front Community (*qianshe* 前社), the Middle Community (*zhongshe* 中社) and the Rear Community (*houshe* 後社)—which are further divided into eight small communities (*xiaoshe* 小社). The three big communities are each headed by a Community Head (*sheshou* 社首) who has overall responsibility for managing and maintaining temples and shrines in his domain and collaborating with the other worship communities in organising village temple festivals. To each temple or shrine is allocated approximately one hundred *mu* (equiv. 6.67 hectare) of community-owned agricultural land (*sheitan* 社田) to cover the costs of routine operation and maintenance and village festivals.

The village boasts seventeen temples and shrines: the Palace of the Morning Clouds (Bixia gong), the Temple of the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang miao 玉皇廟)[6] (Figure 1),[7] the Palace of the Three Primordials (Sanyuan gong 三元宮) (Figure 2),[8] the Pavilion of Guanyin (Guanyin ge 觀音閣), the Hall of the Three Great Bodhisattvas (Sandashi tang 三大士堂),[9] the Temple of Emperor Guan (Guandi miao 關帝廟) (Figures 3 and 4), the Temple of the Patriarch (Zushi miao祖師廟), also called the Temple of the Perfected Warrior (Zhenwu miao 真武廟) (Figures 5 and 6), the Hall of White Robe (Baiyi tang 白衣堂),[10] the Hall of the Cui Family (Cuijia tang 崔家堂),[11] the Shrine of the Earth God (Tudi miao 土地廟), the Pavilion of the God of Literature and Culture (Wenchang ge 文昌閣), the Hall of the Buddha (Fodian 佛殿), the Shrine of Patriarch Lü (Lüzu an 呂祖庵) and the Shrine of the Bald-Headed Grandma (Tunainai miao 禿奶奶廟) (Figure 7),[12] in addition to three small shrines to the Five Paths (Wudao miao 五道廟).[13]

Figure 1. Main Hall of Jade Emperor Temple.

Figure 2. Three Primordials: Tianguan flanked by Diguan (right) and Shuiguan (left).

Figure 3. Statue and Spirit Tablet of Lord Guan Enshrined in the Sacrificial Hall of Emperor Guan Temple.

Figure 4. A Section of the Mural Depicting Lord Guan Crossing Five Passes and Decapitating Six Generals (*Guo wugan zhan liujiang* 過五關斬六將) on the Northern Wall of the Sacrificial Hall of Emperor Guan Temple.

Figure 5. Statue of the Patriarch.

Figure 6. Patriarch Temple Viewed from Outside.

Figure 7. Shrine of the Bald-Headed Grandma.

The most prominent of them is Bixia gong, which occupies a central position—spatially and spiritually—in Jiacun (Figure 8).

These temples and shrines may be classified into four groups according to their religious origin or orientation, as shown below in Table 1:

Table 1. Temples and Shrines in Jiacun.

Temple/Shrine	Religious Orientation				History		Preservation Status[14]
	Buddhism	Confucianism	Daoism	Folk Belief	Year of Construction	Year of Reconstruction/ Renovation	
Bixia gong			√	√	Yuan dynasty	1506/1533/ 1693/1741/ 1801/1992/ 1996	Excellent
Yuhuang miao			√		Unknown	1543/2001	Good
Sanyuan gong			√		1720	1997	Good
Guanyin ge	√				unknown	1831	Excellent
Sandashi tang			√		unknown	16431826/ 1912	Good
Guandi miao			√		Unknown	Qing dynasty	Poor (renovation under plan)
Zushi miao/ Zhenwu miao			√		Unknown	1847/1876/ 1995	Good
Baiyi tang	√				Unknown	1822/1916	Good
Cuijia tang	√	√			Unknown	1809	Good
Tudi miao			√	√	Unknown	1965	Good
Wenchang ge			√		Unknown	Unknown	Dilapidated
Fodian	√				Unknown	Unknown	Dilapidated
Lüzu an			√		Unknown	1965	fair
Tunainai miao				√	?1944	2000/2005	Excellent
Wudao miao in the south of village			√		Unknown	Unknown	poor
Wudao miao in the east of village			√		Unknown	Unknown	poor
Wudao miao in the north of village			√		Unknown	1828	fair

Overwhelmingly dominant among them are Daoist temples and shrines, which vastly outnumber temples and shrines of any other religion and account for 65% of the total number of temples and shrines in Jiacun. It must be pointed out, however, that the above classification is far from black and white, as the boundary drawn between them is not always as clear-cut as is thought. This is because one can almost always find elements of one religion in temples or shrines of the other religion. A good example of this is the Cuijia tang, which is a sanctuary for ancestor worship as well as for Buddhist worship, as indicated by its alternative name Gu fotang or the Ancient Hall of the Buddha. As such, the distinction between them is more often than not a matter of degree rather than a matter of kind in a broad socioreligious context.

Figure 8. Bixia Temple Viewed from Outside.

This is particularly true of the borderline between Daoism and Chinese popular religion, for they share common origins or sources in many of their respective beliefs and practices. Since emerging as an organised form of religion from an integration of various folk beliefs, the Huang-Lao 老 thought and Lao-Zhuang 老莊 philosophy at the end of the second century AD, Daoism has never given up attempting to assimilate or synthesise local traditions and cults of local deities. A case in point is the Bixia gong dedicated to Bixia yuanjun or the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds, a goddess who, with her origin in the cult of Taishan 泰山 or Mount Tai, is widely worshipped in Daoism and folk religion in northern China as the Heavenly Immortal and Holy Mother (Tianxian shengmu 天仙聖母) charged with childbirth and childcare (Li 2018, p. 62)—a point to which we will return later in more detail. There are others in a similar vein. Take for example the Lüzu an, a shrine dedicated to Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, the best-known of the Eight Immortals (*baxian* 八仙) in Chinese mythology and folk religion, who is also credited as a founder of Daoist Internal Alchemy (*neidan* 丹) and venerated as a patriarch of the Way of Completed Perfection (Quanzhen dao 全真道), one of the two major schools of Daoism along with the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tiansh dao 天師道).[15] The same may be said of the Tudi miao, a small shrine dedicated to the Earth God (Tudi 土地). Also called the Lord of the Soil and the Orthodox Deity of Fortunes and Virtues (Fude zhengshen 福正神), among others, the Earth God was originally a local tutelary deity and was later incorporated into the Daoist pantheon of a bewildering myriad of gods, spirits and immortals (Chavannes 1910, pp. 437–525). This is also the case with Imperial Lord Wenchang (Wenchang dijun 文昌帝君), the God of Culture and Literature in Daoism, whose cult originated from a local deity of Zitong 梓潼, a hilly county in northern Sichuan (Kleeman 1998), hence alternatively called Imperial Lord Zitong (Zitong dijun 梓潼帝君).

While a temple or shrine is generally named after the god or goddess to whom it is dedicated in China, it is not at all uncommon to find shrines or spirit tablets (*paiwei* 牌位) in its altars set up for the worship of other gods and goddesses. A case in point is the Zushi miao, a temple dedicated to the Perfected Warrior (Zhenwu 真武), also known as the Dark Warrior (Xuanwu 玄武) in Daoist mythology.[16] Interestingly, the Zhenwu miao is flanked by two small shrines: one on its western side dedicated to the God of Five Grains (Wugu 五穀) and the God of Wealth (Caishen 財神) and the other on its eastern side to Zhang Ban 張班 and Lu Ban 魯班 (See Figure 6).[17]

4. Bixia Yuanjun and Bixia Gong in Jiacun

The harmonious coexistence of temples and shrines for various religions and beliefs in Jiacun and that of halls or shrines built for the worship of various gods and goddesses in the Bixia Temple, as we shall see, are a common and distinctive feature of Chinese local religion. The Bixia Temple lies at the centre of Jiacun's north–south axis that runs through the Pavilion of Guanyin, the Temple of Emperor Guan, the Hall of the Cui Family and the Temple of the Patriarch. 'Sitting to the North, facing the South' (*zuobei chaonan* 坐北朝南), the temple is 69.7 metres long and 34.6 metres wide, covering an area of 2411.62 square metres (Figure 9). Across from a small square in front of its entrance gate is the Pool of the Morning Clouds (Bixia chi 碧霞池), a six hundred square metre pool enclosed with a carved stone balustrade. Also called the Divine Pool (Shenchi 神池), the pool was rebuilt in 1992 when the Bixia Temple underwent an extensive renovation (see Figure 8).

Figure 9. Bixia Temple Viewed from Stage over the Temple Gateway.

The temple is a three-row-and-two-courtyard (*sanjin liangyuan* 三進兩院) complex. Situated along the north–south axis of the temple are, in turn, the first row (*qianjin* 前進) that is the mountain gate (*shanmen* 山門),[18] which is a two storey gatehouse with a roofless stage over the gateway (*shanmen xitai* 山門戲台) flanked by a corner tower (*jiaolou* 角樓) (Figure 9, see also Figure 8), the front yard (*qianyuan* 前院), the middle row (*zhongjin* 中進), that is, the middle hall (*zhongdian* 中殿) or the main hall (*zhudian* 主殿), the rear yard (*houyuan* 後院) and the rear row (*houjin* 後進), that is, the rear hall (*houdian* 後殿), which serves as the sleeping hall (*qindian* 寢殿) for the goddess. The middle hall is the main building of the temple, at the centre of which stands an awe-inspiring statute of Bixia yuanjun, the principal deity of the temple, who receives sacrificial offerings and watches musical and theatrical performances presented in her honour during temple festivals; thus, the main hall is also called the hall for offering sacrifices or sacrificial hall (*xiandian* 獻殿)

(Figure 10). The corner tower that flanks the stage is purpose-built to be multifunctional and is used by musicians and theatre actors as a lodge room, storage room, dressing room and entrance to and exit from the stage. The front section of the religious complex is designed to be a temple theatre with the stage over the gateway oriented towards the main hall across the front yard and conjoined on either side with seven side halls (*peidian* 配殿) extending westward all the way from the corner tower first to the middle hall and then to the rear hall, thus forming an enclosed space in the front section for staging and watching musical and theatrical performance.

Figure 10. Main Hall/Sacrificial Hall.

The fourteen side halls are each dedicated to a subsidiary deity (*fushen* 輔神) or a grouping of minor deities. On the eastern side, from north to south, are the Hall of the Three Sovereigns (Sanhuang dian 三皇殿),[19] the East-Side Hall of King Yama (Dong Yangwang dian 東閻王殿), the Hall of the Six Ding (Liuding dian 六丁殿),[20] the Hall of Sanzong (Sanzong dian 三嶐殿) (Figure 11),[21] the Hall of (Lady Who Heals) Eyesight (Yanguang dian 眼光殿) (Figure 12),[22] the Hall of the Locust Emperor (Huanghuang dian 蝗皇殿) (Figure 13) and the Hall of the Horse King (Mawang dian 馬王殿).[23] On the western side, from north to south, are the Hall of the Eight Trigrams (Bagua dian 八卦殿), the West-Side Hall of King Yama (Xi Yanwang dian 西閻王殿), the Hall of the Six Jia (Liujia dian 六甲殿) (Figure 14),[24] the Hall of Zhaoze (Zhaoze dian 昭澤殿),[25] the Hall of Sons and Grandsons (Zisun dian 子孫殿) (Figure 15),[26] the Hall of the Dragon King (Longwang dian 龍王殿) (Figure 16) and the Hall of Five Plague Spirits (Wuwen dian 五瘟殿).[27] These gods and goddesses make up the pantheon of the Bixai Temple, headed by the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds or Bixia yuanjun.

The cult of Bixia yuanjun is closely associated with the cult of Mount Tai (Taishan 泰山), which has its roots traceable to the ancient official state ceremonies of *fengshan* 封禪 performed on Mount Tai to offer sacrifices to Heaven (*feng* 封), and on Mount Liangfu 梁父, a small hill nearby, to Earth (*shan* 禪).[28] Also known as Daizong 岱宗, Daishan 岱山, Daiyue 岱嶽 and Dongyue 東嶽 or the Eastern Peak, Mount Tai is a sacred mountain in present-day Shandong province, ranking as the first of the five sacred mountains (*wuyue*

五嶽) in China.[29] As the most revered of the five sacred mountains, Mount Tai enjoyed a privileged relationship with the royal court in imperial China.

Figure 11. Hall of Sanzong.

Figure 12. Hall of Eyesight.

Figure 13. Hall of Locust Emperor.

Figure 14. Hall of Liujia.

Figure 15. Hall of Sons and Grandsons.

Figure 16. Hall of Dragon King.

Mount Tai was worshipped not only as the sacred mountain for the imperial ceremonies of *fengshan* but also as the final destination or disposition for the souls of the dead in Chinese folk religion. In pre-Buddhist China, it was widely believed that the Lord of Mount Tai (Taishan fujun 泰山府君) ruled from Mount Liangfu over the souls of the dead in the Dark Realms (*yinjian* 陰間) (*Gaiyu congkao* 35: 3a–4b; see also Okamoto 1943, cited in Yü 1987, p. 389), as does King Yama over ghosts in Hell in Chinese Buddhism. The

mountain was deified and its cult was incorporated into the officially mandated 'Register of Sacrifices' (*sidian* 祀典) during the Tang dynasty. In the thirteenth year (724) of Kaiyuan 開元, Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (712–756) of Tang granted Mount Tai the noble title of the King Who Equals to Heaven (Tianqi wang 天齊王) following an imperial ceremony of *fengshan* on Mount Tai (*Jiu Tangshu* 23.901, 24.934). The following dynasties witnessed higher and higher royal titles conferred on the Eastern Peak (*Gaiyu congkao* 35.2b–3a). Among them were the Benevolent and Holy King Who Equals to Heaven (Rensheng tianqi wang 仁聖天齊王) (*Songshi* 102.2486), the Benevolent and Holy Emperor Who Equals to Heaven (Tianqi rensheng di 天齊仁聖帝 (ibid.) and the Benevolent, Holy and Greatly Life-Giving Emperor of the Eastern Peak Who Equals to Heaven (Tianqi dasheng rensheng di天齊大生仁聖帝) (*Yuanshi* 72.1900). In late imperial China, the god was popularly referred to as the Great Emperor of the Eastern Peak (Dongyue dadi 東嶽大帝). With his rank promoted from prefect (*fu* 府) to king (*wang* 王) to emperor (*di* 帝), the mountain god was firmly established as the supreme deity of the Eastern Peak. His ascension to the status of *di* comes as no surprise considering the great popularity the mountain god had enjoyed for centuries as one of the Ten Kings of Hell alongside King Yama in Buddhism (*Foshuo Dizang pusa faxin yinyuan shiwang jing* X01n0020.1: 0405a24, 1.0407a13) and as the supreme ruler overseeing the life and death of mortal beings in Daoism and folk religion (*Hou Hanshu* 82.2731).[30] Beginning in the Song dynasty, his cult spread across the country, and the god became so popular that one could hardly find a county or district without a Dongyue miao 東嶽廟 or Temple of the Eastern Peak.

His popularity reached its zenith in the mid-to-late sixteenth century when there occurred a sudden shift of focus in the cult of Mount Tai to Bixia yuanjun, whose image or statue as the daughter of Dongyue dadi seems to have found its way overnight into a great many of Dongyue miao in northern China (Goossaert 2011, p. 379). This is amazing given that the name Bixia yuanjun does not appear in any text earlier than the fifteenth century (Gyss 2011, p. 235). Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century at the latest, Bixia yuanjun replaced Dongyue dadi as the most popular deity in the pantheon of Mount Tai. In 'Epigraph for the Primordial Sovereign' ('Yuanjun ji' 元君記), Han Xizuo 韓錫胙, a High-Qing scholar-official, writes: 'The Eastern Peak ranks as the first among gods and spirits under Heaven from past to present, so does the Primordial Sovereign among the gods and spirits of Mount Tai.' The first half of the statement is an exaggeration; the second half is not. In Qing times (1644–1911), for example, Shandong boasts more than three hundred temples and shrines devoted to the goddess, and this is also largely true of her cult in Qing Beijing, Hebei and Shanxi (Ye 2009; Tian 2004).

Just because the name Bixia yuanjun is not found in any text earlier than the fifteenth century, it does not mean that the goddess appeared out of thin air in sixteenth-century China. Although it remains a subject for debate as to how the goddess emerged from the cult of Mount Tai and how she came to replace Dongyue dadi as the most popularly worshipped deity in the pantheon of Mount Tai, there is evidence that her cult began at the turn of the eleventh century at the latest, when the goddess was worshipped as the Jade Maiden of Mount Tai (Taishan yunü 泰山玉女), a title granted to her by Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 997–1022) of the Song dynasty (*Wenxian tongkao* 90.22b-23a; *Rizhi lu* 25.9b–10a). Among various other titles the goddess was known by are the Holy Mother of Mount Tai (Taishan shengmu 泰山聖母), the Old Lady of Mount Tai (Taishan laonainai 泰山老奶奶), the Lady of Mount Tai (Taishan niangniang 泰山娘娘), Lady Jade Maiden (Yunü niangniang 玉女娘娘), Jade Maiden the Great Immortal (Yunü daxian 玉女大仙), the Jade Immortal and Holy Mother (Yuxian shengmu 玉仙聖母), the Heavenly Immortal, Jade Maiden and Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds (Tianxian yunü Bixia yuanjun 天仙玉女碧霞元君) and the Heavenly Immortal, Holy Mother and Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds (Tianxian shengmu Bixia yuanju 天仙聖母碧霞元君) (Ye 2007).

There are more titles that can be added to the list, which accounts for the great popularity of Bixia yuanjun in late imperial China. Noteworthy is that the goddess is also known in the Shangdang area as the Three Immortals, Child-Giving Lady and the

Primordial Sovereign of Mercy and Wisdom (Sanxian songzi niangniang ciyi yuhui yuanju 三仙送子娘娘慈懿育慧元君)[31] and the Fecund Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven, Guardian of the Delivery Room and Primordial Sovereign (Duo'er duonü jiutian weifang shengmu yuanjun 多兒多女九天衛房聖母元君), which are recorded in the 'Stele Inscription of Rebuilding the Palace of the Primordial Sovereign of the Moring Clouds' ('Chongxiu Bixia gong beiji' 重修碧霞宮碑記) (Figure 17). Located in Chengjiachuan 成家川 of Lucheng, about ten kilometres east of Jiacun, this Bixia temple is locally called 'Temple of the Lady of the Ninth Heaven' (Jiutian niangniang miao 九天娘娘廟) or simply as 'Temple of the Lady' (Niangniang miao 娘娘廟).

In the celestial bureaucracy of Daoism, there is an agency called the Office in the Ninth Heaven for Childbirth (Jiutian jiansheng si 九天監生司) in charge of human baby delivery and nursery. The Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven and Guardian of the Delivery Room (Jiutian weifang shengmu 九天衛房聖母) is one of the eighteen major deities staffed in the office, as described in the thirteenth-century liturgical text titled *Golden Book for Universal Salvation According to the Sect Leader of the Numinous Treasure Tradition* (*Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466: 57.15a, 239.1a–4a)[32] and also in the two anonymous Daoist scriptures: the Oracular Slip of the Great Compassionate, Life-Loving Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven, Guardian of the Delivery Room and Primordial Sovereign (Daci haosheng jiutian weifang shengmu yuanjun lingying baoqian DZ 1300: 1a–2b) and the *Precious Scripture of the Celestial Worthy and Jade Pivot of Universal Transformation on the Echo of Thunder from the Ninth Heaven to the Primordial Origin* (*Jiutian yingyuan leisheng puhua tianzun yushu baojing* DZ 16: 6a–7b).[33]

Clearly, Bixia yuanjun is confused or merged with Jiutian shengmu, the goddess of childbirth and childcare, into the Office in the Ninth Heaven for Childbirth or vice versa with Jiutian shengmu, merged into the pantheon of Mount Tai and identified with Bixia yuanjun, the goddess of Mount Tai, as one and the same deity. The confusion or identification of Bixia yuanjun with Jiutian niangniang as we have seen in the Bixia Temple of Chengjiachuan also occurs with the Bixia Temple in Gaocun 高村, a village in Changzhi county about twenty kilometres southwest of Jiacun. The temple plaque (*miao'e* 廟額) bears three Chinese characters—*shen* 聖 (holy), *mu* 母 (mother) and *miao* 廟 (temple), and the three bronze censers in the temple are all marked with *jiutian shengmu miao* 九天聖母廟, meaning 'Temple of the Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven', whereas its main hall is named the 'Shrine of the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds' (Bixia ci 碧霞祠) with a statue of the goddess seated at the centre of the hall. Inscribed on a temple stele erected in the eighth year (1580) of Wanli 萬, a reign period of the Ming dynasty, is 'A Record of Rebuilding the Traveling Palace of the Primordial Sovereign' ('Chongxiu Bixia yuanju xinggong ji' 重修碧霞元君行宮记). In the inscribed text, the goddess is referred to as 'the Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven and the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds of Mount Tai the Eastern Peak' (Dongyue Taishan Jiutian shengmu Bixia yuanjun 東嶽泰山九天聖母碧霞元君) (Fanzhou 2021). Here and again, we see the cult of Mount Tai being integrated with that of the Ninth Heaven and the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds being entrusted with the divine responsibility for childbirth and childcare that used to be almost exclusively undertaken by the Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven in Daoist mythology. Significantly, the Travelling Palace of the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds in Gaocun was rebuilt (and probably renamed at the same time) during the reign of the Wanli emperor (1573–1620)—a period that witnessed the mountain goddess rising quickly to fame as one of China's three principal female deities alongside Guanyin and Tianhou 天后 (Queen of Heaven, also known as Mazu 馬祖) thanks to royal patronage (Pomeranz 2007, p. 29; Li 2018, pp. 60–61). The dual naming of the temple as we have seen above also appears in the Bixia Temple in Jiacun, as indicated by the temple plaque above the mountain gate that leads to the entrance hall of the temple, which reads 'Temple of the Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven (Jiutian shengmu miao 九天聖母廟) (Figure 18). Interestingly, however, its main hall is named Bixia gong or the Palace of the Morning Clouds, and the temple is locally called Nainai miao 奶奶廟 or Grandma Temple as well.

Clearly, Bixia yuanjuan and Jiutian shengmu are worshipped as one and the same goddess in Jiacun, as elsewhere in Shangdang (Li 2016).

Figure 17. Chengjiachuan Bixia Temple Stone Stele.

Figure 18. Temple Plaque above the Gate Leading to the Entrance Hall.

With a verifiable record of history going back to the fifteenth century or even earlier, the Bixia Temple is the largest and oldest of all the temples and shrines in Jiacun village and is also the oldest of Bixia temples and shrines still extant in the Shangdang area. Available to us are eight stone stelae, on which are inscribed records of renovating and reconstructing the temple over the past few centuries (Du 2011b, pp. 2–7). The oldest of them was erected in the first year (1506) of Zhengde 正德 during the Ming dynasty with a short text inscribed on it about the background to the reconstruction of the temple in that year (Du 2011b, p. 2). The text traces the history of the cult of the Holy Mother of the Ninth Heaven to the Tianyou 天祐 period (904–924) of the Tang dynasty but stops short of giving any detail or evidence; when it comes to the rationale behind the reconstruction of the temple, the text reveals that no one knows exactly when the temple was first built due to a lack of records. Apart from the eight stelae, there is one that fails to survive in its entirety except for a fragmentary piece preserved in the temple. Still visible on it is a vertical line of Chinese characters, which read: 'Rebuilt on the twenty-fourth day of the second month of the eighth year of Zhengtong' (Du 2016; Wang 2007, pp. 18–19). Zhengtong 正統 was a reign period (1435–1449) of Emperor Yingzong 英宗 of the Ming dynasty. The stone stele, albeit extant only in fragmentary form, strongly suggests that the temple was first built much earlier than 1443—that is, the eighth year of Zhengtong. The history of the temple may even be traced to the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) (Li 2016), as evidenced by the main structure of the main hall of the temple which demonstrates a style characteristic of the architecture of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) (Wang 2007, p. 21; Guo 2020, p. 52).

5. Bixia Temple Festival

While the beginning history of the Bixia Temple Festival in Jiacun remains unclear, there is evidence that by the late sixteenth century at the latest, a highly sophisticated protocol of ritual and theatrical performances had been developed for village festivals, as shown in the *Lijie chuanbu*, a liturgic handbook copied in 1574 by Cao Guozai 曹國宰, a ritual specialist of Jiacun, from a master copy datable to the Jiajing 嘉靖 era (1522–1566) of the Ming dynasty (Han et al. 1987a, p. 56n3). Discovered in 1985 in Nanshe, a member village along with Jiacun of the above-mentioned Eight Big Village Worship Associations, the text was originally owned by the Niu 牛 family in Jiacun, and in 1956, it fell into the hands of Cao Zhan'ao 曹占 and his brother Cao Guobiao 曹占標, diviners and geomancers of Nanshe village (Du 2011b, p. 235). Dated on its cover page 'Wanli second year, first month, thirteenth day' (4 February 1574), the text refers to itself on its first page as *Zhou yuexing tu* (Figure 19). This manuscript served as a practical guide for local ritual organisers and performers for more than three hundred and fifty years until the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937–1945) (Han et al. 1987a, pp. 53–54) and has continued to do so since it was recovered in 1986 (Du 2016; Song 2016a).

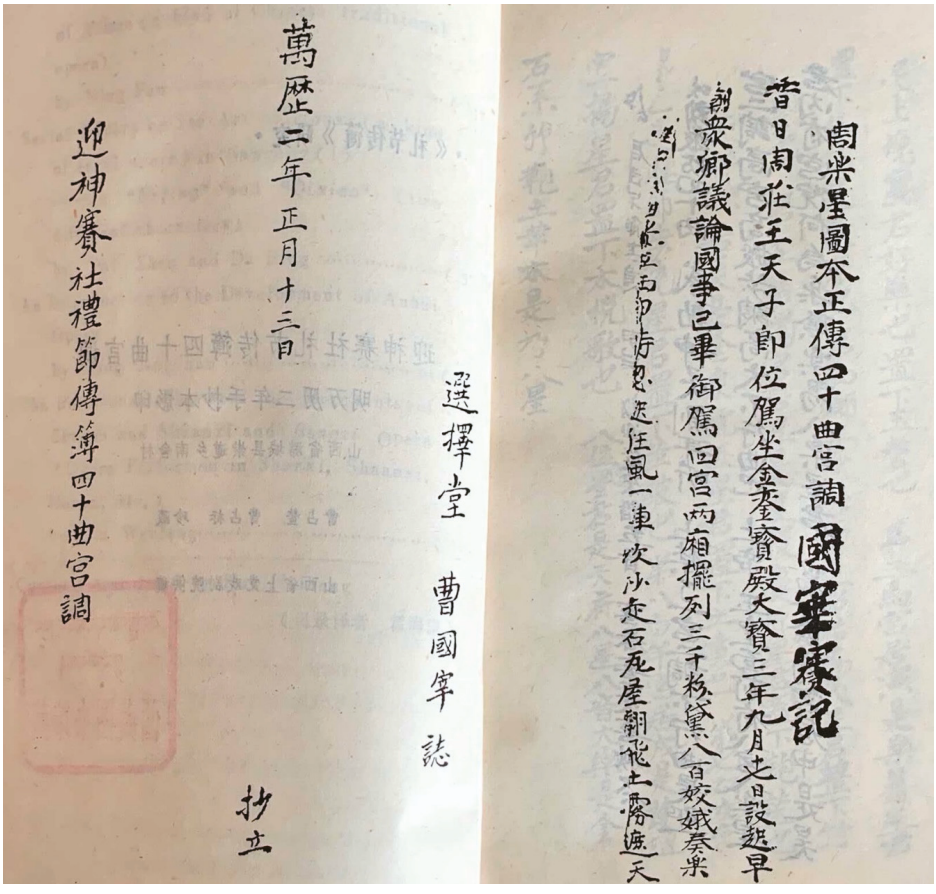

Figure 19. Cover and First Pages of *Lijie chuanbu*/*Zhou yuexing tu*. Source: *Zhonghua xiqu* 3 (1987), pp. 2–3.

Temple festivals are an integral part of village life in rural North China (Overmyer 2009). Jiacun is no exception. There are various ceremonial and festival events. Some of them are family-based rituals and ceremonies, such as funerals, weddings and ancestral rites, and some of them are community-based temple festivals, such as the Double-Second Burning Incense Festival (*Eryue'er xianghuo hui* 二月二香火會) and Double-Fourth Temple Festival in Jiacun, both held in honour of Bixia yuanjun with the Bixia Temple as the major venue for ritual and theatrical performance during the festival. As its name suggests, the Double-Second Burning Incense Festival falls on the second day of the second lunar month, but it is actually a three-day event starting on the thirtieth day of the first month and running through until the second day of the second month when it peaks (Du 2011a, pp. 68–78). The Double-Second Festival is celebrated in its own right and at the same time as a prelude to the Double-Fourth Temple Festival, the most important *sai* in Jiacun, which is held to celebrate the birthday of Bixia yuanjun.

In history, the annual Double-Fourth Festival was normally celebrated as a three-day *xiaosai* 小賽 or small *sai*, and every forty years there would be a large-scale celebration called *dasai* 大賽 or big *sai* held over the course of six consecutive days in the fourth lunar month. The last time the big *sai* took place was 1917 (Du 2016). However, the centuries-long tradition failed to carry over to the next fortieth year. In early 1957 when villagers planned to hold a big *sai*, according to Du Tonghai (Du 2016), a highly revered local Community Head, an order came from above to call it off. The year 1996 witnessed the restoration of the Double-Second Festival for the first time since it was last held in 1945, and the following year witnessed the 'large-scale re-enactment of ancient temple festivals', which ran over six days from the first to the sixth day of the fourth month on the Chinese lunar calendar (Wang 2007, pp. 49–55). The Bixia temple festival has since been held annually but usually on a smaller scale than before because many people leave for work in cities and only return home for the Spring Festival once a year (Du 2016). Although staged on a smaller scale than before, Jiacun temple festivals remain fundamentally unchanged in form and function from the past, with the procedure and programme stipulated in the received liturgical texts faithfully observed whenever possible, as I was told by Du Tonghai (Du 2016). Noticing a look of surprise on my face, he showed me a stack of papers containing detailed instructions, invocations and prayers in verse and prose for the Double-Fourth Festival and kindly let me take a photograph of each and every page he had copied from the liturgical texts, with notes, signs and symbols densely written in the margins.

I do not have the slightest doubt that there is any substantial change made to the general structure and procedure of the temple festival, but to believe that the temple festival in its newly reconstructed form resembles what was presented a century ago in every respect would be nothing but wishful thinking, as cautioned by Johnson (2009, p. 39) in his observation of the New Year festival in the village of Renzhuang in southeastern Shanxi, which was restored based on a liturgy discovered in 1987. In any case, however, the Double-Fourth Temple Festival has once again become an important part of village life in Jiacun, albeit in a reconstructed form, through which traditional ritual and theatrical performances that would otherwise have been lost are revived and reintegrated into the mainstream of local religion.

The ritual procedure and programme of Jiacun temple festivals are organised around the Twenty-Eight Mansions (*Ershiba xingxiu* 二十八星宿) in the Chinese constellation pantheon, beginning with the mansion of 'Horn Represented by the Wood Dragon' (Jiao mujiao 角木蛟) and ending with that of 'Chariot Represented by the Water Earthworm' (Zhen shuiyin 軫水蚓), as described in the 1574 liturgical text, where each mansion is given a name, followed by a mythical creature or guardian deity, according to the Chinese astrology.[34] Under the name of each mansion is a list of ritual, musical and theatrical performances including the ritual of offering cups (*gongzhan* 供盞) and performing variety shows (Du 2011b, pp. 246–83). Recorded in the ritual text are a total of 245 titles of melodies, songs, dances, dance dramas and dramas, 198 of which are dance dramas and dramas with

their origins datable to the Song, Jin, Yuan or Ming dynasty (Han et al. 1987b, pp. 131–36; Huang 1987, pp. 137–43; Zhang 1987, pp. 153–67).

The theatrical performance may be classified into three broad categories in terms of liturgical procedures and functions: (1) full-length performances presented on temple theatre stage after offering the seventh and final cup to deities, (2) short interlude performances presented in front of the hall for offering sacrifices, respectively, between offering the fourth and fifth cups and between offering the fifth and sixth cups, and (3) music and dance dramas in processional performances. Dramatic pieces staged after the completion of the ritual of offering cups[35] are categorised, respectively, as *yuanben* 院本 (farce, lit. 'court text'),[36] *zaju* 雜劇 (sketch comedy) and *zheng duixi* 正隊戲 (main group skit) in the liturgical manual. The *zheng duixi* is so named to distinguish it from the *gongzhan duixi* 供盞隊戲 (group skit for offering cups) and the *ya duixi* 哑隊戲 (muted group skit) (Huang 1998). The *gongzhan duixi* is meant for the interlude performance between offering cups, and the *ya duixi*—an ancient form of unspoken and unsung music and dance drama datable to the Tang and Song dynasties (Dou 1987)—is presented in processions by the Entertainers as warm-ups or rehearsals for the temple festival according to local ritualists (Li 1993b, 1993c).[37] I had the good fortune to find all the three forms of theatrical performance presented during my fieldwork in Jiacun on the Double-Fourth Temple Festival in May 2016. It was a year for small *sai* though, and accordingly, the procedure and programme reserved for the six-day big *sai* was simplified and adjusted to accommodate the form of a small *sai.*

The temple festival involves a great number of people. Most prominent among them are the Chief Community Head (*weishou* 首), the Chief Master of Ceremonials (*zhuli* 主禮), the Leader of Entertainers (*qianhang* 前行), Masters of Ceremonials (*lisheng* 禮生 or *sili* 司禮) and Incense Elders (*xianglao* 香老) (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Jiacun Ritual leaders (left to right)—Du Tonghai: Chief Community Head and Chief Master of Ceremonials; Wei Qianxiu 衛前秀: Master of Ceremonials; Song Huaizhi 宋懷支: Leader of Entertainment; Zhang Kaitai 張開泰 and Feng Chunsheng 馮春生: Incense Elders.

The Chief Community Head is selected from among Community Heads (*sheshou*) and sometimes may concurrently act as the Chief Master of Ceremonials, as is the case with Du Tonghai. As the Chief Community Head, Du is the *sai* organiser, leader and director and, as such, he is also called the Chief Priest in Charge of Sacrifices (*zhuji* 主祭); and as the Chief Master of Ceremonials, he is also charged with planning for and officiating at ritual performances (Du 2016). The Leader of Entertainers takes the lead in processional ritual performances, and this role is most of time ceremonial (Song 2016a). As shown above in Figure 20, the Leader of Entertainers wears a three-part long black artificial beard, a black gauze hat (*wushamao* 烏紗帽) and an embroidered jade girdle (*yudai* 玉帶, a hoop-shaped belt with jade ornaments) around the waist and costumes himself in a traditional ceremonial red silk robe embroidered with pythons (*mangpao* 蟒袍) as *laosheng* 老生 (lit. 'old man'), a major role type (*jiaose* 色) in traditional Chinese drama and theatre (*xiqu* 戲曲) that often portrays an imperial official. Notably, the Leader of Entertainers holds a bamboo staff (*zhuganzi* 竹竿子) in all ritual performances he is involved in, so he is also called Master Bamboo Staff (*zhuganzi*). As for Masters of Ceremonials, this role is conventionally played by revered Yinyang Masters (*yinyang shi* 陰陽師, a diviner) or Fengshui Masters (*fengshui shi* 風水師, a geomancer also called *kanyu jia* 堪輿家) in the locality, whereas the role of Incense Elders is commonly assigned to village elders, who are also ritual specialists.

Another prominent figure active in the village festival is Mapi 馬疋 or Mabi 馬裨, a spirit-medium who used to have both cheeks pierced with a 15 to 20 cm long steel pin (*kouqian* 口釬) while performing trance séance in Shangdang village festivals. According to Song Yusheng 宋玉生 (2016), the Mapi of Jiacun，the main responsibility of Mapi is to provide assistance in the ritual of offering sacrifices and help maintain order in processions during temple festivals (Figures 21 and 22).[38]

Also essential to the temple festival are a troupe of professional actors and musicians from the Registered Households of Entertainers (*yuehu* 樂戶) and the Chief Ritual Chefs (*zhuchu* 主厨), the former playing ritual music and performing dance and drama during the festival, and the latter preparing elaborate food offerings and arranging them in an extremely intricate pattern (*chaji* 插祭) (Figure 23) in a colourfully decorated shed called the 'Incense Pavilion' (*xiangting* 香亭) (see Figure 20).

As a traditional saying goes in Shangdang, 'Engaged in competition (*sai*) with each other in a big temple festival (*sai*)[39] are three groups of people: tortoises (*wangba* 王八), chefs and *yinyang* masters.' While the saying contains the word *wangba* as a derogatory term for ritual Entertainers or *yuehu*,[40] it reveals the instrumental role of these three groups of people in temple festivals in the Shangdang region. A Registered Household of Entertainers is usually affiliated with one or more ritual communities (*she*) to perform at temple festivals, although they also perform in domestic ceremonies such as funerals, weddings and anniversaries. Traditionally affiliated with the three Jiacun Worship Associations is the Assembly of Eight Sounds' (*Bayin hui* 八音會) (Figure 24), headed by Wang Jinzhi 王進枝 (Figure 25), the eighth-generation inheritor of the Wang Registered Household of Entertainers of Xiliu 西流, a village about twenty-five kilometres northeast of Jiacun (Wang 2016a).

Village festivals also involve various ritual attendants and assistants such as Carriers of Spirit Tablets (*tingzi* 亭子), Carriers of Food Offerings in the Courtyard (*tingzi* 庭子), Canopy-Holders (*weizi* 帷子), Escorts of Offering Cups (*yazhan* 押盞), Incense Elders (*xianglao* 香老), Incense Masters (*sixiang* 司香), Tea Masters (*sicha* 司茶), Wine Masters (*sijiu* 司酒), Candle Masters (*sizhu* 司蠋), Water Attendants (*shuiguan* 水倌), Banner-Holders (*zhiqi* 執旗), Umbrella-Holders (*sanfu* 傘夫), Carriers of Sedan Chairs (*jiaofu* 轎夫) and Ceremonial Guards (*yizhang* 儀仗). Apart from them, there are also numerous procurement personnel (*caimai* 採買) and odd-jobbers (*qinza* 勤雜) involved in the festivals.

Figure 21. Song Yusheng Who Plays Mapi in Jiacun Temple Festivals.

Figure 22. Mapi in Procession.

Figure 23. Food Offerings in the Incense Pavilion.

Figure 24. The Assembly of Eight Sounds from Xiliu Village.

Figure 25. Wang Jinzhi, Head of the Assembly of Eight Sounds from Xiliu Village.

6. Jiacun Double-Fourth Temple Festival

The year 2016 was a year for small *sai*. The normal length of small *sai* is three days, which, however, was shortened to two and a half days in 2016, with the celebration beginning on the morning of the third day of the fourth month (9 May) and running until the noon of the fifth day of the fourth month (11 May), although the festival still followed a standard tripart format, i.e., welcoming, entertaining and seeing off gods, which are locally referred to as the initial *sai* (*tousai* 頭賽), the main *sai* (*zhengsai* 正賽) and the final *sai* (*mosai* 末賽), respectively. The first day of the temple festival was devoted to the initial *sai*, with the main *sai* and final *sai* scheduled, respectively, for the morning and afternoon of the second day, followed by a special concert performance by the Entertainers on the morning of the third day.

The initial *sai* consists of a series of rituals—namely, Inviting the Deities to Descend (*xiaqing* 下請), Welcoming the Deities (*yingshen* 迎神), Assembling All the Deities (*yuan-shen* 圓神), Dismounting Horses (*xiama* 下馬), Receiving the Deities (*jieshen* 接神) and Settling the Deities (*anshen* 安神). The ritual of Inviting the Deities is also called 'the Assembly for Offering Incense' (*Shanxiang hui* 上香會) in the Shangdang region, in which the principal

god of the *sai* festival invites through the local Earth God all other deities and spirits worshipped by members of a ritual community to receive sacrificial offerings and enjoy musical and theatrical performance at the host temple of the *sai* festival. In the case of the Double-Fourth Temple Festival in Jiacun, Bixia yuanjun plays host to the *sai* festival as the principal deity of the Bixia Temple.

6.1. The Initial Sai: Morning Session

The ritual of Inviting the Deities took place very early on the morning of the third day of the fourth month in the Bixia Temple. Before daybreak, hundreds of people gathered in the temple around Du Tonghai, Song Huaizhi and other ritual leaders. Among them were an ensemble of eight wind and percussion musicians from the Assembly of Eight Sounds and an army of Guards of Honour, Carriers of Spirit Tablets and Canopy-Holders, among others.

The ritual started with a formal announcement by Du Tonghai, the Chief Master of Ceremonials: 'I declare open the Jiacun Double-Fourth Temple Festival, celebrating the birthday of the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds. Sound the golden bell and beat the drum; All be ready to perform their respective duty!' (Figure 26).

Figure 26. Du Tonghai Chief Head Community/Chief Master of Ceremonials Announces the Opening of Jiacun Double-Fourth Temple Festival.

No sooner had he finished the opening declaration than came three beats of a big gong and then another three beats of a big drum, followed by 'Open the Door Wide' (*Dakaimen*大開門), a piece of suona 唢呐 or shawm music performed by the Entertainers under the direction of Master Bamboo Staff. The ritual leaders circled the Incense Pavilion three times. Also called the 'Offering Pavilion' (*xianting* 獻亭) and 'Divine Shed' (*shenpeng* 神棚), the Incense Pavilion was a canopied tabernacle temporarily built in front of the main hall to house a display of 'arranged flowers for the altar' (*chaji* 插祭/*huaji* 花祭) with food offerings neatly piled on a large offering table against a floor-to-ceiling framework decorated with seasonal flowers and painted clay figurines of famous characters in traditional drama. The food offerings are made of wheat paste—hence their alternative name of 'flour offerings' (*mianji* 面祭). They are cut into fine-looking shapes and deep fried until golden brown and put on display in the Incense Pavilion (Figure 23).[41] The Incense Pavilion served as the centre for ritual performance during the temple festival (see Figure 26). In front of the Incense Pavilion stood an altar with sprit tablets and food and fruit offerings (Figure 27).

After the ear-piercing suona music stopped, Du Tonghai, the Chief Master of Ceremonials, invited Feng Chunsheng and Zhang Kaitai, the two Incense Elders, to perform the ritual of offering incense (*shangxiang* 上香). While Feng walked up to offer incense, Zhang unfolded the 'Writ of Offering Incense' (*shangxiang wen* 上香文)[42] (Figure 28), and at the same time, all other ritual participants knelt down to listen to him reciting the text. After he finished reading the text, Wei Qianxiu, the Master of Ceremonials, took a cup of wine from Mapi and poured it on the ground (Figure 29). Next came a long prayer said by Du, the Chief Community Head, of grateful thanks to Bixia yuanjun on behalf of the three worship associations of the village.

After offering the incense, Master Bamboo Staff, Song Huaizhi led the other ritual leaders out of the Bixia Temple to the Earth God Temple, followed in processions by Vanguards, Entertainers, Ceremonial Guards, Banner-Holders, Umbrella-Holders, Rearguards, etc. The grand procession wound its way slowly through the streets and lanes of the village to the Earth God Temple, which was located in the northwestern corner of the village. At the front were two men dressed as yamen runners in premodern times, beating gongs to clear the way for the parade, followed by the ritual leaders, flanked by processional placards and banners (Figure 30) and accompanied by a small wind and percussion band formed by members of the Assembly of Eight Sounds (Figure 31).

When the procession arrived at the Earth God Temple, Du Tonghai took a step forward and made a deep bow, announcing, 'Let sacrifices be offered to the Gate; let incense be lit and presented; let music be performed; let us all kneel to kowtow thrice [to the Earth God].' He then went a few steps up to the door and knocked on it to the suona music of 'Open the Door Wide'. The door opened inward, and the ritual of offering incense, singing prayers, pouring wine, kneeling and kowtowing was performed to the accompaniment of 'Drumming for Offering Incense' (*Shangxiang gu* 上香鼓). Again, each of the actions was repeated three times, and after that, Du chanted the 'Writ of Invitations' (*Qingzhuang wen* 請狀文), by which formal invitations were extended on behalf of the Earth God to all gods and spirits of the village to attend the celebration of the birthday of Bixia yuanjun in the Bixia Temple. After finishing reading the writ, he set it alight and placed it in the incense burner. Seeing it burnt to ashes, he signalled the Entertainers to play the 'Melody for Worshipping the Drum' (*Baigu qu* 拜鼓曲) to 'conclude the ritual of making offerings' (*zhongxian li* 終獻禮) at the Earth God Temple. The procession then returned to the Bixia Temple, retracing the earlier route through the village.

Before they passed through the entrance hall of the temple, a ritual called 'Offering Sacrifices to the Gate' (*Jimen* 祭門) was performed to the music of 'Open the Door Wide', which was followed by the ritual of offering incense and wine and that of kneeling and kowtowing held in front of the Incense Pavilion to the 'Melody for Worshipping the Drum', hence the end of the ritual of 'Inviting the Deities to Descend'.

Figure 27. Altar with Sprit Tablets and Food and Fruit Offerings.

Figure 28. Offering Incense.

Next came the ritual of 'Welcoming the Deities'. Also called 'Fetching the Deities' (*jieshen* 接神), 'Welcoming the Deities' was a large-scale *shehuo* performance that involved the parading of the image (*xingixang* 行像) of Bixia yuanjun through the village. The ritual started around 9:30 a.m. with the musical performance of 'Fetching the Deities' presented by the Entertainers in front of the Incense Pavilion (Figure 32) as a prelude to the 'Writ of [Requesting the Deities to] Mount Horses' (*Shangma wen* 上馬文) recited by Du Tonghai, the Chief Master of Ceremonials. The Entertainers followed Du and other ritual leaders out of the temple to the Divine Pool, where a gigantic procession, all dressed in flamboyant costumes, had already formed up. The two men who were dressed as yamen runners walked ahead of all others, and they were the first to emerge from the gateway of the temple, beating the gong to clear the way (Figure 33).

Right adjacent to the Divine Pool was Cundong 村東 Road, the main street in Jiacun that ran from north to south through the village. The procession set off for the Yuhuang miao or the Jade Emperor Temple, which was located approximately seven hundred metres northwest of the Bixia Temple. They walked northwards along the main street until they came to a crossroads where stood the Guanyin Pavilion (Figure 34), through the gateway of which ran a thoroughfare linking the Eastend and Westend of Jiacun. The section of the through road on the eastern (right) side of the Pavilion was Gedong 閣東 Road, and that on the western (left) side was Gexe 閣西 Road, which led to the Jade Emperor Temple about three hundred metres due west of the Guanyin Pavilion (Figure 35).

Figure 29. Wei Qianxiu, the Master of Ceremonials, Pours Wine Before the Offering Table.

Figure 30. Yamen Runners Beat Gongs to Clear the Way for the Procession Headed by Master Bamboo Staff and Other Ritual Leaders.

Figure 31. Entertainers Play Music to Accompany the Procession.

Figure 32. Entertainers Perform 'Fetching the Deities'.

When they arrived at the Jade Emperor Temple, there were ritual performances of opening the door, offering incense, pouring wine, praying, kneeling and kowtowing presented in the same way as I had observed earlier at the Earth God Temple (Figure 36).

After that, the Jade Emperor was carried out in a sedan chair with a golden cover on top adorned with a pair of golden dragons (Figure 37) to meet the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds who was waiting in her sedan chair parked outside at the entrance from the road. The sedan chair for the goddess showed no difference from that of the god except that its top was adorned with a pair of emerald green phoenixes (Figure 38). The dragon stands for yang, the phoenix yin in fengshui, so they make a perfect match.

The procession to the Divine Arena for the Assembly of All Deities (*yuanshen chang* 圓神場) began when all participants were lined up outside the Jade Emperor Temple along the way they had come from. The procession route was lined four to five deep by thousands of people from neighbouring villages and towns, all eager to get a good view of the street performance (Figure 39). When they came to the crossroads, they stopped to be joined, first by twenty-four *tingzi*, all female, each carrying a spirit tablet with the name of a god inscribed on it, next by four Divine Carriages (*shenjia* 神駕)[43] carrying the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas (Sihai longwang 四海龍王), and then by gods and goddesses that frequently appear in xiqu such as the Eight Immortals and Lord Guan. These mythological and legendary characters were played by the Entertainers. Some of them were riding horses, some walking on foot, and while proceeding down the north–south avenue to the Divine Arena, they made stylised movements and gestures as if performing drama onstage. One could easily tell what dramatic characters or roles they represented from their props, cosmetics, costumes, movements, gestures and facial expressions. These deities were all invited by Bixia yuanjun to attend the celebration of her birthday. Among them, the most distinguished was the Jade Emperor. In front of each group of divine beings were young men carrying flags bearing the paper cut-outs of 'divine mansions' (*shenou* 神樓)

and 'divine horses' (*shenma* 神馬), followed by a small music troupe with gongs and drums, and at the rear were young women carrying ceremonial parasols and banners.

Figure 33. Yamen Runners Emerge from the Gateway.

Figure 34. Gatehouse of Guanyin Pavilion.

Figure 35. The Procession Turns Left at the Crossroads, Heading for Jade Emperor Temple.

Figure 36. Villagers and Ritual Participants Kneel Down to Wait for Jade Emperor to Be Carried Out of His Temple.

Figure 37. Jade Emperor Is Carried Out in His Sedan Chair.

Figure 38. The Goddess Sits in Her Sedan Chair, Waiting for the Jade Emperor.

Figure 39. Crowds Follow the Procession to the Divine Arena.

While the goddess was paraded alongside other deities in the pantheon of Jiacun, a grand show was put on with gongs, drums and pipes of colourful fans and banners; ceremonial parasols, placards and pennants; mule-drawn drum carts and flower carts; royal crosspieces (*huanggang* 皇杠); tableaux (*gushi* 故事);[44] and divine mansions, divine carriages and divine horses that were residences, conveyances and mounts for the invited gods and goddesses. There was also stilt-walking, masked parade (*mianju dui* 面具隊), dragon dance, lion dance, land-boat dance, rice-sprout dance (*yangge* 秧歌), waist-drum (*yaogu* 腰鼓) dance, etc.

Most spectacular of the street performances was the carrying of royal crosspieces (*tai huanggang* 抬皇杠) and the carrying of floats on poles (*taige* 抬閣). Also known as 'flower crosspieces' (*huagang* 花杠), the royal crosspiece is a pagoda-like majestic golden timber structure consisting in its lower part of a colourfully embellished heavy square wooden box with a long crosspiece placed across it; in its middle is a latticework embellished with brightly coloured ribbons and embroidered balls and wreaths with an oversized mirror fixed at the centre and in its upper part is an antenna-like top decorated with a feather duster (Figure 40). The crosspiece is made of flexible wood to allow easy swaying when carried along, hence the alternative name of the royal crosspiece as the 'swaying crosspiece' (*huanggang* 晃杠).

The carrying of a float on poles, also known as 'carrying cosmetics on poles' (*kangzhang* 扛妝) and 'walking stories' (*zou gushi* 走故事) in Shangdang, is a popular form of *shehuo* performance, in which a young child, costumed as a famous figure from popular plays, stood on a small platform carried along by a man on two vertical iron poles (Figures 41 and 42).

The procession moved slowly down the avenue from the Pavilion of Guanyin at the crossroads to the Divine Arena at the southern edge of the village. Covering an area of approximately five thousand square metres, the Divine Arena was a public square that featured some recreation and sporting facilities including basketball courts and playgrounds for children. Following the procession all the way, huge crowds of people swarmed into the square (Figure 43). Some of those who lived around the square kindly left their houses open to let in people—whether known or unknown—for a view of the Assembling of the Deities from their balconies, windows and rooftops (Figure 44).

Under the direction of Du Tonghai, the Chief Master of Ceremonials, the divine images, mansions, carriages and horses were lined up in orderly rows. In front of a temporary altar set up at the centre of the Divine Arena stood two sedan chairs, one for the Primordial Sovereign and the other for the Jade Emperor, with the four Divine Carriages for the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas neatly arrayed behind them (Figure 45). The ritual of 'Assembling All the Deities' started off with three shots of ritual muskets. The Chief Master of Ceremonials walked up to the two golden chairs and knelt down, chanting the 'Writ of Assembling All the Deities' (*Yuanshen wen* 圓神文), which was followed by *qupo* 曲破[45] performed by the Entertainers.

Figure 40. Carrying the Royal Crosspiece in Procession.

Figure 41. Walking Stories in Procession.

Figure 42. A Girl Dressed Up as Xiqu Character in Walking Stories.

Figure 43. Crowded Divine Arena.

Figure 44. Watching Parade from Balconies.

Figure 45. Assembling the Deities in the Divine Arena.

Next came the ritual of 'Dismounting the Horses', which started with the Chief Community Head reciting the 'Writ of [Requesting the Deities to] Dismount Horses' (*Xiama wen* 下馬文). While he was reciting the text, divine images, carriages, mansions and horses were carried, doing a route around the altar called 'Circling the Arena' (*yuanchang* 圓場). The carriers of divine images, carriages and spirit tablets would stop to bow to the Primordial Sovereign and the Jade Emperor seated in their sedan chairs, which was understood by all present as a sign of the god or goddess they carried dismounting from their horse to pay homage to the two paramount deities of Jiacun.

What followed was *Crossing Five Passes and Decapitating Six Generals* performed by the Entertainers in the local style of group skit (*duixi*). This play is about Lord Guan escorting Lady Gan and Lady Mi in search of their husband Liu Bei 劉備—a famous Three-Kingdom story that finds expression in almost all genres of traditional Chinese performance literature and performing arts. Like Emperor Guan (Guandi 關帝), Lord Guan (Guangong 關公) was a posthumous title conferred on Guan Yu 關羽 (?–AD 220). A native of Hedong 河東 in present-day southern Shanxi, Guan Yu was a powerful military general under Liu Bei (AD 161–223) the founder of the Kingdom of Shu 蜀 during the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280). He was deified after death and has since been widely worshipped as a god of war, a god of wealth, a rain-maker and a divine protector against demons, devils, diseases and bandits.[46] The Lord Guan play (*Guangong xi* 關公戲) consists of a series of highlight scenes enacting Lord Guan 'Hanging Up the Seal and Packing Up the Silver' (*Guayin fengjin* 掛印封金), 'Bidding Farewell to Cao Cao' (*Guangong ci Cao* 關公辭曹), 'Crossing Through Five Passes and Decapitating Six Generals', 'Travelling One Thousand *Li* Alone on Horseback' (*Qianli zou danji* 千里走單騎), 'Searching for [Liu Bei, His Sworn] Elder Brother for One Thousand *Li* (*Qianli xunxiong* 千里尋兄), 'Meeting [Zhang Fei 張飛, His Sworn Younger Brother] at Old City' (*Gucheng hui* 古城會) and 'Decapitating Cai Yang' (*Zhan Cai Yang* 斬蔡陽). Best known for its martial arts combat scenes, *Crossing Five Passes and Decapitating Six Generals* ranks among the most popular plays to stage and makes up the central core of Three-Kingdom plays (*Sanguo xi* 三國戲) in xiqu.

This play is listed in the *Lijie chuanbu* in the category of main group skit (*zheng duixi*), and as such, it is meant for stage performance after offering the seventh cup (Du 2011b, pp. 250, 253, 257). Clearly, its performance in the Divine Arena after the ritual of 'Circling the Arena' was not held as specified in the liturgical manual. It was not performed on stage in the temple, nor was there any area designated for its performance in the public square. Actors simply performed on the level ground, moving from one place to another as the story unfolded, thus turning the whole square into a huge open-air theatre. Spectators followed them, closely watching. Among them were some young children play-fighting at their heels, setting off a ripple of laughter and applause from time to time across the square. Lord Guan figured prominently as the central character in the play. Riding his Red-Hare Horse (Chutuma 赤兔馬) and wielding his Azure-Dragon Sword (Qinglongdao 青龍刀) and followed by ten or more armed foot soldiers escorting Lady Gan and Lady Mi seated in their sedan chairs, Lord Guan fought all along until he arrived at Old City, where he met his long-lost sworn brother Zhang Fei, hence a grand reunion (*da tuanyuan* 大團圓)—a happy ending typical of xiqu.

The Shangdang group skit manifests itself as a form of verse drama known as *shizan* 詩讚, albeit still at a fairly rudimentary level on the whole. Composed in alternating segments of prose and verse using plain, colloquial language, the Shangdang group skit displays some affinity with Tang transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文) and Song-Yuan precious scrolls (*baojuan* 寶卷). Although its verse section contains occasional decasyllabic lines, the predominant form is pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic, with rhyme occurring on the last syllable in even-numbered lines, as in the verse section of transformation texts and precious scrolls. This is also the case with the sung parts of the beat-based form (*banqiang ti* 板腔體) of xiqu, such as Jingju 京劇 or Beijing Opera and Clapper Opera (*bangzi* 梆子), including Shangdang Clapper Opera (*Shangdang bangzi* 上黨梆子).

The Shangdang group skit specialises in historical drama and martial drama, particularly Three-Kingdom plays. Its performance is not confined to a fixed stage or space, which is a distinctive feature of folk temple theatre. Actors may play on the stage or on the street and may even play while riding horses, brandishing weapons or carrying sedan chairs along the street if need be. They perform primarily through speech and action, and singing is secondary and occasional. They speak in prose, but when it comes to the verse part, they intone (*nian* 念) or recite and chant (*yinsong* 吟誦). Intonation and recitation are thus the dominant mode of delivery. No string or wind instruments are played but percussion instruments such as drums, gongs and cymbals. When actors finish reciting one verse line, there will be two beats of gongs and drums altogether; when they finish reciting four verse lines, they will perform an action to the rhythmic beat of gongs and drums. Speech in prose is usually delivered without any instrumental accompaniment.

The Shangdang group skit arguably retains features and functions of a Song dynasty court group skit and group dance (*duiwu* 隊舞). Derived from Tang dynasty court group dance and dance skit (*wuxi* 舞戲) (*Jiaofang ji* 1.11–12; *Gongci* 1.11b; *Yuefu zalu* 1.42, 1.45), the Song court group skit was a major form of the royal command performance alongside group dance and sketch comedy (*zaju* 雜劇) presented to accompany the ritual of offering cups (*Dongjing menhua lu* 9.832–835; *Wenxian tongkao* 146.12a–12b, 14b–15a). The Song court group dance skit featured a court music officer called 'Adjutant' (*canjun* 參軍),[47] who is also referred to in Song dynasty sources as Master Bamboo Staff (*zhuganzi*) because he held a bamboo staff or bamboo-staff whisk (*zhugan fuzi* 竹竿拂子) when directing court performances (*Maofeng zhenyin manlu* 48.3b–10a; *Dongjing Menghua lu* 9.833).

The group skit and the bamboo staff as described in the Song sources appear still extant—though not in their entirety or originality—in Shangdang temple festivals. While there is no evidence of a direct link between Song court theatre and Shangdang folk temple theatre, historical records are abundant, with a considerable number of Song court musicians and entertainers breaking free of their Jurchen escorts and escaping into mountains in Hedong and Shangdang after being taken across the Yellow River at Gongxian 鞏縣 in the wake of the Humiliation of Jingkang (*Jingkang zhi chi* 靖康之恥)—the fall in early 1127 of Bianliang 汴梁, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty to the Jurchens, who ransacked Bianliang, capturing both Emperor Qinzong 欽宗 (r. 1126–1127) and his father, Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1100–1126), and escorting them along with hundreds of members of imperial and aristocratic families and thousands of court officials, attendants, artists, artisans and entertainers via Shanxi to Shangjing 上京[48] (*Sanchao beimeng huibian* 77.12b–16a, 78.3b–5b; *Jingkang baishi* 6.201, 7.223–224; *Songshi* 23.436, 129.3027; *Jinshi* 28.691, 39.882; and *Nanzheng luhui*, cited in *Jingkang baishi* 4.173–174). Some of those who had successfully escaped the clutches of Jurchen soldiers settled down in the Shangdang area. They drew on their performance skills and first-hand knowledge of court rituals, performances and celebrations, making a living as ritualists, musicians and entertainers—hence the reason traces still remain in Shangdang temple festivals of ritual and theatrical performances from the Song and Jin eras (Yang 1997a). Thus, it would not seem to be far-fetched or fanciful to think of the Shangdang group skit as a surviving remnant of the Song court theatre.

With the grand reunition of Lord Guan and Zhang Fei at Old City, the morning session of the Initial *Sai* came to an end. Minutes later, all participants gathered up behind the ritual leaders and marched in procession from the Divine Arena to the Bixia Temple. Between the morning session and afternoon session, there was a two-hour lunch break. I was invited to have lunch with Du Tonghai in his home. Among his guests was Li Tiansheng, a renowned local scholar on Shangdang temple festival and temple theatre. I had a very fruitful conversation with them at the table.

6.2. The Initial Sai: Afternoon Session

Among the major rituals scheduled to be performed in the afternoon session were 'Receiving the Palanquins' (*jiejia* 接駕), 'Settling the Deities' (*anshen* 安神), 'Offering Three Cups' (*gong sanzhan* 供三盞) and 'Leading the Sheep' (*lingyang* 領羊), all of which were

held in the front courtyard of the Bixia Temple. Also called 'Receiving the Deities' (*jieshen* 接神), the ritual of 'Receiving the Palanquins' started with the Chief Master of Ceremonials reciting the 'Writ of Receiving the Deities' (*Jieshen wen* 接神文). All ritual participants knelt on the floor while he was reciting the text until he finished the last word, with which ended the ritual of 'Receiving the Deities' (Figure 46). He instructed Wei Qianxiu, the Master of Ceremonials, to offer incense on behalf of the ritual community to all invited gods and goddesses (Figure 47) and an ensemble of ten musicians from the Assembly of Eight Sounds to accompany him 'bowing in worship four times and offering burning incense three times' (*sanxian sibai* 三獻四拜).

He then recited the 'Writ of Settling the Deities' (*Anshen wen* 安神文), and after that, he issued an instruction for all the deities to be carried in their sedan chairs, carriages and spirit tablets to their proper places, each according to their rank and status in the pantheon of Jiacun, headed by the Jade Emperor and the Primordial Sovereign (Figures 48 and 49).

Now that the deities were settled, it was time to 'Offer Three Cups'. The first offering was a cup of wine, the second of food and fruit and the third of tea. The ritual of 'Offering Three Cups' was performed by Tray Carriers (*tingzi*) and Canopy-Holders (*weizi*), who were all beautifully dressed women from the age of twenty to sixty as they appeared. They lined up in two lines near the entrance hall under the guidance of Master Bamboo Staff, Song Huaizhi. The Tray Carriers each held a flower in their mouth to show piety for the deities while carrying a tray with cups on it to a long offering table positioned against the wall of the main hall (Figure 50). When they reached the table, they carefully placed the offerings before spirit tablets and filed out back to the entrance hall to fetch another cup of offerings (Figure 51). Each cup was offered twice, six times in total.

Figure 46. Du Tonghai, the Chief Master of Ceremonials, Reads the 'Writ of Receiving the Deities'.

Figure 47. Wei Qianxiu, the Master of Ceremonials, Offers Incense.

Figure 48. Jade Emperor Is Carried into Bixia Temple and Settled in Front of the Incense Pavilion.

Figure 49. Spirit Tablets Are Carried and Settled in the Bixia Temple.

Figure 50. Tray Carriers Hold Flowers in Their Mouths While Carry Offering Trays.

Figure 51. Tray Carriers Put Offerings before Spirit Tablets on the Offering Table.

Next came a sacrificial ritual called 'Leading the Sheep'. After a sheep was led in, Du Tonghai, the Chief Master of Ceremonials, recited the 'Writ of Leading the Sheep' (*Lingyang wen* 领羊文). Three cups of wine were then poured over the sheep to wash it clean by a ritual assistant, who then led the sheep out and handed it over to its owner. In the past,

however, the ritual would involve a sheep being slaughtered on the scene as a sacrifice to the goddess (Du 2016).

Now it was time to entertain the deities with theatrical performance. People moved aside from the Incense Pavilion and gathered in front of the stage over the gateway to watch the Shangdang group skit, *Decapitating Hua Xiong* (*Zhan Hua Xiong* 斬華雄). Also known as *Lord Guan Decapitates Hua Xiong While the Wine Is Still Warm* (*Guan Gong wenjiu zhan Huao Xiong* 關公酒斬華雄), *Zhan Hua Xiong* is another Lord Guan play in the standard repertoire of the Shangdang group skit. In the play, Guan Yu, who has not yet established his reputation as a formidable warrior, fights Hua Xiong, a seemingly invincible general under the warlord Dong Zhuo 董卓 (AD 132–192), and returns from the battlefield with Hua's head before a cup of warm wine cools off. Actors first played on the stage, but when it came to the chase scene, the dramatic show turned into a street performance. To escape Lord Guan's chase, Hua Xiong fled the stage, and Lord Guan intercepted and stopped him in the courtyard, forcing him to rush for the gate and run out of the temple to the main street. The drama ended with Hua Xiong running back to the temple to be caught and beheaded by Lord Guan onstage.

In the *Lijie chuanbu*, *Decapitating Hua Xiong* is listed as a 'group skit for offering cups' (*gongzhan duixi*) alongside another Three-Kingdom play, *Fighting Lü Bu* (*Zhan Lü Bu* 戰呂布), for the interlude performance between the fifth and sixth cup (Han et al. 1987a, p. 87; Du 2011b, p. 257), but to my surprise I found this play presented as a main group skit (*zheng duixi*) immediately after the completion of the ritual of offering cups. I turned to Du Tonghai for an explanation and was told that the adjustments had been made on the advice of Li Tiansheng on the grounds that this play was perfectly suitable for both stage and street performance and that people just enjoyed the thrill of the chase (Du 2016).

Next came the stage performance of *The Hall of the Earth God* (*Tudi tang* 土地堂), a farce (*yuanben*) about sworn brothers gambling, cheating, drinking, quarrelling and fighting before reaching reconciliation at an Earth God Temple (Figure 52). This play is characterised by an exaggerated and ludicrous situation, physical humour, deliberate absurdity, bawdy jokes and pleasantly boisterous horseplay to entertain people and make them laugh, thus distinguishing itself from the main group skit that features historical figures and events as we have seen in Lord Guan plays. *The Hall of the Earth God* is one of the eight *yuanben* plays recorded in the *Lijie chuanbu*. Similar to the Shangdang group skit with its origins traceable to Song dynasty group dance and group skit, Shangdang *yuanben* is rooted in Song *zaju* and Jin *yuanben* (Huang 1987, pp. 146–49; Hu 1988, pp. 6–10). Hardly any texts of Jin *yuanben* have survived except for seven hundred-odd titles recorded by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (fl. 1348) under the 'Catalogue of Court Texts' (*Yuanben minglu* 院本名目) in *Nancun's Notes upon Rest from the Plough* (*Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕, 436–450). Jin *yuanben* had long been thought of as an early form of Chinese theatre that failed to survive beyond the Yuan dynasty until the discovery of the *Lijie chuanbu*. The staging of *The Hall of the Earth God* in Jiacun temple festivals provides valuable evidence for *yuanben* having survived and having continued to be performed into the modern era.

After the theatrical performance, all the male deities, including the Jade Emperor, were carried out of the Bixia gong to their own shrines and temples. This is because Bixia yuanjun is a maiden goddess, so no male deities or spirits from other temples or shrines are allowed to stay overnight in her temple. With the return of the gods to their home temples or shrines, the afternoon session of the initial *sai* came to an end.

Figure 52. A Scene from *The Hall of the Earth God*.

6.3. The Main Sai

The main *sai*, which usually lasts the whole day in a small-*sai* year, was reduced to a half-day event scheduled for the morning of the fourth day of the fourth month (10 May), with the purpose of bringing down the cost and achieving maximum concentration (Du 2016).

The main *sai* began very early in the morning with a ritual called 'Golden Rooster Announces the Dawn' (*Jinji baoxiao* 金雞報曉). At daybreak, a massive crowd of people assembled in the temple to listen to the Chief Master of Ceremonials reciting 'the Writ of Announcing the Dawn' (*Baoxiao wen* 報曉文), 'the Writ of Waking Up' (*Cuiqin wen* 催寢文), 'the Writ of Washing Up' (*Guanshu wen* 盥漱文) and 'the Writ of Offering Incense'. While he was reciting the writs outside in front of the Incense Pavilion, it was understood that Bixia yuanjun was washing up and dressing in her sleeping hall with the assistance of her maidservants (Figure 53).

The goddess was then carried out to receive offerings of cups, together with the Jade Emperor, who had already been carried over from his own temple. Following the ritual of offering cups, the Chief Community Head invited the other ritual leaders to walk up and kneel down before the Jade Emperor. All people present stood in awe listening to him reciting 'the Writ of Obeying Orders' (*Tingming wen* 聽命文).

Next came 'Offering Sacrifices to the Sun' (*ji taiyang* 祭太陽) and 'Offering Sacrifices to the Moon (*ji taiyin* 祭太陰), which started with the solemn performance by the Entertainers of 'Bells and Drums Sound Simultaneously' (*Zhonggu qiming* 鐘鼓齊鳴). To the bell and drum music, the Chief Community Head turned to the east and knelt down together with the other leaders of the *sai* festival, reciting loudly 'the Eulogy to the Sun' (*Song taiyang* 頌太陽). After reciting the text, he took a cup of wine from a Wine Master, lifted it up and poured the wine in the direction of east as an offering to the sun, accompanied by *dizi* 笛子 flute music. This was done three times altogether. Then, he turned around to the west,

facing the direction where the moon rises, reciting 'the Eulogy to the Moon' (*Song taiyin* 頌太陰) and offering three cups of wine to the moon as he had done to the sun.

Embedded between the first and second cup was the performance of a group skit called *Eight Immortals Celebrates the Birthday* (*Baxian qingshou* 八仙慶壽), which began with the Leader of Entertainers reciting 'the Writ of Inviting the Star of Longevity' (*Qingshou wen* 請壽文) and ended with him reciting 'the Writ of Seeing off the Star of Longevity' (*Songshou wen* 送壽文). This was a short and simple masked performance in which the Eight Immortals were lined up to offer rhyming verse birthday wishes to the Star of Longevity (Figure 54).

Figure 53. Bixia Yuanjun Flanked by Maidservants in Sleeping Hall.

The offering of the second cup was followed by another group skit called *Dancing Jianzhai* (*Tiao Jianzhai* 跳監齋). This muted masked performance featured Jianzhai 監齋 (Warden of Vegetarian Food), the god of the kitchen in Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries. The actor who played Jianzhai wore a mask with three heads and a costume with six arms. Accompanied by a group of masked minor deities, Jianzhai jumped and danced while holding a melee weapon in each hand. His exaggerated jumping dance and funny-looking costume and makeup aroused great interest from ritual participants and spectators (Figure 55).

Figure 54. A Scene from *Eight Immortals Celebrate the Birthday*.

Figure 55. A Scene from *Dancing Jianzhai*.

Presented after the third cup was *A Monkey Extracted from Its Shell* (*Yuanhou tuoke* 猿猴脱壳), which is listed in the 1574 ritual manual as a group skit under the title of *Yuanhou tuojia* 猿猴脱甲[49], to be enacted after the fifth cup in the mansion of 'Rooftop Represented by the Lunar Swallow' (Wei yueyan 危月燕) (Du 2011b, p. 256). However, in the *Jisi wenfan*, a ritual text copied by hand during the reign period of Daoguang 道光 (1820–1850), this play is designated for performance after the fifth cup in the mansion of 'Horn Represented by the Wood Dragon' (Han et al. 1991a, p. 35).[50] This was a farcical mime featuring one actor performing silently through miming a monkey grooming, walking, running, drinking, eating, climbing, turning, stretching, bending, swinging and jumping until tiring himself out and lying down on a fine piece of brown felt. Then came along two carriers of food plates (*tingzi*), who poured through a mesh sieve a bag of flour on the head, body and limbs of the actor who impersonated the monkey before carrying him away, thus leaving the contours of a monkey on the felt. They then picked up the felt carefully from the ground and hung it beside the Incense Pavilion. In Shangdang, this play is frequently performed as a *nuo*-exorcism rite during a funeral service, and the felt bearing the shape of the monkey will be hung in a mourning hall as a talisman or fetish to ward off evil spirits (Du 2016).

6.4. The Final Sai

The final *sai* started after a lunch break with 'Offering Three Cups', which followed the same procedure and pattern as performed in the initial *sai*, with group skits presented in between. Next came a *nuo*-exorcism ritual called 'Rinsing Off Plagues' (*chongwen* 冲瘟). This ritual was fairly simple in form but quite engaging. In the beginning, a miniature 'plague boat' (*wenchuan* 瘟船) made of paper was brought in and placed on firewood in front of the Incense Pavilion. Then, the Chief Master of Ceremonials recited 'the Writ of Exorcising Evil Spirits' (*Quxie wen* 驅邪文). While he was reciting the text, a ritual attendant set fire to the paper boat under the watchful eye of the Chief Master of Ceremonials. After that, a boy and a girl, about five or six years old, were brought in by their respective fathers. With their child held firmly on the chest, they jumped over the flaming boat in the presence of a large crowd of spectators, who reacted with a hearty round of applause. The ritual of 'Rinsing Off Plagues' is an ancient form of *nuo* exorcism performed during the temple festival to cleanse the community of evil spirits and epidemic diseases, and this is also the case with *Dancing Jianzhai* and *A Monkey Extracted from Its Shell*, both of which are key pieces in the repertoire of local Nuo theatre (*nuoxi* 儺戲) (Du 2016).

The final *sai* then proceeded to 'Beating the Drum of the Supreme Peace' (*da taipinggu* 打太平鼓), which was presented in front of the Incense Pavilion by a troupe of drummers from the Assembly of Eight Sounds to pray for peace and prosperity. Following the drum music was 'Offering Sacrifices to the Wind' (*jifeng* 祭風), which was performed in each of the four corners of the village, starting clockwise from the eastern corner. The ritual involved erecting an altar (Figure 56), offering incense, kowtowing and reciting sacrificial texts (*jiwen* 祭文) (Figure 57).

Among the various ritual, musical and theatrical performances for the final *sai*, the most important is 'Seeing Off the Deities According to Their Wishes' (*Songshen dacai* 送神打彩).[51] Similar to 'Inviting the Deities' and 'Welcoming the Deities', 'Seeing Off the Deities' is a grand procession, in which the gods and goddesses are carried in their sedan chairs, divine carriages or spirit tablets back to their own temples or shrines. Shortly after returning from offering sacrifices to the North Wind, the Chief Master of Ceremonials took a bunch of burning incense sticks from an Incense Master, inserted it in the burner in front of the Incense Pavilion, knelt down and kowtowed three times together with the three other ritual leaders. He then rose to his feet to chant the 'Writ of Seeing Off the Deities' (*Songshen wen* 送神文), which contained a long list of the invited deities and of the divine blessings the local community had received from them (Figure 58). Following the chanting of the ritual text was 'Offering Three Cups'. A village elder was invited to say prayers of grateful thanks to the goddess and her invited deities (Figure 59).

Figure 56. An Altar Is Set Up for the Ritual of Offering Sacrifices to Wind.

Wang Jinzhi then led all Entertainers from the Assembly of Eight Sounds to perform a music and dance to honour the gods and goddess, and after that, they walked up one by one to make a deep obeisance in thanksgiving for their divine grace. With the (sedan chairs, divine carriages and spirit tablets of) invited deities being carried back to their home shrines and temples, the final *sai* came to an end.

Figure 57. Offering Sacrifices to Wind.

Figure 58. The Chief Master of Ceremonials Chants the 'Writ of Seeing Off Deities'.

Figure 59. Village Elder Kneels Down to Kowtow.

7. Coda to the *Sai:* A Special Concert

The Double-Fourth Temple Festival continued to be celebrated on the morning of the third day (11 May) with a special concert of traditional folk and ritual music prevalent in the Shangdang region for centuries. This was an open-air concert held in the courtyard before

the main hall of the Bixia Temple. Starting at 8:30 a.m. with the lighting of firecrackers, the concert was presented as a stand-alone instrumental performance open to all (Figure 60).

Figure 60. The Concert Opens with Firecrackers.

The musicians invited to give the concert remained from the Assembly of Eight Sounds, headed by Wang Jinzhi from Xiliu village. This small-scale concert consisted of two sessions devoted, respectively, to tune-title or named-song (*qupai* 曲牌) music and wind-instrument (*chuizou* 吹奏) music. The musical instruments come in two main categories, woodwind instruments and percussion instruments, the former including the suona, the *sheng* 笙 pipe, the *bili* 篳篥 pipe, the *dizi* flute and the *bangzi* 梆子 clapper, and the latter the drum, the *luo* 鑼 gong and the *bo* 鈸 cymbal (Figure 61). Predominant among the instruments is the suona, which is widely used in a variety of rituals and festivals in northern China (Jones 2007).

The first session presented a variety of music from thirteen tune titles or melodic models, i.e., 'A Four-Clause Sentence' (*Siju ju* 四句句), 'Happy Dongdong' (*Xi dongdong* 喜咚咚), 'The Moon Over the Stern of a Boat on the Gu River' (*Gushao yue* 沽梢月), 'Old Sichuan Tune' (*Lao Chuandiao* 老川調), 'Worshipping the Drum' (*Baigu* 拜鼓), 'An Evergreen Goblet' (*Changqing bei* 長青杯), 'A Five-Flower Cup' (*Wuhua zhan* 五花盞), 'A Grand View of Lanterns' (*Daguan deng* 大觀燈), 'Joy for All Under Heaven' (*Putian le* 普天樂), 'Ten Thousand Years of Happiness' (*Wannian huan* 萬年歡), 'Enjoy Lotus Flowers' (*Shang lianhua* 賞蓮花), 'Five Blessings in Their Glory' (*Wufu rong* 五福榮) and 'A Tune on Flowers in Bloom' (*Kaihua diao* 開花調), which are at the core of the repertoire of the Assembly of Eight Sounds in the Shangdang region (Wang 2016a). They each consist of ten or more tunes or melodies. Some of these tune titles, such as *Wannian huan* and *Putian le*, have their origins in Tang and Song court music and Yuan and Ming operatic music, and some, such as *Xi dongdong* and *Kaihua diao*, in local folk music and mountain songs (*shange* 山歌). Most of them have been incorporated into the music of the two popular forms of Shangdang theatre, Shangdang Clapper Opera (*Shangdang bangzi*) and Shangdang Lotus Opera (*Shangdang laozi* 上黨落子) (Wang 2016a).

Figure 61. Eight Musicians from the Assembly of Eight Sounds.

The concert also provided a good opportunity for the musicians to demonstrate their technical skills in playing woodwind instruments. Presented in the second session were two pieces of operatic music from Shangdang Clapper Opera, *The Crow Mountain* (*Wuya shan* 烏鴉山) and *A Great Birthday Celebration* (*Da baishou* 大拜壽), the former belonging to the style of *chui* 吹 and the latter to *erhuang* 二 in the musical system of Shangdang Clapper Opera. They both enjoy great popularity with locals, who have no difficulty seeing in their mind's eye scene change and stage performance through the changes in melody, tone, pitch, rhythm and timbre of the music (Wang 2016a). This type of musical performance is popularly known as *chuixi* 吹戲because the woodwind instruments represented by the suona, when blown (*chui* 吹), produce sound images of theatrical performance (*xi* 戲) (Wang 2016a).

The concert ran from 8:30 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. at noon, with a 30-minute break between the first and second sessions. The concert attracted a great many people in the first place, and some of them came from neighbouring villages and towns. Having performed for three hours, the musicians all looked tired, but their faces lightened up instantly at a great roar of applause breaking out from the audience. The concert was over with the melody still lingering on the final note. A great wave of relief washed them over. I went up to Wang Jinzhi, asking whether I could have a picture with his troupe. 'Yes, of course, but please be quick. You know, we haven't had our lunch yet, and we have to get to Tunliu this afternoon to perform at a wedding ceremony this evening' (Wang 2016a). I noticed a small, weary, rueful smile crossing his face.

I gave a grateful bow to him. After the picture was taken, I saw him and his troupe off at the Divine Pool outside the Bixia Temple. I quickly engaged him in a conversation about Shangdang *yuehu* and his troupe. He spoke with a strong local accent about ten or more minutes, answering my questions, until a minibus came to pick them up. I waved goodbye to him, and then I walked back to the Bixia Temple only to find some people beginning to dismantle the structure of the Incense Pavilion and take down the paper and flower decorations from it. At the same time, I saw a female spirit medium (*shenpo* 神婆) performing séance in the courtyard (Figure 62) and some old village women queuing up to

offer incense to the goddess in the sleeping hall with a *shenpo* singing and chanting inside (Figure 63).

Figure 62. Female Medium Spirit Performs Séance in the Courtyard.

Figure 63. Female Medium Spirit Chants in Sleeping Hall.

Now I realised that the Double-Fourth Temple Festival had eventually reached its end. After two and a half days of heightened celebrations, life was returning to normal in Jiacun, so was the functioning of the Bixia Temple.

8. Conclusions

This paper on Jiacun temples and temple festivals provides an eyewitness account of the *sai* ritual and *xi* performance presented in May 2016 during the Double-Fourth Temple Festival, covering a whole series of heightened activities of the 'number one folk *shehuo* in North China'—the standard tripartite *saishe* programme of welcoming, entertaining and seeing off deities in general and the dramatic shows on stage and street, grand processions of divine images and carriages, and sacrificial offerings of food, fruit and wine in every particular. Moreover, this paper also conducts a careful enquiry into the origins of *saishe* and the historical links of ritual and theatrical performance in Shangdang *saishe* with Song-Jin court ritual and variety show and an extensive survey of temples and shrines that house gods and goddesses in the Jiacun pantheon—together with a general introduction to *saishe* organisers and ritual specialists such as the Chief Community Head, Chief Master of Ceremonials, Masters of Ceremonials, Leader of Entertainers, Entertainers, Incense Elders, Ritual Chefs and Mapi, the spiritual medium, and their respective functions and responsibilities in the temple festival.

All this shows that Jiacun *sheshuo* is not simply a country funfair with loads of sideshows and roadside stalls but a deep-rooted, highly structured, sophisticated religious festival. The annual celebration in honour of the birthday of Bixia yuanjun, the principal deity of the Double-Fourth Temple Festival, which has come to represent the heart and soul of the social and spiritual life of Jiacun, presents to us a symbolic world of local religions at work in contemporary China—a world that is created through a dazzling array of deities and demigods and a series of seemingly seamlessly connected ritual and theatrical performances, demonstrating an elaborate structure and an exceptionally high level of sophistication that are on a par with and no less favourable a comparison to state and court rituals recorded in dynastic histories.

Widely known as the oldest surviving village festival in Shangdang, Jiacun *shehuo* retains more than any other village festival in southeastern Shanxi the form and function of court and country ritual and theatrical performances from the Song-Ming era that would have otherwise sunk into oblivion but for the rediscovery in the 1980s of the Ming-Qing liturgical texts. With an intriguing mixture of ritual performance and musical/theatrical entertainment, Jiacun village festival features a wide variety of traditional Chinese performing arts—from folk and ritual dance to dance drama, from mime to music, from farce skit to comedy sketch, from street performance to stage performance and from dramatic ritual to ritual drama to full-length historical drama. The festival allows us an opportunity to see how religious ritual is performed in association with music, dance and drama and how ritual, music, dance and drama interact and integrate with each other into a form of total theatre that involves masking; face painting; costuming; drumming; singing; speaking; chanting; dancing; miming; impersonating animals, immortals and human characters; and astounding displays of martial arts and acrobatics, for which xiqu is best known. The festival also allows us an opportunity to watch some early forms of Chinese theatre, such as *duixi*, *zaju* and *yuanben*, which had long been considered extinct, yet are found well preserved in the repertoire of Jiacun temple theatre.

The integration of various elements and various forms of Chinese theatre as we have seen in the festival are significant to research on Chinese theatre history, and particularly to the present study, which comes as part of the author's continuing efforts to explore the origins of Chinese theatre and examine the dynamic, interactive relationships between temple and theatre and between religious ritual and theatrical performance (e.g., Zhao 2019, 2020, 2022a, 2002b). Jiacun temple festival adds fresh evidence for the ritual origin of Chinese theatre, showcasing the pivotal role played by temple festival and temple theatre

in the historical development of Chinese theatre from ritual to ritual drama and from ritual drama to drama.

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Notes

1 The earliest recorded reference to the biannual community ritual appears in 'Clearing Away the Grass' (*Zaishan* 載芟) and 'Good Ploughshares' (*Liangsi* 良耜) in the section of 'Eulogies of Zhou' (*Zhousong* 周頌) of the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經). These two poems are interpreted by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) as referring, respectively, to 'spring prayer' (*chunqi*) and 'autumn thanksgiving' (*qiubao*) in his 'Introductory Note on "the Eulogies of Zhou" ' (*Zhousong pu* 周頌譜). For this note, see *Maoshi* (19.314).

2 The Mound of the Emperor of Locusts is a metonym for the Temple of the Locust Emperor (Huanghuang miao 蝗皇廟), which was built on a mound (*gang* 崗) northeast of Xiaotiangong 小天貢, a village about three kilometres south of Jiacun. The Eight Big Village Worship Associations was an alliance formed in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) of village worship associations of Jiacun and eleven other villages including Xiaotiangong to worship Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 628–649), who was deified and widely worshipped as a god of locusts in northern China. Tradition has it that the Emperor swallowed locusts, thus bringing to an end a locust plague that had wreaked havoc on crops in the capital area in 628 or the second year of Zhenguan 貞觀 (627–649), as recorded in the *Essentials of Government during the Reign Period of Zhenguan* (*Zhenguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要 8.2a).

3 Records of temple festivals held in Shangdang in the Song-Jin era are mostly found in epitaphs on tombstones and inscriptions on temple stone stelae. See, for example, 'Epitaph Inscribed on the Tombstone for Shi Shaozhong' (*Shi Shaozhong beiwen* 史少中碑文), written by Zhao Bingwen 趙秉文 (1159–1232), a famous poet, scholar and court official of the Jin dynasty (*Fushui ji* 12. 3b–4a); see also Wang (2016b, pp. 39–67, esp. 45–46) for a highly informative discussion of the inscriptions on temple stone stelae dating from the Northern Song dynasty of the construction of theatre stages (*wulou* 舞樓, lit. 'dance tower') for the performance of musical dance (*yuewu* 樂舞) and variety show (*zaxi* 雜戲) during village temple festivals.

4 The 1997 re-enactment of the temple festival was staged and videoed as arranged by Changzhi City Bureau of Cultural Affairs for research and preservation purposes (Li 1997, cited in Wang and Wang 2007, p. 55). This is also the case with the 2006 re-enactment of the temple festival, which was held in association with the 'International Symposium on the Culture of Village Festivals and Hereditary Outcast Actor-Musicians', 11–15 August 2006. A total of sixty-three papers are included in the proceedings of the symposium (Ma and Liu 2006), but surprisingly, none of them are concerned with Jiacun temple festivals. For a detailed account of the two 'large-scale re-enactments of ancient temple festivals', see Du (2011a, pp. 112–166, 370–449).

5 The word 羌 in 羌城 is locally pronounced as *kang* rather than *qiang* as is normally pronounced.

6 Yuhuang 玉皇 or Yudi玉帝, abbreviated from the Great Jade Emperor (Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝), is widely worshipped as the ruler of Heaven and the Heavenly Court in Chinese popular religion and also as a supreme deity in Daoism.

7 All photos included in this paper were taken by the author.

8 The Palace of the Three Primordials is a temple dedicated to the Three Officers (*sanguan* 三官) in the Daoist pantheon—namely, the Officer of Heaven (Tianguan 天官), the Officer of Earth (Diguan 地官) and the Officer of Water (Shuiguan 水官).

9 The Three Great Bodhisattvas (*sandashi* 三大士) refer to Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin pusa 觀音菩薩), Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Puxian pusa 普賢菩薩) and Bodhisattva Manjushri (Wenshu pusa 文殊菩薩), respectively.

10 Here, Baiyi 白衣 is an acronym for Baiyi Guanyin 白衣觀音or White-Robed Guanyin, one of many manifestations of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, which is closely associated with Child-Giving Guanyin (Songzi Guanyin 送子觀音) in Chinese Buddhism.

11 The Hall of the Cui Family, also known as the Shrine of Lord Cui (Cui fujun miao 崔府君廟), is not only a place for ancestor worship but also a Buddhist shrine called 'Ancient Hall of the Buddha' (Gu fotang 古佛堂), as recorded in the 'Stele Inscription of the Shrine of the Cui Family' (*Cuixing jiamiao beiji* 崔姓家廟碑記) (Du 2011b, p. 8). It must be pointed that Cui fujun, the

ancestor of the Cui family in Jiacun, should not be confused with Cui Jue 崔玨, an early Tang dynasty official who was awarded the posthumous title of Cui fujun or Lord Cui after death and worshipped as a City God (Chenghuang 城隍) or an Infernal Judge (Panguan 判官) in Daoism and Chinese folk religion. For a hagiographical account of Cui Jue, see *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* (2.26b–27a).

12 The Bald-headed Grandma is the divine name (*shenhao* 神號) conferred on Baoshihua 寶石花, locally called Old Grandma Zhang (Zhangshi laonainai 張氏老奶奶, b. 1872), a virtuous woman who was deified after death in 1944 and worshipped as a patron god of women in Jiacun (Du 2016).

13 These small shrines are dedicated to the General of the Five Ways (Wudao jiangjun 五道將軍), who is described in Chinese ghostlore as a subdeity in the retinue of King Yama and the Lord of Mount Tai (Taishan fujun 泰山府君). For anecdotal and legendary accounts of the General of the Five Ways in pre-Tang records of the strange and supernatural (*zhiguai* 志怪), see *Extensive Records of the Era of Supreme Peace* (*Taiping guangji* 103.7b–8a, 103.10a–11a; 109.9b–11a; 297.5a–9b; 302.1a–5a; 304.2b; 329.3b–5b).

14 My comment on their preservation status is based on my fieldwork in Jiacun in May 2016.

15 In a fine-grained analysis of 'The Eight Immortals between Daoism and Popular Religion', Clart (2009, p. 86) correctly points out that the presence of the Eight Immortals as a group is clearly stronger in popular culture than in a Daoist context.

16 Renamed from Xuanwu in the fifth year (1012) of Dazhong xiangfu 大中祥符of the Song dynasty in order to avoid the imperial taboo on the word *xuan* 玄 (*Yunlu manchao* 9.243; *Songshi* 85.02097, 104.02541 and 146.03430), Zhenwu emerged as an anthropomorphic deity from a pre-Qin (221–206 BC) cult of the stellar God of North emblematised by a tortoise entwined with a snake and reached the peak of popularity in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) when the warrior deity became one of the most widely worshipped gods in Daoism and Chinese popular religion as well (Chao 2011).

17 Zhang Ban and Lu Ban are revered, respectively, by bamboo carpenters and wood carpenters as their respective patron gods.

18 The main entrance gate of a Buddhist/Daoist temple or monastery is conventionally referred to as *shamen*, which means literally 'mountain gate'.

19 The Three Sovereigns in Daoist mythology are the Sovereign of Heaven (Tianhuang 天皇), the Sovereign of Earth (Dihuang 地皇) and the Sovereign of Humankind (Renhuang 人皇) (*Baopuzi* 4.37b, 4.42b–43a; *Wushang biyao* DZ1138: 25.3a–7b), who rule over vital force (*qi* 氣), spirit (*shen* 神) and life (*sheng* 生), respectively (*Wushang biyao* DZ1138: 6.5b, cited in Steavu 2019, pp. 8–9).

20 Liuding 六丁 are a grouping of six female spirits of the *ding* stem (*dinggan* 丁干) in the system of heavenly stems and earthly branches (*tiangan dizhi* 天干地支), which is the yin counterpart of Liujia 六甲, a grouping of six male spirts of the yang *jia*-stem. The six *ding* days with which Liuding are associated are *dingmao* 丁卯, *dingsi* 丁巳, *dingwei* 丁未, *dingyou* 丁酉, *dinghai* 丁亥 and *dingchou* 丁丑, on which they descend from Heaven in response to prayers and summons from Daoist priests. While collectively referred to as the Divine General of the Six Yin (Liuyin shenjiang 六陰神將), the Jade Maiden of the Six Ding (Liuding yunü 六丁玉女) or the Envoy of the Six Ding (Liuding shizhe 六丁使者), they each have a name of their own named after the day of their descending to the world, hence the Jade Maiden of Dingmao 丁卯玉女, the Jade Maiden of Dingsi 丁巳玉女, the Jade Maiden of Dingwei 丁未玉女, the Jade Maiden of Dingyou 丁酉玉女, the Jade Maiden of Dinghai 丁亥玉女 and the Jade Maiden of Dingchou 丁丑玉女. For this note, see *Baopuzi* (3.34b–41b, 4.6a–7a), *Dongshen badi miaojing jing* (DZ640: 3b, 18a, 22a, 32a), *Shangqing lingbao dafa* (DZ1221: 2.17b–19a), *Wushang biyao* (DZ1138: 25.5a) and *Qimen dunjia yuanji* (1.15–17).

21 Sanzong refers to Hou Yi 后羿, a god of archery who is described in the second-century philosophical work *Huainanzi* (18.118) as a hero who shot down nine suns on Mount Sanzong. The mountain lies about 25 kilometres northwest of the urban centre of present-day Tunliu, a county of Changzhi, which accounts for the sheer popularity of the Sanzong cult in the Shangdang region. For a brief discussion of folk beliefs in Sanzong and associated temple theatres in Shangdang, see Wang (2016b, pp. 278–88). See also Johnson (2009, pp. 235–301) for a detailed description of Sanzong temple festivals in Shangdang.

22 The shrine features a statue of the Lady of Eyesight (Yanguan niangniang 眼光娘娘). A popular goddess worshipped widely in northern China, the Lady of Eyesight is often portrayed as an acolyte or a manifestation of the Primordial Sovereign of the Morning Clouds, alongside the Lady Who Brings Children (Songzi niangniang 送子娘娘) in Daoist mythology (Peng 2006, p. 125).

23 The Horse King, also known as the Horse Marshal (Ma yuanshuai 馬元帥), the Numinous Horse Officer (Ma lingguan 馬靈官) or the Horse King Lord (Mawang ye 馬王爺), was one of the most widely worshipped deities in late imperial northern China. The god is frequently portrayed as being three-eyed in the iconography of Daoism and popular religion. For an insightful study of his cult in rural North China, see Shahar (2019).

24 See Note 20 above.

25 The shrine is dedicated to the King of Manifested Grace (Zhaoze wang 昭澤王), a noble title conferred by the Song court on a local deity surnamed Jiao 焦. Born in Changle 長樂 village, Wuxiang 武鄉 county of Shangdang Commandery in the ninth year (866) of Xiantong 咸通of the Tang dynasty (618–907), Jiao became an accomplished Daoist priest with supernatural power to summon wind and rain and suppress demons and devils and was deified and worshipped by locals as a dragon king after death. The deity was invested as Spirit Marquis (Linghou 靈侯) during the Tang dynasty and then as the Duke of Manifested Sagacity (Xiansheng gong 顯聖公) during the Five Dynasties (907–960), as recorded in the inscription—a rubbing of which was witnessed by the author of this paper in 2016—on a stone stele erected in the eighth year (1869) of Tongzhi 同治 during the Qing dynasty

(1644–1911) in the Travelling Palace on the Dragon Cave Mountain (Longdongshan xinggong 龍洞山行宮), a grotto shrine in Hanbei 韓北 township, Wuxiang county, where it is popularly known as the Cave of Dragon Jiao (Jiaolong dong 焦龍洞).

[26] The word *zisun* 子孫 should not be understood literally as 'sons and grandsons' here. Rather, it is used to refer to small, private, hereditary (Daoist) monasteries, temples or shrines that have passed on to sons and grandsons as opposed to big, public monasteries, temples or shrines known as *conglin* 叢林 (lit. 'forests') or *shifang conglin* 十方叢林 (lit. 'forests of the ten directions').

[27] Also called the Five Envoys of Epidemics (Wuwen shizhe 五瘟使者), they are Zhang Boyuan張元伯, the spring plague spirit; Liu Yuanda 劉元達, the summer plague spirit; Zhao Gongming 趙公明, the autumn plague spirit; Zhong Shigui 鍾士貴, the winter plague spirit; and Shi Wenye 史文業, the mid-year plague spirit and also the chief deity of the Five Plague Spirits. For this note, see *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* (4.42a).

[28] The earliest performance of the *fengshan* rites recorded with a definite date were conducted by Ying Zheng 嬴政, the First Emperor of Qin (r. 247–210 BC) in 219 BC or the third year after he completed the conquest of all Chinese lands and founded the first unified empire of China. This record appears in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 28. 1361–1365) by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (b. 149 BC), who also makes a mention of ancient (legendary) sage kings and rulers of the Shang (c. 1600–1046 BC) and Zhou (1045–256 BC) dynasties performing the rituals, although he does not provide any further detail except give Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BC), an eminent stateman of Qi 齊, as the source of information. On the state ceremonies of *feng* and *shan* in early China, see Chavannes (1910, pp. 158–353) and Lewis (1998).

[29] The other four sacred mountains are: Mount Heng (Hengshan 衡山), or the Southern Peak in Hunan; Mount Hua (Huashan 華山), or the Western Peak in Shaanxi; Mount Heng (Hengshan 恆山), or the Northern Peak in Shanxi: and Mount Song (Songshan 嵩山), or the Central Peak in Henan. On the five sacred mountains worshipped in the Daoist tradition and the development of their cult in late imperial China, see Reiter (2019) and Landt (1994).

[30] On the Ten Kings of Hell in medieval Chinese Buddhism, see Teiser (1994). See also Sørensen (2017) for an informed description of the netherworld in medieval Daoist and Buddhist imagination.

[31] In Chinese popular religion and literature, the Child-Giving Lady (Songzi niangniang 送子娘娘) refers to a grouping of three immortal sisters—namely, the Lady of the Cloud Firmament (Yunxiao niangniang 雲霄娘娘), the Lady of Emerald Firmament (Bixiao niangniang 碧霄娘娘) and the Lady of the Jade Firmament (Qiongxiao 瓊霄娘娘). In a sixteenth-century vernacular novel titled *The Investiture of Gods* (*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義), for example, they are described as disciples of an accomplished warrior goddess called the Tortoise Spirt and Holy Mother (Guiling shengmu 龜靈聖母), who are invested by the Jade Emperor as 'the Lady of Childbirth' (Zhusheng niangniang 注生娘娘) in charge of human baby delivery and nursery after ascending to immortality.

[32] The Daoist scriptures referred to throughout this study are all taken from the 1923–1926 Baiyunguan 白雲觀 version of the *Zhengtong daozang* 正統道藏 (Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign Period), reprinted in 1977 by the Taibei-based Yiwen yinshuguan. Here, DZ stands for the *Zhengtong daozang*; the number following DZ is the sequential number of the text in the Schipper (1975) index to *Zhengtong daozang*; the first number after the colon is the *juan* number of the cited text; the number after the period is the page number in that *juan*, followed by 'a' and 'b' that refers to the recto and verso sides of the page, respectively.

[33] This precious scripture is dedicated to Jiutian yingyuan leisheng puhua tianzun 九天應元雷聲普化天尊, the most revered God of Thunder (Leishen 雷神) in the pantheon of the Divine-Firmament (Shenxiao 神霄) and Pure-Tenuity (Qingwei 清微) schools of Daoism.

[34] For a brief introduction to 'The Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions of China', see Kelley (1991).

[35] Meng Yuanlao (fl. 1100–1150) offers a fairly detailed description of the ritual of offering cups performed in imperial banqueting in the Song dynasty in his *Dream of Splendour of the Eastern Capital* (*Dongjing menghua lu* 9.831–835). For an annotated English translation of Meng's record, see Idema and West (1982, pp. 48–56).

[36] In the *Formulary of the Correct Sounds of Supreme Harmony* (*Taihe zhengyin pu* 1.90), the early Ming prince Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378–1448), a theatre enthusiast and a playwright himself, interprets *yuan* as 'guild' (*hangyuan* 行院) and *yuanben* as abbreviated from the longer phrase *hangyuan zhi ben* 行院之本, meaning 'scripts from the guild [of actors]', which is further interpreted by Wang [1915] (Wang [1915] 2007, p. 56) and Hu (1988, pp. 4–5; 2008, pp. 11–13) as texts from the guild of courtesans, entertainers, prostitutes, minstrels and beggars who made a living in entertainment quarters (*wasi* 瓦肆) in Song and Jin capital cities.

[37] Attached to the 1574 Jiacun ritual text is a list of characters and spectacles (*juese paichang dan* 角色排) (Du 2011b, pp. 275–83: Han et al. 1987a, pp. 106–17). Included in it are twenty-five music and dance dramas, which are labelled as '*ya duixi*' in the modern punctuated edition of the text by Han et al. (1987a, p. 106), who note that Cao Zhanbiao, from whom the text was collected, refers to these pieces as 'muted performance in processions' (*yaba dui* 啞巴隊, lit. 'muted group').

[38] For a well-documented study of Mabi in folk beliefs and practices, particularly in rural North China, see Yao (2015). See also Zhang and Pu (1993, pp. 220–22) and Johnson (2009, pp. 51–53) for their descriptions of the liturgical role and performance of Mabi in Shanxi temple festivals.

[39] Note the pun in the saying on the polysemous word *sai* 賽, which may mean 'competition' and 'offering sacrifices in gratitude to deities' as well.

[40] The Chinese word *wangba* is used here to refer to *yuehu*, a hereditary caste of actors and musicians who lived on playing ritual music, dance and drama in ceremonies and festivals. For book-length studies of *yuehu* in Shanxi, see Xiang (2001) and Qiao et al. (2002).

[41] For a detailed description of the flowery display of offerings in Shangdang *sai* festivals, see Zhang (1993, pp. 239–41, cited in Johnson 1994, pp. 683–94).

[42] All the writs (*wen* 文) referred to in this study are from the *Collection of Prayer Textgs* (*Jiwenbu* 祭文簿) compiled over a period from the late Qing to the early Republican era and included in the *Huanghuanggang* (Du 2011b, pp. 425–498).

[43] The divine carriage is a wooden frame holding the clay statue of a dragon king attired in full dress regalia and carried by a man on shoulders.

[44] Here, I follow Overmyer (2009, p. 97) in translating *gushi* as 'tableau', which is 'a scene from an opera represented on a small tray that is usually carried on frames fitted to the backs of men in a ritual procession'.

[45] *Qupo* is an ancient form of musical entertainment. Its name is derived from the grand melody (*daqu* 大曲) prevalent during the Tang and Song dynasties. The third part of *daqu* is called *po* 破, which is sung and danced in accelerating tempo to music. For a brief discussion of the relationship between *daqu* and *qupo* and their performance in the Song dynasty, see Yang (1997b, pp. 146–52).

[46] For an in-depth study of the religious and cultural history of the Guan Yu cult, see ter ter Haar (2017).

[47] This court music officer, who was affiliated with the Section of Adjutants (*canjun se* 參軍色) of the Imperial Bureau of Court Entertainment (*Jiaofang si* 教坊司) of the Song dynasty, should not be confused with the role type (*jiaose* 腳色) of Adjutant (*canjun*) in Tang dynasty Adjutant plays (*canjun xi* 參軍戲). See Dolby (1988, pp. 13–15) for a brief discussion of the role type of *canjun* in Tang Adjutant plays.

[48] Shangjing was located in modern Acheng 阿城, now a district of Harbin 哈爾濱, the capital of Heilongjiang province in Northeast China.

[49] The Chinese words *ke* 殼 and *jia* 甲, both meaning 'shell', are synonymous and interchangeable with each other.

[50] For a discussion of the historical value of this ritual text, see Han et al. (1991b).

[51] The Chinese word *dacai* 打彩 is commonly used to refer to audiences throwing (*da* 打) coins or other valuable things (*cai* 彩 or *caitou* 彩) to the stage as a reward or encouragement to an actor for their excellent performance, but here, this word is used to mean 'as the god wishes' (*rushen suoyuan* 如神所愿), according to the Chief Community Head (Du 2016).

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