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VIRTUES OF THE VERNACULAR:
MORAL RECONSTRUCTION IN LATE QING JIANGNAN
AND THE REVITALIZATION OF BAOJUAN

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BY
KATHERINE LAURA BOS ALEXANDER

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation is a study of popular religious literature and culture in Jiangnan during and after the Taiping War, explored through researching the contents and contexts of four *baojuan*. This period of *baojuan* florescence, at the tail end of the genre's 700-year-long history, has received little concerted scholarly attention until now. As such, the dynamics that powered this renewed interest in their proliferation and composition at this tumultuous period of Chinese history had yet to be described or related to the wider context of late Qing culture.

However, in this study, by connecting these four *baojuan* with their religious roots and cultural branches, I reveal rich literary and social complexities underlying the simplistic surfaces of these vernacular morality texts. Many caught up in the turmoil of 1850s and 1860s Jiangnan believed the destruction to be heaven-sent judgment for society's ills. *Baojuan*, because of their simple language, were immediately graspable by functionally literate readers and illiterate listeners alike. Social reformers of the late Qing like prominent philanthropist Yu Zhi (1809-1874) realized their value in reaching out to segments of society that traditional means of moral education had so far failed to influence. The perceived high stakes of moral reform – averting future disasters and shoring up the Qing against collapse – made for a fertile environment in which vernacular morality literature like *baojuan* proliferated. Chapter 1 addresses *Liu Xiang baojuan*, an older text that experienced a surge of reprints from the mid-nineteenth through to early twentieth century, and closely examines its textual history and contents. In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine three new *baojuan* composed in the nineteenth century. *Baojuan* of the late Qing, including works likely authored by Yu Zhi himself, met the needs of a populace weary of religious war and new ideologies, looking instead for entertainment and edification wrapped up in engaging tales.

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I engage closely with four specific *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls) circulating in Jiangnan 江南 (a region of southeastern China) during the late nineteenth century, a period of *baojuan* florescence that has not yet undergone concerted effort at contextualization within the literary, religious, and social movements of this tumultuous time in Chinese history.¹ Though differing in form and purpose from the texts of the genre's first florescence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *baojuan* of the late nineteenth century are examples from a second flowering of the genre as it continued to evolve to meet the religious and social needs of its composers, sponsors, and audiences. Not only was there an explosion in the quantity of reprints in the latter half of the century, there were also new works composed to address contemporary religious and social movements of the time.

The texts I examine were printed and distributed in Jiangnan, an area of China that was devastated during the Taiping War (1850-1864).² It is estimated that twenty to thirty million people died as a result of this war between Qing imperial forces and the Taiping army, who

¹ *Baojuan* is most often translated as “precious scroll,” a literal take on the second character of the binome. Although I agree with Daniel Overmyer that the term “precious volume,” is a more precise reflection of these texts, as the archaism “scroll” misrepresents their physical forms, because the recent surge in publications of *baojuan* translations into English, thanks to Wilt Idema’s tireless work, all use the term “precious scroll” in their titles, I will do so as well. Even so, it is important to note that printed *baojuan* from the Ming are scroll-like only in that their pages were glued together, end to end, before being folded, sutra style, between cloth-covered wood or cardboard. Much taller than they are wide (about 36cm tall and 13 cm wide), these early examples are vulnerable to disintegration at their multiple folds. See Daniel Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 3, for further discussion of form. Most Qing editions, in another testament to the appearance of the genre’s secularization, take the form of average string bound books, formally removed from the specifically religious sutra style and indistinguishable at first glance from other mass-market publications of the time.

² Most commonly known in English as the Taiping Rebellion, here I follow arguments made by Stephen Platt and Tobie Meyer-Fong, among others, and simply call the conflict the Taiping War. Meyer-Fong notes that this term remains ideologically neutral, while “rebellion” places both writer and reader on the side of the Qing against whom the Taipings were battling. See Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013), 24-25 and Stephen Platt, “War and Reconstruction in 1860s Jiangnan,” *Late Imperial China* 30, no. 2 (December 2009):7-8, doi: 10.1353/late.0.0024.

justified their violence with sinicized Christian-inflected rhetoric.³ In response, conservative moralism rooted in ideas of karmic rewards and retributions meted out by agents of a heavenly and infernal bureaucracy, a concept shared by popular Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, experienced a revival. Literature popularized by this morality movement countered the Taiping vision of a Kingdom of Heavenly Peace (太平天國) with a utopia of this world based on adherence to traditional ethical codes and the potential for a better rebirth. The majority of printed *baojuan* circulating in the nineteenth century supported conservative social order, emphasizing lowest common denominator approaches to religious devotion. The promotion and circulation of such works were part of the reconstruction of moral order during and after the war.

I specifically confine my interest in the genre to xylographic *baojuan* printed before 1900. The introduction of lithography, centered in Shanghai during the final years of the Qing, changed the Jiangnan print world and led to the commodification of *baojuan* as profit-making products, designed for personal reading and falling under publishers' copyright assertions and business needs.⁴ In contrast, the *baojuan* I analyze in the following chapters began their mass-market textual lives as woodblock prints of varying levels of quality, produced by publishers of morality literature operating within or near temples. These texts were published not out of financial concerns but out of the desire to earn heavenly merit by transforming earthly morals and rebuilding Jiangnan from the level of individual hearts on up.

This dissertation tells two related stories about how popular literature and conservative religious culture interacted in the 1850s-1870s, around and beyond religious civil war, and each

³ Meyer-Fong, 12-13.

⁴ Rostislav Berezkin, "The Lithographic Printing and the Development of Baojuan Genre in Shanghai in the 1900-1920s: On the Question of the Interaction of Print Technology and Popular Literature in China (Preliminary Observations)," *Zhongzheng daxue Zhongwenxueshu niankan* 17 (2011): 337-67.

of the four *baojuan* offers insights into both historical narratives. The first story concerns *Liu Xiang baojuan* 劉香寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Liu Xiang*, hereafter *Liu Xiang*), the most widely circulating version of a tale about a religious young woman, which had roots in the late Ming revival of lay Buddhism. After a steady but unremarkable rate of publication in Jiangnan from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, it experienced a remarkable surge of popular attention and publication in the late Qing, both within and beyond Jiangnan.⁵ As a piece of religious performance literature, this *baojuan* is one of only a few texts about which, via publication data and donor lists, we can clearly demonstrate significant and widespread interest on the parts of so many people from so many places in such a short period of time. As a complex, entertaining text that spawned adaptations by writers of various religious bents, for venues from the popular storytelling halls (Fuzhou *pinghua* 福州評話) to the commercial stages of Republican Shanghai and beyond, its popularity is well documented.⁶ Even so, the factors that propelled this classic text to the sustained attention and widespread endorsement of so many have yet to be clearly understood.

This brings us to the second story this dissertation narrates, one about a vocal morality campaigner personally caught up in the wartime destruction and post-war reconstruction of Jiangnan. Prominent Jiangnan resident Yu Zhi 余治 (1809-1874) bore many labels during and

⁵ Extant editions according to Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo choubelichu, 1998), 80-82 and supplemental archival research. Prewar editions are limited to five, in 1774, 1833 (2 eds), 1844, 1851. Between 1869 and the end of the Qing, however, Che records 24 separate editions.

⁶ For the Fuzhou *pinghua*, see *Liu Xiangnü* 劉香女 in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo cang Su wenxue congkan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏俗文學叢刊 (Folk literature: Materials in the collection of the Institute of History and Philology), edited by Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo suwenxue congkan bianji xiaozu 中央研究院語言研究所俗文學叢刊編輯小組, photographic reprint, 500 vols., (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2005), vol. 370, 324-348. Advertisements for staged shows of *Liu Xiangnü* can be found periodically in the Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao* 申報, including on April 20, 1915 and October 1, 1915.

after his lifetime: *shanren* 善人 (do-gooder), maverick philanthropist, five-time failed exam candidate, elementary school teacher, Chuanzhen Daoist adept, and foreign language academy principal.⁷ While actively calling for the burning and banning of the popular novels and dramas that he deemed immoral, he also stridently advocated for the composition and widespread distribution of popular morality literature, via both the printed and the spoken word. Yu composed a massive corpus of morality literature in vernacular Chinese intended for oral performance – play scripts, vernacular lectures on various morality issues, songs, and more – and toured Jiangnan with an opera troupe hired to perform them. Convinced of the potential energy stored within vernacular literature by what he perceived as its negative influences on society, and anxious about the failure of traditional education to impart lasting moral change in even lifelong scholars (since no one is immune from the lure of immoral literature, in Yu’s view), he was determined to use the influence garnered by his philanthropic organizing to spread virtue through easily accessible methods, not classical pedagogy. His emphasis on the restorative possibilities latent in morality literature, including *baojuan*, certainly amplified and revitalized the attention given to many texts, *Liu Xiang* in particular.

Therefore, Chapter 1 addresses *Liu Xiang*, this older text that experienced a surge of reprints from the mid-nineteenth through to early twentieth century, and closely examines its textual history and contents. In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine three nineteenth-century composed *baojuan*: *Liu Xiang zhong juan* 劉香中卷 (*The Middle Scroll of Liu Xiang*), *Pan Gong mianzai jiu'an* 潘公免災救難寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll in which Mr. Pan [explains] How to Avoid Catastrophe*,

⁷ For a succinct summary of Yu’s life and major accomplishments, see You Zian 游子安, *Shan yu ren tong: Ming Qing yilai de cishan yu jiaohua* 善於人同：明清以來的慈善於教化 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 93-95. For a detailed analysis, see Lai Jinxing 賴進興, *Wan Qing Jiangnan shenshi de cishan shiye ji qi jiaohua linian – yi Yu Zhi (1809-1874) wei zhongxin* 晚清江南士紳的慈善事業及其教化理念—以余治(1809-1874)為中心 (master’s thesis, National Cheng Kung University, 2008), 13-27. <http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/70021667324274441461>

hereafter *Pan Gong*), and *Xigu baojuan* 惜穀寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Cherishing Grains*, hereafter *Xigu*). Although these *baojuan* lack direct authorial attribution, it is still possible to link them closely to Yu Zhi and his campaigns about the virtues of vernacular media. Albeit deeply traditional, the four *baojuan* I closely examine here circulated in a time of great turmoil, a century rocked by civil war and foreign invasion, events which triggered a religious revival and the nostalgic desire for the stability of the past.⁸ During and after this war against armies that professed belief in a heterodox new religion, *baojuan* of the late Qing, including the works likely authored by Yu Zhi, met the needs of a populace weary of new religious ideologies and figures. Before detailing the specifics of my methodological approach to these texts, a brief overview of the genre's textual and performance history is necessary.

A brief history of *baojuan*: form and performance

The term “*baojuan*” describes a sweeping genre of Chinese popular performance literature that flourished during the Ming 明 (1368-1644) and Qing 清 (1644-1911), simultaneously part of the worlds of religion and entertainment. This single generic term refers to a wide variation of contexts and forms among the types of texts labeled “*baojuan*” during the genre's 700-year history. Though the lack of intentional archival preservation of these non-canonical texts prior to the twentieth century has prevented scholars from compiling a linear narrative of their development over time, a rough outline is possible. The earliest texts linked to the *baojuan* form date to the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, with the earliest extant text using *baojuan* in its title dated

⁸ Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968), 73, 250, 259.

1373.⁹ During this early period of their development, reaching into the fifteenth century as well, *baojuan* were closely related to Buddhist storytelling and preaching, a fact that links them to the genre of Tang dynasty *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts).¹⁰ By the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, newly produced *baojuan* were the proselytizing method of choice for either fringe Buddhho-Daoist groups or millenarian sectarian groups who professed beliefs in newly revealed deities. Sectarian groups discovered to be producing *baojuan* of this variety were sometimes repressed or violently persecuted by the state, during both the Ming and Qing.¹¹ Both types of early *baojuan*, the works that recounted Buddhist tales about popular figures or the sectarian texts that emphasized apocalyptic millennialism and/or new salvific deities, are presently the most closely studied by contemporary scholars.¹²

In terms of form, early examples of *baojuan* expounded upon themes such as suffering, salvation, or the end of the world age and recounted tales of karmic destiny in alternating passages of prose and poetry, using mostly seven-character couplets or ten-character lines with end rhymes. Songs of praise, set to tunes from popular operas, also delineated chapters or

⁹ See Che Xilun, “Zui zao yi ‘baojuan’ mingming de baojuan - tan ‘Mulian jiumu chuli diyu sheng tian baojuan.’ 最早以‘宝卷’命名的宝卷——谈《目连救母出离地狱生天宝卷》” *Journal of Ningxia Teachers University (Social Science)* 28.2 (March 2007): 34-38.

¹⁰ Che Xilun, “Baojuan de xingcheng han zhaoqi de fojiao baojuan. 宝卷的形成和早期的佛教宝卷” *Wenshi Zhishi (Chinese Literature and History)* 1 (2006): 16-22, Victor H. Mair “The Contributions of T’ang and Five Dynasties Transformation Texts (p’ien-wen) to Later Chinese Popular Literature.” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 12 (1989): 1-71.

¹¹ On the specific dynamics of inconsistent state suppression and tolerance of sectarian religious groups, *baojuan* producing and otherwise, see Hubert M. Siewert, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 209-484.

¹² On the former, see such works as Barend J. ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture: A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), Rostislav Berezkin, “The Development of the Mulian Story in Baojuan Texts (14th–19th Century) in Connection with the Evolution of the Genre.” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2010), and *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and her Acolytes* trans. Wilt Idema, (Honolulu: U of Hawai’i, 2008). For the latter, see Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*.

subsections within the texts.¹³ As the genre shifted in response to social and religious changes, the complexities of form were discarded. *Baojuan* written in the late Qing retain the prosimetric alternation between vernacular prose and poetry comprised of seven- or ten-character lines, but do not for the most part retain tune titles or complex internal divisions.

As works that are in neither the Buddhist nor the Daoist canon and are not ranked with the classics in the field of Chinese literature, *baojuan* were not intentionally preserved until the twentieth century, when vernacular literature attracted attention as a legitimate field of study.¹⁴ The texts which are extant today, and there are many, originally survived by accident.¹⁵ *Baojuan* were not conceived of as a prestigious genre to produce, and the taint of association with heterodoxy, even if generally inapplicable in later centuries, perhaps lent an air of suspicion to their existence that caused their authors to leave their names off the title pages.¹⁶ As such, not only are there few mentions of *baojuan* performances before the modern era, but little is known about their pre-modern performers, writers, publishers, and audiences, particularly before the Republican era (1911-1949). Some works feature paratextual materials – prefaces, afterwords, and donor lists – which do help provide a sense of the actors involved. The association between sectarian groups and early texts abets their study by linking some works to better known religious and political movements. Narrative *baojuan*, particularly those featuring female protagonists,

¹³ Overmyer, 3-5.

¹⁴ One example of such a study that includes consideration of *baojuan* is Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Zhongguo wenxue lunji* 中國文學論集. (Shanghai: Kaiming shuju. 1934), 678-722.

¹⁵ In *Zhongguo baojuan zonglu*, Che catalogs 1579 different works under the *baojuan* label. This catalog, as extensive as it is, is also incomplete, as it does not include works found in archives beyond East Asia. Doubtless there are many texts yet to be discovered in both Chinese and overseas archives and personal collections.

¹⁶ This trend means that *Pan Gong* and *Xigu*, discussed in Chapter 3, are all the more significant. Though they lack clear statements of authorship, they were likely written by Yu Zhi, and successive editions included a variety of signed prefaces by men wishing to leave their mark on the text. Why this may have been the case is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, 196 - 201.

make up a significant portion of the *baojuan* that circulated in the late Qing, and they are associated with female audiences.¹⁷ The association with female audiences is due in a large part to representations of *baojuan* performances in the seventeenth century novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*), but also due to the representation in paratextual materials that characterize the text to which they are appended as useful for the edification of the uneducated, particularly women.¹⁸

Sawada Mizuho, in his path-breaking study of *baojuan* history and texts, collates references to *baojuan* performances and audiences dating from the sixteenth century through the early twentieth century.¹⁹ Such descriptions range from offhand references in early twentieth-century anti-superstition novels or periodicals to poetic descriptions of Jiangnan customs or courtesan culture, including consideration of the extended descriptions in the *Jin Ping Mei*. Sawada traces a broadly defined tradition that involved different classes of performers, from elderly clergy and their junior assistants to unaffiliated *xuanjuanren* 宣卷人 (scroll preachers); different styles of accompaniment, from simple wooden clappers to stringed instruments and woodwinds; to

¹⁷ Sawada Mizuho, *Hōkan no kenkyū* (Nagoya: Saika Shorin, 1963), female audiences: 62-64, female protagonists: 76. More explicitly, Che Xilun highlights the suffering of female protagonists as the main reason for the tales' popularity among women in feudal (封建) society in *Xinyang, jiaohua, yule: Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu ji qita* 信仰•教化•娛樂：中國寶卷研究及其他 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2002), 20-22. For an overview of the historical references to female performers audiences at *baojuan* performance, covering many of the same sources as Sawada and additional related works, but in English, see David Johnson, "Mu-lien in Pao-chüan: the Performative Context and Religious Meaning of the You-ming Pao-chüan" in *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies*, ed. David Johnson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 59-74.

¹⁸ For example, in Berezkin's dissertation, "The Development of the Mulian Story in Baojuan Texts (14th–19th Century) in Connection with the Evolution of the Genre," he writes "One can suppose that *baojuan* texts were most in demand for female audiences or readers." (28) Berezkin cites a preface from 1919 that directly names women as an audience as his evidence for this association. An earlier example of a preface identifying women as a narrative *baojuan*'s intended audience is dated 1873 and appended to an edition of *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, the topic of Chapter 2. The preface writer, a monk named Daoxiu 道修, refers specifically to *yufu* 愚婦 (ignorant women) as the ones the text will help bring to a realization of right behavior. "汝依波醒浪覺於正。"

¹⁹ Sawada, 62-75.

different performance contexts, from the temple to the private home to the brothel to the airwaves itself when broadcasted on radio in the 1930s.

This professional class of *baojuan* performers, comprised of clergy and lay members, did not obviate the existence of amateur performance. The sheer volume of printed matter produced by late Qing temple and morality book publishers suggests that these works were meant for amateur recitation and reading as well. Storytellers often used hand-copied manuscript versions of the texts, and such handwritten texts make up a large proportion of the variant versions of widely printed *baojuan* or *baojuan* known only in a single edition.²⁰ Another indication that printed *baojuan* were intended for inexperienced readers rather than professionals is the fact that some printed editions included guides for pronunciation of characters that editors assumed inexperienced readers would have some difficulty correctly speaking aloud. Such pronunciation guides are not the kind of crutch needed by a professional.²¹ Handwriting on the covers of many printed works mark them either as privately owned books or as the property of temples or morality organizations, confirming Sawada's association between philanthropic societies, printed *baojuan*, and the wider scope of morality literature in the late Qing and early Republican era.²²

Nearly all *baojuan* texts, whether manuscript or printed, begin and end with features that create ritual space for the recitation of the main text, whether sermon or story. At the very least, works open with a pair of couplets reminding the audience of the religious ambiance of the listening experience, variations on a theme here exemplified by the opening poem for *Liu Xiang baojuan*: “As *Liu Xiang baojuan* is first opened, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas descend and

²⁰ Sawada, 60-1.

²¹ For example, see many works produced by Ma'nao Jingfang in Suzhou and Hangzhou during the 1870s and 1880s, including *Huilang baojuan* 回郎寶卷, *Mulian sanshi baojuan* 目連三世寶卷, and *Xiuniu baojuan* 秀女寶卷。

²² Sawada, 60.

assemble here. Good men and faithful women listen sincerely, adding to good fortune, lengthening lives, and diminishing disasters.”²³ *Baojuan* then usually close with a reminder to the audience of the limitless merit that their sincerity and attention has generated. An example from one of the final pages of *Liu Xiang* mirrors the opening pair of couplets: “The recitation of *Liu Xiang baojuan* is complete, the ancient mirror has again been polished and illuminates the nine heavens. Good men and faithful women listen sincerely; if they don’t become bodhisattvas they’ll at least become immortals.²⁴ Throughout many *baojuan*, notations of “*Namo Amitābha Buddha*” are invitations for the audience to join the reciter in calling upon Buddha’s name, including them as active participants in the ritual.²⁵

However, some works are even more specific in ways that suggest a concern for their correct ritual performance, a concern that implies these texts were in the hands of readers in need of additional guidance. For example, *Liu Xiang*, in addition to bookending its tale of a faithful woman’s religious pursuits with the standard ritual reminders quoted above, also includes more detailed instructions about the creation of the performance context, details which would have been less necessary for a performer versed in the conventions of leading a group in ritual

²³ “劉香寶卷初展開，諸佛菩薩降臨來。善男信女虔誠聽，增福延壽免消災。” *Liu Xiang baojuan*, (Hangzhou: Huikong jingfang, Tongzhi era (1862-1874)) vol. 1, 1a-1b, (facsimile 59-60), reprinted in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo cang Su wenxue congkan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏俗文學叢刊 (Folk literature: Materials in the collection of the Institute of History and Philology), edited by Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo suwenxue congkan bianji xiaozu 中央研究院語言研究所俗文學叢刊編輯小組, photographic reprint, 500 vols., (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2005), 355:51-322. All references to this *baojuan* in this dissertation will come from this facsimile edition, unless otherwise noted, and will refer to both the original page numbers (for the ease of readers of other editions, which generally have the same pagination) and the *Suwenxue congkan* facsimile pages.

²⁴ “劉香寶卷宣完成，古鏡重磨照九天。善男信女虔誠聽，不成菩薩也成仙。” *Liu Xiang*, 2:56b-57a, (facsimile 302-303).

²⁵ Alternately, in *Xiangshan baojuan* 香山寶卷, a work focusing on Guanyin, the intercessions are directed towards Guanyin, not Amitābha Buddha.

acts.²⁶ The text anticipates its user to need particular instructions on leading their listeners into the devotional space:

First, set up the incense table. After, recite an opening-sutra gāthā.
Incense hymn:

The brazier's incense smoke spreads as it burns, suffusing the dharma-realm. All within the boundless distances of the buddha sea hear, and in all directions auspicious clouds coalesce. With sincerity and honest ardor, all the buddhas wholly reveal their bodies.

Namo incense-enshrouded bodhisattva mahāsattva (three times)
Upon first opening the *baojuan*, a fragrant wind fills the chiliocosm,
Immortal as many treasures, its benefits are broad beyond limitation.²⁷

Liu Xiang likewise ends with instructions on how, once the final admonitions and conclusive couplets have been read, the ritual space can be dismantled. After wishing the emperor long life and health, another two couplets generalize the value of reciting *baojuan*. Finally, directly addressing the reader himself/herself, the last line reads, “Now you can also lead them communally to kneel and recite various Buddhist verses of penitence. After that, lead them in *nianfo*, then end.”²⁸ In performing this *baojuan*, a monk, nun, professional lay reciter, or most of all, a functionally literate amateur, could be guaranteed to have accomplished the ritual of a recitation correctly thanks to the detailed instructions provided from beginning to end.

²⁶ Debates about performance-oriented scripts and reading-oriented publications are common in discussions of drama from the Yuan through Ming and are relevant here, along with the need to consider the additional dimension of amateur performance that Xu Peng, in her dissertation “Lost Sound: Singing, Theater and Aesthetics in late Ming China, 1547-1644” (University of Chicago, 2014. especially 12-13), reminds us is so often left out of the picture. For an earlier discussion on the difference in texts intended for performance or private reading, see Xu Fuming, “Shilun Ming Qing chuanqi fumo kaichang,” in Zhao Jingshen (ed.), *Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo xiqu lunji* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1985), 140-57.

²⁷ “先排香案 後開經偈
香贊
爐香乍熱。法界蒙熏。諸佛海會悉遙聞。隨處結祥雲。誠意方殷。諸佛現全身。
南無香雲蓋菩薩摩訶薩。三稱
寶卷初開起，香風滿大千。仙如多寶藏，福引廣無邊。” *Liu Xiang*, 1:1a, (facsimile 59).

Aside from the hymn, which is punctuated in all editions of the text, as is the prose, punctuation above is my addition.

²⁸ 再能為眾心者跪誦佛各懺悔文畢領眾念佛一堂終。(The final character is half the size of the others.) *Liu Xiang*, 2:60b, (facsimile 310).

Baojuan studies

There are many studies on the origins of *baojuan*, their early writers and readers, their relation to other vernacular literature of the Ming, their ties to *bianwen* found at Dunhuang and the practice of *jiangjing* 講經 (explicating sutras), but much less has been said so far about the other end of the timeline, at the end of Qing and in the early Republican era.²⁹ A few specific references proved the impetus for pursuing this current study, the foremost of which were made by Overmyer in his introduction to his book on sectarian *baojuan*. He justifies limiting the scope of his attention to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by virtue of the latter texts' change in form and audience, suggesting that Qing narrative *baojuan* be taken as a separate category of work better left for scholars of literature.³⁰ Li Shiyu, in his introduction to his collected writings on *baojuan*, refers to narrative *baojuan* as irregular and excludes them from his study entirely.³¹ The evidence for this repudiation hinges on a publisher's list from the early Republican era Shanghai in which *baojuan* are offered for sale alongside entertainment literature and novels. However, in light of Berezkin's evidence showing that innovations in the Shanghai print world

²⁹ For more on relationship to vernacular literature of the Ming, see: *Meng Jiangnü Brings down the Great Wall: Ten Versions of a Chinese Legend*, trans. Wilt Idema (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); *The White Snake and Her Son: a Translation of The Precious Scroll of Thunder Peak with Related Texts*, trans. Wilt Idema (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009); *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang*, trans. Beata Grant and Wilt Idema (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011). For ties to *bianwen*, see: Che Xilun, "Baojuan de xingcheng han zhaoqi de fojiao baojuan 宝卷的形成和早期的佛教宝卷," *Wenshi Zhishi (Chinese Literature and History)* 1 (2006): 16-22; Victor H. Mair, "The Contributions of Tang and Five Dynasties Transformation Texts (pian-wen) to Later Chinese Popular Literature," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 12 (1989): 1-71. For more on Shanghai lithographic *baojuan*, see Berezkin, "Printing and Circulation of 'Precious Scrolls' in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai and Its Vicinity: Towards and Assessment of Multifunctionality of the Genre," in *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China: 1800-2012* ed. Phillip Clart and Gregory Adam Scott (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 139-185. For fieldwork on modern performance, see Mark Bender, "A Description of *Jingjiang* (Telling Scriptures) Services in Jingjiang, China," *Asian Folklore Studies* 60, no. 1 (2001): 101-133.

³⁰ Overmyer, 5 and 282.

³¹ "不能算正規的寶卷。" Li, Shiyu 李世瑜. *Baojuan lunji* 寶卷論集 (Taipei: Lantai chubanshe, 2007), 13-14.

with regards to *baojuan* resulted in a wide-ranging change in their form and function, a printer's list from 1929 should not serve as definitive evidence for how the texts were considered throughout the Qing and Republican periods.³² Li also points out that late Qing *baojuan* had little to do with heterodox religion. However, subsuming late Qing *baojuan* under the label of popular, secular performance literature begs the question of why their authors and publishers called them *baojuan* in the first place. Given the richness and variety of dramatic performance forms available to writers at the time, texts which continued to be intentionally titled as *baojuan* should be taken at face value as examples of the genre, however changed it may have become over time. Otherwise, had they not been perceived as *baojuan* by someone along the chain of production or consumption, they would have been called something else: *tanci* 彈詞 (plucked rhymes), *pinghua* 評話 (plain tales) or maybe, even more simply, just *zhuan* 傳 (record).

Not content with broadening the scope of inquiry simply to include all *baojuan*, in addition to including every work that self-identifies as *baojuan* in his 1998 catalogue of *baojuan* in the collections of mostly Chinese libraries, Che Xilun also included related genres like *keyi* 科譯, *baozhuan* 寶傳 and *gudian* 古典.³³ No study of *baojuan* can proceed without acknowledging the incredible debt the field owes to this man and his encyclopedic work on the genre. To get a sense of his impact, consider how a small collection of self-selected articles on *baojuan*, published in 2009, culminates in ten pages that list the main books, articles, conference papers on *baojuan* and

³² Berezkin, "The Lithographic Printing and the Development of Baojuan Genre in Shanghai in the 1900-1920s," 343.

³³ For the full list and reasoning behind expanding the scope of *baojuan* to include these alternately named works in his catalogue, see Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, iii.

vernacular literature that he has produced in his fifty year career.³⁴ Che's work on *baojuan* spans research on its roots to fieldwork on its modern day performance. A careful cataloguer and linguistic analyst, there is little about *baojuan* of which he does not have at least a passing knowledge. The texts Che has focused the most on, however, remain the sectarian works from the late Ming and early Qing, with reports on present day fieldwork coming in close second.

One early English-language study to address late Qing *baojuan* reads one text from the period in conjunction with earlier examples of the genre, looking for values held common between the texts in order to establish shared generic features across time. Janet Kerr's 1994 dissertation, "Precious Scrolls in Chinese Popular Religious Culture" centers on the proposal that the strict division between early and late *baojuan* may be eased by examining the function of later texts as religious objects, regardless of their story-focused content. Through a close reading of three very different *baojuan*, she detects a common core of ideals shared by all three – the importance of family and filial piety, certainty in karmic justice acting as a cosmic balance sheet by rewarding good deeds and punishing evil ones, and the description of pious practices that will guarantee salvation after death or positive results during one's life.³⁵

Kerr insightfully points out how, regardless of theological differences and narrative structure, *baojuan*, when performed, claim to create sacred space in which merit is generated.³⁶ However, by comparing diverse texts that spanned four hundred years, she obscures their major plot and theological differences in favor of the lowest common denominator of shared ideas. The

³⁴ Che Xilun. *Minjian xinyang yu minjian wenxue: Che Xilun zixuan ji* 民間信仰與民間文學：車錫倫自選集 (Taipei: Boyang shuju, 2009), 423-433.

³⁵ Janet MacGregor Lynn Kerr, "Precious Scrolls in Chinese Popular Religious Culture," (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1994), 228-229.

³⁶ Kerr, 11-14.

risk is that by saying something about all three, her conclusions are not particularly enlightening when applied back to any one of the texts. She uses these commonly held ideas to show that *baojuan* addressed the same concerns as mainstream religion. At this level of reductionism, any sectarian scripture could be shown to share values with the orthodox traditions. Randall Nadeau, citing his agreement with Kerr, called for scholars to take the term *baojuan* at face value when it appears in a text's title. If their authors titled them as such, then modern scholars should respect that and seek to understand what about later texts in the genre unites them with their late Ming and early Qing predecessors, which were explicitly religious.³⁷

Chen Kuei-hsiang's 陳桂香 dissertation on *baojuan*, completed in 2006, analyzes the contents of nine *baojuan* focusing on women's religious journeys, including *Liu Xiang*. She compiles data to show the similarities in descriptions of their characters, appearances, and life stories to explore how women readers and listeners would receive and respond to these figures.³⁸ She draws close attention to the kinds of injustices suffered by these women and the freedom they are granted once leaving the social system of the Confucian home. However, in covering nine different texts, her analysis can only scratch the surface of some of the complex dynamics at work in these tales and hint at interesting entry points to further inquiry.

In 2010, Rostislav Berezkin completed his dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania on *baojuan* about Mulian. In it, he tackles the problem of generic development by tracing the same story through five incarnations in *baojuan* from the fourteenth through the nineteenth

³⁷ Randall Nadeau, "Genre Classifications of Chinese Popular Religious Literature: *Pao-chüan*," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21 (1993): 121-128.

³⁸ Chen Kuei-hsiang 陳桂香, "Funü xiuxing gushi baojuan yanjiu 婦女修行故事寶卷研究" (PhD. dissertation, National Chung Cheng University, 2006).

century, supplementing this with evidence from modern performances of similar texts.³⁹ Through a systematic approach that breaks *baojuan* down into detailed descriptions of nine different points of interest including linguistic characteristics, visual materials, and verse forms, Berezkin clearly demonstrates the development of the Mulian tale through the lens of various sectarian cults and popular religious milieus.⁴⁰ Further research by Berezkin has begun to fill in glaring gaps in our understanding of *baojuan* as part of the cosmopolitan book market of 1920s and 30s Shanghai.⁴¹ Concerned with their production and overall generic development, however, his focus differs from my interest in the lives and worlds of the texts' producers and users.

Morality Literature in War and Reconstruction

Exhortative morality literature was both a cause of and a proposed solution to one of the major crises of mid-nineteenth-century China, the Taiping War (1850-1864), which nearly toppled the already faltering Qing imperium. Granted, the factors that led to over a decade of civil war were multifarious and complex, as were the countermeasures employed against a rebel force that sought to establish Christian kingdom (with Chinese characteristics) in place of the existing Manchu dynasty. Nevertheless, the *baojuan* analyzed in this dissertation would not have received such attention (and some would not even have been written in the first place) were it not for vernacular Christian evangelistic tracts that inspired religious fervor in a young man who

³⁹ Berezkin, "The Development of the Mulian Story in Baojuan Texts (14th–19th Century) in Connection With the Evolution of the Genre."

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

⁴¹ Berezkin, "The Lithographic Printing and the Development of Baojuan Genre in Shanghai in the 1900-1920s" and Berezkin, "Printing and Circulation of 'Precious Scrolls' in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai and its Vicinity."

would one day rule a large swath of southern China, an area which included Yu Zhi's hometown. The death and destruction of war proved a major source of inspiration for the elementary school teacher, and he composed his massive corpus of vernacular literature as a means to help China return to its moral roots and turn back the tide of war.

But first, in 1836, Hong Xiuqian 洪秀全 (1814-1864), the man who would become the spiritual leader of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and seek to overthrow the Qing, was still just a young scholar hoping to pass the local level *shengyuan* examinations in Guangdong. Rebellious against the system was likely the furthest thing from Hong's mind as he took this first step towards the unlikely possibility of securing a post in the imperial bureaucracy. The anxious young men who emerged from these exam halls, in which they had been sealed for three days and two nights, were considered an easy target for evangelism by Christian missionaries in southern China. It was in one such moment of proselytizing that Hong received a set of morality tracts that would change not only his life but also millions of other lives across the empire. The nine slim volumes placed in twenty-two-year-old Hong's hands, entitled *Quanshi liangyan* 勸世良言 (Good words to exhort the age), probably looked like any other morality text. By his own account, Hong merely glanced at the volumes but did not read them carefully and they sat gathering dust in his study until seven years later.⁴² In the meantime, he would attempt and fail the exam in Guangdong another four times.

In 1843, after noticing the books on Hong's shelf, a relative finally read them and returned them to Hong with the enthusiastic recommendation that Hong do the same.⁴³ The

⁴² Theodore Hamberg, *The visions of Hung-Siu-tshuen, and origin of the Kwang-si insurrection* (Hong Kong: The China Mail Office, 1854), 8-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15, 19.

Quanshi liangyan tracts contained a blend of classical language translations of the Christian Bible followed by vernacular language exegesis by a Chinese convert, Liang A-fa 梁發 (1789-1855). This pattern would appear familiar to any educated, religious Chinese man as the format for lectures on Buddhist scripture. The tracts' Christian message, as far as that Liang was able to convey via decontextualized Biblical passages, seemed to explain the crises facing China from within and without. Without guidance regarding unfamiliar transliterated names, stories of a distant land to the west, and the savior purportedly born there, it likely came across as esoteric. However, to the moderately educated Hong, the tracts were familiar for another reason: they explained a series of mysterious dreams that had come to him while seriously ill after his second exam failure. The *Quanshi liangyan* enabled Hong to come to the realization that his fever dreams had been sent by the Christian's god to inform him of his identity as Jesus Christ's younger brother and his destiny to drive evil out of China, particularly the evil embodied by its Manchu rulers.

Liang's core argument, that disaster was imminent due to empire-wide moral decline, was already familiar to Hong. It is one we will see echoed by Yu Zhi's writings about the Taipings themselves once the advancing wave of their military forces crested and broke over Jiangnan. Yet Yu, a staunch Qing loyalist, was careful to pin the moral decline on individual behavior, not on cosmic forces that might imply the weakness of the reigning dynasty. The ambiguity in *Quanshi liangyan* about the sources of the coming disaster, however, played well into the idea developing in the minds of Hong and his followers that the time for dynastic change and revolution was at hand.⁴⁴ Driven on by faith in this foreign god, the Taiping armies were motivated by ideas about

⁴⁴ Philip A. Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," in *The Cambridge History of China Volume 10: Late Ch'ing (1800-1911), Part 1*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 267. doi: 10.1017/CHOL9780521214476.007.

heaven's mandate that had fueled dynastic change in China for two millennia before their rise. Apart from the iconoclastic insistence on abandoning family altars and local temple cults, the values endorsed by Hong's earliest writings on the subject of his newfound religion reflect concepts one might find in a typical conservative morality text: condemnation of licentiousness, gambling, and murder while endorsing such wholesome values as filial piety and simple living.⁴⁵ Had the Society of God Worshippers, as they first called themselves, never advanced out of Guangxi with the intent to overthrow the Qing, Confucian moralists like Yu Zhi would probably never have found them more than a nuisance, at worst.

As this movement gathered momentum in Guangxi, it drew disenfranchised peasants, former pirates chased up the rivers by the increased British presence in the seas around Hong Kong, and secret societies (including the Triads) to its promise of a new ideal kingdom set to replace the crumbling Qing.⁴⁶ After a successful skirmish with Qing forces over the frontier town Jintian 金田, on January 11, 1851, his 38th birthday, Hong Xiuquan proclaimed the foundation of the Great Kingdom of Heavenly Peace.⁴⁷ Like the sectarian *baojuan* of the late Ming, morality literature had successfully inspired potential revolution on religious terms that threatened national stability. Unlike the sectarian uprisings of the late Ming, however, this late Qing conflict would shake the foundations of the empire to its very core.

Pushing northwards from the periphery, the victorious Taiping forces fought their way from the frontier to the heartland for two years. City after city fell, signs of heavenly favor,

⁴⁵ Kuhn, 269.

⁴⁶ Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 81-86.

⁴⁷ Guo zhu "Taiping tianguo shishi rizhi" jiaobu 郭著《太平天國史事日誌》校補, ed. Mao Jiaqi 茅家琦 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2001), 18.

culminating in a successful assault on Nanjing in March 1853.⁴⁸ The shockwave caused by the fall of this city, former capital of the Ming, now capital of the Heavenly Kingdom, reverberated throughout Jiangnan for decades. Most immediately, it established the Taiping as a serious contender for the mandate of heaven. Less immediately, it inspired moralist Yu Zhi to write a *baojuan* commemorating the fall, one that would become immensely popular during and after the war years. In Yu's eyes, heaven had chosen this moment to send down retribution on degenerate society.

The Qing emerged as the victor only after fourteen years of war, during which it was often unclear which side would ultimately prevail. Was this an immoral rebellion against the benevolent state or a brave revolutionary overthrow of a corrupt dynasty? Were Jiangnan residents caught between the forces of a crumbling old dynasty and the incipient new dynasty, as they had been during the Ming-Qing transition? In 1853, while Yu Zhi composed his *baojuan* about the fall of Nanjing, although he fervently hoped for the restoration of Qing order, how certain could he have been of that eventuality, in light of overwhelming Taiping victories? Leaving aside political labels, he characterized the longhaired bandits as agents of heavenly punishment, perhaps in search of a supernatural explanation for their rapid spread across China that did not require acknowledging their imported god. The sieges, battles, and refugee crises that defined the wartime life for the average Jiangnan resident inspired uncertainty, and a search for reassurance in simple frameworks of salvation – either in this life or the next – that make up the core message of the *baojuan* I focus upon in this dissertation.

⁴⁸ Mao, 40-44.

Framework of approach

Drawing upon themes from the histories of *baojuan* and its studies detailed above, in this dissertation I create linked micro-histories for each text along axes defined by three questions: What does the text reveal about its place and function as a piece of popular literature? What does it reveal about the position and uses of religion in this period of religious war and conservative cultural backlash? And lastly, what can we learn from it about the lives of non-elite women in a period when Confucian modes of social organization overdetermined the course of most women's lives? In considering these three axes of inquiry, I define space for discussions of how popular literature relates to women's history, how women's history relates to religion, and how religion relates to popular literature. A three-dimensional image takes shape regarding how these particular *baojuan*, serving as exemplars of old and new popular texts, fit into the complex religious and social context of late nineteenth-century Jiangnan. Therefore, this is neither specifically a genre study (territory trod already by the excellent prior works on *baojuan* I touched on above, and more besides), nor is it a single author study (since *baojuan* generally lack authorial attributions). Rather, I am entering conversations held not only among *baojuan* scholars, but also with scholars of pre-modern Chinese popular religion, vernacular literature, and women's history. My examination of these texts reveals new aspects of nineteenth-century Chinese history and culture, offering revisions to our current conceptions of how popular literature and conservative religion were performed, and the ways in which both affected women's lives.

First, my research reveals a strain of rhetoric valorizing vernacular literature that predates the May 4th movement, rhetoric that justifies the use of such literature in direct support of political ends while at the same time advocating traditional religion and culture, rather than

vilifying it as May 4th activists did.⁴⁹ In an undated essay, analyzed more closely in Chapter 3, Yu Zhi lays out a framework for buttressing the stability of the Qing based on maintaining a unity of *zheng* 政 (governance) and *jiao* 教 (philosophy) within China by using vernacular literature (among other approaches) to counter the threat of Christianity spread by foreign missionaries. The Qing remains strong, in Yu's view, because it has maintained unity in honoring Confucianism (*rujiao* 儒教). Yu considers other philosophies that might prove a threat to this Confucian primacy, easily ruling out Daoism and Buddhism, then acknowledging Islam but dismissing Chinese Muslims as dangerous, before settling on Christianity as the greatest threat to the Qing's continued unity of *zheng* and *jiao*. Elaborating further, Yu outlines a world in which every country follows the philosophy and governance that suit their culture best,⁵⁰ going as far as saying that the admonitions of China's sages will not suit the needs of foreigners as well as their heaven-born Jesus does.⁵¹ Religion/philosophy is not personal; it is political. In suggesting the development of moral popular literature, Yu politicizes heretofore works of the entertainment realm – *pinghua* stories and *tanci* ballads – as tools for maintaining state control. Over fifty years before the New Culture Movement, Yu anticipated activists' concern with bolstering support for a state in turmoil through the use of easily accessible literature. Yu matched his activism with

⁴⁹ For more on the place of vernacular literature in the May 4th/New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century, see pp. 435-437 in Benjamin I. Schwartz, "Themes in intellectual history: May Fourth and after," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank. 1st ed. vol. 12. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 406-450. doi: 10.1017/CHOL9780521235419.009 and pp. 466-472 in Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Literary trends I: the quest for modernity, 1895–1927," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank. 1st ed. vol. 12. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 451-504. doi: 10.1017/CHOL9780521235419.010. On iconoclasm, see Lin Yu-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

⁵⁰ “各行其教既各子其民。” Yu Zhi, “Shang dang shi shu 上當事書” in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* 尊小學齋集 (Guwu [Suzhou]: Dejian zhai, 1883), 3:5b.

⁵¹ “中國聖人之教未能偏及外國天生耶穌以化其俗以治其人。” Yu, “Shang dang shi shu,” 3:5b.

composition of works meant for the illiterate and newly literate, promoting his vernacular works with enthusiasm that contributed to widespread elite and non-elite interest in disseminating them and other morality literature, *baojuan* included.

Therefore, secondly, this dissertation creates space in which to discuss the motives and concerns of actors involved in shaping religion and culture. As Meyer-Fong points out, the involvement of philanthropists and elites in postwar reconstruction was not only self motivated, it was also “inflected by a vibrant religious sensibility.”⁵² As I consider in depth in Chapter 3, Yu Zhi’s creation of *Pan Gong*, certainly based on his deeply held religious convictions about heaven’s response to the accumulated transgressions of Jiangnan residents, was also socially advantageous both for his own need to establish himself as an activist worth listening to and for the aspirations of the many different men who added signed prefaces to many of the reprint editions that followed in the 1850s through 1870s. By grafting themselves onto the work that Yu Zhi wrote as a means of both saving Jiangnan and establishing himself as successor to the famed philanthropist Pan Zengyi’s 潘曾沂 (1792-1853), these men whose names never made it onto the rolls of successful exam candidates nonetheless carved out a social place and identity for themselves alongside cultural luminaries. Prefaces that relate tales of searching for the text in the midst of war or recarving worn-out blocks to meet demand assert their writers’ participation in the reconstruction of Jiangnan, both physical and moral.

Lastly, because three of the four *baojuan* considered in the following chapters feature female protagonists and because Yu Zhi is perhaps best known as an activist for his anti-female-infanticide efforts in Jiangnan, my analysis of these texts adds to our understanding of non-elite women’s history in pre-modern China. Unlike the talented and well-educated women

⁵² Meyer-Fong, 31.

of pre-modern China about whose lives it is easier to gain a more nuanced understanding because such women could write about themselves, how are we to access the experiences of people who were not writing about themselves and were not seen as worthy of individual writerly attention?⁵³ We may not be able to examine what such women wrote, but we do have works that were written *for* them. Reading such texts brings to light aspects of culture that directly affected semi-literate and illiterate nineteenth-century women living outside the homes of the cultural elite. In analyzing these *baojuan*, two specifically intended for women and one strongly associated with female audiences, as sources for pre-modern Chinese women's culture, Carlo Ginzburg's micro-historical work on the religious life of a sixteenth-century Italian peasant offers some cautionary words:

Since historians are unable to converse with the peasants of the sixteenth century... they must depend almost entirely on written sources. These are doubly indirect for they are *written*, and written in general by individuals who were more or less openly attached to the dominant culture. This means that the thoughts, the beliefs, and the aspirations of the peasants and artisans of the past reach us... almost always through distorting viewpoints and intermediaries.⁵⁴

Ginzburg warns against assuming that the written word, even texts that appear to have been popular given the number of editions produced, equates with the culture of "the popular classes" whose culture was largely orally transmitted and, he asserts, thus separate from the written word.⁵⁵ Given that at the time it is estimated that no more than ten percent of Chinese women were functionally literate, non-elite women's culture *was* oral culture, and any textually

⁵³ It would be impossible, for example to produce something like Susan Mann's fantastic work *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) about an audience of illiterate *baojuan* devotees.

⁵⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xv.

⁵⁵ Ginzburg, xv.

based study of it will be fundamentally distorted by its translation to the male-dominated scope of the written word.⁵⁶ Though these *baojuan* were undoubtedly written by men and cannot be taken as direct examples of female experience, they were sometimes intentionally made for and certainly were used by women nonetheless, strands woven into the fabrics of their religious and social lives.

All three of the female-centric *baojuan* I consider argue that, whether implicitly or explicitly and with differing approaches, female lives had value, merit, and merit making potential. This is not, however, to say that such texts' assertions of female value directly challenge predominantly Confucian and patriarchal cultural structures that subordinated women, limited their chances for education, and greatly pressured them to conform with expectations to marry and produce male heirs. Whereas *Liu Xiang* (Chapter 1) offers alternatives to this framework in its challenge to the low position of a junior daughter-in-law, for example, the text does not oppose the obligation of filial piety owed to one's in-laws no matter how abusive they might be. The two female-focused *baojuan* associated with Yu Zhi's work, while loudly asserting the great evil of drowning baby girls, also more firmly bind women to their socially mandated work within the home with emphasis on the meticulous attention that must be paid to household duties lest transgressions inadvertently result. For example, *Xigu* (Chapter 3) ends with the powerful statement that a powerless elderly grandmother will use whatever means she has to save the infant girls of her village, but also asks that its listeners take extra time before cooking to pick out every single unhusked grain of rice, or when cleaning to rescue each spilled grain, or when traveling to the river for water to be on the lookout for grains to glean from careless farmers.

⁵⁶ Evelyn Rawski, "Functional Literacy in 19th Century China," in *Literacy in Historical Perspective*, ed. Daniel P. Resnick (Washington: Library of Congress: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1983), 87.

Such duties are emphasized and expanded upon in *Liu Xiang zhong juan* (Chapter 2) in tales that include a mother and toddler son killed for their casual regard of the written word (the son in particular dying because his mother failed to prevent him from playing with and soiling a book) and another woman saved from imminent death caused by her carelessness as she ground grain into flour. To consider the space that such written tales left for women to make them their own and incorporate them into their popular, oral culture, we need to think more carefully about what it means to call these *baojuan* “popular.”

Popular literature

In moving away from away from the literature of elite readers and writers, complications as to precisely defining authorship and audience immediately arise, as does assessing these texts along traditional definitions of literary richness. Therefore, what does it mean to consider these examples of *baojuan* as popular literature? “Popular literature” encompasses both literature intended for the reception of mass audiences (for the people) and literature that was enjoyed by many people (by the people). These are not mutually exclusive definitions, but as I demonstrate in Chapter 2, just because a *baojuan* was written with features that had proved popular before, it was not guaranteed adoption into the popular repertoire. My analysis of these *baojuan* as literature, bearing in mind both applications of the term, is guided by the theorization of readerly and writerly texts, described by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, and an addition to this pairing, the producerly text, developed by twentieth-century media theorist John Fiske in *Understanding Popular Culture*.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) and John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010)

Readerly texts, Barthes explains, reflect a divide between their writers and readers, and are essentially products, created with a fixed cosmology of meaning, intended for the consumption of readers who need not extend themselves to grasp at alternate interpretations. Whereas writerly texts, which Barthes also describes as plural texts, are a theoretical construct standing opposite to the readerly; writerly texts make writers of their readers as each constructs their own meaning of the work out of pluralities of signification. Purely writerly texts are seemingly impossible; they are “novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem.”⁵⁸ Since the majority of literature is, as Barthes notes, readerly, interpretation (when a text allows for it) is an excavation of the incomplete pluralities within the text that create moments wherein readers generate meaning for themselves.⁵⁹

Baojuan, with their straightforward approach to expounding the consequences of good and evil behavior and familiar moral frameworks, would seem to fall firmly into Barthes’ category of the readerly. Yet, due to their nature as ritual texts that could be read/performed, they are not consumed by their audiences so much as they are used by them to create merit, over and over again if necessary. Barthes disassociates rereading from the readerly approach to texts as authorial products to be consumed, instead highlighting how rereading is the process by which pluralities are discovered and enjoyed.

“[R]ereading,” he writes:

...saves the text from repetition... multiplies it in its variety and in its plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology (“this happens *before* or *after* that”) and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* or *after*); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naïve, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to “explicate,” to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of a

⁵⁸ Barthes, 4-5.

⁵⁹ Barthes, 6.

reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no *first* reading,⁶⁰ even if the text is concerned to give us that illusion by several operations of *suspense*, artifices more spectacular than persuasive); rereading is no longer consumption, but play...⁶¹

As works of literature that were intended, by nature of their function as religious performance texts, *baojuan* are prime candidates for considering what pluralities such repetition can reveal in works that seem intrinsically simple, even flawed, on first glance. In this sense, the ritual space of *baojuan* performance is created not only by the invocation and descent of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but also by the recapture of “mythic time” where audiences, knowing the story already, are collectively entertained and edified by its pluralities. Yet *baojuan*, given their formal characteristics and simplicity, cannot be literature that Barthes would label as writerly. Rather, they are distinctly tonal in the sense that, “tonal unity is basically dependent on two sequential codes: the revelation of truth and the coordination of actions represented: there is the same constraint on the gradual order of melody and in the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence.”⁶² *Guo* 果 (karmic fruit) always follows *yin* 因 (karmic cause); *gan* 感 (stimulus) always precedes *ying* 應 (response).

This dichotomy between readerly and writerly, Fiske points out, creates a model of literary reception in which tonal, readerly texts ought to prove the most popular among unsophisticated readers passively looking to be entertained, whereas texts that exhibit more plural, writerly characteristics challenge readers to earn their pleasures in ways that fewer would find appealing. Fiske creates a third category to explore how and why “some texts are selected by

⁶⁰ A text like *Liu Xiang* has no first reading, its features are immediately evocative of many other widely known stories, written and oral, about devoted Buddhist women, long suffering daughters-in-law, scholar-beauty pairings, and the ineffable inevitability of karmic law/heaven’s response.

⁶¹ Barthes, 15-16.

⁶² Barthes, 30.

the people to be made into popular culture,” and some are not, positing “producerly” as a midpoint between readerly and writerly.⁶³ Producerly texts are popular writerly texts, or, in other words, plural readerly texts. As accessible as readerly texts, producerly texts can be easily understood by the passive or unchallenging reader, but simultaneously leave themselves open to the writerly creation of alternate meanings.⁶⁴ On the surface, sounding the gradual tonalities of dominant ideologies (and explicitly moralistic literature like *Qing baojuan* particularly foreground such meanings), a writerly text:

offers itself up to popular production; it exposes, however reluctantly, the vulnerabilities, limitations, and weaknesses of the preferred meanings; it contains, while attempting to repress them, voices that contradict the ones it prefers; it has loose ends that escape its control, its meanings exceed its own power to discipline them,, its gaps are wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them – it is, in a very real sense, beyond its own control.⁶⁵

The potential energy of popular literature that Yu Zhi hoped to harness to fuel the moral reconstruction of Jiangnan was a function of how it placed its audiences in the position of prospective co-creators. If the writerly is the “novelistic without the novel,” the producerly text sits instead at the other extreme; it is a novel overflowing with novels, a text with plurality of readings there for the taking without the alienation of the writerly. Analyzing the producerly text not only requires engaging with the dominant meanings that account for their readerly characteristics (and, given the obviousness of these meanings, the potential for such analysis to tell us something that we do not already know is not high), but also reading them, in Fiske’s words, “in order to expose their contradictions, their meanings that escape control, their

⁶³ Fiske, 103.

⁶⁴ Fiske, 103-4.

⁶⁵ Fiske, 104.

producerly invitations; to ask what it is within them that has attracted popular approval.”⁶⁶ Fiske suggest that those interested in understanding popular culture begin by “concentrat[ing] on those texts that have either escaped critical attention altogether or have been noticed only to be denigrated. The combination of widespread consumption with widespread critical disapproval is a fairly certain sign that a cultural commodity or practice is popular.”⁶⁷ Late Qing *baojuan*, condemned by early twentieth-century Chinese critics as superstition, ignored by Li Shiyu for their irregularities of form, widely deemed simplistic, and unsigned by their authors due to the need to avoid the taint of heterodoxy, are therefore an ideal place to begin exploring the dynamics of the relationship between popular literature and religion at that time.

In the late Qing, *baojuan*, as vernacular literature meant for oral performance, unlike classical language works, did not even need the written word to spread, opening it up for the use and reuse of a group that made up the majority of Chinese society at the time: the illiterate.⁶⁸ As Chapters 1 explores, *Liu Xiang* overflows with possible readings. Out of a pregnant gap between its first and second volumes, an author well acquainted with Yu Zhi’s work created the *baojuan* I analyze in Chapter 2, one that does not appear to have caught on as well as he hoped. Taking into account the ways in which this new text mimics the form but not the producerly space of *Liu Xiang* helps explain its failure to be adopted by popular culture. In Chapter 3, Yu Zhi’s theories of how vernacular literature might serve the needs of reconstructing the morality of an empire on the brink of disaster, and the relative successes of two examples of his efforts to use *baojuan* to further his aims, allow us to consider the social aspects of the producerly.

⁶⁶ Fiske, 105.

⁶⁷ Fiske, 106.

⁶⁸ On the threat that this posed with regard to immoral literature, see Chapter 3, 169-172.

Though I will frequently return to the concepts of the readerly and producerly in my analysis of the four *baojuan* featured in this dissertation, I remain aware of the limitations of applying the concepts Fiske defines specifically in terms of mostly white, patriarchal, capitalist, industrialized society in the context of late Qing. The divide between capitalist “cultural industries” and his characterization of popular culture as an undisciplined guerrilla resistance movement do not map easily onto postwar Jiangnan society.⁶⁹ Additionally, unlike the popular cultural works Fiske analyzes, the *baojuan* I focus on in this dissertation were non-commercially produced. Their publication was motivated less by economic concerns and more by religious and moral priorities.⁷⁰ Even so, the popular reception of *Liu Xiang* in this period and Yu Zhi’s desire to similarly disseminate his texts’ moral values as broadly as possible in an easily accessible manner, result in many parallels with the popular media of the 1980s that Fiske analyzes. In addressing these late Qing *baojuan*, rather than assuming that their simplistic stories and pedantic moralistic tone detract from their value as literature, we must remember all that can be done with such simplistic tales when they are, by nature of performance and print, revealing their writerly pluralities and making producers of their audiences.

Distribution of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I analyze *Liu Xiang* from its roots in the late Ming (early seventeenth century), to the changes in the tale as it was updated in the eighteenth century for Qing readers and listeners, to the height of its popularity in post-Taiping Jiangnan. In considering a range of possible readings that helped this text to become widely supported, reprinted, and retold, I

⁶⁹ Fiske, 25.

⁷⁰ Although heavenly account books in which meritorious acts were tabulated could be considered an economy of sorts in their own right.

explore the *baojuan*'s pluralities. As a work linked to the revitalization of lay Buddhism in the late Ming, the early Qing development of the tale in *baojuan* form already demonstrates how the story underwent popular reinterpretation that valorized lay religious practice and non-canonical texts. Why, however, did it so capture the popular religious imagination of the late Qing? What features of the text allowed for and encouraged its popular receptivity?

Chapter 2 focuses on an obscure *baojuan* that seemingly hoped to capitalize on the popularity of *Liu Xiang* by appropriating its heroine. In *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, the familiar popular Buddhist protagonist now animates and comments on a number of morality tales taken from popularly circulating Confucian morality literature of the time, particularly Yu Zhi's *Xuetang riji*, an illustrated primer for elementary education in free schools supported by philanthropists. Reading two different versions of this hybridized work against each other uncovers signs of a disagreement between its anonymous writer and Yu Zhi about how best to adopt *baojuan* to the purposes of disseminating the morals represented in Yu's particular framework of transgression, retribution and repentance. Were these texts supposed to convince their readers of the supremacy of his approach above all other methods of merit cultivation? Or was the point to allow *baojuan* devotees to continue their lay Buddhist devotion with the inclusion of additional principles regarding issues like grain preservation, written paper, and household management? What does this hybrid of lay Buddhism and vernacularized Confucianism, and its lackluster performance in the Jiangnan print world, reveal to us about how the popularity of *baojuan* was understood and employed?

In Chapter 3, I examine the activism and rhetoric that led Yu Zhi from a career of rural obscurity to becoming a regionally famous moralist and a champion of popular literature. I focus on how Yu Zhi developed his perspective on the state of Chinese morality at this critical juncture

in history, resulting in calls for conservatives to compose and distribute vernacular morality literature intended for unsophisticated audiences, employing genres lacking prestige, seemingly the antithesis of any gentleman's literary dreams. Two *baojuan*, *Pan Gong* and *Xigu*, are considered in terms of how their contents reflect or develop Yu Zhi's theories about morality and restoration and the different ways in which these works made producers and co-creators of their readers.

CHAPTER ONE

Liu Xiang baojuan: The Producerly Text and Post-Taiping Popularity

As work of pre-modern Chinese popular literature, *Liu Xiang* is an invaluable resource. *Liu Xiang*'s publication history, particularly its proliferation during the late Qing, provides us with concrete proof of the text's popularity. Che Xilun's *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* lists forty-two printed and manuscript editions of *Liu Xiang*, twenty-four of them published in the final four decades of the Qing.¹ My archival research uncovered at least ten more late Qing editions to add to this number. This *baojuan* is one of only a few texts about which, via publication data and donor lists, we can clearly demonstrate having generated significant and widespread interest in so many people from so many places, all in a short period of time. Such resources are rare and offer many different avenues of inquiry to guide research.

My particular interest in *Liu Xiang* grew out of a simple question: What made this *baojuan* so popular? On first reading, the simplest, most easily accessible interpretation of the tale that presents itself – a perfect young woman resists all attempts to turn her away from goodness and prevails, while those who abused her are punished – is not unique among either *baojuan* or popular literature as a whole. Its pluralities are hinted at by contradictions within the story, including regarding what it means to be a woman (as daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law), the mixed blessings of beauty, and how the demands of private religious devotion and societal expectations of marriage compete. Overmyer rightfully warns contemporary scholars studying

¹ Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 80-82. See Appendix 2 to this chapter for further details on the publication history of *Liu Xiang*.

baojuan that this lack of coherence is to be expected of texts written by the less educated.² But, once we consider *Liu Xiang* in light of Fiske's definition of producerly works, these incoherencies and inconsistencies are more fully revealed as assets that aided in the text's popularity, not detractions from its narrative coherence.³ A text as rich with potential interpretations and readings as *Liu Xiang* invites its audience members to produce their own particular versions based on the particular coherence of meanings they respond to, or are seeking from, in this story that overflows with meanings.

The dynamics that influenced the revitalization of *baojuan* in the post-Taiping era, powering the adoption of *Liu Xiang* by audiences beyond the small groups lay Buddhists who had previously printed at least five different editions before the war, will be the focus of Chapter 3. This chapter is instead concerned with what it was about the text that allowed for *Liu Xiang* to capture the attention of so many audiences, donors, and publishers in an era when popular morality literature was particularly valorized. In order to account for these features, we must also consider its literary and textual history before this period, as well as its gradual decline in the popular sphere during the Republican era.

Liu Xiang, an early-to-mid Qing text, is itself a popularized revision of a lost *baojuan* that circulated in the late Ming, and likely developed alongside other early Buddhist *baojuan*. This chapter begins by looking closely at the late Ming, a dynamic period of religious revival focusing on lay practice in ways that parallel the late Qing focus on non-elite access to moral education, in order to understand literary and religious influences that remain important in *Liu Xiang*. Even

² Overmyer characterizes *baojuan* from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in this manner "The authors of these books were not highly educated; so there are problems of style and of incorrect characters. To make these books more coherent than they really are would be a disservice." in Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, 7.

³ See Introduction, 26-31 for discussion of Fiske's use of "producerly" in relation to Barthes' "readerly" and "writerly" texts.

then, the early *baojuan* version inspired recreation and reinterpretation, serving as the source for a lost *chuanqi* drama by a prominent Jiangnan playwright.

Ming roots of *Liu Xiangnü*: lay Buddhism and elite theater

Liu Xiangnü came onto the stage, literally, during a great period of religious revival among lay Buddhists in the Ming, led by monks like Yunqi Zhuhong 云栖祿宏 (1535-1615), who focused on making Buddhism accessible even to those who were socially bound not to leave the home. Zhuhong emphasized the importance of Buddhist values of compassion and wisdom, but melded them with traditional Confucian conceptions of filial piety in an attractive, compelling syncretic message for lay believers.⁴ In this milieu the earliest traces of Liu Xiangnü emerge in Jiangnan, the same area in which the later *baojuan* would be most reprinted. Xiangnü appears as the protagonist of a *chuanqi* 傳奇 drama in the late Ming called *Shuangxiu ji* 雙修記 (*The Story of the Cultivating Couple*), written by Ye Xianzu 葉憲祖 (1566-1641). The play's introduction credits a text called *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan* 劉香女小卷 (*The Small Volume of Liu Xiangnü*) as the source of its plot.⁵ Unfortunately, both *Shuangxiu ji* and *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan* are no longer extant.

⁴ Yü Chun-fang. *The Renewal of Buddhism in China. Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1981).

⁵ *Xiaojuan* translates to “small volume.” In contemporary *baojuan* performed in Jiangnan, *xiaojuan* is a term used for short, lyrical, and entertaining *baojuan* that are used as interludes. *Huaming baojuan* (花名寶卷 The Precious Volume of Flower Names), a five-page text sometimes appended to *Liuxiang baojuan*, is considered to be the most famous of such small volumes. (See Che Xilun. “Qingmo minguo jian Changzhou diqu kanyin de baojuan,” *Minsu yanjiu*. 4 (2011):129-140. p.135.) It has no narrative, consisting only of twelve stanzas of lyrics on the various flowers that bloom throughout the year and the religious sentiments they inspire in their viewers. I can find no references to *xiaojuan* before such late Qing *baojuan*, but believe that *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan*, while it might have been short, most likely differed from later texts with the same generic name by nature of having a plot.

Missing both texts, our understanding of Liu Xiangnü as the protagonist of a late Ming tale is based solely on the introduction to the *chuanqi* and a summary of the play itself preserved in a compilation of uncertain origins, a brief mention of an alternately titled *baojuan* version in Lü Tiancheng's 吕天成 (1580-1608) *Qupin* 曲品, and the reconstruction below of the social and religious spheres in which the texts circulated during the late Ming. In this section, which takes us back over 250 years from the period in which *Liu Xiang* flourished in the late nineteenth century, we will use the small volume and the full drama script to help us put Liu Xiangnü's early literary incarnations into perspective. By carefully establishing the links between the missing texts, the late Ming revival of Buddhism led by an increase in lay religious groups, the playwright himself, and his involvement with the literary elite of his time, we can understand how this non-canonical Buddhist text underwent further changes in the Qing, ones that marked an intensification of the role lay practitioners could play in their own salvation and the salvation of their peers, and a widening of the breadth of female religious experiences portrayed and endorsed.

We know the most about the existence of these missing pieces of Xiangnü's tale due to a single anonymous source, *Chuanqi huikao* 傳奇彙考 (*Assembled Critiques of Chuanqi*), traditionally believed to have been compiled between 1715 and 1722, which preserves the introduction along with an anonymous commentator's exegesis. However, *Chuanqi huikao* itself did not exist in print until 1914.⁶ Every edition that remains to be examined today is incomplete, entirely lacking in

⁶ For close consideration of the provenance of *Chuanqi huikao*, see Deng Changfeng 鄧長風, "Chuanqi huikao tanwei 傳奇彙考探微" *Hanxue yanjiu* 17 (1999):229-258. The *Chuanqi huikao*, in its earliest edition, consists of eight volumes of summaries of Ming and Qing dramas. This edition circulated concurrently with a ten-volume edition that the editors of the *Qyhai zongmu tiyao* 曲海總目提要 (*The Comprehensive Catalogue with Content Summaries of the Ocean of Song*) used to compile their work in 1926(8?), and includes entries that do not appear in that later better-known and better-edited work. (Deng, 230-231). Deng acknowledges the uncertainty for the first publication date of *Qyhai zongmu tiyao* as another problem with the source material. It is also quite likely that multiple versions of *Chuanqi huikao*, if not wholly different texts entirely consisting of entries about drama using the same title, circulated in manuscript form until the early Republican era. *Chuanqi huikao* (Shanghai, 1914), 3:20a-22a.

paratextual detail.⁷ The contents consist of summaries of plays in no particular chronological or thematic order. Each entry begins by identifying, if possible, the playwright and its time period. It follows with a source for the title, and then reproduces, if possible, the introduction to the play. This is followed by the compiler's speculation as to sources for the play, consisting of quotations and summaries of these prior texts. Most entries also include a fairly detailed summary of the play as well.

Whoever the compiler of the *Shuangxiu ji* entry was, it is likely that he was as bibliographically stymied by *Shuangxiu ji* as we are by *Chuanqi huikao*. This is immediately apparent when the entry begins by identifying two pen names, one for the play and another for the foreword, neither of which the compiler relates to their owner, Ye Xianzu, a prolific playwright of the late Ming. Rather, the compiler says that the identities of both sobriquets have been lost.⁸ The entry then quotes the foreword, in which Ye explains that after two of his earlier works were popularly received, his study of Buddhism and sincere belief in the Pure Land led him to pick up *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan* in a moment of leisure and set it to music to compose the following play.⁹ The compiler took this to mean that the play was composed by a Wanli era 萬曆 (1573-1620) man of letters and a Buddhist monk, though Ye Xianzu was neither. The compiler then comments, "Among the recent lyrics and songs that discuss Buddhism, Tu Long's 屠隆 *Tanhua ji* 曇花記 (The Tale of Umbara) is the most canonical."¹⁰ The relative nature of the term

⁷ Ibid., 235.

⁸ “而榭園居士姓名亦不傳。” *Chuanqi huikao*, 3:20a.

⁹ “序又云。居士精詞曲。其所作玉麟、四艷諸記。皆為世膾炙。精究佛理。篤信淨土。暇日取劉香女小卷。被之聲歌。名雙修記。” (original not punctuated) Ibid., 20a.

¹⁰ “近代詞曲中談佛法者。屠隆曇花記為博極內典。” Ibid., 20a.

“recent,” and the fact that Tu Long lived from 1542-1605, make it less likely that this particular entry was written in 1715-1722, the purported dates of the anthology’s composition. Instead, this suggests the entry was written closer to the date of the composition of *Shuangxiu ji*, since the entry’s writer considered the late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century *Tanhua ji* still to be recent.

In this period, *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan* must have circulated among politically and socially involved late Ming literati for it to attract the attention of literati-playwright Ye Xianzu in his moment of leisure. This association between Ye and an earlier version of *Liu Xiang*, unknown as it was to the anonymous early Qing compiler of *Chuanqi huikao*, connects *Shuangxiu ji* to Ye’s network of prominent late Ming political and literary elites, making Ye’s adaptation of the *xiaojuan* a high point of the tale’s cultural cachet. Further examination of the individuals in these circles reveals how the antecedents of *Liu Xiang* attracted the attention of gentry far removed from the functionally literate readers or illiterate listeners associated with the later *baojuan* in the Qing.

Ye hailed from the city of Yuyao 餘姚, in Zhejiang 浙江, famously the home of the neo-Confucian luminary Wang Yangming 王陽明, (1472-1529).¹¹ Although Ye himself struggled to pass the imperial exam, succeeding finally at the age of fifty-four in 1619, he was incredibly well connected within the literary and political circles of the late Ming and early Qing long before his success in securing a bureaucratic post. In the expanded edition of friend and prominent literary critic Lü Tiancheng’s *Qupin*, completed in 1610, Ye received credit for five *chuanqi* dramas, including *Shuangxiu ji*, marking its initial composition some years earlier than his

¹¹ On Wang Yangming, see Weiming Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-Ming’s Youth (1472-1509)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

1613 foreword included in *Chuanqi huikao*.¹² Lü briefly mentions how the play draws upon a work he calls *Liu Xiangnü xiuxing baojuan* 劉香女修行寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Liu Xiangnü's Cultivating Merit*), deeming the *baojuan* rustic but in harmony with old customs and beneficial for female audiences.¹³ Eventually, Ye came to be credited with credited with twenty-four *zaju* 雜劇 (variety plays), twelve of which are extant, and nine *chuanqi*, two of which are extant – *Jinxiao ji* 金鎖記 (*The Golden Lock*) and *Luanbi ji* 鸞籠記 (*The Barb of Love*).¹⁴ Other late Ming literary greats with whom Ye interacted include Feng Menglong,¹⁵ Sun Kuang,¹⁶ Sun's nephew Lü Tiancheng,¹⁷ and Wang Jide^{18,19} Ye's students included Yuan Yuling²⁰ and Wu Bing.²¹

¹² Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, *Wan Ming qu jia nian pu* 晚明曲家年譜 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang gu ji chu ban she, 1993), 494

¹³ Lü Tiancheng, *Qupin*, ed. Wu Shuyin (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 385.

¹⁴ Zeng Yongyi 曾永義, *Ming zaju gailun* 明雜劇概論 (Taipei: Jiaxin shuini gongsi wenhua jijinhui, 1978), 304.

¹⁵ Feng Menglong (1574-1646) was a publisher, a prolific writer of vernacular shorts stories, and anthologizer of popular songs and poetry, exam handbooks, jokes, and other esoteric materials. A Ming loyalist, he died when the Qing advanced south. For more details, see Deng Shaoji 鄧紹基, Yao Shuyi 幺书仪, and Wang Yongkuan 王永寬, *Zhongguo gudai xiqu wenxue cidian* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 172.

¹⁶ Sun Kuang (1543-1613) was a Ming official, prolific literary critic, editor and publisher from Yuyao, Zhejiang. See Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 128-130.

¹⁷ Lü Tiancheng (1580-1618) was a prolific playwright and famous drama critic. His father was a close associate of famous playwrights of the late Ming as well. On Lü, see Deng, et al, 456-457.

¹⁸ Wang Jide (?-1623) was editor of one of the most influential editions of *Xixiang ji*. Wang remained outside of the exam system, instead dedicating his life to the study and composition of drama. For more on Wang Jide, see Deng, et al, 757.

¹⁹ This list of Ye's associates comes from Zeng, 304.

²⁰ Yuan Yuling (1599- 1674) was a novelist and playwright of works including most famously *The Western Bower* (西樓記). Expelled from the Imperial College after an affair with the favorite courtesan of a local official, he wrote novels dramas until finally assuming a positing in the bureaucracy of the newly established Qing dynasty. See Li Xiusheng 李修生 and Wu Shuyin 吴书荫, *Guben xiqu jimu tiyao* 古本戏曲剧目提要 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), 389.

A number of these men were also the same individuals who recorded, in their diaries and correspondence, the earliest mentions of the *Jin Ping Mei*'s existence.²² This is significant because, as noted in the introduction to this dissertation, some of our earliest representations of *baojuan* performance come from the *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*).²³ This 100-chapter long Ming anonymously-authored novel was, at this time, still circulating in manuscript form among the same literati that made up Ye's social circle. Winning notoriety for its salacious scenes of explicit sex that violated social and moral conventions, the novel was at the same time justified by its author as a vehicle for moral instruction, a common convention at the time used to defend the composition and spread of vernacular literature.²⁴ According to the framework of karmic retribution upon which the novel's plot hung, the most depraved characters were eventually punished with horrific deaths, while the characters that were morally corrupt in lesser ways faced minor punishments. For example, for the sin of inviting nuns into the home to recite *baojuan* for the benefit of the assembled women in exchange for temple donations, Wu Yueniang, mother of Ximen Qing's only living son, is doomed to be abandoned by the boy. Katherine Carlitz identifies an ironic use of the character "filial" in this child's name, heightening the impact of his abandonment of familial obligations to become a Buddhist monk. The narrator

²¹ Wu Bing (1595-1647) was Yixing, Jiangsu native who attained a *jinshi* degree in 1619 and served the Ming dynasty for twenty five years, including as superintendent of Jiangxi schools. When the Ming fell in 1644, he fled south with Prince Yongming, but was captured by the Qing in 1647 and died the next year on a hunger strike. The *Mingshi* 明史 (Ming History) describes him as a martyr. Deng, et al, 783-784 and Shen Jing, *Playwrights and Literary Games in Seventeenth Century China: Plays by Tang Xianzu, Mei Dingzuo, Wu Bing, Li Yu, and Kong Shangren*. (Plymouth, RI: Lexington Books, 2010), 123-150.

²² Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel: *Ssu ta ch'i-shu** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 55-72.

²³ The novel relates the intricate details of daily life a fictional polygynous family, including graphic descriptions of sex. It follows the main character, Ximen Qing, from when he acquires his wealth, five wives, fame and sexual stamina to the dissipation of his estate, family, and life.

²⁴ Katherine Carlitz, "Family, Society, and Tradition in the *Jin Ping Mei*." *Modern China* 10.4 (1984): 389.

particularly draws attention to the connection between his mother listening to *baojuan* during her pregnancy and the child's shameful lack of filial piety.²⁵

As plot devices serving the needs of the plot's moral framework, can such representations of *baojuan* performance within the women's quarters of this elite family be taken as a realistic reflection of late Ming performance practices and contexts? Carlitz admonishes caution to literary and cultural historians who might be tempted to take the narrative at face value as an unembellished source for performance history, but notes that the text represents *baojuan* in much the same way as irritated officials who were trying to clamp down on the unofficial spread of potentially heterodox religious texts.²⁶ However, by coupling the representations of *baojuan* recitation in the *Jin Ping Mei* with Ye's involvement within the literary world in which it circulated and his exposure to and adaptation of *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan*, it is possible to imagine this *Liu Xiang* precursor also being performed in the setting described in the novel – the private space of gentry women's quarters. This helps support the historical reality of such texts' circulation in these spaces. At the same time, in contrast to the disparaging representation made by Ming officials, in this case, Ye's adaptation (and Lü's gentle endorsement) are also affirmations of the *xiaojuan/baojuan* as a valuable text, worthy of retelling and rewriting into a more literary form. As genealogical evidence shows, Ye's home was filled with women - two wives, three daughters, and many granddaughters. In a certain way, it was a real historical counterpart to the inner quarters of Ximen Qing's fictional estate.

²⁵ Ibid., 406-407.

²⁶ Ibid., 408.

Ye and his wives, Madame Shao 邵氏 and Madame Liang 梁氏, had three daughters and no sons.²⁷ Politically, Ye's connections embroiled him in the turmoil of the early seventeenth-century conflict between the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568-1627) and the Donglin faction of scholar-officials. When Wei began his violent purge of the faction, Ye was demoted to a position at the Ministry of Works due to his relation, by marriage, to Huang Zunsu 黃尊素 (1584-1626).²⁸ Huang, his daughter's father-in-law, was one of the Donglin seven *junzi* arrested in 1626 and killed by Wei's order while in prison on July 23.²⁹ Due to the fame of Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1676), son of the Donglin martyr and one of the great Confucian scholars of the early Qing, we know the name of the daughter he married – Ye Baolin 葉寶林 (1609-1676) and the years of her birth and death.³⁰ This marriage was uxorial, and Huang writes that he enjoyed many debates with his father-in-law while they lived together.³¹ At his death in 1641, Huang recorded that he was survived by five grandsons and a number of granddaughters (孫女幾人).³²

²⁷ Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, “Waijiu Guangxi anchashi Liutong Ye Gong gaizong muzhiming 外舅廣西按察使六桐葉公改葬墓誌銘” in *Nanlei ji: fu xueji chugao* 南雷集:附學箕初稿, 8 vols. (Shanghai: Hanfen lou, 19--), 5:7b. Huang's collected writings are subdivided into separately named and paginated collections. This epitaph is in the first *juan* of “Wu mei ji 吾梅集。”

²⁸ Another of Huang's daughters, married to Zou Guangji (鄒光繩) (?-?), is listed as a childless, chaste widow in the 1792 edition of the *Shaoxing fu zhi* 紹興府志 (*Shaoxing Gazetteer*). She was filial enough to cut a piece of her thigh to help cure her mother-in-law's illness. (*Shaoxing Gazetteer*, 64:71b) Nothing is recorded about the third, who married a man named Chen Xiangzhou (陳相周) (?-?).

²⁹ John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and its Repression, 1620-1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 122.

³⁰ Tu Lien-Che, “HUANG Tsung-hsi 黃宗羲” in *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* ed. Arthur W. Hummel (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1943) 1:351-352.

³¹ Huang, 6b.

³² Huang, 7b-8a.

Ye was also well connected with the leaders of the late Ming revival of Buddhism – both monastic and lay. Ye’s engagement with Buddhism was eclectic and lifelong. Zeng Yongyi notes that in addition to *Shuangxiu ji*, two of his earlier plays, *Yishui han* and *Mazuo ji*, also involve religious themes.³³ According to the epitaph written by Huang, Ye was personally acquainted with Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1567-1642) and Zhanran Yuancheng 湛然圓澄 (1561-1627). Huang attests that he saw firsthand how Miyun once predicted an illness of Ye’s, warning him in time to aid in full recovery.³⁴ Miyun represented one extreme of Chan practice, reviving the practice of using shouting and beating in encounters with students, which were said to bring about sudden enlightenment.³⁵ Zhanran, on the other hand, while a master in the Caodong school of Chan Buddhism, took his vows under Zhuhong, the previously mentioned great reviver of the Pure Land tradition during the late Ming.³⁶ Though Huang notes that this dedication to Buddhism happened in Ye’s retirement, the 1613 preface to *Shuangxiu ji* was written years before he passed the imperial exam, and it highlights his sincere devotion to Pure Land practice. It is clear that Ye was deeply tied to Buddhism well before the end of his career.

³³ Zeng, 315.

³⁴ Huang, 7b.

³⁵ Wu Jiang, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 86-87. Miyun’s practice of the Linji school of Chan, whose abrasive methods were idealized by Wang Yangming, meant that literati deeply admired him. In his lifetime, Miyun served as the abbot of a number of monasteries and ordained 300 disciples.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-95. Zhenran was a master of the Caodong lineage, which, in terms of its practices, was more conservative than the Linji school. His fame was also tied to literati support, but his less flashy strategies and limited number of students gave meant the Caodong lineage was less well known outside of southeastern China.

Zhuhong, the late Ming Buddhist Renewal, and lay Buddhist Practice

With *Shuangxiu ji* as evidence for Ye's earlier interest in Buddhism, Ye also becomes connected with prominent Jiangnan abbot Zhuhong's efforts to attract literati to lay Buddhism. At the time *Shuangxiu ji* was written, Zhuhong was at the height of his prominence, both locally as a Jiangnan abbot, and nationally as an opponent to Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits. Born in Hangzhou to the prominent Shen family, Zhuhong took orders as a Buddhist monk at the age of thirty-two, only after having failed the exams, failed to have children, and having lost his first wife to illness.³⁷ In 1571, he began restoring Yunqi Monastery, also in Hangzhou, remaining there until his death.³⁸ In Jiangnan, his fame as a monk spread as his many literati followers founded their own lay associations for animal release and *nianfo* (reciting Amitâbha Buddha's name) across the region.

Influenced by his reading of the most famous and widely reprinted of Daoist morality texts, *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (*Tract of the Most Exalted on Action and Response*), Zhuhong also authored his own addition to the genre, *Zizhi lu* 自知錄 (*The Record of Self-Knowledge*), which reinterpreted Daoist framework of heavenly rewards and punishments in light of the Buddhist tradition of karmic law and justice.³⁹ In Zhuhong's new approach, rather than threatening readers with shortened lives for sinful behavior and promising extended lives of great fortune for benevolent acts and the chance to ascend bodily as *xian* 仙 (immortals), Zhuhong removes heavenly bureaucrats from the equation altogether. The impersonal law of karmic justice

³⁷ The temple where he received the complete precepts for ordination, Zhaoqing Monastery, would in the Qing also house the publisher of the earliest extant Chinese edition of *Xiangshan baojuan* and of many editions of *Liu Xiang*.

³⁸ Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

becomes the arbiter of suffering or happiness in both this life and the next, and each individual bears responsibility for their own fates.⁴⁰ The resultant work is a syncretic blend of Confucian filial piety relating to one's own family and Buddhist benevolence for all creatures.

Zhuhong intentionally used this medium of morality books, which reached a broader audience because they were intended for common readers, rather than the highly educated, because he believed that in his own time Buddhism had failed in its effort to reach as many people as possible.⁴¹ In his view, deluded by esoteric Chan sects, the common people were not able to grasp the fundamental importance of karmic law and earning merit to avoid suffering in the next life, which could be done through such simple acts as *nianfo*, vegetarianism, and releasing captive animals back into nature.⁴² Zhuhong's focus on the vernacularization of Buddhism led his greatest successes as an abbot in his promotion of lay Buddhist societies. As a result of his efforts, Yü concludes: "The lay Buddhist movement at the end of the Ming was more activist than contemplative, more moralistic than theological, more world-affirming than world-rejecting."⁴³ It was in this environment that Liu Xiangnü's tale spun out from an anonymously composed "small volume" *xiaojuan* into a *chuanqi* drama (Ye's two extant *chuanqi* contain twenty-seven and thirty-three scenes) written by a prominent dramatist, moving from the intimate space of the women's quarters to the worldly social sphere of male poets and playwrights.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 112-113.

⁴¹ Ibid., 81.

⁴² Ibid., 27.

⁴³ Ibid., 227.

However, the compiler of the *Chuanqi huikao* entry, in considering the influences on *Shuangxiu ji*, could not make such connections to Ye Xianzu's social, political and religious background and his motives because he did not make the connection between the play and its playwright. Neither does the compiler cite preexisting texts about Liu Xiangnü as influences on the play, though Lü Tiancheng certainly knew about them. Rather, the *Chuanqi huikao* compiler quotes from Buddhist scriptures and suggests a connection with a play about the lives of Zhuhong and his wife, who followed his spiritual guidance and became a nun. *Guiyuan jing* 歸元鏡 (*The Mirror of Returning to the Origin*) was written during the Wanli era as well, with the purpose of promoting *nianfo* and vegetarianism. The compiler's assumption that these sutras and this particular religious drama were the most immediately accessible sources of inspiration for *Shuangxiu ji* points to two issues. First, his evidence is entirely focused on the importance of Pure Land Buddhism and the preeminence of *nianfo* as a devotional practice, emphasizing a strong connection between Zhuhong's influence on lay Buddhism and the composition of *Shuangxiu ji* that will be elaborated below. Secondly, wherever and whenever this entry was written, the compiler must not have had a copy of *Liu Xiangnü xiaojuan* (or Lü's *Liu Xiangnü xiuxing baojuan*) to consult, perhaps because the earlier text did not have the broad distribution across the empire that the later *baojuan* enjoyed. What is clear, however, is that Liu Xiangnü's brush with high culture – her appearance in *Shuangxiu ji* – came out of a period of reform in the relationship between clergy and lay Buddhists. *Shuangxiu ji* is an example of a sub-genre of *chuanqi* drama: literature inspired by and for the sake of religious revival. The late nineteenth century, which has bequeathed us with dozens of different printings of the *baojuan* from across southern China, was too a time of religious revival, as Chapters 2 and 3 will explore in greater detail.

Shuangxiu ji* and *Liu Xiang

Building on the simple salvific formulae Zhuhong popularized, *Liu Xiang* remains true to the spirit, if not the execution, of pious lay Buddhist life. Che Xilun believes the *baojuan* that has come down to us in nineteenth-century sources was rewritten earlier in the Qing.⁴⁴ In this next section, comparing the orthodox religious framework of *Shuangxiu ji* with the lay religious inclinations of *Liu Xiang* will help us better understand how closely aligned the earlier versions were with Zhuhong's mission, and how the latter text emphasized an alternate reading of the elevation of lay Buddhism. The *chuanqi* drama stays true to its roots in the era that saw the reinvigoration of the monastic system and the initial expansion of lay Buddhism, emphasizing the saving power of *nianfo* and the everlasting joy of the Pure Land. But by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is clear that the *baojuan* had incorporated a number of lay Buddhist ideals from other approaches to religious cultivation. Particularly in emphasizing the power of the uninitiated individual to secure his or her own salvation, *Liu Xiang* takes on some characteristics associated with Non-Action Teachings, a late Ming movement considered either purely lay Buddhist or disturbingly heterodox, depending on whether non-elite or elite sources are consulted.⁴⁵ Non-Action Teachings (*wuwei jiao* 無為教) describes a lay Buddhist movement that venerated the writings of a lay Buddhist, Patriarch Lo, written the form of late Ming *baojuan*.⁴⁶ Patriarch Lo's writings, when examined closely as Ter Haar does in his recent study of the

⁴⁴ “現存劉香女寶卷的版本，都是清代人的改編整理本。” “The editions of *Liu Xiang* that are extant today all were revised and edited by people during the Qing.” Che Xilun, e-mail message to author, February 15, 2014.

⁴⁵ In particular, “Rediscovering Lay Buddhism” in ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture*. 219-233. More succinctly, ter Haar writes, “Their supposed heterodoxy was entirely constructed by outside elite observers,” 8.

⁴⁶ These *baojuan* fall into the category of newly composed text considered heterodox by elite Buddhist clerics, but its spread was due in part to proselytizing by Buddhist monks. *Ibid.*, 2.

movement, indicate producerly creativity and innovation on the part of lay Buddhists engaging with and using canonical texts in new ways to meet their particular religious needs.⁴⁷ Likewise, while not explicitly deviating from the drama's (and presumably the *xiaojuan*'s) Pure Land focus, *Liu Xiang* creatively popularizes the drama's ideas about lay Buddhism, and in expanding it, engages with similar debates on the level of Buddhist practice in daily life as Non-Action Teachings did, with less iconoclastic conclusions.⁴⁸

The simple plot of *Shuangxiu ji*, based on the *Chuanqi huikao* summary, focused on the virtues of renouncing killing and *nianfo*, featuring their transformative power in the lives of Liu Xiang, her parents, her husband, and the larger community of lay believers that take her in after her evil in-laws throw her out onto the street. These precepts are introduced by a Buddhist monk, who by his involvement in Xiang's childhood enlightenment and her ascension to the Pure Land as an adult, drives home the importance of clergy in shaping and supporting lay practice. Though the play centers on lay Buddhists and their personal practices of *nianfo* and vegetarianism, it also focuses on duty towards family as a component of their compassion. This lines up with Zhuhong's emphasis on such practices as ones that met the requirements of filial piety, and a further melding of Buddhist piety and filial piety with each other.⁴⁹ In daily life, even while remaining within the household, the play emphasizes that religious dedication was not just possible, but highly beneficial. Xiang's parents passed away while sitting in meditation on a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁸ That is not to say that *Liu Xiang* is specifically a Non-Action text. Patriarch Lo and his *Five Books in Six Volumes* garner no attention, and neither do the full range of Non-Action Teaching precepts, which included a rejection of religious iconography including statues and all ancestor worship, the prohibition of meat and alcohol, and participation in lay religious halls that included initiation into the specific practices of the patriarchs who came after Lo.

⁴⁹ Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 27.

predetermined day, having created sufficient merit to be reborn in the Pure Land. Ma Yu escapes the collective punishment dealt to his family in hell because of his piety. Still, there is need for clergy to recite scripture and perform rituals, both as the impetus for Xiang's initial dedication and as the source of salvation for the evil Ma family at the end of the text when monks are hired to perform a Water and Land Rite 水陸法會 at their funerals.⁵⁰ The play ends with Xiang and her husband seeking guidance on *nianfo* meditation from the same monk whose scripture recitation opened the story. This attention to the continued role of Buddhist clergy in the lives of lay believers aligns with Yü Chun-fang's observation about the paired resurgence of lay and monastic Buddhism: "Lay Buddhism, then, reflected the new energy of monastic Buddhism in the late Ming. It did not emerge as a substitute for the latter."⁵¹ *Shuangxiu ji*, with its monk who converts Xiang and prophecies that her life will be difficult appearing again at the end to lead her and her husband in their lay practice, emphasizes the clergy's essential function.

In contrast, *Liu Xiang* makes clergy unessential to pursuing Buddhism. It also replaces canonical scriptures and rituals with non-canonical popular texts and rituals performed by lay people. Instead of the monk's recitation of a sutra as the impetus of Xiangnü's conversion, an unaffiliated nun recites a number of popular texts, including a *baojuan*.⁵² The lay reorientation of

⁵⁰ The Water and Land rite was a popular rite for the salvation of the tormented souls of those who died on the water or on land. Monasteries made the rite widely available to patrons from at least the Southern Song onwards, flexibly offering its performance in specialized temple halls, patron's homes, and community shrines. Most often the ritual took seven days to complete, and though it was often used as part of mortuary ritual, was not exclusively confined to the context of funerals. For more on the rite and its evolution in pre-modern China, see, Daniel Stevenson, "Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu fahui*, the Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land" in *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Marsha Widner (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 30-70.

⁵¹ Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 65.

⁵² In particular, the Shorter Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sutra (The Wonderful Panoply of the Land of Bliss). For an English translation of this sutra, see Donald Lopez, *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin, 2004). The *baojuan* performed, *Huaitai baojuan* 懷胎寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Carrying a Child*), has yet to be translated, but the anxiety

Liu Xiang, from whatever the lost late Ming version may have contained, is a demonstration of how the *baojuan*, even before its newfound popularity, was already an example of an orthodox text subjected to popular production and adopted according to a less orthodox, productively reading of a story. This revision (or series of revisions) took advantage of the instabilities inherent in Xiang's assertion of her right to practice piety as she saw fit and the various Buddhist movements in the late Ming that underscored lay religious devotion as a socially acceptable alternative to leaving the home.

In *Shuangxiu ji*, after Xiang's banishment from her in-laws' home, she takes up residence in an old temple and privately cultivates merit. The *baojuan*, however, raises her to the role of a lay preacher, entertaining crowds of local men and women who flock to a hermitage to hear her preach and recite popular texts, including one quoted in its entirety: *Foshuo sanshi yinguo jing* 佛說三世因果經 (The Sutra of Buddha preaching on the Causes and Results of the Past, Present, and Future), a non-canonical sutra that other late Qing *baojuan* also quote.⁵³ Finally, at the close of the *baojuan*, Ma asks Xiangnü to lead the rituals to save his family members' souls from hell. To further drive the point home, the episode ends with the poem:

A vegetarian virtuous person and a volume of scripture,
Lost souls immediately ascend to the Western Heaven.
If you invite those wine-drinking, meat-eating monks to ask for pardon,
There's no merit, and instead they descend even further.⁵⁴

surrounding pregnancy and its karmic consequences, which are related to this text's aims, are masterfully detailed in Beata Grant and Wilt Idema's introduction to *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang*.

⁵³ In particular, *Zhaoshen baojuan* 灶神寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of the Stove God*) quotes it at great length, while *Xiuniu baojuan* 秀女寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Xiuniu*) quotes it in part. For more on *Xiuniu*, see conclusion.

⁵⁴ “吃素善人一卷經。亡魂立刻就超昇。若請酒肉僧道來求懺。無功反要墮沈淪。” *Liu Xiang*, 2:56b, (facsimile, 302).

Now, the Non-Action Movement took a vocal anti-clerical stance to empower lay devotees as agents of their own salvation.⁵⁵ However sidelined clergy may be within *Liu Xiang*, it does not make a blanket condemnation of all monks; Xiangnü hires monks to perform her own parents' funeral rituals. Clergy is not the enemy, merely superfluous. The broad approaches to religious cultivation taken in *Liu Xiang* work together to endorse an egalitarian view of religious practice, echoing those movements from the late Ming that emphasized that one need not become a cleric to grasp complex mysteries of religious doctrine when the simple essentials will suffice. In *Liu Xiang*, the path to enlightenment is pared down to an immediately graspable formula that Zhuhong himself would still recognize but might not fully endorse, given the absence of ecclesiastical guidance. Likewise, even given its mildly anti-clerical stance and its focus on the autonomy of Buddhist devotion, neither does *Liu Xiang* explicitly align itself with Non-Action Teachings, although its practitioners could certainly have found much to agree with in the Qing *baojuan* version of the tale.

Whereas Liu Xiangnü is equally as virtuous and dedicated to practicing piety in each version, she assumes a significantly more vocal and important role in the *baojuan*. In doing so, the space for lay believers to enact their piety widens, a space for further producerly readings of the text. *Liu Xiang* becomes more than just another tale about an inspirational lay Buddhist woman. Furthermore, by making a *baojuan* part of the source of Xiangnü's conversion, thereby framing a *baojuan* performance within the *baojuan* itself, the text emphasizes its own importance, advertising the effectiveness of *baojuan* as a means for inspiring not only its eponymous heroine, but also its reading and listening audiences. It serves as an example for its audience of the transformative power of *baojuan* in the life of a woman who begins the tale as a simple commoner. This

⁵⁵ ter Haar, 3.

transformative power is immediately accessible to the audience themselves as they hear the text being recited. Not only do they earn merit through the hearing of it, but on the basis of the text's simple instructions for religious practices that can be adopted into daily life, they can continue to earn merit even after the final couplet has been recited by themselves becoming its performers (by performing the piety Xiangnü modeled or reading it, if they could) and producers (by donating to have it printed).

Interpretive Approaches⁵⁶

In this section, we will explore a few of the many ways *Liu Xiang* leaves itself open to pluralistic interpretation and producerly readings.⁵⁷ Although there are no records describing in detail how *Liu Xiang* was performed or how its listeners responded after hearing it, a few editions include either or both a preface or afterword. In these, the writers – a monk and a layperson – acknowledge the value of the text as a simplistic means of getting across a deep message about the need to turn away from evil and earn merit. In his afterword, dated 1871, layperson Li Xiyuan 李西緣 writes, “Those who read this book will see that, even though its words are rough and provincial, its truths are deep and mysterious. It encourages, at the basic level, how to swiftly return to the realm of the sages. I believe this is an extraordinary work.”⁵⁸ Monk Liezheng, in an undated preface, details how the superior philosophies of Mahayana Buddhism are present even within *Liu Xiang*, marking it as an entry point to higher understanding. He

⁵⁶ Methodologically, this section is inspired by Chapter 7, “Interpretations,” in Dudbridge, Glen, *The Legend of Miaoshan*. Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 102-118.

⁵⁷ For a detailed summary of the *baojuan*, see Appendix 1 after the conclusion of this chapter.

⁵⁸ “觀其書。語雖粗鄙。義實深玄。誘掖初機。旋歸聖域。信非尋常之卷。” *Liu Xiang*, 2:61a-61b. (facsimilie, 311).

writes, “To climb a jeweled pagoda without treading on the lower levels, how could one reach the summit?”⁵⁹

Li Xiyuan and Liezheng’s paratextual pieces about *Liu Xiang* both pick out specific aspects of the text to support their argument that it is a significant work worth reprinting. When Li notes Xiangnü’s father’s decision to abandon his butcher’s knife, for example, in addition to Xiangnü’s practices, he is highlighting another textual exemplar of lay piety, male like the preface writer himself.⁶⁰ Liezheng emphasizes the work’s value in conveying canonical truths to the masses in the face of criticism of Buddhism, befitting a clerical concern for the work’s ability to convey fundamental doctrine simply and engagingly.⁶¹ Contemporary audiences would have similarly found different aspects of this producerly text appealing or resonant, reflecting Barthes’ description of the active reader, “this ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts.”⁶² Chen Kuei-hsiang’s 2006 dissertation on *baojuan* and female piety points out how the ability for women from multiple perspectives to see themselves within the story could account for the popularity of *Liu Xiang*, one of the sources used in service of her main argument about women’s religious lives.⁶³ Due to this more general focus, Chen brings out elements of the tale as evidence of what life was like for the pious women who consumed these works. She argues that the text was popular because its audiences saw their real-life experiences and opinions reflected in Liu Xiangnü’s religious pursuits. To women suffering in the patriarchal family, her eventual

⁵⁹ “如登寶塔。不屢始層。乃至極頂。” *Liu Xiang baojuan* (Hangzhou, 1873), 1:1b. For specific details on this edition, held at Peking University, see Chapter 2, Appendix 1.

⁶⁰ *Liu Xiang*, 2:61a, (facsimile, 311.)

⁶¹ *Liu Xiang baojuan*, (Hangzhou, 1873), 1:1a.

⁶² Barthes, 10.

⁶³ Chen Kuei-hsiang, “Funü xiuxing gushi baojuan yanjiu 婦女修行故事寶卷研究.”

triumph would prove attractive; whereas to young women uncertain of marriage, her tale might inspire them to remain single rather than face her troubles; and to daughters-in-law in a precarious position in their new families, her story would remind them of their experiences.⁶⁴ Though these are reasonable points of contact at which the tale may resound with its various audiences, with the texts they came to the story already bearing, this analysis is also somewhat limited as Chen takes the events related in the *baojuan* as directly representative of women's religious experiences. For example, the incident in which Xiangnü's parents have an argument over letting Xiangnü visit a temple is taken as evidence that men and women had differing opinions about the propriety of women making public religious acts and that most families strictly controlled the movements of their women outside the household.⁶⁵ Even so, the point about *Liu Xiang* as a text that enables and encourages plural readings is significant. Chen's work highlights the versatility of *Liu Xiang* for audience members of different backgrounds or stages in life. Implicitly, then, Chen is in agreement with Fiske's theorization that producerly texts allow for pluralities that engage with audiences in ways other than the dominant ideological aims of the work.⁶⁶

Liu Xiang is indeed an extraordinary work. In its producerly plurality, it had something to offer everyone, from those looking for devotional literature and resolutions to religious dilemmas, to enjoyment of a satisfying tale, to academics looking to understand pre-modern Chinese religion and women's history, to name a few. Below, we will consider some different interpretive approaches to the text that audiences could engage with, in order "not to," as Barthes' writes,

⁶⁴ Ibid, 78-79.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 93.

⁶⁶ Fiske, 104.

“give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but to the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it.”⁶⁷

Readerly entertainment

One reason for the height of popularity reached by *Liu Xiang* in the late Qing was that the tale itself is compelling and entertaining, structured in such a way as to maintain an audience’s interest and attention.⁶⁸ In addition to the frequent alternation between prose, 7-7 couplets and 3-3-4 metered lines, giving sonic variation, the text includes songs clearly marked with the instruction “sing” (唱). These songs, generally sung in the voice of Xiangnü herself rather than the omniscient voice of the narrator, offer variation in both style and perspective.⁶⁹ The text moves between different registers as the plot necessitates, defusing tense moments with clever wordplay, as in the inclusion of a song playing off the names of sixteen herbal drugs immediately following Xiangnü’s parents’ death and ascension to the Pure Land. Variation also heightens dramatic import by making a break from the expected aural pattern. At the moment of Xiangnü’s parents’ cremation, a different metrical style appears: a 5-5 couplet followed by 6-6, four sets of 7-7, culminating in a jarring 8-8 pair that sends their souls off toward the west.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Barthes, 5.

⁶⁸ For a full summary of the *baojuan*, see Chapter 1, Appendix 1.

⁶⁹ Xiangnü first sings following her parents’ deaths. The final marked song of the text, however, is given to Ma Yu to sing while he is on his tour of hell after his parents beg him to return to the land of the living and ask Xiangnü to save them. In it, he mourns the suffering that his family is undergoing while praising Xiangnü for her forbearance throughout all their abuse, promising her their eternal gratitude if she saves them (*Liu Xiang* 2:50a-b, (facsimile 289-290)). This chance for Ma Yu to sing, whereas earlier Xiangnü has sung all the previous songs, is another mark of her victory over Lady Ma in terms of her influence on her husband.

⁷⁰ The song of sixteen medicines, “十六味藥名”, is on 1:30b-31a, (facsimile, 118-119). The funeral chant follows on 1: 32a-32b, (facsimile, 121-122).

The use of poems and songs that can be found in other late nineteenth-century popular religious texts suggests a body of common referents that were available for popular literary productions. The second half of *Liu Xiang*, when Xiangnü has attracts crowds of worshippers to her hermitage and preaches to them, features a version of the apocryphal *Foshuo sanshi yinguo jing* 佛說三世因果經 (*Sutra on Past, Present and Future Karma*), which can also be found in *Zaoshen baojuan* 灶君寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of the Stove God*), and a poem on the theme of emptiness, attributed to a Ming poet, which remains meaningful in contemporary popular Buddhism.⁷¹ The song that runs from Volume 2, 26b-27b, introduced by Xiangnü as “*Pu quan ge* 普勸詞” (“The Lyrics of Universal Exhortation”) handed down from earlier sages, can also be found in a slightly different order in *Sanbao zhengming baojuan* 三寶證盟寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Transmitting the Teachings of the Three Treasures*).⁷² When she performs funerary rituals to rescue the Ma family from hell, Xiangnü retells the familiar tale of Mulian rescuing his mother, a common feature of funerary ritual, with a twist – ending with the equation of Mulian and Ma Yu.⁷³ Such familiar shared vocabulary provided benchmarks for the audience to ground themselves in a broader tradition of popularly circulating morality literature. Woven around these familiar songs, poems and tales, in places *Liu Xiang* assumes the shape of a popular religious pastiche, tying together the

⁷¹ In *Liu Xiang*, the sutra runs from 2:22a-26b (facsimile, 233-242), and the poem on emptiness runs from 2:20b-21b, (facsimile 230-232). For twenty-first century popular references to the emptiness poem, see Ye Xiurong 叶秀荣, “Niannian ‘wan kong ge’ 念念《万空歌》” *Yinyong xiezuo* 9 (2007): 55; “Wang shijian 望世间,” *Fojiao wenhua* (April 2003):43.; “‘Wan kong ge’ yu ‘qian ben cao’ 《万空歌》与《钱本草》” *Nongmin wenzhai* 3 (2008):57.

⁷² (facsimile, 242-244). *Sanbao zhengming baojuan* (Changzhou: Peiben tang, 1890), 7b-8a.

⁷³ “昔日目連能救母，今日馬玉度雙親。” *Liu Xiang*, 2:56a, (facsimile, 301). For more on the place of *Mulian baojuan* in Ming and Qing religious culture, see Rostislav Berezkin, “The Development of the Mulian Story in Baojuan Texts (14th–19th centuries) in Connection with the Evolution of the Genre.”

greatest hits of morality literature with a story that frames them as instructive lectures – particularly at the nun’s hermitage in Volume 1 and in Xiangnü’s many orations in Volume 2.

As a story that narrates karmic consequences (*shuo yinguo* 說因果), from the outset the audience is primed to expect that Xiangnü’s virtue will eventually be rewarded just as those who abuse her will be summarily punished. Perfect in virtue, as much as Xiangnü resists forming such resentments against her in-laws, the audience itself cannot help but thirst for vengeance as she is repeatedly beaten unconscious. Even before the tale begins, the audience comes to the text knowing that the instabilities incurred by evil seemingly triumphing over good will eventually be resolved into the comforting reassurance of good’s ultimate victory. Once Volume 2 sees Xiangnü safely ensconced in her hermitage, cheerfully singing for crowds of country folk, and Ma Yu and his new wife off at his first bureaucratic posting, happily bringing justice to Chaozhou, good has been rewarded. But for the audience, tension remains because the other half of the story’s promise has yet to be kept. Having seen good characters rewarded with what they most wished for – religious retreat, exam success – it is now time for the evil to be punished. The narrative’s desire for revenge must be satisfied, even if Xiangnü herself is above such base desires.

Like the audience members consuming the story for its confirmation of the orthodoxy of karmic justice, the Jade Emperor 玉皇 is unwilling to write off the Ma family’s evil. He sends a plague god to rain down heavenly justice on the whole family when they gather for Lady Ma’s sixtieth birthday party. This banquet scene is drawn out for the sake of suspenseful pleasure. Knowing that retribution is about to be served, literally, in the form of a poisoned turtle, the narrative lingers on ironic details. Ma Xin admonishes his sons that hunting down the most delicious animal to serve at the feast is a way to show their filial piety. Lady Ma is delighted with

the turtle and instructs her daughters-in-law to carefully prepare it. The narrator seems in no rush to get to the climactic moment that the tale has been building steadily towards all along. Instead, the scene is drawn out for maximum dramatic effect with detailed birthday wishes, the relative positions of various members of the family seated in the banquet hall, and their effusive appreciation for how delicious the deadly turtle tastes. Lady Ma praises her children for their filial piety, revealing that she is still as ignorant of true piety as when she abused Xiangnü for her Buddhist devotion. Repeated references to filial piety throughout this scene remind the audience that the word does not mean what the Ma family elders think it means. Once the family retires for the evening, sleeping peaceably in their own rooms, heaven delivers its justice. Blood flows from all the seven orifices of their bodies, as blood once flowed from Xiangnü's mouth and nose after each of her beatings. Everyone dies.

Shortly thereafter, Ma Yu faints and his spirit descends to hell, where his suffering family begs him to rescue them with the proper funeral rituals. In a brief tour of the underworld detailing the tortures meted out to souls of evildoers, the *baojuan* further indulges in the voyeuristic need to see evil punished. In this most readerly version of the narrative, where Xiangnü's goodness is as fixed from the start as her mother-in-law's foreordained stint in hell, little effort is required on the part of the passive listener. Even Xiangnü's rescue of the family's souls from the underworld, an extraordinary act of mercy for her abusers, serves to confirm her unsurpassable goodness. While the following sections detail the social and religious debates that *Liu Xiang* is deeply enmeshed within and the various ways it represents filial piety and womanhood, these readings are not necessary aspects of its enjoyment as a entertaining tale of good and evil, told in an engaging style.

Personal Salvation as Filial Piety

One central conflict in *Liu Xiang* comes between the demands of the traditional Confucian family system and personal devotion to popular lay Buddhism. This conflict is a reflection and reshaping of the conflict between Princess Miaoshan and her father in *Xiangshan baojuan*, the *baojuan* version of the tale of Princess Miaoshan. In turn, Princess Miaoshan's conflict is shaped by the earlier tale of Mulian and his mother. If the explicit question of the Mulian legend is whether a monk can still be a filial son to his mother, and the explicit question of the tale of Miaoshan is whether a daughter who wants to be a nun can still be a filial daughter to her father, where then is the discordant familial relationship at the heart of *Liu Xiang*?

This tension between filial piety and personal salvation has been present in Chinese debates on Buddhism since the religion entered China.⁷⁴ Mulian originates in an Indian tale that came to China in the early centuries of Buddhism. Over centuries of sinicization, versions of the tale increasingly emphasized the filial piety of Mulian's rescue of his mother from hell, where her soul is confined for the sins of opposing Buddhism that she committed during her life. This legend, according to Alan Cole, was a means by which the Buddhist establishment contextualized filial piety, a traditionally Chinese value, within the moral framework of still-foreign Buddhism.⁷⁵ By the time *Liu Xiang* was circulating, the Mulian tale had been rewritten into an immensely popular ritual opera by Zheng Zhizhen 鄭之珍 (1518-1595) in the mid-sixteenth century.⁷⁶ As Qitao Guo details in *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage*, Zheng further

⁷⁴ Credit for the concise encapsulation of these sides of the conflict goes to Wilt Idema for the title of his annotated and translated edition of *Xiangshan baojuan: Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and her Acolytes*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

⁷⁵ Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 3.

⁷⁶ Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Hui Zhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 90.

transformed Mulian to support Confucian concerns for the family and lineage, expanding Mulian's secular life and his relationship with his parents before their deaths, his monkhood, and his tour of hell.⁷⁷ Through vivid descriptions of the frightening sufferings visited upon sinful spirits in the courts of hell, the tale emphasized that Buddhist piety (in Zheng's case, the hybridized Buddho-Confucian piety of the time Zheng rewrote Mulian), as the only means to reach and redeem them, was the ultimate expression of filial devotion. Alan Cole observes that in order to further strengthen the links between the Yulanpen ritual, filial sons, and mothers in need of salvation, the Mulian tale developed the concept that the act of childbirth itself, through the polluting nature of uterine blood, condemned mothers to Blood Pond Hell. By this formulation – childbirth, and by extension, female sexuality itself – was sinful in and of itself.⁷⁸ Idema, in his introduction to his translation of *Xiangshan baojuan*, sees this conceptualization of female sexuality as inherently sinful as a prerequisite for the development of the tale of Miaoshan, in which the demands of filial piety and personal salvation clash in the self-identity of a young woman.⁷⁹

The legend of Miaoshan, which Glen Dudbridge traces back to the Song, has no direct Indian predecessors.⁸⁰ Princess Miaoshan, third daughter of a king in a far-off land, decides to practice Buddhist piety from early childhood. When her sonless father demands that his daughters marry and produce grandsons as heirs, Miaoshan reveals her desire to become a nun, a request that eventually leads to her execution for unfilial behavior. In the underworld, her goodness results in the salvation of so many souls that she is returned to life before hell loses all its inhabitants. Revived, she possesses magical powers and lives as a pious hermit on a remote

⁷⁷ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁸ Cole, 217.

⁷⁹ Idema, "Introduction" in *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety*, 24-25.

⁸⁰ "Anatomy of the Story" in Dudbridge, *The Tale of Miaoshan*, 88-101.

mountain. When she hears that her father is dying of a wasting disease brought on by his sinful nature, she anonymously offers her eyes and hands to him as a divine remedy for his illness. Healed, he visits the hermit, only to have his queen recognize the mutilated form of their youngest daughter. When he repents of his evil, Miaoshan's eyeless and handless body is transformed into one with ten thousand eyes and hands, thus revealing her as an incarnation of Guanyin. In one powerful interpretation, the tale can be read to address how the Confucian demand for daughters to marry and produce children, thus sinning by shedding blood in childbirth, conflicts with the requirements of Buddhist piety and purity. Through her sacrifice of her body for the sake of her father's health, Idema writes that the tale "may therefore also be seen, despite its surface narrative, as a tract designed to persuade daughters to accept marriage, to accept being sacrificed for the sake of the patriarchal family."⁸¹

In direct contrast to the earlier tales, both of Xiangnü's parents support her religious inclinations and join her in realizing them. As the ideal parents of a religious girl, they make no demands that she marry and assent to each of her suggestions for greater religious devotion. Reflecting Miaoshan's desire to dedicate her life to virginal purity and Buddhist devotions, Xiangnü steadfastly advocates vegetarianism and retirement from public interaction in favor of private meditation, sutra reading, and *nianfo*. Though her arguments in favor of these practices never reach the heights of Miaoshan's polemics against marriage in *Xiangshan baojuan*, they still appeal strongly to most of her listeners, including her parents, Liu Guang and Xu Shi. Rather than being set in the rarified world of a far-distant kingdom, *Liu Xiang* brings the conflict home to the Chinese heartland – Shandong – and into the tensions of the Chinese home. With a tradesman's daughter as its main character, it positions her as an outspoken defender of the

⁸¹ Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety*, 26.

simple message that lends itself to the readerly apprehension of the story: good begets good and evil begets evil.

However, this does not exempt her from the obligations of the Confucian system she was born into. Granted, in comparison with its popular *baojuan* predecessors, *Liu Xiang* is not about resolving a conflict between its main character and his/her natal parents. Although Xiangnü's father is initially skeptical of the need for religious devotion, he is clearly not the mirror image of Miaoshan's tyrannical Confucian father. His objections, first to Xiangnü's desire to listen to a nun chanting at a local hermitage, and then to Xiangnü's suggestion that the family convert its wine and meat focused restaurant to a vegetarian noodle shop, are easily dispelled. The first case demonstrates that neither is Xiangnü's mother disrespectful of religion as Mulian's mother was. Rather, Xu Shi argues in favor of Xiangnü's excursion to hear the nun's sermon, emphasizing Xiangnü's goodness. Her husband quickly assents. The second moment of opposition, in which he questions the reality of karmic retribution, is a convenient plot device that sets Xiangnü up to give her first sermon on the nature of good and evil karma. Though Xiangnü, Miaoshan, and Mulian all act as their parents' saviors, Xiangnü's sermonizing is a significantly less gruesome way of bringing about their salvation than Miaoshan's sacrifice of her eyes and hands to cure her father's wasting disease, or Mulian's torturous journey through the grisly courts of hell.

Instead, the conflict between popular Confucianism and popular Buddhism begins to take shape when Ma Xin, a powerful local squire, forces Liu Guang to betroth Xiangnü to his third son, Ma Yu. Xiangnü, unlike her spiritual sister Miaoshan, agrees to consider the match, saying that this marriage, for better or for worse, was predetermined by her karma and should not be opposed. Whereas Miaoshan's piety does not leave room for marriage and her opposition to it leads to her public execution, Xiangnü's simple faith in the workings of karmic causes allows her

to accept marriage as one of the effects she must live out in her current incarnation. Marriage does nothing to dull her religious convictions, and upon entering her husband's home, this stubborn piety is the cause of all her suffering. Although the bullying man is the impetus behind the unwanted match, he too is not the source of conflict.

Therefore, the true villain is Lady Ma, Xiangnü's mother-in-law, emerging after Xiangnü moves into the Ma family home. Here women are pitted against each other, rather than opposite gender pairings of parent and child. Lady Ma's older sons' wives, who spy on Xiangnü and make regular reports on her anti-conventional Buddhist convictions, aid the quick-tempered spokesperson of Confucian common sense. Thus, *Liu Xiang* sets up its young heroine against an older female antagonist and her allies, sparking conflicts between the unrelated women brought in as wives to perpetuate the Ma family line – the weakest point of the agnatic family in the case of patrilocal marriage. Throughout their conflict, neither Xiangnü nor Lady Ma changes her beliefs nor concedes a victory to the other. The consequence of these collisions between unyielding antagonists is that Ma Yu eventually recognizes the evil in his mother's perspective and the truth in his wife's Buddhist faith, and is therefore able to escape from the karmic punishment visited on the rest of his family.

Though the Chinese family system was historically more flexible than the patrilineal image portrayed in Confucian texts, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was still ripe for contention and dramatically portrayed in popular literature from the time as a relationship likely to turn abusive.⁸² Lady Ma, as a mother to three sons, secured her position in the family, one that she joined as an outsider, through her sons' affection and loyalty. Acquiring wives for her sons presents new threats to her hold on their loyalty, and thus each new marriage

⁸² For example, the first episode in *Liu Xiang zhongjuan* dramatizes a conflict between a woman and her daughter-in-law, fueled by her daughter and the village gossip.

presents a transition rife with tension and uncertainty. The conflict between Lady Ma and Xiangnü highlights this instability at the heart of the patrilineal family and at the same time redefines the nature of filial piety that daughters-in-law owed to their new families.

By all standards of society in dynastic China, the Ma family is conventionally powerful. Ma Xin is a wealthy landlord with three adult sons. His youngest shows true promise as a scholar, giving the family hope that he might succeed in the imperial exams and add to their reputation and cultural cachet. Lady Ma, matriarch of the household, has successfully secured the loyalty of her other two daughters-in-law, navigating past the divisive threats they presented to family unity when they married into the patriline. Having secured an exalted reputation in the area, the primary interests of the family lie in maintaining or expanding their status. Ma Xin's spur of the moment decision to betroth his youngest son to a pretty girl he saw serving at a restaurant proves to be an incredible headache for his proper, convention-defending wife.

From the moment Xiangnü enters the family compound, bedecked not in bridal splendor and jewels but clothed in simple blue cotton with a wooden stick in her hair, Lady Ma has good reason to fear that her new daughter-in-law will cause trouble, for that is exactly what Xiangnü intends to do, albeit initially in a non-confrontational manner. Xiangnü first preaches Buddhist salvation through cultivating merit to her new husband, earning her mother-in-law's ire for her dismissive attitude towards Ma Yu's scholarly aspiration to ascend the ladder of imperial bureaucracy. With her husband confined to his study and herself banished to the kitchens to work as a drudge, her attention turns to opposing the sinful behaviors of the family as a whole, from their gluttonous love of killing and eating animals to their avaricious abuse of tenants who fall behind on their rent. A pattern is established: the in-laws behave sinfully, Xiangnü reminds them of the karmic debts accumulating, and her in-laws punish her with beatings and hard labor.

Yet, upon closer examination, *Liu Xiang* is not particularly subversive, even when its protagonist is first exiled from the family compound for the criticisms she directs at the family. While Xiangnü seemingly threatens the sanctity of cultural institutions such as Qingming jie 清明節 (The Grave-sweeping Festival), what she critiques are the superficial trappings of conspicuous consumption and displays of wealth that surround the day, rather than the need to perform rituals to ancestors themselves. The debate she gets into with Lady Ma about sacrificing meat versus sacrificing vegetarian offerings was a very old one already.⁸³ Xiangnü's greatest objection is to the pomposity of the entire affair, particularly because it only creates ill karma rather than merit. She criticizes how a festival for going out to enjoy the spring has been turned into a dubious religious ritual, dressed up in ostentatious displays of wealth and faux filial piety. By contrast, Xiangnü's parents were cremated after their foreordained deaths. Though she weeps extensively about her inability to truly repay them for the debt she incurred when they gave her life, because she was the source of the religious devotion that led to their ascension to the Western Heaven, she has already succeeded at being the perfect filial daughter.

If one of the questions central to this text is, "Can Xiangnü be a good daughter-in-law and still be a Buddhist?" then the answer is yes, but only if she does not behave in the superficial ways that a "good" daughter-in-law, as defined by other characters in the text, behaves. In the nun's sermon, a good daughter-in-law smiles even when her in-laws treat her angrily and never speaks back when her husband scolds her.⁸⁴ Her sisters-in-law and mother-in-law put high

⁸³ Daniel Stevenson, "Protocols of Power: Tz'u-Yün Tsun-Shih (964-1032) and T'ien-T'ai Lay Buddhist Ritual in the Sung" in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 340-408. Also a concern of the Non-Action Teachings, note here that Xiangnü does not protest against the concept of ancestor worship so much as the kind of worship offered them by the Ma family.

⁸⁴ "公婆發怒忙陪笑，丈夫怒罵不回聲。" *Liu Xiang*, 1:5b, (facsimile, 68).

priority on how she represents the family's wealth and status before the onlookers at the wedding feast by dressing in fancy clothes and wearing makeup and jewelry.⁸⁵

Yet her ultimate filial piety towards her in-laws is proven not by wearing finery or preparing delicacies for her mother-in-law, but by converting her husband and performing funeral rituals for her in-laws. In her new household, Xiangnü begins by practicing filial piety as she did in her parents' home, namely by attempting to persuade her new family to give up karmically harmful behaviors and take up cultivating merit for the sake of future rebirths. In her arguments with her sisters-in-law and mother-in-law and in the religious songs she subversively sings while they are out of sight (but inconveniently within earshot), Xiangnü is not subverting what is ultimately required of her as a good daughter-in-law. She practices extreme filial piety at the cost of her bodily integrity.⁸⁶ Trying to do what is best for her new family, "best" being defined by the terms of popularized Buddhism, she antagonizes those who would hold her to the superficial standards of obsequious obedience and external appearances. By stripping away the gaudy exterior of traditional behaviors, she reveals their emptiness. Xiangnü draws attention to the violent, spiteful acts that have become habitual within the family in her emphasis on the need to perform meritorious deeds for the sake of avoiding coming punishments and hopefully attaining a better rebirth. Used to looking only at the surface, rather than actively considering the substance of any matter, her new family sees only a rebellious, uncontrollable new wife whose

⁸⁵ *Liu Xiang* 1:37a-41b, (facsimile 131-140).

⁸⁶ Consider Ye Xianzu's daughter, commemorated as a virtuous widow for cutting a piece of her thigh as a cure for her ill mother-in-law, the commonness of this trope in descriptions of filial children, and the overall theme of physical suffering for the sake of one's parents or in-laws in works such as the *Ershisi xiaoshuo* 二十四孝說 (*Twenty-four-exemplars of filial piety*). For more on these kinds of tales see Daniel K. Jordan, "Folk filial piety in Taiwan: the twenty-four filial exemplars" in *The psycho-cultural dynamics of the Confucian family: past and present*. ed. Walter H. Slote (Seoul: International Cultural Society of Korea:1986). 47-106.

spirit needs to be broken. Proving unbreakable, then for the sake of appearances, they seemingly have no choice but to disown her.

Pulled briefly into orbit around the powerful Ma family, every push away that weakens their gravitational pull on her brings Xiangnü joy, until she is finally freed from their grasp and flung out into the streets at the end of the Volume 1. Her sisters-in-law collude to lie to their mother-in-law about her activities since her exile to the cemetery vegetable garden, in an effort to prevent her from benefiting from her husband's newly attained first place in the national exams. That this expulsion comes about through being slandered as an adulterous woman, roundly beaten, and shorn of her hair matters not at all to Xiangnü. As the first volume closes, she gets in the last word, singing "Oh sisters-in-law, you've hidden the truth but can't hide it from Heaven's law! Ah mother-in-law, you old woman, in the end you're really unconscious about some things!"

The second volume, while still featuring Xiangnü, ceases to be about her struggle. Xiangnü has already triumphed over Lady Ma, who has proven beyond admonishment. Buddhist common sense has prevailed. Continuing with the gravitational metaphor, this half of the text instead addresses the individuals who are drawn in by the strength of Xiangnü's devotional field, becoming pious satellites with trajectories defined by the degree of their newfound commitments to vegetarianism and *nianfo*. These include reformed ruffians, the aged of the community, a wealthy matron and her husband, and the couple about whom the text spends the most energy describing: Ma Yu and his second wife Jinzhi. Ma Yu embodies Xiangnü's victory over his mother, and is also the only main figure in the *baojuan* to undergo character development as he negotiates his way through attaining a high position in the government bureaucracy while following the precepts Xiangnü taught him about cultivating merit. Unlike the rest of his family who refused to listen to her, he is saved from hell by his meritorious efforts.

Liu Xiang is not only about the way women must balance demands of filiality and piety, but about how these forces pull their husbands in opposite directions as well. In it, audiences might have been able to see ways in which they could balance the competing definitions of what it meant to be “good” in order to pursue their own socially acceptable expressions of piety in the hope of karmic reward, inspired by the many examples of different characters converted by Xiangnü’s exhortations.

A Religious *caizi jiaren* Romance

Taking into consideration Ma Yu’s side of the story, although he is absent for much of the text and, when present, generally overshadowed by his wife and mother, turns our focus to another way of reading *Liu Xiang*. Pairing Ma Yu and Xiangnü together as equal halves of the tale (albeit with one half mostly told between the lines of the other) reveals how *Liu Xiang* also draws upon the narrative tropes of *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 (talent/beauty) romance.⁸⁷ Predictably, Ma Yu is an accomplished scholar who passes all levels of the civil exam with flying colors, receiving praise and honor from the emperor. Xiangnü, religious though she may be, is also described in the most glowing terms during her public introduction to the family on the first day of her marriage:

“As soon as the assembled relatives saw Liu Xiangnü,
they all began to praise the woman.
With steps like clouds her skirts did not move,
her voice was brilliant but her lips did not wag.
A natural, rare beauty so young and delicate,
beautiful like a flower, like a Jade Maiden.
As if Chang-E had descended from the moon,
or an immortal maiden had come down to this realm of dust.

⁸⁷ Ma Yu and Xiangnü are first referred to by this stereotypical trope on *Liu Xiang* 1:24a, (facsimile, 105) in a narratorial comment after Ma Yu arrives to visit Xiangnü when she asks to negotiate her own marriage contract.

A clever illustrator would have difficulty sketching her,
her remarkable likeness could not be painted.
How could a visage be better looking?
Like flowers, like jade, her appearance surpassed the masses.
Under heaven, in the realm of humans, she was the pinnacle,
on earth it is difficult to find a second like her.
Though her sisters-in-law in all their paint and ornament looked good,
they could not compare with even the smallest measure of the bride's beauty."⁸⁸

Beautiful as she is, this pivotal scene also establishes the source of the conflict for the remainder of the text. Though unadorned, she outshines her sisters-in-law's pampered beauty. Yet all the limited visions of these two women can show them is a country bumpkin lacking finery and in desperate need of a makeover. She sets them against her when she refuses their offers of clothing and jewelry to wear on the third day of her marriage ritual, instead lecturing them on the sinfulness of ostentatious ornamentation. They report on this lack of gratitude to their mother-in-law, warning her of Xiangnü's willfulness. This marks the beginning of the pattern introduced earlier, whereby Xiangnü resists her in-laws' efforts to incorporate her into the sinful, superficial behaviors of the family and is punished. In this first iteration, the punishment is light: a thorough scolding from Lady Ma after she appears before the clan and its neighbors in the simple peasant clothes she arrived at the Ma compound wearing. Only after Xiangnü proves herself immune to Lady Ma's criticism, and reckless in singing pointed songs about the inevitable punishments waiting for the evils incurred by the Ma family, do the beatings begin.

Liu Xiang features a beautiful woman, battered and bruised but with unbroken spirit. Her spectacular body undergoes spectacular suffering. Xiangnü's beauty enhances the impact of her suffering and her disfigurement. This places the audience in the position of not just being

⁸⁸ “眾親一見劉香女，都來稱讚女裙釵。行走如雲裙不動，聲音朗朗不搖唇。天生絕色多嬌嫩，美麗如花像玉人。好像嫦娥離月殿，猶如仙子下凡塵。聰明畫工難描盡，奇樣丹青描不成。那有真容來好看，如花如玉貌超群。天下凡間為第一，世上難尋第二人，伯姆妝扮雖然好，不及香女半毫分。” *Liu Xiang*, 1: 36b-37a, (facsimile 130-131).

witnesses to a woman's suffering, but to the suffering of a beautiful woman. In popular literature, fictional and nonfictional, the tragedy of violence against women is often emphasized by drawing attention to the victim's beauty.⁸⁹ It is as if beauty somehow makes a woman less deserving of such treatment than if she had been average or ugly, and thus the entertainment (bound up in horror though it may be) aspects of Xiangnü's repeatedly bruised form are amplified.⁹⁰

Until Xiangnü enters the Ma home, the *baojuan* makes little reference to her external appearance, focusing instead on her external actions that serve as indicators of internal goodness – vegetarianism, filial piety, moral exhortations and scriptural recitations. Xiangnü's appearance is described at her birth and as she grows up, but in very different terms than the effusive language the narrative uses to describe her wedding day. As a newborn, her face is round like the moon, her appearance proper and solemn.⁹¹ As a child, she has delicate features that remain proper and solemn.⁹² Far more ink is expended describing her ideal characteristics as a filial daughter. Even later, at age fifteen when her future father-in-law sees her at her parents' restaurant, the narrative's description is restrained:

Raising his head he saw Liu Xiangnü
and his heart was stimulated into matchmaking, wanting to make a betrothal.
With delicate features she had been born well,
she stood out from among other women.⁹³

⁸⁹ For more on the myth of the "beautiful victim" and its pervasive attraction in popular media, see Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 309-311 and 333-341.

⁹⁰ The excessiveness of the violence enacted on Xiangnü brings out another potential reading of the text related to how it makes the debased position of daughters-in-law an issue for general conversation. This potential reading, unexplored in this chapter, is inspired by Fiske's analysis of the excessive suffering of heroines in twentieth century English language romance novels. "...her exaggerated suffering at the hands of the hero, exceeds the 'normal' victimization and suffering of women in a patriarchy. Norms that are exceeded lose their invisibility, lost their status as natural common sense, and are brought out into the open agenda." (Fiske, 114)

⁹¹ *Liu Xiang* 1:2a, (facsimile, 61).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1:2b, (facsimile, 62).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1:19a, (facsimile, 95).

Xiangnü's entry into the Ma home begins with her introduction as a beauty, as quoted above. By commonly held social and literary expectations, this should be rewarded with accolades and the best of the best – the *jiaren* finds her *caizi* and lives happily ever after. Instead, she is forcibly separated from her *caizi* when Lady Ma fears her influence over Ma Yu is waning as he falls for Xiangnü's convincing arguments in favor of Buddhism. Throughout the tale, Ma Yu expresses deep sorrow at this separation. He pines for Xiangnü as he is confined to his study. Returning home as a newly minted *zhuangyuan* 狀元 (first place in the palace exam), the truth of Xiangnü's expulsion eventually comes out and, overcome with grief, Ma Yu attempts suicide. Recovering, he tracks her down and invites her home to assume a place of honor and wear the finery only a *zhuangyuan*'s wife secures. As with the first offer of finery that sets the Ma family against her, she refuses. As a *jiaren*, Xiangnü has beauty and a desperately devoted *caizi*, both of which she rejects, confounding social and literary convention.

Liu Xiang initially conforms with audience expectations of a *caizi jiaren* tale before it subverts them. The contrast between the socially constructed expectation of rewards for physical beauty and the reality of the tale – that Xiangnü herself cares little about her physical characteristics (even singing joyfully after her hair is forcibly shorn off at the close of Volume 1), that this disregard for appearances is what got her into trouble in the first place, and that her in-laws are bent on destroying her after she rejects their standards – signals an underlying assertion that there is more to value in a woman than simply her looks. That she is capable of doing more than falling in love with the nearest talented scholar. As a beautiful *jiaren*, Xiangnü is expected to perform her beauty through ornamentation, dressing from head to toe in finery like

her sisters-in-law. Instead, Xiangnü defies the expectations of both in-laws and audience alike by performing her religion instead, acting, as her mother-in-law dismissively says, like Guanyin.⁹⁴ Lecturing him on the threat his wife poses to his future and the reasons she must separate the happy couple, she makes the following comparison in a quatrain that, strikingly, features a slant rhyme of “Guanyin” with *yaojing* 妖精 (bewitching demon):

“Now, you go ahead and focus diligently on studying,
leave practicing asceticism and performing Guanyin to her.
Wholeheartedly grasp onto your books and read them,
don’t hang onto thoughts of that bewitching demon.”⁹⁵

This connection between Guanyin and *yaojing*, made explicit by a moment of derisive commentary on the story’s exemplary protagonist, links religious devotion with sexual seduction. It also indirectly refers to an extant parallel between Guanyin and seduction in the sexuality her incarnation as Fish-basket Guanyin. In this incarnation, a popularly represented one in late imperial art and literature, Guanyin appears as a beautiful woman promising to marry whichever man could perfectly memorize and recite increasingly long sections of sutras in the space of a single night. A brilliant young man, also surnamed Ma, succeeds, but after the fish-basket-toting beauty dies on the day of their wedding, a traveling monk reveals her true identity as the bodhisattva. Clever Guanyin uses this to teach the townspeople about the ephemeral nature of beauty and the preeminent value of pursuing the sutras instead of sex.⁹⁶

Admirable though Xiangnü’s performance of her religion may be, it also serves as a frustrating deferral of the happy pairing that *caizi jiaren* tales promise, even if Xiangnü is more

⁹⁴ Creating a direct parallel between Guanyin and enticing supernatural creatures with a reputation for driving bewitched *caizi* to their early graves.

⁹⁵ “你今只管攻書去，由他修煉做觀音。一心勤把書來讀，休要掛念這妖精。” *Liu Xiang* 1:45a, (facsimile, 147).

⁹⁶ Chun-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*. 186-7,

Guanyin than *yaojing* in the intended outcome of her seduction. How can Xiangnü still be a romantic heroine when she rejects the romance? The final moments of the *baojuan* bring *caizi* and *jiaren* back together within a new framework of religious salvation rather than romance. Xiangnü leads Ma Yu and his second wife, Jinzhi, through the funerary rituals that save Ma's family from hell. In the realms of the dead, King Yama checks his registers and reveals what so far has only been alluded to in the text: Xiangnü and Ma Yu's karmically bound past. Xiangnü was once a maiden sworn to chastity who wore flowers in her hair. Ma Yu was a chaste monk whose nose was drawn to the fragrance of her ornamentation, causing them to share a meaningful glance that destined them for a three-day marriage in this life.⁹⁷ Cleverly named Shanyin 善因 (Good Cause) and Shanguo 善果 (Good Effect), rather than the prosaic names given the former incarnations in the Ming play, paired they become *yinguo* (因果) – causes and effects, or karma – and their lives become an extended illustration on the inviolability of karmic law. Upon their deaths in this life, they ascend to the Western Heaven and are granted high places among the ranks of the blessed.

As *Liu Xiang* is a tale about causes and effects, it is impossible to ignore the root cause of this extended illustration - Shanguo/Xiangnü's irresistible beauty in both lives. Underlying the borrowing from and confounding of the *caizi jiaren* genre is the Buddhist conception of female sexuality and its place in religious practice, namely that it should not be there. Xiangnü's suffering is not only made more poignant because of her beauty. Her sexual attractiveness is actively the cause of her suffering, given that it was a single glance from Ma Xin that aroused his interest in betrothing her to his son, the consequence of a single glance between Shanyin and

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2:58a-b, (facsimile, 305-306). An unexplained reference to the three-day arrangement occurs on 1:36a, (facsimile, 129) and the karmic consequences of a single romantic glance caused by dressing up in finery are highlighted on 1:38a, (facsimile, 133), with the couplet “一日風流一日債，造些孽障緊隨身。”

Shanguo that sealed their karmic destiny in their previous lives. As Idema has pointed out, a work like *Xiangshan baojuan* (and by extension, *Liu Xiang*) could not have succeeded without the inherent sinfulness of female sexuality having been firmly established in Buddhist religious consciousness.⁹⁸ In the case of Princess Miaoshan, her solution was to resist marriage altogether. But Xiangnü, like most of the readers and listeners of her tale, could not avoid being matched and wedded.

Being beautiful does not just make for a more entertaining story; beauty is the *cause* of this story. Xiangnü continuously struggles against the predetermined roles for an attractive woman: blushing bride, beguiling demon, seductive adulteress, and vulnerable victim. She rejects each of these roles in favor of pursuing religious merit, arguing vociferously for the rightness of her faith in karmic law. In the end, the sisters-in-law still use this attractiveness against her, lying to Lady Ma about the illicit relationships Xiangnü has had while exiled to till the cemetery vegetable patch. The truth is that the most her body has been occupied with, outside the control of the family compound, has been recovering from the deadly beating administered by their husbands, Ma Jin and Ma Ying. Alone in the fields, Xiangnü has not been entertaining men with sex, but with her death. The only foreign body that has reached under Xiangnü's skirts is the magical white rabbit that she hides from the hunters, in the process becoming their prey herself. In showing no concern for the fate of her beautiful body and being willing to give it up for the sake of an innocent animal, the animal is able to give her back her life with a stalk of magical grass. This is the first supernatural involvement in Xiangnü's life.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety*, 25.

⁹⁹ *Liu Xiang* 1:61a-b, (facsimile, 179-180).

The second follows shortly after. Beaten until not a single uninjured spot is left on her body, Lady Ma cuts off Xiangnü's hair as well. She then throws both the young woman and her mass of shorn locks out of the compound out onto the street. Echoing the rabbit's concern for her body, crows sweep down from the sky and collect Xiangnü's hair from the ground, saving it from whatever indignities her body is left on earth to bear.¹⁰⁰ The narrator notes, "Cutting her hair and changing her appearance, she looks like the Buddha."¹⁰¹ Is this sufficient to guarantee her safety from the female sexuality that continues to endanger her and interfere with her religious practices?

In the second volume, Xiangnü's words become effective tools of change again. Once outside the Ma family compound, when her bodily integrity is threatened by two beggars who accost her one night when she is sleeping alone in an abandoned temple, her words save her rather than leading to assault. Rather than the unprompted responses to her goodness by the rabbit and crows, Xiangnü demonstrates that heaven now responds directly to her pleas. The beggars come upon her – alone, defenseless, and (as the *baojuan* emphasizes again) beautiful – and are determined to rape her.¹⁰² Xiangnü confronts the men, admonishing them that their low status in this life must have been determined by earlier sins and predicting their rebirth as beasts or insects should they continue their evil acts. When this threat fails to make an impression, Xiangnü, gazing upon the empty altar, calls upon heaven for help. The men are immediately struck down with debilitating pain and beg Xiangnü for mercy, kowtowing to her and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1:67b, (facsimile, 192)

¹⁰¹ “剪髮改形變佛相” Ibid., 1:68a. (facsimile, 193).

¹⁰² This episode runs from 2:12a-18a, (facsimile, 213-225). The threat of sexual assault from itinerant single men is a common trope in Qing literature and legal documents, due to the preponderance of “bare branches,” single men who lacked the resources to marry and establish families of their own. For more on “bare branches” see, Matthew Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 66-113.

acknowledging her power. Xiangnü makes their relief conditional on their repentance and vows to cultivate Buddhist merit, demands to which they tearfully consent. After this incident, Xiangnü's fame spreads throughout the area and she is offered a permanent home in a hut, the location from which she preaches until summoned home upon the deaths of her in-laws.

This first crisis after her body is allegedly freed of its feminine markers to become like Buddha draws the audience's attention back to the inherency of female desirability, not tied to her hair or clothes but to her simply being a *jiaren*. This episode is filled with the voyeuristic tension of seeing Xiangnü's bodily integrity once again violated, complicated here by the sexual nature of the violence. Yet the fact is that this time words save her from violence, where before they only served to ensure greater harm enacted on her beautiful body, marks a significant shift in the power dynamics. Xiangnü is no longer an object that can be acted upon by any outside force, but a force herself acting on behalf of Buddhist values. In giving up her body at the close of Volume 1, she retains control of it in Volume 2. She refuses to be gazed upon with lust, jealousy, or anger and resists the violation of her person.

Although at the opening of Volume 2, Xiangnü still retains some aspects of her beauty, when Ma Yu finally tracks his wife down at her hermitage, we observe her final transformation:

At the moment Ma Yu entered the hut, in a glance he took in the changes in Xiangnü's appearance. He just saw short hair only down to her eyebrows; ratty clothes patched hundreds of times, a dirty face and disheveled hair, feet covered in mud, and so thin her bones looked like sticks. Ma Yu wept and said, "Dear wife, why are you in such circumstances? With just a single glance I'm about to die of a broken heart!"¹⁰³

Lady Ma interjects, "It's fine, it's fine. Today you've gotten back your living treasure," before Ma Yu begins an extended passage of poetry comparing Xiangnü's current appearance with her lost

¹⁰³ “此時狀元一見香女。改形變相。只見短髮齊眉。破衣百結。垢面蓬頭。腳帶黃泥。骨瘦如柴。狀元哭道。妻吓。你為何這般光景。叫我一見。好不傷心殺人也。” *Liu Xiang* 2:33b, (facsimile, 256).

beauty.¹⁰⁴ Eventually, she is able to convince the disappointed *caizi* that his *jiaren* will not assume the role he intends for her.

Incomplete though Ma Yu's conversion may initially seem given his pursuit of exam success, appointment to a magistrate's position in local government, and inability to understand Xiangnü's reasons for not returning with him, her "seductive" efforts to convert him were not in vain. Through her itinerant preaching in Volume 2, she converts the woman who Ma Yu's parents force him to marry as a concubine after Xiangnü's refusal to return home with him. From dawn until dusk (not just within the bedchamber), she continues Xiangnü's lecture and actively refuses to play the part of a seductress.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, marriage resistance is set aside and a new wifely duty created, replacing the demand that the Confucian need for descendants placed on a woman's body as sexually reproductive object. Instead, a good wife resists ornamentation, empty ritual, and conforming with socially-constructed *jiaren* roles, and instead uses the space of her private interactions with her husband to urge him on to religious piety. To seduce him, in a sense, to read the sutras in imitation of Fish-Basket Guanyin, while concurrently remaining as pure and devoted as Princess Miaoshan.

In the end, even though the narrator asserts, "Don't say it's difficult for a woman to become a Buddha. Cultivating the way with a resolute heart, one will certainly ascend to heaven," it appears that for a *jiaren*, the road to Buddhahood remains difficult.¹⁰⁶ Xiangnü, burdened with an overabundance of negative effects stemming from the simple cause of her attractiveness, manages to overcome her karmic debts and ascend to the Pure Land. As much as

¹⁰⁴ “院君說道。還好還好。今日還好你這個活寶貝了。” Ibid., 2:34a, (facsimile, 257).

¹⁰⁵ “早晚間常常勸相公修行，持齋把素，念佛看經。” Ibid., 2:42a, (facsimile, 273). and “與夫成親有一載，並無邪念戀夫情。別人都道真夫婦，那曉金剛不壞身。” Ibid., 2:42b, (facsimile, 274).

¹⁰⁶ “莫道女人難成佛。堅心修道必昇天。” *Liu Xiang* 2:57a, (facsimile, 303).

audiences might look to be entertained by a tale of romance between an ideally paired couple, as *caizi jiaren* pairs always proved to be, and delight in how all obstacles to their union are eventually overcome, both of which *Liu Xiang* provides in satisfying detail, *Liu Xiang* also emphasizes that beauty and romance are meaningless, at best, and the source of karmic suffering at worst.¹⁰⁷

A Charter for Celibacy¹⁰⁸

Considering Xiangnü's beauty along these lines, the common twentieth-century interpretation of *Liu Xiang* as a text advocating marriage resistance emerges in response not only to the depressing sermon on the state of womanhood given by the nun at the beginning of the text but also in the way the text as a whole displays an underlying discomfort with female sexuality. When considered from the perspective of a young, impressionable woman, like Xiangnü herself was at the beginning of the text, the orthodox narrative of good triumphing over evil is hard to accept given the struggles Xiangnü must face because she is a beautiful woman trapped in a patriarchal society. This too is one of the many plural readings that the simple work allows its audiences to make out of the unresolved conflict between Xiangnü's femininity and her exemplarity.

The most prominent critique of *Liu Xiang* as a work that directly incited young women to forswear marriage is Zhou Zuoren's 周作人 (1885-1967) 1936 essay "Liu Xiangnü."¹⁰⁹ Zhou, having heard of two incidents involving young *Liu Xiang* readers who committed suicide rather than marry, acquires a copy of the text to see for himself what might have set them off. Based on

¹⁰⁷ ter Haar, 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Credit for this subject heading goes to Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan*, 102, in which he uses passages from *Liu Xiang* to support one interpretive approach of *Xiangshan baojuan* as supporting marriage resistance.

¹⁰⁹ Zhou Zuoren, "Liu Xiangnü" in *Guadouji* (Shanghai: Yuzhoufeng she, 1937), 42-51.

the quotations he includes, Zhou seems to have only read as far as page 12b, despairing at the hopeless tone set by the nun's elaborate detail about the pains of pregnancy and childbirth, the uselessness of daughters, and the difficulties faced by young wives. His reading focuses on misogynist admonitions like, "If you are a wise and clever woman, you will eat vegetarian food, recite the Buddha's name, and start religious cultivation at once. How favoured and honoured you will be when you migrate from a woman's to a man's body! In your next existence you can once again follow the way to the Pure Land."¹¹⁰ In Zhou's analysis of the text, it becomes clear that he is less concerned with actual readers of *Liu Xiang* and more with using the text as an example of pre-modern attitudes towards women and religion that need to be discarded as Republican China modernizes. Given the bleak situation embodied by nun's sermon, to Zhou the women's suicides are demonstrations of the inability of religion to offer them true escape from the horrors of their lives. The object is not to understand *Liu Xiang* so much as to further an argument in a debate that I will discuss again below.

In Western scholarship, the use of this text by women who foreswore marriage, as described by Topley, Dudbridge, and Overmyer, also dominates discussions of the work, but for less polemical reasons. It is important to note that this association is related to evidence that such use did occur, encountered during Topley's work with women's vegetarian halls and in Zhou's anecdotes about the virgin suicides. Extreme as they were, these readers establish a pattern that proves this was one way of reading *Liu Xiang*. But, as Dudbridge warns, the "socially rebellious

¹¹⁰ Translation of these two couplets comes from Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan*, 103. "若是聰明智慧女。持齋念佛早修行。女轉男身多富貴。下世重修淨土門。" *Liu Xiang* 1:6b, (facsimile, 70).

teachings of these religions served a wider audience than the determined but small groups of women who actually withdrew from orthodox social life.”¹¹¹

Dudbridge uses *Liu Xiang* in support of his examination of the legend of Princess Miaoshan from multiple perspectives, considering its historical development, its place within Buddhist practices (including *baojuan* versions of the tale), and the works that may have influenced its contents and structure. He focuses on three of the main ways in which the text might be interpreted: as a charter for celibacy, as a supreme act of filial piety, and as a narrative of a divine being rescuing the condemned from hell.¹¹² In his discussion of the legend of Miaoshan as a charter for celibacy, Dudbridge uses quotes from this nun’s sermon in *Liu Xiang* as examples of the troubles married women faced in marriage, childbirth and after death that would induce unmarried women to swear off the institution completely.¹¹³ However, he warns that his interpretations of the Miaoshan legend, if taken on their own, limit readers’ ability to understand the text as a whole:

A reading which... sets the story in a social context and relates it to particular social problems has the advantage of being easy to document and verify. But such a reading also narrows attention to one theme, one function, and blurs all other distinctions. It fits the story easily but loosely, taking no account of the ‘anatomical’ complexities discussed above.¹¹⁴

In “Values in Ming and Ch’ing Pao-chüan” and again in “Women in Chinese Religion,” Daniel Overmyer summarizes the text and considers the full arc of Xiangnü’s religious path, not

¹¹¹ Ibid., 104.

¹¹² Ibid., 102-118.

¹¹³ Ibid, 103.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 107.

just the contents of the sermon that inspires her dedication to practicing piety.¹¹⁵ He repeats Dudbridge's suggestion that *Liu Xiang* was tied to practices, attested to in Guangdong, of "girls' houses" where unmarried women dedicated themselves to practicing piety and refused to marry. However, counter to Dudbridge's warning, he strengthens the exclusivity of that association, asserting, "there was a specific social context in a which such books as the *Liu Hsiang pao-ch'uan* made sense, that of religious voluntary organizations in which unmarried women played an important or dominant role."¹¹⁶ While it is, as Overmyer notes, reasonable to suggest that details about difficult childbirth and unhappy marriages might make young women question their futures, specifically linking such a popular text only with a minority practice that has been documented in Guangdong runs directly against the text's diffusion in late Qing popular culture.¹¹⁷ Though women in these homes certainly read *baojuan* as part of their devotional activities, this segment of the genre's audience should not be taken as the entire intended audience, just as Glen Dudbridge warned with regard to the tale of Princess Miaoshan.

In a sense, this interpretation of *Liu Xiang* had become, by the late 1980s, the readerly version of *Liu Xiang*. Evelyn Rawski, in a survey essay titled "Popular Culture in China," simply used *Liu Xiang* as a representation of marriage resistance and female bitterness with regard to the demands placed on women in marriage and childbirth. In the context of the essay's larger discussion on the influence of religion in popular culture in China, *Liu Xiang* serves as the

¹¹⁵ Daniel Overmyer, "Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch'ing Pao-ch'uan," *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 219-254 and "Women in Chinese Religions: Submission, Struggle, Transcendence" in *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in honour of Prof. Jan Yün-hua*, ed. Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen. (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991) 91-120.

¹¹⁶ Overmyer, "Women in Chinese Religions." 111.

¹¹⁷ See Marjorie Topley, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung," in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 67-88.

example of how Buddhism troubled the Confucian system of patrilineal ancestor worship, not only in the case of celibate clergy, but also in the case of the celibate lay women with whom Dudbridge and Overmyer associate the text.¹¹⁸ “These texts,” Rawski writes, taking *Liu Xiang* to be representative all female-focused *baojuan*, “not only express an antimarriage bias, but also the resentment of a woman’s lot.”¹¹⁹

However, as a counterbalance to the revolutionary potential implied by these readings, it is likelier that representations of female grievance as the poems and the pregnancy *baojuan* were at best socially acceptable and expected protest, not direct indications of resistance.¹²⁰ Such readings can and were produced by *Liu Xiang*’s audiences, but the dominant response to such graphic depictions of female suffering was already coded into lay Buddhist audiences by the widely known Mulian story. In *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, Alan Cole draws attention to the fact that the imagery of blood, women’s pain and the debt of kindness owed to one’s parents tie directly into Buddhist tropes that for close to two thousand years had been used to reinforce the need for Buddhist clerics to rescue sinful mothers from hell.¹²¹ Therefore, Cole reads the nun’s sermon in terms of how listeners, all children of mothers who have suffered thus, would perceive the text and their duties as filial children. Addressing the *baojuan* directly, Cole writes, “As long as pain is to be recompensed by means of the next generation relying on Buddhist rituals, I suspect that the text is still securely in the orbit of Buddhist propaganda, which urges

¹¹⁸ Evelyn Rawski, “Popular Culture in China,” *Tradition and Creativity: Essays on East Asian Civilization*, ed. Ching-I Tu (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 41-65.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁰ Anne McLaren, *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 2-3.

¹²¹ Cole, 215.

support for the family and the monasteries.”¹²² In positioning the rhetoric of the nun’s sermon within the context of Buddhist literature, Cole highlights how even such vivid descriptions of suffering serve the values of social and religious stability, rather than undermining them.

In fact, even in a number of stage versions of the Mulian tale, Mulian’s sinful mother, Madame Liu, sings a song in hell that details the three great sufferings of being female: “pregnancy as a daughter-in-law, raising children as a mother, and spiritual abandonment as a wandering soul after death (as women rarely received sacrifices from their offspring).”¹²³ Qitao Guo regards the inclusion of this song as a means by which the wives of Huizhou merchants “found their voice heard,” even as the sympathy expressed for women’s plights came from the mouth of the tale’s primary sinner.¹²⁴ The song of “Three Great Afflictions” appearing in both the original script for the ritual drama written by a strident Confucian, and in popularly adapted scripts thereafter marks the sentiments expressed by the song as socially acceptable expressions of female suffering, not as direct challenges to traditional social hierarchies.¹²⁵ Regardless, at least some readers, including the women about whom Zhou wrote, incorporated *Liu Xiang* into their withdrawal from the demands of Confucian society, prioritizing the socially marginalizing aspects of the story in their readings. This world-denying way of reading the tale, unorthodox as it may have been given late Qing society, is also one of the meanings which overflows, undisciplined, out of the simple contents of *Liu Xiang*.

¹²² Ibid, 216.

¹²³ Guo, 207.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 208.

¹²⁵ On socially expected female lament, see McLaren, *Performing Grief*.

Producerly *Liu Xiang* and criticism of late Qing popular religious culture

Given the wide appeal of *Liu Xiang*, as its sustained publication from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century demonstrates, we know that the work became part of popular religious culture in late Qing Jiangnan.¹²⁶ Yet in the early twentieth century, the text's widespread reputation also made it an easy target as a representation of a social and religious past, relabeled as superstition, which reformers were eager to leave behind with the fallen Qing imperium. Theater critic Bing Xin's 冰心 1916 review of a stage version condemns the tale for spreading four poisons of traditional society among women.¹²⁷ In a similar vein, Zhou Zuoren's essay discussed above ends by comparing *Liu Xiang*'s promise of comfort in a better rebirth to the shallow reasoning used by parents who drowned their infant girls at birth rather than allow them to suffer the life of a woman.¹²⁸ These condemnations portray the residual presence of the tale in Chinese popular culture as an ongoing delusion, one that perpetuates social phenomena to which both writers strongly objected – religious superstition, the glorification of the exam system, the celebration of wealth, and a skewed sense of justice in Bing Xin's case, and the devaluation of female life in Zhou's estimation.

Zhou, in particular, focuses on excessive reactions to the *baojuan* (suicide) and on the ways he thinks it offers readers little more than escapist fantasies (like the fantasy of release that Zhou believes infanticidal parents used to justify killing their daughters) in the midst of their wretchedness as women living in pre-revolutionary China. In *Understanding Popular Culture*, after

¹²⁶ See Appendix 3 for a close examination of a detailed donor list from 1869 (or slightly later) with monks, nuns, and lay men and women listed along with the denominations of their donations.

¹²⁷ Bing Xin 冰心 “Guan minming she Liu Xiangnü ju ping 觀民鳴社劉香女劇評” *Yuxing* 15 (1916): 107-109. It is unclear whether or not this article was written by Xie Wanying 謝婉瑩 (1900-1998), prominent writer who used the pen name Bing Xin, given that in 1916 she was still a high school student and her writing career began in earnest from 1918 onwards.

¹²⁸ Zhou, 50.

Fiske develops the idea of the producerly text, used fruitfully in this chapter to consider a small selection of the plurality of possible interpretations that overflow beyond the boundaries of *Liu Xiang*'s simplistic narrative framework, he responds to common critiques of producerly works on the basis of language, obviousness and excessiveness, contradictions, and textual poverty.¹²⁹ Here, the concept of excessiveness and the critiques it draws are particularly constructive ways of using Zhou's criticism to get a deeper sense of *Liu Xiang* itself and understand why his criticism has been the primary means by which the work has been interpreted for so long.

Producerly texts, Fiske writes, are by definition excessive.¹³⁰ Zhou is right in identifying the exaggerated horrors of womanhood that the *baojuan* begins with, but primed by the question that led him to the text, "What in this text caused its readers to commit suicide?" this is the only sense he can derive from its magnification of female suffering. The staying power of this interpretation is due to its correctness, to a certain extent, and the plausible link between a narrative of socially bound female misery inciting its readers to hopeless despondency. Zhou is right, *Liu Xiang* sensationalizes the condition of pre-modern women's lives. But is this necessarily a negative trait that logically inspires the sensationalized suicides Zhou uses to emphasize his critique of traditional China?

The complex and contradictory ways in which *Liu Xiang* relates its prescriptions for female social and religious behavior and describes relationship dynamics between related and unrelated women make it fertile ground for many female-focused interpretations of the work. Not all of these are as socially revolutionary as its use as a charter for resisting marriage or as hopeless as the implications of Xiangnü's inability to avoid being cast as a *jiaren/yaojing* despite her

¹²⁹ Fiske, 106-127.

¹³⁰ Fiske, 114.

religious desires. As one reader of *Liu Xiang* notes – the anonymous author of *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, explored in the following chapter – Xiangnü is particularly well poised to comment on conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law due to her experience with Lady Ma, suggesting a reading of the text that focuses specifically on how this fraught relationship offers its readers potential solutions to their own difficulties. The excessiveness that Fiske defines as a feature of producerly texts like *Liu Xiang* means that even the grim significances Zhou rightly identifies in the nun's opening sermon are not the only meanings that can be derived from its descriptions of women's lives. Every member of the reading/listening audience of *Liu Xiang* could (and did) make use of its surfeit of meanings to produce their own version of the work, independent of the orthodox or readerly surface framework it most easily offered them.

Liu Xiang, a popular, producerly *baojuan*, captured the attention of many audiences in late Qing Jiangnan (and beyond). Considering its popularity in retrospect, particularly in the context of the religious revival of post-Taiping Jiangnan, helps us to identify many resonant features of the text that help to answer why this work, long a part of religious subculture, was eagerly adopted into the wider scope of popular religious culture. Having already been popularized in its revision from the late Ming *xiaojuan/chuanqi* to a *baojuan* that championed and empowered lay practice beyond the advisorial control of clergy, *Liu Xiang* offered its varied audiences many different ways to practice their piety and entertain themselves at the same time.

Appendix 1: Summary of *Liu Xiang baojuan*

A butcher, Liu Guang, and his wife Xu, are blessed late in life with the miraculous birth of a daughter because of their virtuous roots (*shan'gen* 善根). Because heavenly music is heard in the distance and a holy fragrance fills the room at her birth, they name her Xiangnü (fragrant girl). Xiangnü is an exceptionally good child who naturally becomes vegetarian by the age of six and is unfailingly filial. At ten *sui*, she asks to join the throngs of devotees she sees passing by their home on the way to hear a local nun preach. The contents of this sermon, which focus on the difficulties of being female, the pain of pregnancy and childbirth, and the futility of raising a daughter, convince Xiangnü of the necessity of repaying the debt she owes her parents for having given birth to her. She returns home and convinces her father to abandon butchery in favor of running a vegetarian noodle shop. She and her parents run the restaurant in the morning and spend the afternoons meditating and practicing *mianfo*.

When Xiangnü is fifteen *sui*, a wealthy landowner sees her and forces her father to betroth her to his third son, Ma Yu. Xiangnü consents to the match only if she can speak directly to Ma Yu to determine the quality of his character and negotiate the terms of their marriage contract herself. Liu Guang receives word from heaven that he and Xu have completed their merit cultivation and will soon die to be reborn in the Pure Land. Xiangnü seeks help from the Ma family to provide her parents with a funeral, after which she is taken to the family as a bride.

Xiangnü, rejecting her sisters-in-law's attempts to socially indebted her to them by lending her finery for her wedding ceremony, sets them against her for the rest of the story. By not keeping up appearances as the wife of a wealthy landowner's son, she also antagonizes her new mother-in-law. Separated from her husband on the third day of their marriage after being overheard recommending that he abandon studying for the exam in favor of cultivating merit,

she begins a cycle of conflict with her in-laws that ultimately results in her being expelled from the household. Leading up to this climax are incidents in which she criticizes her mother-in-law for unfairly collecting rents and is beaten unconscious, hides a rabbit from her hunting brothers-in-law and is therefore beaten to death before the rabbit provides magical grass to revive her, and falsely accused of adultery by her sisters-in-law and therefore beaten and shaved bald.

Wandering the streets, homeless Xiangnü takes advantage of her newfound freedom to preach. She converts a wealthy woman and her husband. When attacked by two male beggars and threatened with rape, she preaches to them and eventually makes disciples out of the men. The community sets her up in a hermitage and she frequently reads sutras and preaches to the men and women who visit her.

Meanwhile, Ma Yu returns home in triumph from the exam and is distraught when he discovers how his family treated his wife. He cannot convince her to return home with him. His parents force him to take a concubine. This is a woman that Xiangnü had earlier converted. Ma Yu and his second wife take up his post far away. The Jade Emperor sends down punishment on the rest of the Ma family and they all die. Ma Yu faints and his soul travels to the underworld, where he sees his family suffering and they beg him to cultivate merit for their sake. He returns home to find Xiangnü already performing the proper funeral rituals. He retires from his post and spends the rest of his life practicing piety with Xiangnü, his concubine, and a virtuous maid. Eventually, all of them die and are reborn as buddhas and bodhisattvas in the Pure Land.

When the Jade Emperor looks into their karma, it is revealed that Ma Yu and Xiangnü were fated to a three-day marriage because of a bond created in their previous lives. Ma Yu was a monk distracted from his practice by the scent of a flower worn in the hair of the woman Xiangnü had been. They shared a significant glance that karmically bound them to each other.

Appendix 2: Publication history of *Liu Xiang*

Though *Liu Xiang* was primarily printed in the Jiangnan region, particularly Hangzhou and Suzhou, Qing editions have also been preserved from print runs in Guangzhou and Hunan. Tracking the explosion of publications of this text in the late nineteenth century enables us to better grasp its the extent of its appeal, keeping in mind that as the text was distributed, so were the plural interpretations of its contents. Fundamentally, *Liu Xiang* must have appealed to a wide range of audiences.

Che Xilun's *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* lists forty-two printed and manuscript editions of *Liu Xiang*.¹³¹ This list is far from complete, with uncatalogued editions of *Liu Xiang* turning up at nearly every archive I visited. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these forty-some editions is that the core text changes very little from edition to edition, with one notable exception – an 1882 edition from Hunan.¹³²

According to Che's entry on *Liu Xiang*, the earliest extant edition dates to 1774 and is held at the library of the Chinese National Academy of the Arts, Department of Drama and Opera in Beijing.¹³³ Che notes that later woodblock printed editions show few changes between editions, so this earliest edition, while it has not been seen in years, likely differed little from later, more easily accessible editions. Photographs of one 1833 edition, in Li Shiyu's personal collection and photographed by Rostislav Berezkin, show that it is essentially the same as the 1870 Yihuatang (翼化堂) edition. A second 1833 edition, also in Li's catalog, was published in Hangzhou and the

¹³¹ Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 80-82.

¹³² See Appendix 4 for a brief analysis of this revised version.

¹³³ In private correspondence with Che, he relates that he has not personally seen this edition, rather that the entry comes from Li Shiyu's earlier catalog of *baojuan*, published in 1961.(Che, Personal correspondence, February 15, 2014.)

blocks were kept by Shen Mouzun 沈懋樽. This edition shows similarities with an 1869 edition, held in the collections of two Taiwanese collectors, location of publication unclear.¹³⁴ The 1844 edition, held at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts, was printed from different blocks than the 1833 edition, but was also printed in Hangzhou, and seems to represent a third recension of the text, which later editions from Ma'nao jingfang 瑪瑙經坊 (1898 and undated) and Huikong jingfang 慧空經房 (multiple reprints between 1861-1874) seem to have used as their base text. The differences in these editions are slight, mostly with regard to formatting, and overall they form a picture of a coherent, widely accepted core text.¹³⁵

Although the contents of the body text in most editions of *Liu Xiang* were nearly identical with each other, publishers had greater leeway with paratextual materials appended before and after the core text. Many editions began with an illustration of the titular heroine, ranging from the crude to the elaborately stylized, all of which drew upon imagery associated with Guanyin. In addition to the opening image of Xiangnü and the dragon stele inscribed with wishes for dynastic longevity and national peace and salvation, a few editions include Liezheng's 烈正 preface or Li Xiyuan's 李西緣 afterword.¹³⁶ In addition, a few editions have a second *baojuan* appended after the main text: the five folio page length popular *Huaming baojuan* (花名寶卷 *Precious Scroll of Flower Names*).

¹³⁴ Collection of Yang Yongzhi 楊永智 and Yang's unnamed contact.

¹³⁵ In the 1844 edition, the final line of poetry on 12a reads “報答雙親恩德深” whereas in editions edited by the monk Liezheng (烈正) from the 1870s, the line reads “報答親恩做賢良” The 1870s editions also include an extra phrase “意欲修行就此發心皈依真空師太為道言女” before Xiangnü departs from the nun's home and returns home. The 1844 edition does not include this line, and neither do most later editions.

¹³⁶ Though Liezheng is credited as the editor as early as 1869, the first edition in which I have found his preface is the 1873 edition held at Peking University, printed in Hangzhou. Following this, the 1876 edition, also printed in Hangzhou, held at the Shanghai Public Library, also includes the preface.

APPENDIX 3: Donor Funded Publication: An Economic Case Study

One edition of *Liu Xiang* includes an extensive donor list appended after the text and the supplementary *Huaming baojuan*. This edition, published by the Hangzhou Zhaoqing Temple Huikong jingfang 杭城昭慶寺慧空經房, includes a note added after the body text that credits the monk Liezheng 烈正 with editing and reprinting the text in 1869.¹³⁷ After *Huaming baojuan*, two folio pages of donors close the volume. The title to the donor list specifies that these are the names of those who joyfully donated funds for the reprinting of *Liu Xiang*. What follows is a mostly hierarchical arrangement of one hundred and sixty individuals and organizations. Monks are listed first, from the biggest donors to the smallest donors, totaling twenty-six men and one hermitage. After this, there are thirteen nuns, followed by the dharma names of nine male disciples and upāsikā 三寶弟子優婆夷 (female disciples who have taken refuge in the three treasures and accepted the five principles), forty-four male disciples 三寶弟子 who have taken refuge in the three treasures, and then thirty seven faithful men 信男 and thirty one faithful women 信女 (all married and listed by family surname followed by personal surname).¹³⁸ The print house itself ends the list with the largest single donation of twenty silver dollars. In total, the

¹³⁷ *Liu Xiang*. Hangzhou: Huikong jingfang, n.d. p. 56b. “同治八年杭城錢塘華陽休菴比丘烈正校對增補重刊” This particular edition is held in the Shanghai Public Library under catalogue numbers 482164-482165.

¹³⁸ Upāsikā are female lay disciples who have accepted the first five monastic precepts, which are prohibitions on killing, stealing, debauchery, lying, and consuming alcohol. (See entries at the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* by Charles Muller for 優婆夷 ([www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?51.xml+id\(%27b512a-5a46-5937%27\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?51.xml+id(%27b512a-5a46-5937%27))) and 五戒 ([www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id\(%27b4e94-6212%27\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e94-6212%27)))). The three treasures are the Buddha, the Dharma (the true teachings of the Buddha) and the sangha (monastic order). By taking refuge or surrendering to these treasures, a practitioner accepts the Buddha as a teacher, the Dharma as medicine, and Buddhist clerics as friends. (Charles Muller, “三歸” at the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* ([www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id\(%27b4e09-6b78%27\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e09-6b78%27))))

donors gave 132 silver dollars, which given the time were most likely Mexican Republican dollars, and 38,000 copper coins, totaling 166.56 silver dollars.¹³⁹

The list gives tantalizing details into the costs of *baojuan* production in the mid-nineteenth century. It appears that these funds, donated for the sake of printing *Liu Xiang*, were in excess of what was actually needed, so were thus made available for other religious uses. Forty-five silver dollars were used for miscellaneous tasks including the printing of one hundred copies of *Xiangshan*, the carving of an image of a patriarch, the hand copying of three volumes of a text called the *Zhanran jing*, the cost of making comparisons with another edition of *Xiangshan* to fill in missing characters in their edition, cholera medication, and a glass thermometer. Following this, in lines clearly added later, it is noted that there were extra funds enough to print one hundred more copies of *Liu Xiang*, and that four more donors contributed a total of seven silver dollars.

What does all this data mean? This list, more than simply preserving names and numbers, helps provide a rare glimpse into the social support needed to bring a text like this to press. A precious few donors gave sums of three or five silver dollars. Though a single dollar, as the majority of the lay male and female donors are recorded as giving to this printing enterprise, may not seem like much upon first glance, it was not an insignificant donation. Neither were the even smaller gifts of 800 or 600 copper coins. A brief outline of the monetary system of late Qing China is needed in order to get a sense of the impact of such a donation at the time, both in terms of the economic position of its donors and the economic impact of the text's publication.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Richard von Glahn, "Foreign Silver Coins in the Market Culture of Nineteenth Century China," *The International Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no. 01 (January 2007): 51–78, doi:10.1017/S1479591407000575. (p. 71).

¹⁴⁰ Getting perspective on the Qing monetary system is a Herculean task. Two excellent starting points are Se Yan, "Real Wages and Wage Inequality in China, 1860-1930" (PhD dissertation, University of California - Los Angeles, 2008) and Peng Xinwei, *A Monetary History of China*, trans. Edward H. Kaplan (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1993).

At the time these texts were printed and circulated, the Chinese monetary system is best described as chaotic. To call it bimetallic – based on both copper and silver – obscures the influence of foreign currency flooding into Chinese markets for centuries as exports to Europe and the Americas increased, as well as the account book wizardry that happened within China as copper was exchanged for silver and sometimes, in desperate times like the Taiping War, paper.¹⁴¹ Although the official exchange rate between copper coins and silver taels was 1000 to 1, changing demand for copper and silver based on economic realities and consumer perceptions of value meant that the exchange rate was constantly in flux. Even when the central government in Beijing dictated that taxes be paid in a standard weight of silver called a Kuping *liang*, the Kuping *liang* used by the government to pay its expenses weighed less.¹⁴² Rates fluctuated in infinite array based on the realities of economic and political conditions, for example, in 1854 as the Taipings continued to occupy Jiangnan, silver appreciated such that Peng estimates that one tael was equivalent to 2000 copper coins.

Foreign currency in the form of Spanish, Mexican, American, and Hong Kong silver dollars were the preferred currency for many exchanges, including the record of donations in this edition of *Liu Xiang*. Silver dollars contained less silver than a tael, but were exchanged for a premium that varied over time based on their relative scarcity and the perception of their purity and reliability. The exchange rate for silver dollars to taels was set at 0.72 taels in an agreement between Western and Chinese merchants in 1779, but this too fluctuated, meaning that one cannot simply divide the total of copper donated to the printing of this text by 0.72 to get an

¹⁴¹ Peng, 738-747.

¹⁴² Debin Ma, “Money and Monetary System in China in the 19th-20th Century: An Overview,” Working Papers No. 159/12, Department of Economic History, London School of Economics (January 2012): 5.

equivalent in foreign silver.¹⁴³ Prices varied widely across the country according to local inflation, crisis, and supplies, but stayed relatively uniform between treaty ports and within major cities around them, which places Hangzhou, where this *baojuan* was printed, within the macro region defined by Shanghai and Ningbo.

In 1869, which is the best estimate for the date of this edition of *Liu Xiang*, the exchange rate between copper and silver was 1759 coppers per Haiguan tael (HKT), a denomination developed by the Chinese Maritime Customs service to cope with the monetary chaos when compiling its own trade and wage records. Of course, this new standardized tael also had an exchange rate governing its relationship with the plethora of other currencies circulating on the market. In 1869, it was equivalent to 1.6 silver dollars, bringing the total investment recorded for this *baojuan* to 166.56 silver dollars or 104 HKT.¹⁴⁴ Considering other data gleaned from customs reports, in 1869 Shanghai, 1 silver dollar would have purchased roughly 11.5 kg of dried fruit, 60 paper fans, 19 kg of manure cakes, or 32.5 kg of beans and peas.¹⁴⁵ In 1869, 166.5 silver dollars could have purchased between 4220 to 4702 kgs of rice, which would have fed between

¹⁴³ In 1814, as silver dollars entered China mostly via Guangzhou, the coins were valued at 710-720 coppers, but in areas where they were less common, like Jiangnan, they were equivalent to 800 copper or more. High prices in Jiangnan in turn raised prices for foreign silver in Guangzhou. von Glahn further notes that functionally the coins contained only .684 *liang* of silver, giving them a premium on the currency market even before consumer demand drove the exchange rate higher. (von Glahn, 60.)

¹⁴⁴ For this exchange rate between copper and silver, which is not in Peng or Yan, I draw upon *Trade Statistics of the Treaty Ports for the period 1863-1872. Compiled for the Austro-Hungarian Universal Exhibition, Vienna, 1873: to illustrate the international exchange of products*. (Published by the order of The Inspector General of Chinese Maritime Customs. Shanghai: Maritime Customs Press, 1873), page 24 in the subsection on “Shanghai,” which gives a valuation of 235,274 HKT for 413,872 strings of copper cash, which assuming that each string was to contain 1000 cash, is a value of 1759 cash per HKT in Shanghai in 1869. Confirming this exchange rate is Peng’s table on 748, which also bases its data off Maritime Customs records (the particular reports are unspecified). His table begins in 1870, and gives a rate of 1 HKT = 1856 cash. My data from the 1873 chart gives a rate of 1 HKT = 1854 cash. In 1871, Peng’s rate remains at 1856 cash, while the 1873 customs record also matches perfectly at 1856 cash per tael.

¹⁴⁵ *Trade Statistics of the Treaty Ports for the period 1863-1872. Compiled for the Austro-Hungarian Universal Exhibition, Vienna, 1873: to illustrate the international exchange of products*. (Published by the order of The Inspector General of Chinese Maritime Customs. Shanghai: Maritime Customs Press, 1873), page 24 of subsection on “Shanghai.”

11 and 18 people for a year.¹⁴⁶ Given Yan's estimate that an unskilled laborer made an average of 11.23 silver dollars per month in the years between 1858-1875, overall, this print run of *Liu Xiang* represents over 14 months of work for someone like a bricklayer.

That is, however, not to suggest that unskilled laborers were the primary social group donating to *baojuan* reprints. Rather, to have such disposable income meant that the donors came from a class above unskilled labor. Peng, noting that a male textile worker in Shanghai during the late Qing earned twenty-five cents a day (predictably, women earned twenty-two cents for the same labor) and that Shanghai had the highest wages in China for its time, pointed out that common laborers had little enough money to spend to feed themselves, let alone donate to charity.¹⁴⁷

This single text drew the attention and support of over one hundred and fifty named individuals in Jiangnan in the late 1860s. The fact that three-quarters of them were non-clergy illustrates the significance of *Liu Xiang* in lay religious practice. Even so, this edition was edited by a monk and reprinted by the print house of one of the famous temples of Hangzhou, Zhaoqing shi 昭慶寺. The textual history of *Liu Xiang* – its numerous reprints, the amount of money invested in these efforts in a region still recovering from fourteen years of war, and the dedication in carefully reworking it for audiences further afield – establish its significance in the late Qing. This *baojuan* attracted remarkable attention among audiences who left few records of their

¹⁴⁶ The imprecision here is due to three factors. 1) The variance in the weight, from 175-195 lbs of the unit in which rice was sold. 2) The lack of notation if the rice sold was husked or unhusked. 3) The lack of clear contemporary details on yearly per capita rice consumption. For more on rice prices, see Yeh-chien Wang, "Secular Trends of Rice Prices in the Yangzi Delta, 1638-1935," in *Chinese History in Economic Perspective*, ed. Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 35-69. For a discussion of the complexities of calculating per capita consumption, see Dwight H. Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China, 1386-1968* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2013), 298.

¹⁴⁷ Peng, 764.

appreciation, but their enthusiasm has left us with hundreds of copies from dozens of editions of this text. Readers and listeners across China had access to multiple, nearly identical, versions of this work.

Appendix 4: Variations of *Liu Xiang baojuan*

Liu Xiang circulated primarily in the Wu speaking regions.¹⁴⁸ The notable exceptions are two editions printed in Guangdong: an edition first printed in 1875 and reprinted in 1906, an odd looking edition printed in 1869 with two donors listed – one from Ningbo and the other from Guangdong; and then further afield: an 1882 edition from Hunan. Whereas the former editions listed above remain close to the edition that was so widely reprinted in Jiangnan, the Hunan edition is a carefully condensed and revised version of the *baojuan*.

The Guangdong edition from 1875 differs from the typical Jiangnan edition only in its formatting. Whereas the Jiangnan editions mimic the performance context by ending lines of poetry on the stressed, rhymed character, in the Guangdong edition, presumably to save space (from 129 folio pages down to eighty-nine folio pages), the poetic sections are condensed, breaking up the visual parallel to the aural effect. Instead of each line consisting of a seven-character couplet in which the last character rhymes with the final character of the next line, the Guangdong edition condenses one and a half couplets per line. While both the Jiangnan style of editions and the Guangdong edition are divorced from the performance context by nature of their being printed, static texts, in the Guangdong edition the visual rhythm enforced by the rhyming characters is lost. This seemingly jarring change to the rhythm is less so when we consider how far the text had moved from its home context. For one, rhymes that worked in Wu, the sub-family of Chinese spoken in much of Jiangnan, would not have rhymed as well in Cantonese. In addition, the visual mimesis of aural soundscapes in Jiangnan performance might not have replicated the way in which *Liu Xiang* was recited in Guangdong. Lacking tune titles, *Liu*

¹⁴⁸ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo Baojuan Yanjiu* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 126.

Xiang lent itself to performance using the recitation styles its audience expected, rather than the style the text prescribed, should it be read aloud.

Moving beyond the Jiangnan region, where the tale had circulated in some version or another for centuries, led to further innovation in the tale's structure. The Hunan edition, while still bearing the title *Liu Xiang baojuan* is so far is the only version of this variant we know of. However, the title page, dated 1882, includes the words "recarved," implying that at least one earlier version existed. The title page also records that the blocks were kept at Zhang Zhengsun's umbrella shop in Xingang, Hunan, which is a distinctly different venue than the temple print houses out of which Jiangnan and Guangdong editions were distributed.¹⁴⁹ In the revisions, we can observe a shift in the kind of exemplarity valued by the reviser, as well as an increasing concern for the propriety of popular literature as a vehicle for religious messages.

A great deal of care went into the revisions for the edition published in Hunan. Merely ninety-four folio pages long, in comparison with 129 folio pages in the two-volume *baojuan*, the excisions range from removing superfluous words from prolix narration to deleting up to two thirds of an excessively long poetic section. For the most part, the Hunan edition has not been rewritten so much as it has been revised with great attention to detail. Most of the story's framework remains, apart from the incident when Xiangnü encounters the would-be rapists. In most cases, what appears to have happened is that an editor repackaging the tale for audiences less familiar with *baojuan* and the original tale worked from a Jiangnan edition of *Liu Xiang*, directly copying what could be copied, cutting what was repetitive in the origin text, and inserting elements that the new audience would need for the text to become intelligible and attractive.

¹⁴⁹ Hunan *Liu Xiang*, title page. "新港湖南張正順傘舖藏板"

Though the text still begins with a nun preaching a sermon that results in Xiangnü's conversion, elements from the original lecture have been rearranged with new material inserted. The new material, a long poem on mourning ritual and the passage of the soul through hell, coming after the poem on the mother's suffering during pregnancy and the ten things that go wrong during childbirth, emphasizes even more strongly what Cole suggests that the nun's sermon in *Liu Xiang* represents: that filial children should be convicted of the karmic debts they owe their parents and actively pursue their salvation from hell through Buddhist rituals.¹⁵⁰ Xiangnü's sermon from her hermitage was likewise revised in kind.

The audience for whom this version was intended was likely not as familiar with the genre of *baojuan* as audiences in Jiangnan might have been. The first piece of evidence to support this comes when the nun begins to recite the pregnancy *baojuan*. In both versions, she prefaces her recitation with set of instructions for how her audience should behave themselves during the performance. In the Jiangnan edition, her instructions amount to "All of you good people, sit quietly with pure hearts, don't chat about worthless things, concentrate fully and listen carefully."¹⁵¹ The latter version goes, "All of you good people, sit quietly. Don't speak, don't discuss daily mundane matters. Not only will you not be able to hear, but other people won't be able to understand it. Then there will be no merit in listening, and there will be loss of merit."¹⁵² In contrast with the divided attention of audiences at performances of popular drama and storytelling, the audience present at the ritualized *baojuan* performance receives specific instruction on how this storytelling differs from its secular counterparts. Pages later, the nun

¹⁵⁰ Cole, 216.

¹⁵¹ *Liu Xiang* 1:7a, (facsimile, 71).

¹⁵² Hunan *Liu Xiang*, 9a. "請諸位善人靜坐。勿言不可談論家常閑話。不但自己聽不見。連別人也聽不明白了。更且聽而無功。必到落福。"

directly addresses the value of reciting a *baojuan* over that of a sutra with, “The meaning in sutras is deep and can’t be understood by listeners in a single moment. Therefore I recite scrolls, whose every sentence is close to life, and every listener can easily grasp them. I’m reciting scrolls here today because I want to persuade the people of the world to *nianfo* and practice piety.”¹⁵³ Like Zhuhong’s conviction in the late Ming that elite Buddhism failed to effectively reach all those who needed to hear its life-saving messages and therefore wrote morality books in the style of Daoist texts, the nun here defends the need for the simplified piety presented in *baojuan*.¹⁵⁴ Xiangnü’s sermon to the crowds assembled at her hermitage directs itself at an old man who criticizes her for reciting *xiven* 戲文 (performance texts) when she is supposedly one who has left the household. Xiangnü contradicts the provocateur on both of his assumptions. She has not taken orders and become a nun, she says, and there is nothing wrong with reciting religious dramatic texts for the audience. Cleverly, she illustrates this by reciting a four-line *gāthā* and pointing out that the *gāthā* is impossible to comprehend without explication.¹⁵⁵ Her explication takes the form of prose, poetry, and song – exactly what a *baojuan* is comprised of.

In this refashioning of the tale, the implied narrator, the nun, and Xiangnü go out of their ways to defend the purpose of the *baojuan* and to instruct its audience in the properly reverential way to behave during religious rituals. For example, unlike *Liu Xiang*, but hearkening back to *Shuangxiu ji*, the audience is informed of Xiangnü’s fated three-day marriage to Ma Yu immediately after her betrothal. Yet this revelation is not framed as coming from a heavenly

¹⁵³ “尼姑說。的經中文義深透。听者一時不能明白。故宣卷文。句句真切。使听者人人易曉。我今日在此宣卷。是要勸世人。念佛修善。” Ibid., 15b.

¹⁵⁴ See section Zhuhong, the late Ming Buddhist renewal, and lay Buddhist Practice above, pp. 44-47.

¹⁵⁵ A *gāthā*, the Sanskrit term for “verse,” is a Buddhist poem either in praise of the Buddha or consisting of generic moral importance. Charles Muller, “揭” in the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* ([www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?50.xml+id\(%27b5048%27\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?50.xml+id(%27b5048%27))).

messenger intended for Xiangnü's ears, as it was in *Shuangxiu ji*, but as narratorial explication directed at the audience. Here, the narrator takes the opportunity to instruct women on the sinfulness of dressing up to burn incense or participate in religious rituals, as their actions may tempt young monks and give rise to sinful passions. The encounter between Ma Yu and Xiangnü in their previous lives, framed in the *baojuan* as something of an afterthought and not explicitly condemned, becomes in this version another teachable moment for proper religious devotion.

Hunan *Liu Xiang*, by its careful but significant emendations, reveals levels of concern for defending the genre and proper behavior of lay believers that are not in the original text. There is further emphasis on the way an audience should behave – quietly and reverently – and a re-foregrounding of the event that caused Xiangnü to have a life of suffering this time around in order to chasten immodest women who might go through the motions of religious piety while distracted from the import by impure desires. In Xiangnü's defense of the vernacular, we hear echoes of the justifications used by the writers of the preface and the afterword included with many editions of *Liu Xiang*.

CHAPTER TWO

Xiangnü Reimagined: An Newly Discovered Late Qing *Baojuan*

At roughly the same time as *Liu Xiang* began to climb in popularity from 1869 onwards, a supplement to the *baojuan* appeared.¹ The addition was called, in its abbreviated title, *Liu Xiang zhong juan* 劉香中卷 (*The Middle Scroll of Liu Xiang*). As such, it was positioned to complement to the first and second volumes of the original *baojuan*, taking advantage of the gap in the story after Xiangnü is expelled from her in-laws' home but before she assumes a position of religious leadership in her community. The idea behind this middle volume is admittedly clever. As the convenient gap in the original tale is exploited for creative expansion, Xiangnü's familiar figure becomes the mouthpiece for an additional set of moral injunctions, most of which are not present in the original story. The first volume of *Liu Xiang* ends with Xiangnü thrown out of her in-laws' home, singing about how heavenly repayment will come for her mother-in-law because of her evil actions. The second volume opens with a story about Xiangnü preaching the need for merit cultivation to a rich woman who has invited her in for a meal. The middle volume fits snugly in between these volumes, expanding on the time after Xiangnü was evicted, but before she takes on disciples and eventually settles in the hut from which she preaches and recites sutras. However, given the general lacuna regarding it in contemporaneous records and subsequent catalogues of *baojuan*, it presumably did not catch on. Not listed in Che's *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* or catalogued by name by the library at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts, in whose collection both extant editions are held, this *baojuan* is a newly discovered work that has never been studied before.

¹ Publishing popularity is determined by number of extant editions listed in Che's *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*.

The anonymous author of this sequel borrowed his protagonist from *Liu Xiang* and the rough framework of his narrative from *Xuetang riji* 學堂日記 (*Daily Stories for the Classroom*) an illustrated collection of simplistic morality tales, written by Yu Zhi, featuring examples of heavenly rewards for virtue and punishments for evil, intended for elementary school boys.² These tales are written in simple Classical Chinese, and their educational value, apart from the inculcation of morality, is illustrated by glosses in half-size characters for difficult words or concepts for its student readers. In translating these tales from concise encapsulations of heaven's justice to vernacular, verbose prosimetric narrative, the author created a hybrid text. This *baojuan* neither sheds enough features of its source material to escape from the tight frames of the half-page lessons, nor adopts enough features from its target genre to read like a narrative *baojuan*. Comparing the *baojuan* to the classical tales illustrates the generic features of *baojuan*, as understood by a moderately literate man in the late Qing. His composition of this text was, however awkward it may be in places, an expression of religious conviction and an endorsement of Yu Zhi's conception of vernacular literature as a tool for widespread inculcation of socially restorative morals.

The library at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts, Department of Drama and Opera 中國藝術研究院戲曲研究所 in Beijing has two different editions of the middle volume in its collection. Unlike *Liu Xiang*, the contents of which shows little to no change from edition to edition, these two editions of the sequel show marked change in the space of only a few years³. The first one, (which I will call the Yihua edition) numbers sixty-eight folio pages, the second (termed the Huikong edition) a mere fifty-three when the opening illustration and preface are

² Yu Zhi, *Xuetang riji* (Gusu [Suzhou]: Dejian zhai, 1875).

³ See Chapter 1, Appendix 4 about variant editions of *Liu Xiang*.

excluded.⁴ Editing occurred at the sentence level on nearly every page, balancing lines of poetry and clarifying ambiguous prose. More significantly, Xiangnü's voice is modulated in the Huikong edition away from some of the contentious positions she preaches in the Yihua edition.⁵ Most significantly, the preface to the Huikong edition credits Yu Zhi with making these changes that brought the unrefined original text up to a higher standard worthy of republication.

The discovery of this little known work, and in two very different editions, enables us to closely examine two separate approaches that morality campaigners employed when using *baojuan* as a tool to reach an audience otherwise unlikely to encounter the same material in other popular forms – plays, elementary primers, and poetry collections. In comparing the longer edition to the shorter edition, we gain access to an implicit debate about proselytizing methods in postwar Jiangnan. The first iteration of this work demonstrates an incomplete understanding of the generic features of a *baojuan* and a sense of condescension towards lay Buddhist religious practice. The second approach, thanks to Yu Zhi's intervention as the latter edition's meticulous editor, demonstrates his comfort with the vernacular style, willingness to cooperate with Buddhist organizations, and also his sincere hope that this new version would appeal to its target audience:

⁴ The Yihua edition, which contains no bibliographic data within the text, is kept between the first and second volumes of the 1870 edition of *Liu Xiang* published by Yihuatang 翼化堂. Yihuatang's publishing catalog from 1939 lends support to this attribution by listing *Liu Xiang zhong juan* for sale, separate from its listing of *Liu Xiang*. The Huikong edition names its publisher Huikong Sutra House at Zhaoqing [Temple] in Hangzhou 杭州昭慶慧空經房 on the illustration page and after the preface, dated 1873. Internal evidence when comparing editions also support the later date for this version, so though the publication dates themselves may be tentative, the order in which the versions appeared seems certain – the Yihua edition came before Huikong edition. For more detail about the publication data related to these editions, see Appendix 5 following this chapter.

⁵ Even if the publications dates of 1870 and 1873 are not firmly established, the nature of the meticulous emendations at the sentence level of the poetry, balancing many 8-7 couplets back to 7-7, supports the Huikong edition as a later revision of an earlier text, either the Yihua edition or one quite like it. Closer examination of the Huikong edition further supports this conjecture. In no case does the editor add characters (aside from three character padding words which precede certain lines) to couplets that were already balanced in the Yihua edition.

female *baojuan* listeners/readers.⁶ Both writers, by engaging with *baojuan*, demonstrate their commitment to the postwar crusade to restore moral order in Jiangnan.

Fitting Xiangnü into *Daily Stories for the Classroom*

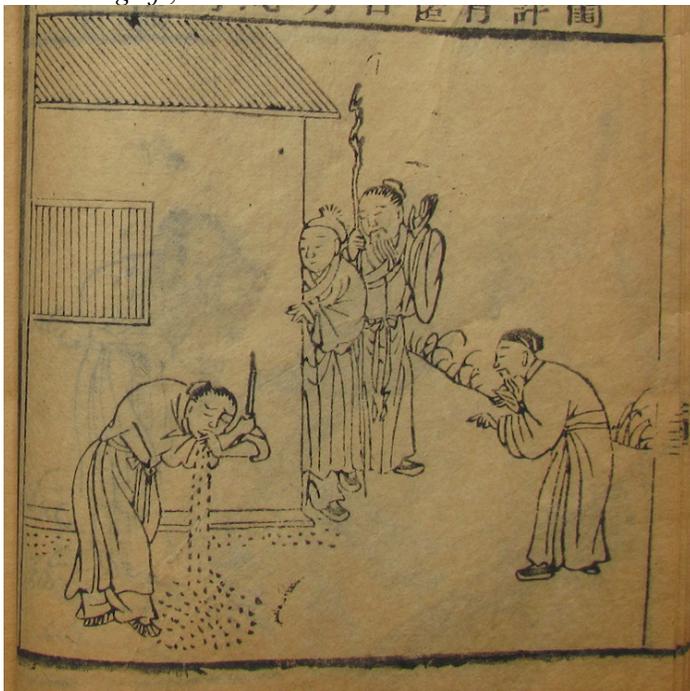
The middle volume, in both editions, consists of unrelated anecdotes about Xiangnü's travels around the countryside, during which she dispenses moral cures for social and physical ills. It dramatizes many of the single panel *Xuetang riji* morality tales, in which unrelated episodes of karmic justice follow one after another in no particular order. Here, in the middle volume, conversations on the roadside and pleas for assistance serve as teachable moments for Xiangnü to explain the moral framework in which specific good deeds are rewarded and bad ones are severely punished. Frequently, the threats to social harmony result in physical disease for the perpetrators of immorality or their innocent family members. In nearly every case, Xiangnü recommends that people repent from their sins, swear an oath to behave morally in the future, and perform good deeds to make up the deficiency of merit, thereby curing their diseases, averting disasters, and ensuring a prosperous future for all within this life.

The two anecdotes that begin the work, in both editions, are good examples of the anonymous author's general approach to adapting short stories from *Xuetang riji* and other source material for the generic requirements of vernacular *baojuan*. Some episodes demonstrate more creativity in storytelling and innovation than most, which simply insert Xiangnü as a commentator on the action that proceeds more or less as illustrated in the original.

⁶ The Huikong edition attributes its editing to Yu Zhi in the preface, written by a Buddhist monk named Daoxiu, and again on the final page of the work. Though Yu Zhi did not write a preface to this *baojuan* as he did for *Pan Gong*, given Yu Zhi's involvement in every aspect of morality literature and philanthropic promotion in 1860s and 1870s Jiangnan, along with the certainty of his composition of the inspiration text, *Xuetang riji*, I accept this attribution as genuine.

To illustrate this, let us compare the first two anecdotes to their sources. Xiangnü's first case involves resolving a conflict between a woman and her daughter-in-law, which the narrative acknowledges she has special sensitivity towards given her own problems with her own mother-in-law. Xiangnü reveals to each woman how gossiping twisted their relationship. A dramatic scene of forgiveness and repentance, filled with weeping, plays out before a statue of Guanyin at the village temple.⁷ The village gossip responsible for fanning the flames of the conflict cuts out her own tongue and screams, "The city god is dragging me down to cutting tongue hell!" before dying in front of everyone.⁸ This teaches the villagers about heaven's punishment for spreading slander.⁹

In *Xuetang riji*, the incident is illustrated like so:



[Figure 1] *Xuetang riji*, 33b. Widner Library, Harvard University Edition.

⁷ *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 8b-9a. Page numbers for both editions are identical until 41b. Unless specifically noted as either Yihua or Huikong edition, the cited text is the same in both editions.

⁸ “城隍菩薩要把我入拔舌地獄去了。” *Ibid.*, 12a.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11b-12a.

At first glance, it is immediately obvious that, for the sake of this *baojuan* revision, the male gossip has been transformed into a woman. The topic of the gossip in the original, a private affair between husband and wife, has also been consciously rewritten to feature female protagonists as well. Why? In addition to noting how appropriate an intermediary Xiangnü is now (whereas she could not as easily have inserted herself into the male dominated narrative portrayed above,) the author also inserts Guanyin into the mix. In reframing this tale for an audience presumably interested in the text because of Xiangnü's role in the story, a tale about men's gossip, Ming locker-room banter, becomes one about rivalries between women in the home, featuring a resolution that plays out in front of Guanyin herself, the most exemplary female *baojuan* protagonist of all.

Guanyin is featured in the next anecdote as well, where Xiangnü encounters a girl given to her husband's family at a young age and raised by her abusive mother-in-law. The girl prays to Guanyin for relief from her suffering, but after three years without change, she has begun to doubt whether the Bodhisattva has any power at all. Xiangnü, upon whom the light of holy wisdom shines, appears and loudly explains to her that she suffers because she was an abusive mother-in-law in a previous life. In this life, she must suffer ten thousand blows before her debt will be repaid. If she can bear one hundred more blows, her suffering will be over. However, because Xiangnü speaks so loudly, the girl's mother-in-law overhears the judgment as well and immediately drops her staff, fearing that she too will suffer in her next life for the blows she deals in this one.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid.,17b-18a.



[Figure 2] *Xuetang riji*, 48a. Widner Library, Harvard University Edition.

In this case, the tale is related with little variation from its source. If the image above featured a third woman standing between Guanyin and the aggrieved girl, acting as a conduit for Guanyin's insight, it would match the *baojuan* version perfectly. No special pains have been taken to make this story more accessible for the *baojuan* audience. Given that it already features women and Guanyin, it's unlikely the author would have seen the need for additional adaptation.

Implications of Innovating with Anti-Infanticide Tales

Most of the fifteen anecdotes in the early version of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* are similarly uncomplicated, employing Xiangnü as an authoritative commentator on minimally developed illustrations of heaven's justice. The few more complexly revised anecdotes, which dramatize

their transgressors as fully delineated characters making decisions to repent, contain moments of fascinating innovation on the part of their writer. Like the gender swapping in the tongue-cutting story related above, these changes seem primarily related to making the source material more accessible to women by enlarging the roles of female characters who interact with Xiangnü or emphasizing Xiangnü's impassioned endorsement of the new devotional practices. Some of these innovations on Yu Zhi's original framing of these scenarios of heavenly retribution undoubtedly led to Yu cutting them out of his version of the work due to their confrontational approach to lay Buddhist practices. However, a creative retelling of an anti-infanticide tale that reorients its plot to feature women as the heroes of the tale, not just the standard roles of perpetrators of sin and subjects of heavenly retribution, emphasizes the attention paid by the author to meet audience expectations that a *baojuan* should feature exemplary women.

From pages 20b-27a of both editions, Xiangnü encounters a penitent couple touring the countryside carrying a flag upon which a woman in labor with a snakelike creature twined about her throat has been drawn. Before exploring the creative revisions made on the part of the *baojuan* author, we need to first establish prominence of the standard version of this snake-baby tale in anti-infanticide literature during the era and later studies about the movement. Yu Zhi famously published many works opposing the drowning of baby girls, including material that was later translated into French by Gabriel Palatre, a Jesuit priest, for circulation in Europe.¹¹ Palatre's monograph on infanticide in China, *L'infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine*, written in 1878, made use of sources readily available to him in Shanghai in the 1870s. Among his sources, he cites Yu Zhi's *Deyi lu* (an encyclopedic work on philanthropy), the newly

¹¹ Meyer-Fong, 42. The volume in which it was translated is Gabriel Palatre, *L'infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine*, Harvard College Library preservation digitization program (Shanghai: Autographie de la Mission catholique à l'orphelinat de Tou-sè-wè, 1878), <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:2556305>.

established Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao* 申報, official government proclamations, and popularly circulating morality texts. Three illustrated versions of the woman laboring to give birth to a snake creature as punishment for drowning her daughters have been preserved in this text as evidence of native Chinese anti-infanticide literature, including the version from *Xuetang riji*, pictured below. The unsettling terror of the spectacle is immediately obvious, and the picture cries out for narrative details to fill in the graphic horror.



[Figure 3] *Xuetang riji*, 35b. Widner Library, Harvard University Edition.

Both major recent publications on the history of Chinese infanticide published within the last decade, *Drowning Girls in China: Female Infanticide in China since 1650* by David Mungello, and *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in 19th Century China* by Michelle King, draw heavily on Yu Zhi's widespread and varied anti-infanticide literature.¹² Both books feature versions of the snake-baby tale prominently in their consideration of the movement, and understandably so, as its impact is shocking and deeply affective.¹³

Each version of the story Palatre, Mungello, and King include in their accounts provides slightly different details, but ultimately the same conclusions, about this birth of a monstrous creature. The version in Yu Zhi's *Xuetang riji*, pictured above, relates how a Qianglong reign period man named Wang Sanyuan and his wife Xu Shi have one son. Then Xu gives birth to three daughters in succession. Because her mother-in-law laments that the wife will bring them to ruin by having only daughters, Xu has no choice but to drown two of the girls.¹⁴ When she goes into labor a fourth time, it lasts three days with no delivery, so Sanyuan calls to heaven saying that they promise not to drown this child. A voice speaks from inside Xu's body, saying, "I've already been killed by you twice, today I come to take life." Crying out in fear, Sanyuan begs the baby to be born, and eventually a monstrous creature half-emerges from Xu. Her mother-in-law and son die from the shock of seeing the human-headed-snake-bodied creature, and it seems Xu will join them when she faints dead away. Sanyuan faces the hearth, kowtows and promises to

¹² Michelle Tien King, *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); and D. E. Mungello, *Drowning Girls in China: Female Infanticide since 1650* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

¹³ King's work, for a number of reasons including its narrower chronological scope, tells by far the most focused, resource-rich account of infanticide in China – in both reality and its literary representations in both domestic and international media of the nineteenth century.

¹⁴ “徐氏不得也溺死二女。” Yu, *Xuetang riji* 35b. Mungello makes a significant mistranslation in his treatment of this story, replacing her mother-in-law with her husband scolding her for bearing daughters, an error that fundamentally changes the nature of the tale. Mungello, 17.

become Buddhist and exhort others to let their children live. In response, a beam of radiant light shines and a spirit in golden armor drives away the monster. His wife recovers from her faint.

Afterwards, as a result of exhorting others to abandon infanticide, they are given another son.¹⁵

The other two versions of the tale included in Palatre's work are essentially similar; the differences are minor variations that do not affect the core story of a snake-baby exacting justice on its family. In one version, the dying woman asks her husband to donate to an infant protection society as the means of reconciling her karmic debt and saving her soul from purgatory.



[Figure 4] Detail of anti-infanticide broadsheet printed by Dejian zhai. Included in Palatre, *L'infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine*. Widner Library, Harvard University Edition.

In the other, the comic-like image above, light on text and heavy on dramatic illustration, the mother cries in fear while the mother-in-law and son fall down dead. In Mungello's opinion,

¹⁵ Yu, *Xuetang riji*, 35b and Palatre, 39.

such stories indicate the particular vehemence of Buddhism in imposing karmic justice on women without offering them a chance for forgiveness.¹⁶ Given that such tales occur in morality works overwhelmingly associated with Yu Zhi, this particular condemnation of Buddhism's representation of women is out of place.¹⁷ However, his point about the inflexibility of karmic justice when it comes to transgressing women stands. King, sidestepping the religious issue, also highlights the nature of heaven's retribution in all anti-infanticide morality tales, concluding "Women... *never* got second chances, and their punishments were often painfully inscribed on a hypergendered body, at the very site of sexual reproduction."¹⁸

In light of these prior versions, and the gender biases Mungello and King both highlight as defining characteristics of the anti-infanticide morality tale, the new version of the snake-baby infanticide retribution tale related in *Liu Xiang zhong juan* becomes remarkable. Whereas in the previous two anecdotes Xiangnü functioned as an intermediary between heavenly judgment and earthly transgressors, in this instance the tale is dramatically rewritten and she acts merely as a listener to a secondary narrator, the infanticidal mother. Rather than killing/silencing the snake-baby's mother, freezing her in the moment of horrific birth, this version features her as a speaking character that has been given a second chance. This alone invalidates King's use of the absolute "never," which based on the evidence detailed below in *Liu Xiang zhong juan* and, in Chapter 3, in *Xigu*, should perhaps be revised to "rarely." The tale resolves with the promise that

¹⁶ Mungello, 20.

¹⁷ One occurrence of the snake baby tale in a text not associated with Yu Zhi can be found in *Zhongxi chuyan baojuan* 眾喜粗言寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Zhongxi's Coarse Words*), a *baojuan* dated 1851, reprinted in Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang, eds., *Zhonghua zhenben baojuan*. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 10:419-420. The place of women in late imperial Chinese Buddhism is a complex. For more on women and Buddhism in late imperial China, see Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995): 29-58, and Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ King, 49. Emphasis added.

all who have sinned by drowning girls may repay their karmic debt through cultivating merit, rather than reiterating what Mungello and King see as the inflexibility of karmic justice. More than simply giving this mother a second chance, the version related here externalizes the criticism of bearing daughters into the mouth of a village gossip, silences the husband entirely, and cast the mother-in-law as the saving agent calling upon heaven to drive away the snake-baby. Rather than being the cause of death, passive subjects acted upon by heaven's will, both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law here become agents of their own rescue and karmic redemption.

Mungello notes, quite rightly, that the writers of such tales would most likely have been men. Therefore he laments, “the mother’s voices are so absent from these tales that it is hard to know what their thoughts and feelings were.”¹⁹ In stark contrast, the only voices heard in this episode of the middle volume are the voices of women, including two birthing mothers. This is not to suggest that a woman wrote this tale, but that the literary silence of the mothers who consigned their daughters to basins of water has been broken. Furthermore, it is not a rule that male authors were opposed to their female characters speaking about their feelings about infanticide, rather, the genres which have so far been consulted in the scholarship on anti-infanticide literature are not ones that lent themselves to vocal female characters of any identity, as an examination of most *Xuetang riji* tales illustrates.²⁰

¹⁹ Mungello, 20.

²⁰ One exception to this lack of female voices is Yu Zhi’s version of the snake-baby tale written for stage performance: *Yuguai tu* 育怪圖 (Portrait of bearing a monster) in *Shujitang jinyue* 庶幾堂今樂, 8 vols. (Suzhou: Dejian zhai, 1880). In it, the woman in labor is assigned the generic female role-type while her husband is played by a clown for laughs, with lines like, “Your pregnant belly looks as large as a chamber pot!” His character is also given all the lines detailing his regret for drowning his daughters, while his wife does little more than moan in pain until after the snake-baby’s birth. Blame for the infant girls’ deaths is placed squarely on the clown’s mother, whose anger at his refusal to drown his baby girls and his pathetic attempts to bribe the midwife into drowning the girl for him leads her to kill the infant herself. Her character, in contrast to the mother-in-law in the *baojuan* version of the tale, is purely evil, written with lines that praise herself for her cleverness and laughing while she drowns the baby. In King’s

In this new version, even the image on the penitents' flag has been modified to show divergence from widely reproduced images included above. Although the snake-baby still twines around the birthing woman's neck, beside her stands an old woman who looks as if she is reciting scripture. Four large characters read, "Personally appearing to exhort repentance 現出勸化," advertising the woman carrying the flag as the very woman struggling with the monster drawn upon it. Two lines of smaller characters give her and her husband's names, their village of origin, and reiterate their commitment to negate their sins by personally urging repentance, reflecting the biographical information given in the morality tales and images referenced above.²¹

Initially, Xiangnü is just one of many in the crowd of hundreds gathering to hear the penitents. The woman speaks, explaining how her husband is mute and cannot tell their story. Her thoughts and feelings about the harrowing experience are the only ones the audience will hear. She begins by confessing that of the five daughters she bore, she allowed only two to live. A village woman once harassed her about having nothing but daughters, saying that she must be fated to have no boys at all. So distressed by this, worried that her neighbors will continue to bully her for having daughters and worried about the cost of raising children that will be a waste of money, she drowns three successive infant girls.

When her sixth pregnancy comes to term, she goes into labor for two days, wracked by pain that nothing can relieve. As she, her husband and the midwife beg heaven for relief, promising not to harm another baby, as in the stories above, a voice speaks out from within her.

summary of this play (68-69), she neglects to note that the birthing mother, though she is said to have died from the pain, eventually awakens to find her only son dead and her evil mother-in-law now mute. Having come back from the dead, the mother is finally given a few brief lines that address some of her emotions. Even so, these only focus on mourning the death of her son, and she soon leaves the stage and is never heard from again. Nothing in this play, even though it intended for oral performance, comes close to this *baojuan* version's outspoken infanticidal mother.

²¹ *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 20b.

“You have a habit of drowning female babies. If I come out, I fear you’ll kill me. It’s better to go see King Yama together, and not fall into the same trap and be born yet again.”²² In this version, however, the husband is scared speechless. The woman herself directly negotiates with her unborn child. “This time will not be like the others. I promise if you behave and are born, I will keep you and raise you into adulthood.”²³ After repeating herself a few times, with a loud cry, the voice finally consents to be born. As in earlier morality tales, the baby is neither a boy nor a girl, but the malformed snake-bodied creature. Both parents are rendered useless, weeping and fainting at the horror. The woman’s mother-in-law, here a vegetarian Buddhist, intervenes by reciting the *Baiyi zhou* 白衣咒 (White Robe Incantation) and a shaft of holy light shines in through the door, driving the snake-baby out of the room.²⁴ The woman recovers from her faint but remains deeply troubled by the experience, not understanding what could have caused the nightmarish birth.²⁵

In this alternate version of the troubled birth tale, the woman in labor speaks back to the eerie voice from within when her husband remains silent. When attacked by the demon child, her mother-in-law joins her in speaking, reciting a text related to Guanyin, whose holy light immediately responds. Everyone lives. In a context where morality tales told of the heaviest burden of heavenly justice falling on the bodies of women and the bodies of the children she allowed to live, this version in the middle volume provides an attractive alternative.

²² “你們慣把女兒溺。出來怕你送殘生。不如同見閻王好。不來上當再臨盆。” Ibid., 21b-22a.

²³ “這回決不照前行。願你好好來生下。保你留養長成大。” Ibid., 22a.

²⁴ Though the exact words of the incantation are not included in the *baojuan*, the name itself suggests a relationship with White Robed Guanyin. For more on this incarnation of Guanyin, see Yü, *Kuan-Yin the Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, 223-262.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 22b.

Eventually, a traveling monk arrives to reveal how her infanticidal actions built up a karmic debt with consequences yet to come. Yet such effects are not inevitable, for they too can be avoided by courageously going out into the world to spread the news about the consequences of infanticide. Perhaps in a direct reference to broadsheets like the one collected by Palatre, she is instructed to “Illustrate the story of giving birth to a snake, clearly write it as a new essay, carve blocks for a handbill and paste it everywhere, in teahouses and bars tell it profusely.”²⁶ Her public lectures across the countryside are another facet of this penance, the completion of which after six months will guarantee that she will be granted a son.

At the end of the penitent mother’s tale, a woman in the audience spontaneously bursts out weeping. Xiangnü also listens to her story, in which her beloved seven-year-old son dies of a pox after the vengeful spirits of two drowned daughters visit her in a dream, another *Xuetang riji* tale. Xiangnü’s echoes the anonymous monk from the first tale and encourages the woman to speak up. “I see you are a perceptive woman, capable of making arguments with a clever nature. Just listen to my few words. Go often in your village to admonish people.”²⁷

In the stories Mungello and King cite, mothers simply do not speak for themselves and nor do they need to. Simple broadsheet illustrations with a minimum of text, for example, are visually affective through immediately recognizable elements. An illiterate viewer would understand that the woman had drowned daughters in the past because the basin of water, knocked over in the panic, was ready as she gave birth in the event of another girl. The ghastly consequences for such an act are clearly represented by the vomiting child and old woman while the birthing mother’s fear is plainly drawn on her face. What is missing from such simplistic

²⁶ Ibid., 23b-24a.

²⁷ “看你是個伶俐女。能言舌辨性聰明。只要聽我幾句話。常在鄉村勸化人。” Ibid., 26b.

renditions, or even the more detailed Classical language version from *Xuetang riji* summarized above, is a character with whom the audience can relate.

In contrast, the new version of this tale involves two women telling their own stories. Such first-person narration is certainly related to being retold in the form of a *baojuan*. The structure of a *baojuan* permitted the static characters of the illustrated morality tale to speak directly to the audience about their motives, fears, and new resolutions. By nature of the text's performance, the fixed story on the page comes to life. At once, the first-person is more emotionally affective than a third-person narration of facts. More so than that, by unfolding in time rather than illustrating a split second of heavenly retribution, these new versions offer their audience a formula of repentance, penance and good works as a means of counteracting the swift, violent justice of the broadsheets and books of simplistic stories, all the while promoting the same values. Even if the women in the tale have words put in their mouths by male writers, the behavior they model invites – demands – that other women speak up about their experiences with infanticide as well. This version of the traumatic birthing tale encourages collective recognition of the painful truths of the practice, rather than exclusively condemning its practitioners with inevitable consequences. Mothers must speak up about the negative effects of the act. Otherwise the only people talking about infanticide are the ones like the village gossip, ridiculing mothers of girls into shame. As far as the anonymous author's adaptations of Yu's single frame morality tales goes, this episode is the best at capturing the dynamic way that *baojuan* empower their audiences as potential performers – performers of merit in general and performers of the text in particular - through interpretive imitation and recreation. A more detailed comparison of a similar move, by Yu Zhi himself, in rewriting a morality play about cherishing grains into a *baojuan* featuring infanticide, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Creative and Condensing

Two of the five episodes that Yu Zhi cut from the Yihua edition when compiling the Huikong edition are particularly explicit about how Buddhist approaches to cultivating merit are insufficiently attentive to the kinds of merits and demerits recorded by heaven. In essence, even a strict adherent to the lay Buddhist devotional formula delineated in *Liu Xiang* would likely transgress the rules laid out in Yu's corpus of morality texts. Whereas the original text goes on the offensive to denigrate the deficiencies of Buddhist practices through its elaboration of these anecdotes, Yu's excision of these episodes from his edition points to a difference in approach to convincing devout lay Buddhists of the deficiencies in their merit cultivation. In the first episode, Xiangnü asserts that cherishing written paper and grains are actions more meritorious than burning incense or reciting Amitâbha's name.²⁸ The second informs the audience that *Xiangshan baojuan*, the highly revered *baojuan* about Guanyin's incarnation as Princess Miaoshan, is incomplete and therefore misleading her worshippers.²⁹

The episode featuring Xiangnü cherishing written paper and grains is a composite of at least three episodes in *Xuetang riji*. As these practices are somewhat more obscure acts of merit making that rose to prominence in the Qing, some background will be helpful to understand just what it is that Xiangnü is supposed to be doing in this anecdote. Honoring written paper involves treating any paper with characters on it with respect and disposing of it properly. Characters, traditionally said to be based on patterns from nature, were linked to the innate material of the universe, giving them power. The power to communicate gave people the power to build civilization and develop philosophy, another oft-used justification in late Qing literature about

²⁸ Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 42a-44b.

²⁹ Ibid., 62a-68a. For a brief summary of *Xiangshan baojuan*, see Chapter 1, 61-62. For a translation, see *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and her Acolytes*. trans. Wilt Idema.

cherishing characters.³⁰ What seems on the surface like an endeavor wholly oriented towards classical Confucian education, as McDermott notes in “Sacred Books and Sacred Trash,” these practices were often also closely associated with Buddhist and Daoist practitioners. “The two earliest Cherish Characters Associations... began and were centered not in a government or private Confucian school but in, respectively, a Daoist shrine and a Buddhist hermitage.”³¹ To McDermott, this demonstrates how popular religious practices were later adopted by Confucians to advance their own moral dicta. Looking at this from a Buddho-Daoist perspective, however, proves the practice religiously meaningful as well. In both religions, writing is a powerful means of transmitting information between the humans and the gods. Buddhist and Daoist scriptures, words revealed by deities, are heavenly power embodied in the vehicle of the written word. Likewise, prayers might be transmitted to heaven by ritually burning the paper upon which they were written.³² This Buddho-Daoist belief in the sacred power of text contributes to the overall reverence of written paper. Additionally, the reproduction of holy words through hand copying and sponsoring printing was a significant means of generating merit. Vice versa, treating words disrespectfully was a way to accrue demerits. To those who revered and cherished the written word, even the ashes of written paper properly disposed of by burning maintained the magical

³⁰ For example, in Yu Zhi, *Deyi lu*. (China: Baoshan tang, 1885), 12.1a-24b. (This Baoshan tang edition includes eight volumes, each consisting of two *juan* with pagination restarting at 1 at the beginning of each *juan*. Therefore, in this edition, *juan* 12 falls in the latter half of the sixth volume of the collection. Other editions paginate differently, including one which begins again at 1 at the start of each subsection of each *juan*. However, the *juan* titles appear in the same order nonetheless.)

³¹ McDermott, 212.

³² For more on the talismanic power of writing in China, see Stephan Peter Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing: Exorcistic and Apotropaic Rituals in Medieval China*, (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2012).

qualities of their written state and should be treated equally as reverently.³³ The practice of treating written paper as sacred was known among literati from the fifteenth century onwards and Cherishing Character Associations had formed by the seventeenth century in association with Buddhist and Taoist temples.³⁴ Why might cherishing paper have been such a high priority to social reformers in the late Qing? McDermott sees the expansion of the practice as a “long term effort to Confucianize society” and their involvement in Buddhist and Daoist temple associations as an “intrusion”.³⁵ Another possibility for why cherishing written paper became a primary moral issue in the late Qing was the specter of cultural change. Chau suggests that the explosion in the use of words on every surface, a highly visible side effect of increased consumer-driven trade, was an easy target for reactionary responses against modernization and social change as a whole.³⁶ Chau notes that the late Qing emphasis on spreading conservative elite values in popularized forms was perhaps a response to elites’ fear of social change. In this way, the stories about the calamities which befall those who fail to reverence written paper are indicative of the educated elite’s greater fear that their entire civilization, one founded on those very characters, was about to fall.³⁷ Change to the social framework of traditional China would have been seen as a threat to their position and status.

In addition to Chau’s specific conception of cherishing written paper with regard to elite male anxieties of cultural change leading to the weakening of their position as cultural lodestones

³³ Adam Yuet Chau “Script Fundamentalism: The Practice of Cherishing Written Characters (Lettered Paper 惜字紙) in the Age of Literati Decline and Commercial Revolution,” in *Chinese and European Perspectives on the Study of Chinese Popular Religions*, Ed. Philip Clart (Taipei: Boyang wenhua, 2012), 144-145.

³⁴ McDermott, 212.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁶ Chau, 157-159.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

beneath a sea of mercantile exchange, we need to give this anxiety further dimension by defining it along religious lines as well. Where written paper proliferates, so also proliferate the opportunities to transgress and reap the consequences of heavenly justice. Individual sinful behavior, particularly in the wake of a war caused by heavenly ire for innumerable demerits, was never truly individual. National catastrophe was made up of millions of seemingly insignificant personal moments. Just as apocalyptic war rains down from heaven as the result of accumulated sin, so averting apocalyptic war begins with the change of a single heart and a simple vow to accumulate wasted paper and grains.

Cherishing grains often occurs along with the practice of cherishing written paper, but the scholarship on this phenomenon is less well developed. Li confirms that once established, Cherish Character Associations often moved to adopt one or two other focal issues, the most common being a concern for proper respect for grains.³⁸ In Yu Zhi's *Deyi lu*, a section on organizing groups to collect and dispose of written paper is followed immediately by similar instructions for establishing groups to honor grain. By way of transition, he suggests that associations form to treasure both as an expedient means of accruing merit, since the same activity – roaming the streets with baskets – applies to both.³⁹ Elsewhere, he draws an analogy between the life-giving properties of grain and how life is given by one's parents, meaning that carelessly allowing grain to fall to the ground is no different than carelessly abandoning one's parents.⁴⁰ Fittingly, the first edition of the middle volume also includes a section on the proper disposal of one's parents' bodies, discussed again below.

³⁸ Li Na 李娜, “Qing dai, minguo minjian xizizhi xinyang yanjiu 清代、民国民间惜字信仰研究” (master's thesis, Huazhong shifan daxue, 2011), 32.

³⁹ Yu, *Deyi lu*, 12.24a.

⁴⁰ Yu, *Deyi lu* 12.25a.

As Xiangnü wanders the countryside, she picks up stray papers and grains and places them in a special bag. Her greatest concern is that these papers or grains may, through either neglect or improper care, be polluted.⁴¹ In the case of grains:

Every day, as she passed privies, she carefully examined them. Often there were scattered grains of rice, which she must, with her own hands, pick up, not fearing the stench and filth. Every day, she thus saved ten or so grains. And when she saw dog droppings on the side of the road with white rice in them, she picked them up and put them in her bag, taking it back to wash them clean, leave them to dry in the sun, and then collect them.⁴²

In this anecdote, the original writer takes his appropriation of Xiangnü too far. Xiangnü continues her efforts to cherish grains by sweeping up the grains scattered on a long section of road. When passersby ask her how she thinks she can do it all herself, she turns the question around on them. “I urge all of you, why don’t you come help me sweep? It’s comparable to burning incense and even better than chanting the name of Buddha.”⁴³ Such elevation of honoring grains above chanting the name of Buddha, a fundamental religious practice and one that Xiangnü herself engages in regularly in the parent text is a glaring conundrum. Not only is it out of character, it is a direct attack on Buddhist devotional practice.

This new hierarchy of meritorious action undermines Xiangnü’s role as a lay Buddhist exemplar, the role detailed in the previous chapter. While honoring written paper and cherishing grains were certainly considered pious from a popular Buddhist perspective as well, their veneration did not exceed veneration of the buddhas and bodhisattvas themselves. Such undermining of popular Buddhist-oriented practice in favor of elevating morals prioritized by elite Confucians constitutes a direct attack on the text’s intended audience. Whatever personal

⁴¹ Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 20b.

⁴² “每日經過坑廁之旁。必用心細看。常見有狼藉米穀。必親手拈起。不怕臭穢。每日必拾幾十粒。又見路旁或有狗屎中白米。必取起包好。帶回浸洗晒乾收好。” Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 42b.

⁴³ “我勸各位官人。何勿來我掃一掃。比如燒香。勝如念佛。” Ibid., 43a.

opinions Yu Zhi had about Buddhism (his collected essays are vague in this regard), as we will see in the following chapter, the *baojuan* he wrote adopted Buddhist imagery, language, and figures like Guanyin to convey his concerns about grain collection, cherishing written paper, or saving infant girls from death at birth. His approach was far from confrontational. Instead, it asked *baojuan* listeners to adopt additional practices, rather than abandon their earlier habits in favor of orthodox adherence to Yu's certainty of the superiority of Confucian practice above all.

Yu Zhi's removal of this particular anecdote, along with the excision of the anecdote that closes the Yihua edition, highlight his non-confrontational approach to getting his message across to an audience familiar with other conventions of religious practice. This latter anecdote, when Xiangnü meets a hanged ghost, blends a story from *Xuetang riji*, in which a suicide ghost appears to her daughter to express regret for her rash actions, with a new addition warning about the potential for *Xiangshan baojuan* to mislead its readers and leave them stranded in hell if they stubbornly resist marriage.⁴⁴ Xiangnü's conversation with this ghost make it clear that *Liu Xiang zhong juan* was written to speak directly to such women who might be as misinformed as the ghost by dint of basing their religious cultivation on traditionally popular *baojuan*. Just as Xiangnü reveals, shockingly, that *Xiangshan* is missing key elements and thus virtuous women are misled by its truncated contents, so *Liu Xiang zhong juan* reveals that key components are missing from the religious practices of the meritorious readers and listeners of *Liu Xiang*.

When the ghost first appears, a woman in her forties with wild hair and a dirty face, she seems unaware that she has an audience for the nightly repetition of her hanging, the punishment mandated by King Yama for her unnecessary suicide. When she notices Xiangnü,

⁴⁴ Yu, *Xuetang riji*, 38a.

she decides to take her as a substitute, a common literary trope about ghostly behavior.⁴⁵ Substitution would allow her to escape the punishment, but trap Xiangnü's spirit in the same unending cycle until another woman should come along. But instead of substitute, Xiangnü will act as savior. Her role here, as it has been throughout the middle volume, is to break the cycle of suffering for whomever she meets, using her superior knowledge of karmic causes and conditions, thereby teaching the story's audience how to escape from it themselves. The version of this tale in *Xuetang riji* tells only the first half of the story related in the *baojuan*, the warning against rashly committing suicide, and lacks the potential for the ghost to escape from future suffering in the underworld that Xiangnü is empowered to offer the ghost. When the ghost attempts to use a noose to strangle and kill her substitute, a halo of holy light above Xiangnü's head prevents her from getting the noose around it. After many failed attempts, Xiangnü addresses the ghost, "How sad, how sad! Are you still unenlightened in Wrongful Death hell?⁴⁶" The ghost falls to her knees and begs Xiangnü for help to escape from here continued suffering.

In life, the ghost was named Miss Wang, and at a young age swore to reject marriage and maintain her chastity because she modeled herself after Princess Miaoshan. When a neighbor slandered her honor, thus tarnishing her reputation, she hung herself in protest. However rash her suicide may have been, her family sued the neighbor in court and ruined them financially, so her appearance as a ghost is not out of a need to exact revenge.⁴⁷ Furthermore, her father used the money won from the court case to pay for her funeral rites, so her family went

⁴⁵ For more on this, see Rania Huntington, "Ghosts Seeking Substitutes: Female Suicide and Repetition," *Late Imperial China* 26.1 (2005): 1-40.

⁴⁶ "哀哉哀哉。阿彌陀佛。你今日在枉死城還不醒悟麼。" Yihua *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*, 63b.

⁴⁷ For more on vengeful ghosts, see Anthony C. Yu, "'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!' Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47, no. 2 (1987): 415-422, doi:10.2307/2719188, and Huntington, 20-21.

through the correct motions to take care of her lonely soul (even if the monks they hired were actually corrupt, as she complains). During the Qing, the court system often used cases dealing with suicide as a means of reinforcing moral principles about virtue, proper social behavior, and the state's role as the final word in resolving conflict.⁴⁸ By requiring her slanderer to pay out, her suicide had received imperial endorsement as justifiable. Even so, given her abject state, it is clear that heaven and hell do not recognize the righteousness of Miss Wang's suicide. When she arrives in the underworld without the merit needed to pass through into the next life, a result of the ineffective funeral rites, King Yama upbraids her. "I, King Yama, hadn't called for you yet, why did you give up your remaining years?"⁴⁹ Within the framework of karmic causation in these tales, the fact that the neighbors' wealth is restored in a short time is an indication of heavenly favor. What does this say about her suicide?

Female suicide, particularly in relation with maintaining chastity, was a fraught topic in Qing times, even as the cult of chastity reached an all-time high in the period. Some detail will help to illuminate what cultural debates this episode entered into and why it would have been a powerfully effective ending to the *baojuan*. Official commemoration of a woman's suicide could result in financial benefit to her surviving family, as it did in this ghost story. It also conveyed social and political benefit, for the particularly virtuous the government would construct a memorial arch her honor. Such recognition legitimated women's private acts of resistance, resulting in suicide as a strategic means of vindication for a woman, whatever the slight to her honor may have been.⁵⁰ Janet Theiss notes that "such suicides represented a powerful, albeit

⁴⁸ Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful matters: the politics of chastity in eighteenth-century China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 21.

⁴⁹ "我閻王不曾來叫你。何為自己喪殘生。" Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 64b.

⁵⁰ Theiss, 31.

circumscribed, form of female agency.”⁵¹ At the same time, Theiss calls attention to the questions officials and moralists – men – raised about women’s inherent ability to make moral decisions, considering them too impulsive and easily insulted.⁵² Huntington suggests that the popularity of ghost stories in the Qing involving interrupted suicides – where a man prevents a ghost from taking her substitute – also reflect this view of women as vulnerable to illogical urges, needing the sensible intervention of a man to save them - from ghosts and themselves.⁵³ The *Xuetang riji* version of this story is just such a tale, a simple condemnation of a woman’s rash actions when she felt threatened.

But, in this new version, Xiangnü shows compassion for Miss Wang. The ghost is beyond helping herself. The audience of this ghost story, however, yet lives and can be saved by what Xiangnü has to reveal, rescuing them from ignorance, not impulsivity.⁵⁴ Incapable of doing anything but reliving her death, Xiangnü cannot admonish Miss Wang to repent, swear an oath to do good, and go out into the world to do meritorious actions. The concern that remains is what led Miss Wang to value her chastity to the point of defending it with her suicide, one that appeared on the surface as virtuous and would have been immediately understandable in the late Qing context.⁵⁵ Xiangnü asks the ghost why she chose to remain unmarried at home with her parents if she had a brother who would care for them in their old age, implying that the only valid excuse for unmarried chastity (in contrast with chaste widowhood) is a filial one. Miss Wang

⁵¹ Ibid., 174

⁵² Ibid., 12.

⁵³ Huntington, 17.

⁵⁴ For more on the role of ignorance and women’s transgressions, see Chapter 3, 211-217.

⁵⁵ Theiss, 21.

explains that as a child she heard the tale of Princess Miaoshan when she listened to a recitation of *Xiangshan baojuan* and it inspired her to reject marriage just as Miaoshan had.⁵⁶

Miss Wang identifies herself as a listener of *baojuan*, a woman quite possibly like the ones in the audience listening to this recitation of her story. She listened to *baojuan* for guidance on how to be a virtuous person. When met with suffering in hell instead of the benefits she expected from cultivating merit and remaining chaste, she admits to Xiangnü that she has doubts about the verity of the *baojuan*. Xiangnü informs her that *Xiangshan* was once a great text, but parts of it were lost and it no longer tells the whole story. Princess Miaoshan was actually a particularly filial child, not the kind to go against any of her parents' wishes. However, when her father introduces the idea of her marriage, she is visited by two buddhas in a dream who reveal that she is actually a *jinxian* 金仙 (gold bodied immortal) sent to earth for a short time but bound to return to heaven. She must steadfastly guard her heavenly body against pollution and not marry, or else she will remain in the human realm for tens of thousands of years. For the sake of her golden body, she is forced to disobey her parents, knowing that she can fulfill her filial duty once she ascends to heaven and bring them with her.⁵⁷

The additional information about Miaoshan's immortal identity invalidates her outspoken defense of Buddhist piety, her extreme commitment to chastity, and her bodily sacrifice as a final act of Buddhist redemption. She becomes supremely filial and obedient instead to the secret will of heaven. Her marriage resistance is not a mark of dedication to her personal salvation over the demands of filial piety, rather, it becomes an unwilling disobedience required of her by a higher power than even the king. In "Gendering Buddhism: The Miaoshan Legend

⁵⁶ Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 65b.

⁵⁷ Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 66a-67a.

Reconsidered,” Sherlin Wing argues that the original tale is explicitly anti-Confucian in nature. Not only does Miaoshan steadfastly defy her father, she also defies her king. Wing writes, “Miaoshan’s insubordination acknowledges that accusation [of unfiliality] and then ultimately trumps it with Buddhist filial piety, proving Confucianism’s inferiority.”⁵⁸ The story of Princess Miaoshan, while on the surface addressing topics addressing women’s religious dedication, was at its inception, in the twelfth century, a story written by men for a largely male readership who would have knowledge of the debates between Buddhists and Confucians.⁵⁹ Even though the tale of Miaoshan may have originally served as an inspiration for a male audience to pursue their preferred method of Buddhist piety, Wing is deeply critical of how it abuses its female heroine for her resistance even as it celebrates it:

Miaoshan provides a convenient forum within which to critique women. The narrative reinforces and reauthorizes qualities of female willfulness and subversiveness. So too does the theme that women must be harshly punished for their transgressions. Why? Because the author was a civil servant, trained in the biases and political agendas of the time.⁶⁰

Liu Xiang zhong juan, in contrast, was a story written for a largely female audience, but likely still by an educated man in or aspiring to be in the civil service. By highlighting and validating Miaoshan’s insubordination as motivated by filial piety, not by Buddhist cultivation, Confucianism’s place of primacy is restored and Buddhism superseded. Fundamentally, this tale invalidates the merit of participating in the performance of a foundational *baojuan* in the religious lives of many Qing women. Her suffering in hell informs the audience that their devotional practices, one in which they are currently engaged as they listen to *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, will not

⁵⁸ Sherin Wing, “Gendering Buddhism: The Miaoshan Legend Reconsidered,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27, no. 1 (2011): 5–31, doi:10.2979/jfemistudreli.27.1.5. (p. 23)

⁵⁹ Wing, 21.

⁶⁰ Wing, 24.

save them from punishment. The merit the ghost believed she was cultivating by emulating Miaoshan did nothing to save her from King Yama's judgment.

Xiangnü tells the ghost that other portions of *Xiangshan* are missing too but that it would take too long to relate all of them to her. However, there is a complete copy on Emei Shan, a Buddhist holy mountain, and if one goes there and asks for it, one can patch the text back to completion.⁶¹ By not revealing all the missing pieces of this popular text, Xiangnü casts doubt on the validity of *Xiangshan* as any kind of guide for female religious experience. Though Emei Shan is a real place, it is out of reach for the average reader/listener of a *baojuan*. For such members of the audience, *Xiangshan* will never be complete or useful again. That is not of concern to the writer, however, who makes clear that their religious efforts would be better spent on more effective practices, which *Liu Xiang zhong juan* just so happens to have introduced in the sixty-three folio pages before its heroine meets the ghost.

Though this ghost tale is not explicitly about a woman being saved from impulsive, ghost-induced suicide by a man's intervention, on further examination it is implicitly of the same type. In this particular anecdote, which we should remember was removed by Yu Zhi, the writer uses a *baojuan*, with a popular *baojuan* protagonist as its lead, to speak to audiences of *baojuan* aficionados about the grave error they commit if they take pious women like Miaoshan as their examples for religious practice. Stepping into the room in which *Xiangshan* and *Liu Xiang* may have been recited prior to this middle volume's performance, the author averts the torment that will surely come upon those who neglect to cultivate the right kinds of merit. Saving women from ignorance instead of impulsivity, this Yihua edition of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* ends by undermining

⁶¹ Yihua *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, 67b.

the very genre it uses to convey its superior method for making merit and averting heaven-sent disasters.

New and improved *Liu Xiang zhong juan*: the Buddhist-approved Huikong edition

In addition to cutting the episodes that clumsily addressed audiences of lay Buddhists to the point of potential alienation, Yu made meticulous changes to the rest of the *baojuan*. These changes show attention to detail and an intention that the text, through these modifications, be amended enough to be adopted as popular by audiences of *Liu Xiang*. Yu Zhi's emendations to the Yihua edition – additions and subtractions – mark a shift away from the explicitly pro-popular-Confucianism, anti-popular-Buddhism attitudes visible in the Yihua edition. Such changes do not affect the fundamental message that Liu Xiangnü preaches about the primacy of values like non-killing (neither infant girls nor animals), filial piety, and the cherishing of paper and grains. However, the Huikong edition does not emphasize the superiority of these values over traditionally Buddhist practices. This revising and repackaging process also included soliciting a Buddhist monk to write a preface and including an opening image of Xiangnü to mimic the visual format of traditional *Liu Xiang* editions. Both features result in the work looking even more like an independent *baojuan*, not simply a disconnected wedge between the original volumes. Instead, by its very appearance, it is marked with Buddhist approval. The identity of the publishing house itself suggests at this Buddhist cooperation as well: Zhaoqing Temple Large Character Sutra House 昭慶大字經房, potentially a predecessor to Huikong jingfang, was at

the same temple, printed and stored the blocks for the earliest extant copy of *Xiangshan baojuan*, dated 1773.⁶²

The Huikong edition of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* looks more like a legitimate edition of *Liu Xiang*, even using the same opening image for its heroine that a number of other editions of *Liu Xiang* use. Because *baojuan* normally only give the first volume a title page, opening image and preface, the Huikong edition may have been printed as a separate text from *Liu Xiang*. In many cases, even the first volume of a multi-volume work has fewer publishing details than this single book does. The addition of opening image, a dragon stele and inscription, and the introduction constitute a repackaging of the text that brings this *baojuan* into closer alignment with the printed form most *baojuan* took in the late Qing, likely raising its status in the eyes of readers, particularly those already familiar with the genre. The zeal of the Yihua edition for the superiority of its morals is dulled, replaced with a record of pleasant cooperation between a monk and Yu Zhi. The preface is signed by a monk named Daoxiu 道修 from the Gufahua Chanyuan 古法華禪院 (Ancient Dharma Flower Meditation Hall) in Hangzhou. In it, he praises *Liu Xiang zhong juan* for its ability to enlighten *yufu* 愚婦 (ignorant women) via performance, signaling a different attitude at play in the production of this edition.⁶³ With the confrontational, potentially objectionable episodes removed, the text provides no clear opposition to Buddhist practices. Daoxiu refers specifically to the Yu's interest in the text: "For a long while, this edition was not

⁶² Dudbridge, 50. For a full reprint of this 1773 edition, see Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, "Kenryūban Kōzan hōkan kaisetsu 乾隆版香山寶卷解說" *Dōkyō kenkyū* 4 (1971):115–95.

⁶³ For more on the use of *yu* 愚 (ignorant) in introductions to describe prospective/imagined readers, see Anne McLaren, "Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. Cynthia Brokaw (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 160-163.

literary. Therefore, philanthropist Yu Liancun 余蓮村 newly revised the collection.”⁶⁴ Daoxiu joins in the charitable deed by writing a preface for the collection, and that he believes its merit is without measure.⁶⁵

When we consider the substantial changes to the contents of the text, it becomes clear why Daoxiu considers these changes mark an elevation, not simply an erasure of objectionable rhetoric. The Huikong edition looks and sounds a little more like other narrative *baojuan*. It no longer insults its audience’s confidence in the reliability of the genre. It ends as it begins with an appropriate quatrain signifying the ritual value of its performance. Its poetry flows.

At the most basic level of emendation, Yu cleaned up the poetic portions of the text, removing non-essential characters from lines where they unbalanced the meter. For example, “young girl 小姑娘” becomes simply “girl 姑娘,” or “old mother-in-law 老婆婆” becomes “mother-in-law 婆婆.” Couplets that lurched along at 8-7 or 7-8 become parallel 7-7 in the Huikong edition. The Yihua edition, with these extra characters in the line, would have proved difficult to read aloud while maintaining any sense of rhythm. Such changes would have been essential if the producers of the later edition hoped for the text to be performable. Sometimes the problem fixed is with clarity of the story itself. In the anti-infanticide episode related above, the woman whose criticism causes the mother to drown her daughters is named Liu Da’niang 劉大娘.⁶⁶ With no clear reason for the mean-spirited village woman to share Xiangnü’s surname, Yu

⁶⁴ “昔版久不成文義爰有居善識等余蓮村初翻新集” Huikong *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, ia. The full title for the two-volume *Liu Xiang*, even in both 1833 editions, ends with the term *quanji* 全集 (complete collection).

⁶⁵ Ibid., ia. Liancun 蓮村 was one of Yu Zhi’s *hao* 號 (style name). (Lai, 15).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 21a.

removed it entirely. Instead, it is a surname-less Da'niang who is punished with the death of her grown sons and a subsequent fall into poverty.⁶⁷

On another level, small substantive changes mark a more refined religious tone. On page 1b, a line, which in the Yihua edition reads, “singing a song about former heaven 唱出先天一曲歌,” has “former heaven 先天” changed to “profound 微妙,” presumably to distance Xiangnü from the heterodox sect of the same name who believe in the Unborn Mother and were officially repressed in the Ming and Qing.⁶⁸ In another case, “Grandpa Buddha 佛爺爺” becomes “Buddha’s vast compassion 佛宏慈,” the sentiment perhaps the same, but expressed in a far more literary manner.⁶⁹ In a less clearly essential revision, Yu removed all but one instance of the word “enlighten 悟 (*wu*),” replacing it with such synonyms as “understand 明 (*ming*)” and “awaken 醒 (*xing*).”

As the chart in Table 1 illustrates, five episodes in the earlier edition did not reappear in the Huikong edition. Unlike the two episodes discussed above, the three others removed in their entirety did not express controversial stances, sensationalist material, or vulgar details. Two of them seem repetitive, covering scenarios of heavenly punishment for transgressions already addressed elsewhere in the *baojuan*. The last one may have been removed for the sake of creating more cohesion between this *baojuan* and *Liu Xiang*. The episode where Xiangnü scolds a family for burning their parents’ coffins, found in the Yihua edition from pages 45a-46b, stands out as a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 25a.

⁶⁸ For more on Xiantian dao 先天道, see Marjorie Topley, “The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 26, no. 2 (1963): 362–92.

⁶⁹ *Liu Xiang zhong juan*. 20a.

problem with coherence. The justification Xiangnü gives for why cremation is a grave sin against filial piety is the same argument made since the Song dynasty, and therefore not iconoclastic or innovative.⁷⁰ Meyer-Fong acknowledges that concerns with the proper ritual disposal of written paper were also linked to donations of land and coffins for proper disposal of bodies: thus the episode itself fits in well with the intellectual contexts of both the author of the middle volume and Yu Zhi.⁷¹ However, given that Xiangnü has her parents' bodies cremated in *Liu Xiang*, it makes little sense for her to speak authoritatively about how this action is a grave transgression against filial piety. No matter how acceptable the sentiments may have been to the editor, coming from Xiangnü they ring false. By condemning herself, she undermines the acceptability of the middle volume as a continuation from the first volume of *Liu Xiang*, and doing so lessens the potential impact of the text as a legitimate companion to the already popular tale.

The Huikong edition concludes with a summary emphasizing Xiangnü's compassion for the endless misery unenlightened beings endure. It closes with a two-couplet poem dedicating the merit earned from the text's performance to all beings so that they might gain enlightenment. This type of invocation, called a *huixiang wen* 廻向文 (merit dedication text), is a common means of closing both Buddhist religious services and *baojuan* recitations. More significantly, it is the exact same poem used at the end of *Liu Xiang* along with the instructions to the reader that come afterwards, meaning that at some point, Yu Zhi read *Liu Xiang* in order to use it as his source.⁷² The Huikong edition wraps *Liu Xiang zhong juan* in a new package, adorned with illustrations and a preface, tied together with a Buddhist monk's seal of approval and a proper, respectful

⁷⁰ For more on cremation in China and Confucian opposition to the practice, see Patricia Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," *American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 406-428.

⁷¹ Meyer-Fong, 45.

⁷² *Liu Xiang* 2:60b, (facsimile 310). See Introduction, 9, n. 28 for a translation of these instructions.

conclusion. These work together as a way that honors the practice of *baojuan* recitation, rather than undermining it, while at the same time emphasizing the need for greater attention to another set of moral injunctions. The overarching intent of the Yihua edition is preserved without the zealotry and contentiousness.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, even righting the text's aesthetic features, metrically balancing its poetry and cleaning up its prose, and softening the confrontational tone did not sufficiently endear *Liu Xiang* to enough audiences to guarantee its publication in other editions by other presses. As Appendix 5 details, it is unclear if there are any extant editions of the text apart from the two at the Chinese Academy of the Arts in Beijing. Ultimately, given the absence of reprints in its own time and its absence from scholarship in later periods, this *baojuan* clearly failed to become a literary work that *baojuan* audiences adopted into their popular repertoire. Banking on Xiangnü's fame did not enable it to expand the reach of the moral principles delineated in *Xuetang riji*.

Although *Liu Xiang zhong juan* is not a particularly engaging attempt at storytelling, neither is it particularly bad. Its existence, if we consider it an experiment, still yields useful data even though it did not achieve its intended results. For one, the anonymous first version is a demonstration of just how effective Yu Zhi's call for the creation of new, moral vernacular literature was. Also, *Liu Xiang zhong juan* demonstrates how the revitalization of *baojuan* as a part of this valorization of the vernacular did not apply to all *baojuan* equally. The failure of this *baojuan* to catch on, even in the carefully edited, non-confrontational, Buddhist clergy approved Huikong edition, provides a counter example to the exceptional attention and investment that *Liu Xiang* was receiving at the time, as detailed in the previous chapter. *Liu Xiang zhong juan* shares its

protagonist with a *baojuan* that Jiangnan seemingly could not produce enough editions of during the Tongzhi and Guangxu reign periods, yet these additional adventures did not engage her fans. *Baojuan* form was not enough to guarantee a text's popularity: neither was a famous protagonist (although, in the case of *Pan Gong* examined in the following chapter, it certainly made a difference). Keeping the producerly qualities of *Liu Xiang* in mind, how does *Liu Xiang zhong juan* measure up to its source material?

As the comparisons between the source material – tales like those from *Xuetang riji* – and their prosimetric adaptations demonstrated, these sequential anecdotes display a range in quality, length, and approach to inserting Xiangnü into the midst of administrations of heavenly justice. As such, they more easily offer themselves for interpretation as individual units – rather like paging through a story collection like *Xuetang riji*, rather than creating a unified work. Taken as a narrative whole, the story of Xiangnü wandering from illustrated panel to illustrated panel lacks the openness and fruitful contradictions that are so compelling in the parent text. Expanded into multipage narratives, the frame surrounding each illustration in *Xuetang riji* still exercises strong restraint on all but a few anecdotes in *Liu Xiang zhong juan*. The exceptions, contradictions with the source material and within the anecdotes' characterizations of its female actors, yield only a few incompletely plural moments. Overall, in both original and revised editions, this *baojuan* displays how its author and editor both considered it a product to be “sold” to a particular customer – lovers of *Liu Xiang*. A divide is erected between creator and reader as the author and editor exert authoritative control over the meanings the text expresses, meanings already clearly defined by so many of Yu Zhi's writings and illustrated in *Xuetang riji*.

This chapter tells the story of an anonymously written text, mostly based on Yu's work, which then returns to him for editing, at which point he initiated many corrections to the method

by which the values he generally advocated were being communicated to a *baojuan* audience. What did the leading advocate of the composition of morality songs, plays and *tanci* as a means to reach popular audiences really want those texts to contain? Yu's emendations and acceptances in the Huikong edition reveal a strident moral campaigner who endorsed female characters who were more vocal than in his own versions of their tales, yet show him backing away from direct confrontation with or denigration of lay Buddhist practices and texts. In the aftermath of religious war and its religiously motivated moral reconstruction, Yu was a subtle tactician rather than undiplomatic diehard, as the following chapter will explore in greater detail.

Liu Xiang zhong juan, given the minimal space it occupied in the minds and homes of late Qing readers, tells us more about what its author and editor thought popular morality literature ought to be than it does about what was actually popular. In so doing, it casts into stark relief the producerly qualities that enabled audiences to so value its parent work, *Liu Xiang*. It also reveals a difference in the approaches taken by two conservative Confucian actors in this period of reconstruction, particularly how the more famous of the two men strongly endorsed a cooperative approach to the moral reconstruction of Jiangnan that its original author did not echo. As a text *for* women, clearly demonstrated in the gender shift in the anecdote that opens the story and the choices to take episodes from *Xuetang riji* that otherwise concerned women, *Liu Xiang zhong juan* again tells us more about what women were told their social and religious roles should be rather than what their practices actually were.

Table 1 Comparison of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* editions with *Xuetang riji*

Episode	Yihua	Huikong	Xuetang riji
Introduction - Xiangnü finds an abandoned temple and begins practicing meditation by herself. However, she realizes that while everyone has a Buddha nature within, there is no one helping people to realize it. This leads her to leave her temple and go out to help people.	1	1	
A woman and her daughter-in-law constantly argue because of a misunderstanding and the intervention of attention seeking gossips. The man of the house is dying of a mysterious disease and his businesses are failing as a result. Xiangnü confronts them, advises them not to listen to those around them, and the women swear to never argue again. The gossiping neighbor cuts out her own tongue and dies.	2a-12a	2a-12a	33a, 33b
A young daughter-in-law is being abused by her mother-in-law. Xiangnü reveals that it is because she was an abusive mother-in-law in a previous life, which scares the mother-in-law into treating her well so as not to be reborn into a similar situation.	12b-20a	12b-20a	48a
A couple on the road is engaging in penance after a monster (with a monkey head and snake body) is born to them because they drowned 3 of the 5 baby girls that had been born to them previously. An onlooker shares that her seven-year-old son died because she drowned two baby girls.	20b-27a	20b-27a	35b, 36a
Xiangnü overhears heavenly bureaucrats marking houses for destruction in a village. 103 homes will burn because the inhabitants are evil and the ten most evil people will die in the fire, while nine homes will stand because the inhabitants do good. She tries to get one of the families slated for punishment to repent but only the wife will listen. She escapes her punishment by calling on Guanyin as the flames rise, though the rest of her family dies.	27a-33b	27a-33b	25b
Xiangnü attempts to meditate by herself in an old temple, but is subjected to a series of tests and temptations. A handsome, rich young scholar wants to whisk her away to a life of comfort in his home. A large snake attempts to eat her but turns out to only be an illusion. Then a large gecko. Then a green faced, red haired monster with tusks burns away to dust when she causes golden light to shine on them. Then a man threatens to kill her if she will not have sex with him. She prevails over all trials.	33b-39b	33b-39b	

[Table 1] Comparison of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* editions with *Xuetang riji*

[Table 1 *cont.*] Comparison of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* editions with *Xuetang riji*

A wealthy man, aged fifty-three, is dying, as is his second son. Doctors cannot find a cure. Xiangnü instructs they donate wealth to care for pregnant widows and orphans in their district. Both man and son live.	40a-41b	40a-41b	20b
Xiangnü picks up paper and grains that she encounters while traveling the roadways. She picks grain out of dog feces and outhouses, and checks the outhouses for paper as well. When people make fun of her, she explains to them the importance of cherishing grains and written paper, giving specific instructions on how to establish cherishing character societies.	42a-44b		17a (no mention of feces), 33b (mentions washing paper), 48b (fecal contamination)
Xiangnü encounters a band of mourners about to burn their parents' corpses. She explains how unfilial this action is and the importance of repaying one's parents' grace with proper care for them in old age and after death.	45a-46b		
Xiangnü encounters a woman visiting her husband who was imprisoned on false pretenses. Xiangnü discerns that this is a punishment for preventing his mother from funneling money to his poor sister and her husband. He will be released in two months if only the woman offers incense before her stove and pledges to repent of this stinginess and do good works.	47a-50a	42a-45a	
A woman keeps her sewing threads between the pages of a book, thereby disrespecting paper with words on it. She and her son, his body found holding a book with fecal matter on it, are killed by lightning.	50a-52b	45a-47a	
The son of a hunter is stricken ill with some kind of pox, as it turns out each boil contains a piece of birdshot, which is what his father uses to kill birds. They pledge before the stove to repent and then the disease is healed.	53a-54b	47a-49b	41a, 44b
Spending the night in a temple, Xiangnü overhears the temple's spirit revealing that a woman will come to the temple tomorrow seeking a cure for her son's illness, but she will not get one. He must die because he talked back to his parents, corrupted a virgin, spilled 123 grains of rice, and threw tobacco packaging with words on it into the outhouse. Xiangnü intervenes to tell the woman the steps to take to make up for his moral deficiencies, including specific information on proper disposal of paper ashes and means of honoring grains. The young man recovers within a month.	55a-58b		

[Table 1 *cont.*] Comparison of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* editions with *Xuetang riji*

Overhears three spirits talking about how all families in a village will come down with a disease except for three vegetarian families. Feng Dashou comes to the temple to plead for his father's life and Xiangnü instructs his family to become vegetarian as well, after which they are healed.	59a-61a	49b-52b	
A woman is grinding flour outside her home and covered in white powder. This is very disrespectful to grains. Xiangnü warns her of this and the woman confirms she had a dream the night before about dying in a fire. By swearing to respect grains in the future, she is able to avoid this calamity.	61b-62a		
Xiangnü encounters a hanged ghost who cannot kill her as a substitute because of Xiangnü's halo of heavenly light. Xiangnü learns why the ghost hung herself and promises to help release her from hell. She also reveals that <i>Xiangshan baojuan</i> , the text the ghost was inspired by to reject marriage, is missing key parts that help explain why Miaoshan actually disobeyed her parents.	62a-68a		38a
Conclusion		52b-53b	

Appendix 5: Publication History of *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*

A Three-Volume 1873 edition?

When Hu Shiyong recorded three editions of *Liu Xiangnü baojuan* 劉香女寶卷 in 1957, he made no mention of a *zhongjuan* 中卷.⁷³ Li Shiyu's 1961 catalogue notes two editions of *Liu Xiang* that contain three volumes – an Yihuatang publication 翼化堂刊本 in 1870 and a Huikong publication 慧空刊本 in 1873 – but he does not call attention to the fact that those editions include additional material that differs from the commonly circulating version of the text.⁷⁴ Li includes additional information about the 1873 three-volume edition: “Edited by Yu Zhi. Proofread and augmented by Liezheng. Head of the volume has preface by Liezheng and preface by Daoxiu. At the end includes the *Precious Scroll of Flower Names*.”⁷⁵ In Che's 1998 catalogue, this Huikong edition is listed as containing only two volumes with no mention of Yu Zhi or the appended *baojuan*. According to Che, it is held by four libraries: Hebei University 河北大學 and Peking University 北京大學 in China, the Fu Ssu-Nien Library at Academia Sinica in Taiwan 傅斯年圖書館, and the National Diet Library 國會圖書館 in Japan.

Working in the twenty-first century, the ability to search library holdings online, an avenue unavailable to Che in 1998, only adds to the uncertainty, rather than resolving it. Individual catalogue listings at the above libraries reveal that this single entry in Che's catalog actually refers to at least two separate editions of *Liu Xiang*, perhaps even three. Neither the version at Academia Sinica, nor the edition held at the National Diet Library, give any indication

⁷³ Hu Shiyong 胡士營, *Tanci baojuan shumu* 彈詞寶卷書目 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 135.

⁷⁴ Li Shiyu, *Baojuan zong lu* 寶卷總錄. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 27.

⁷⁵ “余治編，烈正校對增補。卷首載烈正序。道修序，末附花名寶卷。” Li, 27.

of including a middle volume at time of printing or display the same features noted by Li.⁷⁶ Academia Sinica's edition, printed by Huikong jingfang in Hangzhou, does include the *Precious Scroll of Flower Names* as an appendix. However, there is no indication it was printed in 1873. It does not include the preface by Liezheng and his name does not appear elsewhere indicating his role as editor and compiler. The catalogue at the National Diet Library assigns the year 1871 to their copy, which appears to be the same as Sinica's, based on comparing catalogue data with the facsimile reprint. This firm date is taken from a Li Xiyuan's afterword appended to the text, one not mentioned by Li Shiyu.

Meanwhile, the edition housed at Peking University, while indeed published in 1873 according to the year on the title page, is not the edition to which Li was referring either, and is a different edition than the one at Academia Sinica and the National Diet Library.⁷⁷ Yet on the lower left of the title page, the publisher is not clearly indicated as it is in the Huikong edition of the middle volume or the Huikong edition of *Liu Xiang*. Instead, the vague attribution "Hang province, blocks stored at this office 杭省本衙藏板" is given. The *ya* 衙 in the attribution does not mean that the blocks were stored at the provincial *yamen* 衙門. This phrase, once a reference to private publishing, became more broadly applied in the Qing. Some cases show it was used to indicate government printing, but unlikely in this case. The epithet was also used by commercial publishers on the title pages of books that might have gotten them in trouble with imperial

⁷⁶ This edition held by Academia Sinica is the reproduced in the facsimile edition used as the reference text in throughout this dissertation.

⁷⁷ “劉香寶卷，杭省本衙藏板，同治癸酉夏季重鑄。” Special thanks to Emily Mokros for photographing relevant pages of this edition for me at the Peking University Library.

authorities.⁷⁸ However, since *Liu Xiang* does not appear on lists of banned books, it is unlikely that the publisher was wary of admitting ownership of the edition. This 1873 edition does include Liezheng's preface and notes how he solicited donations for the book's publication. However, since Liezheng's name appears in earlier editions of *Liu Xiang* as well, it is unclear if his name remained on the blocks from their earlier use or that he was also involved with this particular edition. Volume Two ends immediately following the end of the *baojuan*, and no afterword or supplementary *baojuan* follows.

The final location listed by Che as having the 1873 Huikong edition, Hebei University, may in fact be in possession of the edition Li Shiyu included in his catalogue. Hebei University confirms, via phone, that the edition in their rare book collection still includes three volumes. According to the data provided by Li Shiyu, this may finally be the set in which all the pieces come together: Huikong Sutra House as printer, Yu Zhi as the editor, Liezheng and Daoxiu as preface writers, and the *Precious Volume of Flower Names* as an addendum. Visual confirmation is necessary, however, to confidently assert that the three-volume 1873 edition has been found.

Huikong edition

The contradictions involved in locating Li's 1873 edition beg the question: was this actually published as a three-volume edition, or did Li interpolate the middle volume into a separate Huikong publication of *Liu Xiang*? In *Baojuan zonglu* 寶卷總錄, published in 1951, Fu Xihua 傅惜華 follows his entry for *Taihuashan zijinling liangshi xiuxing Liu Xiangnü baojuan quanji erjuan* 太華山紫金嶺兩世修行劉香女寶卷全集二卷, of which he lists eight editions, with a short

⁷⁸ Shen Jin 沈津. "Shuo 'ben Ya Cang Ban' 說「本衙藏板」." in *Chang Bide jiaoshou bazhijin wushou qing lunwen ji* 昌彼得教授八秩晉五壽慶論文集. (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2005), 211-220.

entry on a single volume entitled *Taihuashan zijinling liangshi xiuxing Liu Xiangnü baojuan quanji zhongjuan* 太華山紫金嶺兩世修行劉香女寶卷全集中卷. He notes: “Edited by Yu Zhi, Qing dynasty. This book has not been previously recorded.”⁷⁹ The detailed bibliographic data he records matches the Huikong edition held at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts.⁸⁰ Fu’s copy is listed in that archive’s catalogue as *Liu Xiang baojuan*, published by Huikong jingfang in 1873. Yet, because Fu does not include an 1873 Huikong edition of *Liu Xiang* in his entry of eight editions of the work, it appears that the middle volume in his possession was not in a set with the first and second volumes of the *baojuan*, hence its separate listing.

Given that multi-volume *baojuan* often included prefatory images and text only in the first volume, it seems likely that the Huikong middle volume was formatted in such a way as to be sold alone, not as a set within an 1873 edition of the original work. It is also possible that a Huikong edition of *Liu Xiang* from 1873 never existed in the first place. The Huikong edition of the middle volume opens with an image of Liu Xiangnü with eight seal script characters on the recto and a dragon stele with thirty-two characters on the verso.⁸¹ The publisher’s information on the lower left of the dragon stele folio reads: “Blocks kept at Zhaoqing [temple] Huikong Sutra House, printer and distributor.”⁸² The images are followed by a preface. The edition date

⁷⁹ “清余治重編。此書未見著錄。” Fu Xihua 傅惜華, “Baojuan zong lu 寶卷總錄” in *Mélanges Sinologiques* (Beijing: Bali daxue Beijing Hanxue yanjiusuo (Université de Paris, Centre d’études sinologiques de Pékin), 1951), 73-74.

⁸⁰ In an appendix to his catalogue, Che notes in that Fu’s personal collection was held at this library, but had been separated and that the *baojuan* have been lost. (Che, 355.) Perhaps, instead of being lost, Fu’s original collection was actually incorporated into the library’s larger collection without explicitly being cataloged as such.

⁸¹ An 1898 edition of *Liu Xiang*, published by Ma’nao Jingfang, includes nearly identical images. Only slight differences in the seal script characters, details of Xiangnü’s face, and the publisher’s information in the lower left of the stele page mark them as not having come from the same blocks.

⁸² “版存昭慶慧空經房印造流通。” Huikong *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*, 圖b.

comes from this preface, which closes with “Great Qing, Tongzhi Year Twelve, winter month, auspicious day.”⁸³ The preface ends with two additional lines of attribution, which read, “Blocks carved and circulated by Hangzhou Qianyi Ancient Dharma Flower Meditation Hall. Preface respectfully written by Daoxiu, abbot of this temple’s meditation room.”⁸⁴ In two columns to the left of this attribution, Huikong Sutra House reasserts its claim to the edition with “Blocks stored at Hangzhou, Qiantang Gate, Zhaoqing [temple], Huikong Sutra Hall; printed and distributed.”⁸⁵ The final page of the Huikong middle volume introduces another actor in the work’s reproduction. A single line of small characters on the final page of the text reads: Hangzhou Wengyun Ting carved the blocks (杭州翁雲亭鑄版). One entry in Che’s catalogue indicates that this was not the only cooperation between Wengyun Ting and Huikong Jingfang.⁸⁶

Though the text assumes the form of a single volume *baojuan*, its body text begins with the title *Taihuashan zijingling liangshi xiuxing Liu Xiangnü baojuan quanji zhongjuan* 太華山紫金嶺兩世修行劉香女寶卷全集中卷, marking the volume as the middle one in a complete collection. The volume closes with the designation *Baoyuezun pusa benxingjing jianji zhongjuan* 寶月尊菩薩本行經簡集中卷 (*The middle volume of the simplified collection of the method of attainment of the Venerable Precious Moon Bodhisattva*).⁸⁷ Puzzlingly, both suggest it was once part of a larger collection or a

⁸³ “大清同治拾二年冬月吉日” Ibid, ib.

⁸⁴ “杭州錢邑古法華禪院刻板流行 本山住持禪關釋子道修敬述卷序” Ibid., ib.

⁸⁵ “版藏杭州錢塘門昭慶慧空經房印造流通” Ibid., ib.

⁸⁶ A reference in Che’s *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* lists an 1868 edition of *Xiangshan baojuan* with the publication data “杭州翁雲亭善書局據慧空房刊翁雲亭善書局重印本” Hangzhou Wengyun Ting Morality Bookseller in accord with [blocks] Huikong House carved, Wengyun Ting Morality Bookseller reprints the book. Che, 160.

⁸⁷ *Baoyue zun* 寶月尊 (Venerable Precious Moon) is the name given to Xiangnü at the end of *Liu Xiang* when she is reborn in Western Paradise.

multi-volume edition of *Liu Xiang*. Thus, the existence of a three-volume *Liu Xiang* recorded by Li Shiyu remains possible.

Yihua edition

The second edition held at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts is not listed in the card catalogue. This edition was located between the first (上卷) and second volumes (下卷) of the Yihua edition of *Liu Xiang* from 1870 where a middle volume would be expected to be. By the size, paper, and print quality, it appears to be printed by the same publisher as the books between which it was placed. Yihuatang printed many editions of *Liu Xiang*, which means that they are commonly found in many archives in China, Taiwan, and beyond, though none of these archives clearly indicate possessing the middle volume.⁸⁸ This middle volume has no title on its cover, only repetitive handwritten characters that look as if a previous owner had used the blank page for practicing a cyclical date – sixteenth day, sixth month, Gengshen 庚申 year (1920) – and the characters 反, 面, and 起. Furthermore, it has no opening illustrations, preface, or publication data within the text.

The entry for the Yihua edition of *Liu Xiang* in Che's catalogue lists it as having only two volumes; however, in Li's 1961 catalogue this edition is also listed with three volumes.⁸⁹ An advertisement with price listings from Shanghai Yihuatang Morality Bookshop 上海翼化堂善書局 in *Xiandao yuebao* 仙道月報 from 1939 confirms that the middle volume was part of

⁸⁸ I have personally examined the copies held in Beijing Capital Library and Shanghai Public Library in China and versions held by the Museum of World Religions and in Yang Yongzhi's 楊永智 private collection in Taiwan.

⁸⁹ Che, 80. Li, 27.

Yihuatang's print catalogue. The advertisement lists *Liu Xiangnü juan* 劉香女卷 with a price of thirty-eight cents (三角八分). The following entry on the list is *Liu Xiang zhong juan* 劉香中卷, sold separately for twenty cents (二角).⁹⁰ Over fifty years separates this advertisement from the edition in the case at the Department of Opera and Drama library, but Yihuatang's history as an established Shanghai publisher with a long, uninterrupted publication history lends confidence to the continuity of its catalogue.⁹¹ Yihuatang did print both the original *baojuan* and the middle volume, and while they could be purchased separately, they could have been ordered or bought together as a set if the customer so wished.

⁹⁰ The publishing house's own monthly journal. "Yihua tang shanshujū baojuan daoshu mulu 翼化堂善書局寶卷道書目錄" *Xiandao yuebao* 仙道月報, 1 July 1939: 1. For more information on Buddhist journals and publishing in the early twentieth century, see Jan Kiely. "Spreading the Dharma with the Mechanized Press: New Buddhist Print Cultures in the Modern Chinese Print Revolution, 1866–1949." Ed. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Christopher A. Reed. *From Woodblocks to the Internet: Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition, circa 1800 to 2008*. (Leiden: Brill, 2010). 185-210.

⁹¹ Many essays and poems were published in Shanghai religious journals, including *Yangshan banyuekan* 揚善半月刊 in honor of its eightieth anniversary in 1916.

CHAPTER THREE

Moralizing the Immoral: Vernacular Literature and Conservative Confucianism

In the previous two chapters, the focus has been on one fictional exemplary woman, Liu Xiangnü, and the religious traditions, texts, and criticisms with which she has been associated over the four hundred years of documentable history of her tale, mostly via *Liu Xiang* and its late Qing sequel *Liu Xiang zhong juan*. As detailed in Chapter 2, Xiangnü's fictional saga of pious pursuits intersected with Yu Zhi's real-life moral crusades in the 1873 Huikong jingfang edition of *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, which Yu Zhi edited. This *baojuan* also demonstrates clear parallels to his children's primer *Xuetang riji*, first published in 1868, which most likely served as an inspiration for the moral quandaries Xiangnü provided commentary on throughout the text.¹ Although he did not sign his name to the *baojuan* associated with him in this chapter, it is highly likely that he authored them, given their contents, the fact that they were published by the same print house that published the rest of his credited works, and the defense of vernacular literature that Yu mounts in his other writings.² Unlike the anonymously written *baojuan* we considered in the previous two chapters, *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* have a likely author whose life and works help further clarify the place and purposes of *baojuan* as a subset of morality literature, and particularly the motives behind their resurgence in popularity at this time.

¹ See Table 1 for a comparison of the texts.

² In a series of convincing, detailed comparisons with Yu Zhi's credited works, Lai Jinxing creates a strong case for Yu Zhi's authorship of both these works, confirming Sawada Mizuho's earlier suggestion that *Pan Gong*, *Xigu*, and *Sanmao zhenjun baojuan* 三茅真君寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of the Three Perfected Mao Brothers*), were most likely written by the same author. I add another text, *Liyuan baojuan* 立願寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Making a Vow*) to this trio for a number of reasons: It is mentioned by name in *Pan Gong* as a reputable source to consult for more information, it features a pilgrimage to Putuo Island as does *Xigu*, and it mirrors the twelve precepts given in *Pan Gong* in both their content and sequence. For more, see Lai, 124-137 and Sawada, 125. On *Dejian zhai* and Yu's corpus, see Appendix 6 following this chapter.

Yu Zhi spearheaded an evangelical movement of conservative Confucian philanthropists with rhetoric that called for widespread moral proselytization, promising salvation from future disasters – both national and personal.³ A major player in philanthropic social movements of the mid-nineteenth century in southern China, he was motivated to increase the volume and spread of the morality literature he produced, in part, because of disaster – the Taiping War – that affected his home region. More precisely, he viewed the Taiping War as a symptom of a larger problem facing China: widespread moral decline.⁴ This moral declension itself was a result of a failure to educate the masses in virtue, education that was consistently undermined, in his view, by immoral drama and vernacular literature. Yu considered high literature a failure when it came to inculcating good values into society. He used this to justify the necessity of engaging with and creating “low” literature that would be more accessible to all. His emphasis on mass media presages movements in religious and morality literature in the early twentieth century, including periodicals and vernacular novels, and the May 4th movement’s politicization of the vernacular in service of nation building. By exploring two of the *baojuan* that are believed to have been written by him, we can also gain a sense of the audiences he was specifically hoping to reach, those who would likely already have been reading or listening to *baojuan*, and the kinds of social and religious reform he hoped to inspire.

This chapter focuses on the reasoning behind the rhetoric Yu Zhi used to call for conservatives to compose and distribute morality literature intended for mass audiences,

³ I use the term “evangelical” to describe Yu Zhi in the same sense that Tobie Meyer-Fong used it to describe Yu in *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China*, 77. Meyer-Fong writes, “There is something new (and newly evangelical and puritanical) about Yu Zhi’s conservatism, and it responded, or corresponded, to the conditions of war, and the Taiping ideological challenge.”

⁴ “從來天下之亂係乎人心。” Yu, *Deyi lu*, 11:31a. *Deyi lu*, a sixteen volume work first completed by Yu Zhi in 1849, but only published in 1869 after two decades of accreting even more materials, is something of a comprehensive encyclopedia for morality movements and charity organizations.

complicated by his strident condemnation of the immorality of contemporaneously circulating vernacular genres. By examining the contents of two of Yu Zhi's *baojuan*, *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* in terms of their moral messages and relation to Yu's oeuvre, we will see how the concerns of the educated were translated for the reception of those they deemed ignorant. Taking into account their reprint history, given Yu Zhi's emphasis on the importance of reprinting and further distributing these works, we can come to conclusions about how and why audiences were able or unable to make these works their own and incorporate them into popular culture, returning to considering their producerly characteristics.

Yu's composition of *baojuan* was an attempt to reach a wider Jiangnan audience, those who would have been more likely to cross paths with a *baojuan* than an elementary primer or a Confucian morality treatise. In *Pan Gong*, Yu remains on more familiar territory, writing for a generic audience, more likely than not assumed to be male, but inclined towards Buddhism. The real-life Suzhou philanthropist, Pan Zengyi, who Yu Zhi posthumously raises to the status of a minor divine administrator Pan Gong, was himself a devout Buddhist.⁵ Yu Zhi draws on Pan's Buddhism as he attempts to reframe the system of heavenly moral arithmetic repeated throughout his works within the new context of heavenly mercy, not just of the heavenly bureaucrats striving to strike names from their ledgers of sinners deserving punishment, but of Guanyin's all-encompassing grace, sailing out into the stormy sea of disaster on her boat of compassion, saving drowning sinners from death. Meanwhile, *Xigu* displays certain features in common with *Liu Xiang* in that it also focuses on a female protagonist overcoming great

⁵ Feng Guifen 馮桂芬, "Pan Gongfu xiansheng ji peiyan yiren muzhiming 潘功甫先生暨配嚴宜人墓誌銘," in Pan Zengyi and Pan Yifeng, *Xiaofushanren nianpu* 小浮山人年譜, 1a-1b, (facsimile, 469-470), reprinted in *Beijing tushuguan cang zhenben nianpu congkan* 北京圖書館藏珍本年譜叢刊, ed. Beijing Library, vol. 145, (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1999), 467-586.

difficulties in order to pursue her religious convictions and ultimately receiving great rewards in the end.⁶ From the outset, its protagonist Granny Wang draws attention to her lower status as a woman, but asserts her ability to still teach a thing or two to the audience, particularly when it comes to the problem unique to a parturient mother – should her baby, if born a girl, be allowed to live? How should a woman who has unknowingly sinned by her capitulation to the social stigma against bearing daughters redeem herself?

Yu's evangelical approach to public morality, the contents of his *baojuan* strategically intended to further his moral reform agenda throughout Jiangnan, and the lives that these works took on as they were adopted by receptive audiences and repackaged for republication, all serve to explain the new context in which interest in *baojuan* peaked during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. His life work centered on exhorting goodness and empowering individuals to contribute to the social stability of their communities and the moral reformation of themselves and their neighbors. Yu's books not only explained the moral framework of cosmic retribution which he understood to account for national strife and provided the means to resolve such crises, but also were instruction manuals for individuals hoping to assume a similarly evangelical role, whether one had money to donate to every open hand, spare strength for volunteer efforts, or nothing more than the words of one's mouth.

Baojuan, at their very core, are centered on the oral performance and aural reception of a merit-making text by the laity, and thus fit squarely with Yu's mission to transform transgressive individuals into merit makers. The genre gave Yu Zhi the opportunity to expand his repertoire of morality literature beyond advisorial text on the page or the professional space of the stage.

⁶ As such, *Xigu* was among the texts considered in Chen Kuei-hsiang's 2006 dissertation on *baojuan* addressing female religious culture.

Baojuan carried the potential to reach into the sacred space created by lay performers from a segment of Jiangnan society yet unreached by Yu's moralizing voice.

War: A Time of Loss, A Time of Redemption

On June 17, 1864, when Zeng Guoquan's imperial force breached the walls of the Taiping capital at Nanjing, it effectively brought an end to the political and religious entity that was the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace. Although remnant forces persisted in rural pockets of Anhui until 1868, the Taiping spiritual leader, Hong Xiuquan, had died of illness shortly before Nanjing fell and the religious character of the war died with him.⁷ Qing forces fell upon Nanjing with bloody fervor, killing an estimated 100,000 residents, a horrific number that still pales when put into perspective of the total estimated war dead: 20-30 million between 1850 and 1864.⁸ The Taiping Kingdom justified its violence with its own variety of Christian religious rhetoric, including the claim that its leader was Jesus Christ's younger brother. At the same time, conservative elites like Yu Zhi were confronting their own beliefs. In the face of such long-lasting destruction, how effective had their pre-war philanthropic and social reform efforts been? How did such a war fit into the framework of moral retribution that motivated their public acts of charity and private acts of devotion?

During the war, Yu Zhi wrote a series of three essays entitled “Jichai huilan shuo 劫海迴瀾說” (Great Waves in a Sea of Disaster) – the first (上) in 1853, the second (中) in 1858, the last (下) in 1864 – that frame bloodshed explicitly as the consequence of heavenly wrath for the

⁷ Kuhn, 310.

⁸ Kuhn, 309.

accumulation of innumerable sins.⁹ His 1853 essay begins with the lament, “Alas! What times are these, what circumstances are these? In this time and these circumstances, people are yet asleep and dreaming. The land shakes; people are trampled like mud and ashes, with bodies piled like mountains, blood flowing to become a river. Hearing it hurts the heart, speaking of it stings the nose. What times are these, what circumstances are these?”¹⁰ However, his graphic description of suffering does not translate into sympathy for the victims. Instead, the essay goes on to excoriate residents of Nanjing and the surrounding cities for the wastefulness and sinfulness that deservedly brought down the Taiping takeover in March 1853 upon themselves. Rather than cast the war dead as loyalist martyrs to the Qing imperium, as memorials after the war sought to do, writing only a year after Nanjing fell, Yu blames the victims. He calls upon those who hope to avoid falling victim themselves to swear oaths of morality and repentance, promising that heaven will surely honor such dedication with its protection.

His 1858 essay continues in this vein, emphasizing that heaven treats people the way parents treat their children: rewarding meritorious behavior and punishing disobedience.¹¹ Yu’s 1858 essay reveals the same hopefulness that inspired the redemption of the infanticidal mother in *Xigu*, published in the same year. In the midst of war and dire warnings of heaven’s wrath, Yu remained optimistic – heaven can be persuaded to change its mind. In *Xigu*, even a figure who

⁹ These essays were appended to his 1864 work, *Jiangnan tielei tu* 江南鐵淚圖 (A Man of Iron’s Tears for Jiangnan), an illustrated history of the impact the Taiping War had on Jiangnan’s residents. Featuring forty-two illustrations, the work was intended to inspire philanthropy. For more on this work, see Meyer Fong, 65-76. I have used the versions of these essays included in Yu Zhi’s posthumously published collection of essays and *nianpu*, *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 文:1:7a-17b. (The collection contains six individually paginated *juan* of collected essays (文), two *juan* of poetry (詩), one *juan* of family precepts (家訓), and one *juan* of Yu’s *nianpu* (年譜, chronological biography), so references to pages in this collection will be labeled first with the subsection, followed by the *juan* (if applicable), and folio page number.

¹⁰ Yu, “Jiehai huilan shuo shang” in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 文:1:7a.

¹¹ “天之於人猶父母之於子也。” Yu, “Jiehai huilan shuo xia” in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 文:1:11b.

had failed to find pardon in all earlier literary representations could in fact find salvation through the simplest of measures, cherishing grains, by which she demonstrated her complete change of heart. Wang's punishment should have been guaranteed. Every other earlier and contemporary example of stories that mention mothers who drown their daughters, including *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, a sectarian work from 1851, brutally disciplines such women. In a world where parental heaven punished its earthly children with a horde of longhaired soldiers from the southern hinterlands, threatening to topple the Confucian empire, one still had to somehow hold out hope.

Yet in 1860, despite vociferous efforts to promote morality and philanthropy, the Taiping War forced even the upright essayist to become a refugee.¹² Though he began in 1853 by blaming the dissolute residents of Nanjing who he believed deserved their fates, his final essay, dated 1864, takes an inward turn: “How can it be that everyone's hearts are bad but mine alone is good? This is my great illness, this is my great disaster.”¹³ Betraying a weariness brought on by ten more years of war spent watching Jiangnan bleed and burn, it expresses a mix of hopelessness – “I dare not say that the protection of the gods is guaranteed,” – and determination to bring about change through reforming social mores, aiming to earn back the happiness of heaven and the protection of its deities. “I know this, that the inability of the calamity to end is not the fault of heaven's heart being unable to change or that others' hearts will not change. In truth, it comes from my heart being unable to change. For this reason, if I wish to change others' hearts, I must first begin with mine.”¹⁴

¹² Yu Xiaohui *xiansheng nianpu* in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 年譜:12a-b.

¹³ “豈人心皆不好而我心獨好也。是我之大病也。是我之大患也。” Yu, “Jiehai huilan shuo xia” in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 文:1:17a

¹⁴ “吾於是之大劫之不可回也非天心之不可轉也。亦非人心不可轉也。實由我心之不可轉也。故欲轉人心當先從我始。” Yu, “Jiehai huilan shuo xia” in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 文:1:17b

Though his biographers do not include *baojuan* in their yearly accounting of his activities and publications, there is strong evidence that Yu Zhi composed and influenced the publication of new *baojuan* in the 1850s-1870s.¹⁵ As a prolific writer, Yu Zhi left behind a plethora of materials explaining and justifying his efforts to inculcate society with moral values that would prevent another national disaster through the use of low vernacular literary genres.¹⁶ The implication is clear: even the long derided *baojuan* genre could be part of an elite response to reconstruct moral and social order. Though Yu Zhi's exclamations in his 1864 essay may have sounded hopeless, they also reflect their writer's deep belief in the ability of an individual to be redeemed from past evils, and, in the end, turn heaven's heart back to bestowing blessings and not curses. Conservative book-burner and Confucian moralist though he was, and quick to remind his readers that heaven overlooks nothing and retribution will even out all injustices in the end, the *baojuan* we can credit him with focus heavily on heavenly mercy and the potential for individual redemption and repentance.

Instead of retreating into silence as the simple framework of retributive justice seemed to collapse around him, Yu's personal encounters with the disasters of the Taiping War proved a turning point in his evangelistic moralizing.¹⁷ Prior to the war, his philanthropic efforts had been limited to his local area, and his literary output mostly to classical language writings, albeit some in simpler classical for the instruction of schoolboys. War proved the impetus for a broad

¹⁵ Lai, 124-135.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that from 1843-1851, minor official Huang Yupian 黄育榘 published widely distributed detailed refutations of heterodox *baojuan* from the Ming and Qing, *Poxie xiangbian* 破邪详辩. In the nineteenth century, even as the contents of *baojuan* no longer expressed heterodox views, the genre itself was still a cause for official concern. No matter how morally conventional and Confucian Yu Zhi's *baojuan* were, the genre itself may have aroused suspicion or derision. It was certainly not worth signing one's name to.

¹⁷ You Zian, *Quanhua Jinzhen: Qingdai shanshu yanjiu* 劝化金箴:清代善书研究. (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1999), 100.

expansion of his efforts, earning him the sobriquet *shanren* (善人, do-gooder) in his own time and the label “maverick philanthropist” in twentieth-century scholarship.¹⁸ His new efforts included aiding soldiers and refugees with food and clothing, admonishing officials on the importance of the community compact system and its mandated lectures on the Sacred Edict, and composing morality texts, many of which were written in a vernacular and accessible to the functionally literate reader or illiterate listener.¹⁹ Works of his acknowledged by the writers of his *nianpu* (chronological biography) include the elementary primer discussed in Chapter 2, *Xuetang riji* 學堂日記, collections of morality poems *Xu shentong shi* 續神童詩 and *Xu qianjia shi* 續千家詩 for children’s edification, a collection of filial piety tales for girls *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo* 女二十四孝圖說, and the twenty-eight morality plays on themes like infanticide, preserving grains, and destroying licentious literature collected in *Shuji tang jinyue* 庶幾堂今樂, intended for performance at temple festivals. Though he used varied means of conveying moral stipulations to different audiences, the four *baojuan* most likely written by Yu Zhi are consistent in their

¹⁸ For *shanren*, see the entry on Yu Zhi in the Suzhou city gazetteer. For “maverick philanthropist,” see Yuen-sang Leung, *The Shanghai Taotai: Linkage Man in a Changing Society, 1843-90* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1990), 136.

¹⁹ The Sacred Edict, promulgated by the Kangxi emperor 康熙 (1652-1722) in 1670, is comprised of sixteen maxims, of seven characters each, which encapsulate a simple form of Confucian orthodoxy intended for the edification of the less educated. As this dense classical language was beyond the ken of the majority of Chinese, soon colloquial commentaries and paraphrases were written for use during village lectures that the Qing mandated the community compact organizations deliver at regular intervals throughout the year. For more on the vernacularization of the Sacred Edict, see Victor Mair. “Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the Sacred Edict” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* eds. David Johnson, Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, and Andrew J. Nathan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 325-359. For an introduction to the development of the community compact system during periods of disorder in the Ming and its enshrinement as empire-wide law in the Qing, see Yonghua Liu, *Confucian Rituals and Chinese Villagers: Ritual Change and Social Change in a Southeastern Chinese Community 1368-1949* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 167-171. For greater detail, see Yang Kaidao 楊開道, *Zhongguo xiangyue zhidu* 中國鄉約制度 (Shandong Sheng xiang cun fu wu ren yuan xun lian chu, 1937), 265-319. Yang notes a revision and expansion of the community compact in 1855 (316), particularly noting Wuxi (Yu’s hometown), which corresponds with entries for 1854 and 1857 in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* 年譜:10a-10b.

treatment of merit making and heavenly wrath/grace.²⁰ Whether Yu's values are conveyed explicitly via twelve or thirty-six rules, or implied throughout a coherent, detailed narrative, two major themes run through all these works.²¹

First, Yu firmly asserts that even the most intentionally evil men are given a second chance, after which living morally and intentionally doing good works can absolve them of their accumulated demerits.²² The act of repentance – swearing an oath before the hearth so that the Stove God might report it up the chain of heavenly bureaucratic command – forestalls heavenly justice for a time, giving the penitent man a stay on judgment while he proves his change of heart. In *Pan Gong*, a full thirty percent of those originally condemned to die in the fall of Nanjing are said to have been saved from destruction by this method of repentance and reform.²³ The nature of this penance also forms a major plot point in *Xigu* – the condition of a penitent's heart matters as much, if not even more, than the meritorious actions performed.

Given the care with which scholars of religion are trained to handle such delicate concepts as belief, particularly with regard to assuming the motives behind the performance of

²⁰ This includes *Xigu*, *Pan Gong*, which Lai gives him credit for in her thesis, a third text, *Sanmao zhenjun baojuan*, which Sawada Mizuho originally grouped with the first two, and the fourth that Yu Zhi name drops in *Pan Gong*: *Liyuan baojuan*. See the appendix on Dejian zhai, at the close of this chapter, for further details about these texts and their connection to Yu Zhi. In 1934, price listings on a cover of *Yangshan banyue kan*, the biweekly religious publication that Yihua tang began producing in 1933, show that *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* were both still offered for sale and listed close to each other on the price sheet, along with *Xiqi baojuan* and *Sanmao zhenjun baojuan*.

²¹ The twelve rules of Yu, *Deyi lu*, 4:27b, become twelve “good sayings” in *Pan Gong* and *Liyuan baojuan*. *Sanmao zhenjun baojuan* expands them out to thirty-six good sayings.

²² As discussed later in this chapter, this is more problematic when it comes to women in Yu's work. Someone intentionally antagonistic, like the maid Chunmei is in *Xigu*, seems to be given an abundance of chances to reform. Whereas, when a woman had participated in the killing of her newborn, it was unlikely heaven would grant her one. Second chances were only afforded provided they could be cast as innocent victims, either through ignorance of the true moral cost of infanticide or having been coerced.

²³ *Pan Gong*, 2:18b, (facsimile, 252). (Both page numbers refer to *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan* 潘公免災寶卷 in *Baojuan Chuji* 寶卷初集, vol. 23, 40 vols. (Taiyuan, China: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994), 163-308. This edition was published by Dejian zhai, the publisher that printed many of Yu Zhi's credited works, in 1858, and includes both of Yu's signed prefaces and three full folio illustrations.

religious practices, such matters of the heart require that we tread lightly. Yet in the words of the abbot at Putuo Shan, meant to alert the evil Squire Chen to the second chance he was being given:

Take a moment and ponder the silver and rice that you are donating. Your kitchen woman cultivated herself even in difficulty, completely directed towards blessings. She worked to honor grains, often reciting Amitâbha's name, into her old age, without ceasing. She took every grain of rice to be like a pearl, picking up good karma. She can't be compared with you, so greedy and violent, caring nothing for the heart. Here I am, speaking only about the heart, not about external appearances.²⁴

Yu clearly wrestled with the temptation inherent in advocating merit accumulation for heavenly rewards. The opportunity for taking advantage of the arithmetic of merits and demerits for personal benefit, not disinterested moral cultivation, had occupied the minds of moralists since the popularization of the system during the Ming, if not even earlier during the Song.²⁵ In the Ming, many who followed the ledger method of recording good and bad deeds kept record only of the latter, fearing that, like Squire Chen, their hearts would turn their good acts into profit-seeking, which would count for naught.²⁶ In emphasizing heavenly grace “beyond the register,” Yu Zhi repeats his conviction that heaven can be persuaded to change its mind about the punishments it intends to rain down on humanity if it examines the state of individual hearts, not the balance of merits and demerits on the page. This emphasizes an element missing from the system Brokaw describes as determining fate based on individual behavior, original

²⁴ “你試把。你銀米。自己思量。燒火婆。苦修行。十分福相。勤惜穀。常念佛。到老無亡。一粒米。一粒珠。好孽掌上。不比你。多狼籍。不掛肝腸。我這裡。但論心。不論形像。” *Xigu*, 23a. (Page numbers here refer to *Xigu mianzai baojuan* 惜穀免災寶卷 (Suzhou: Dejian zhai, 1887), beautifully scanned by Waseda University Library in Tokyo, Japan, accessible at wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/bunko19/bunko19_f0399_0073 .

²⁵ See “Merit Accumulation for Status Advancement” in Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 61-109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

allotment, inherited merit and demerit, and karma.²⁷ The value of one's conviction to reform and do good moving forward, laid out in *Xigu*, is developed further in Yu's 1864 essay on the ongoing conflict. Shaken by heaven's seeming unresponsiveness, Yu's increasing emphasis on an individual's responsibility to reconcile with heaven's will helps account for the randomness of those who survived and those who fell victim to war, famine, and disease. It also undermines those who might try to take advantage of heaven's mercy without true moral change.

Secondly, Yu took the opportunity in his *baojuan* to particularly champion the power of the spoken word.²⁸ Given the nature of *baojuan* as texts that could be performed (whether they were or not was up to the literate person into whose hands they fell, of course), emphasizing the value of “speaking virtuous speech 說好話,” as Yu does in *Pan Gong*, adds to the text's value. Cherishing grains and written paper, while not expensive activities, did require a certain degree of effort. This effort accounts for only part of the merit Granny Wang cultivates in *Xigu*, the other part coming from the anti-infanticide advocacy she engages in, powerless though she may be. In *Pan Gong*, from the very first time Pan Gong appears, he reminds his audience: “Those with power should expend their funds. Those without power should spend their words.”²⁹ What does it mean to spend words? Pan explains: “The newly published *Liyuan zhenjing* and *Liyuan baojuan* ask that people often say virtuous things. This is merit gained without expending money, like offering

²⁷ Ibid., 59.

²⁸ *Deyi lu*, 12:17a-21b includes a delightful series of illustrations meant to help shop owners eliminate the use of characters in their branding. See Figure 5 below. Yu's fascination with books and the reproducibility of the written word, for good and for ill, extended back to his earliest years. According to his *nianpu* entry for 1822, when he was 14 *sui*, he wanted to quit his studies and learn the book carving trade to help support his family in their poverty, but his aunt would not permit it. (*Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 年譜:3a-b.)

²⁹ “有力者出錢。無力者出言。” *Pan Gong*, 1:3a, (facsimile, 175).

up incense. Therefore this is called spending words.”³⁰ In lieu of tangible charitable acts, *Pan Gong* gives his potentially impoverished (or refugee) listeners the gift of words they can pass on, empowering the powerless with good sentences, poems, and aphorisms. These powerful words, themselves packaged in a *baojuan* that promised by its very title to prevent disaster, carried in their unvoiced syllables incredible potential.



[Figure 5] Illustrations suggested for shop branding, *Deyi lu* 12: 20b-21a, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago Edition. (See n. 28 above.)

³⁰ “新出立願真經。立願寶卷。要人常說好話。不費錢功德。比如燒香。所以就叫做出言。” *Ibid.*, 1:3a, (facsimile, 175).

Potential Virtues of the Vernacular

The involvement of Confucian local elites in the production and practice of popular culture frequently elicits suspicion, both at the time, if Yu's detailed defense of his plays (which I will address later) is any indication, and in present day scholarship. Some scholars go as far as to imagine that it must have been distasteful for literati to address readers and listeners in vernacular writing, setting up a diametric difference between "the people," who were unequipped to grasp, let alone popularize, classical Confucian texts, and "the literati," some of whom stooped to bridge the gap between the two parts of Chinese society. In particular, Mair characterizes literati involvement as "willfully trying to mold popular culture."³¹ Granted, Yu Zhi indeed wrote with the intent to mold culture. As a lifelong scholar, even though ultimately unsuccessful at the civil service exams, he certainly falls under the label of "bearer of high culture" as used by Mair. But to take Yu Zhi's involvement with popular literature as a last resort in the face of crisis is irresponsible, as Yu himself verbosely defends the value of vernacular as the responsible choice for reformers looking to do the most good. Dismissing his arguments as excuses for his denigration buys into an old trope in Chinese literature wherein educated men are driven to write outside of high status genres because their talents are unrecognized, giving them no audience among their social equals. It also divides Chinese society into two distinct categories in an oversimplification of the realities of social mobility and the transmission of cultural values. In a sense, this mimics the literary divide between readerly and writerly texts delineated by Barthes. This chapter complicates this division between popular and elite by considering the

³¹ Mair, 356. "Distasteful as it may have been for them to address the *hoi polloi*, there were compelling reasons for doing so. They were both responsible for and stood most to benefit from the inculcation of Confucian values in the populace... This is a clear case of the bearers of high culture consciously and willfully trying to mold popular culture."

producerly characteristics of Yu's vernacular works. Were they adopted into popular culture of the time, as he intended them to be? How can we gauge this? Whose popular culture are we referencing?

The reality of the popularization Yu Zhi engaged in was far more complex than simple “willful molding” perpetrated on a receptive, ignorant populace.³² Yu's convictions about the potential uses and abuses of popular entertainment were related to his strongly-held views on the decline of social mores and the disasters – past, present, and future – that heaven inevitably sent as punishment, and the role played by popular literature in this decline. His investment in inculcating Confucian values into the illiterate populace arose from more than a selfish concern over the potential loss of status should literati lose their position at the top of the social hierarchy. Instead, it emerged from a conviction that popular literature could be the means by which the empire could be saved.

Yu Zhi wrote in the vernacular not because those above him on the ladder of success had failed to recognize his talent, but because he believed the system of inculcating traditional Confucian values had itself failed to work as it should.³³ In competition with a powerful, potentially dangerous enemy – popular drama and vernacular fiction – classical education lost out every time. Spoken words affected larger audiences than complex classical language on a page ever could. Whether or not one's talents were recognized by earthly powers, the virtues and

³² Ibid., 356.

³³ Whether or not he had the talents to succeed in the civil service should be beside the point. At this time, the overwhelming majority of students who attempted even the lowest level of exams failed to pass. According to Benjamin Elman *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 1-10, in the late Qing, generally 2-3 million men took the local biennial exams, of which 50-70,000 would pass to the next level of triennial provincial examinations, at which point only 1-3% of candidates would actually graduate and become eligible for civil service assignments.

flaws heaven's unveiled sight observed ultimately mattered more. The classical educational system did not recognize its own failure.

Yu Zhi repeatedly recorded his conviction that popular, vernacular literature was an appropriate medicine for the illness eating away at the Chinese body politic.³⁴ In a charming preface to his morality play collection, entitled “Dada wen 答答問” (“Debate”), Yu imagines a laughter-filled dialogue between himself and a guest who questions his resolve to reform society through the creation of new popular plays.³⁵ Yu's talent for writing convincingly and engagingly is at its best in this piece, hinting at how charismatic the man himself might have been in person. In response to the questioner's suggestion that Yu's new plays might simply be as superfluous as legs drawn onto a snake when compared with classic dramas on moral themes,³⁶ Yu responds:

“What my guest says is true. But may I ask, did the ancients write plays to educate superior people? Or to educate inferior people?” My guest replied, “It was probably for both the superior and inferior – for everyone.” I responded, “Superior people can learn by reading classic books. In them, they find the admonishments of the classics and histories and the wisdom of the former sages. They don't need to get any of that from watching plays. Now, the class with a middling education can benefit from all kinds of currently circulating morality books, so neither do they need to get anything from plays. So plays are really meant for illiterate ignorant men and women. Not only can't they study the classics, they can't even read morality books. So far, only lectures by the community compact exist to enlighten their ignorance. And in modern times, most people are especially bored of hearing them. Therefore, I have specifically used plays to touch the hearts and minds of such people. Consider this: a doctor must prescribe medication according to his patient's particular illness in order to heal him. So, in order to educate inferior people, I must account for the desires of inferior people, in accordance with their particular illnesses. I've written the plays as a medical prescription, composed as a treatment for all the evils that have become habitual among the inferior classes.”³⁷

³⁴ “所以俺近年來編幾本勸世文帶病醫人也” Yu, *Shujitang jinyue*, 1:8a.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16a-21a.

³⁶ The idiom, “drawing a snake and painting on legs” 畫蛇添足, originates from an anecdote in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, and means to ruin something simple by adding superfluous things.

³⁷ “客所言亦是。請問古人作戲為上等人說法耶？為下等人說法耶？客曰：大約上下等兼該耳。予曰：上等人讀書明理。有經史訓言儒先格論在無取乎戲也。既中等人亦有近所傳勸善諸書在亦無取乎戲也”

Yu Zhi's vocation as a teacher becomes clear as the dialogue continues. Describing his guest as an avid donor of medications in the area, he asks the guest which diseases are the most common so that Yu might donate the most useful medications himself. He then asks if there is any need for medications that treat rare diseases, to which the guest responds "Such rare diseases are barely seen even in ten million people, why bother preparing them?"³⁸ Yu points out that classic plays with moral messages feature elite characters whose experiences are far from ordinary. Like medicines for rare diseases, they are useful only to a very few. His new plays, earthy though they may be, are like medications for diseases common throughout the population, remedies that maximize philanthropic efforts to heal the moral illnesses of the poor as well as their bodily pains.³⁹ Popular literature, particularly vernacular performance texts written for the benefit of illiterate masses, are the correct medicine for the wholesale reform of society from the bottom up.⁴⁰ Composing and distributing them is as much a philanthropic good as donating medication in plague time. Or, to put it another way: vernacular morality literature was the only thing standing between the average Chinese and death by heaven's painful retribution.

。所以演戲者為不識字之愚夫愚婦耳。彼愚夫愚婦既不能讀書明理又不能看善書。既宣講鄉約以曉愚蒙。而近世人情又皆厭聽故。特借戲以感動之。譬如醫者之用藥須對病立方乃得見效。既為下等人說法自須切定下等人用意乃為對病。予之所作大約按切近日下等人所犯惡習多作對病方。” Ibid., 16b-17a. See n. 19 for community compact.

³⁸ “此奇怪之病千萬人中所僅見。何煩製備耶？” Ibid., 17a.

³⁹ Ibid., 18b.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 21a.

Vices of the Vernacular and Confucian Fundamentalism

In Yu's moral universe, China had already come under threat from a popular interloper, centuries before the Taiping War began. As such, even before the war, his efforts to found charities and properly educate elementary school children were essential maneuvers in a battle against this dangerous force. Yu Zhi was a warrior, a moral crusader, fighting at the front line of a religious war. He battled not against the orthodox forms of Christianity imported by foreigners, insidiously spreading through local society and weakening social bonds, or the Sinicized version of Christianity threatening to found a new dynasty and violently tearing apart Jiangnan. This was civil war.

Yu Zh begins volume 11 of *Deyi lu*, which include his famous lists of banned novels and plays, with an essay by Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804).⁴¹ Briefly, Qian lays out how, since the Ming, a fourth teaching (*jiao*) has threatened the traditional three schools: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. This fourth *jiao* is the novel (*xiaoshuo*).⁴² Qian takes a broad interpretation of his terms, both *jiao* and *xiaoshuo*, noting that although the school of novels might not consider itself a *jiao*, it is known by everyone, literate and illiterate. In terms of reaching the most people, vernacular literature is not bound by text. The illiterate who hear and retell it spread its subversive values using the power of the spoken word, independent of the printed page. Spreading its ideas more broadly than Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, Qian claims, it

⁴¹ *Deyi lu*, 11:1a-1b. Qian Daxin, a Jiangsu native, attracted attention in 1751 when he passed a special examination at Nanjing given in honor of Emperor Gaozong's southern tour. An influential historian, antiquarian, mathematician, and educator, Qian had an illustrious career in Beijing, Nanjing and Ningbo. This essay, under the title "Zhengsu 正俗," was included in his collected essays, *Qianyantang wenji* 錢研堂文集, 17:14b-15a, and the version in *Deyi lu* is copied correctly word for word. For more about Qian Daxin, see *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period (1644-1912)*, 1:152-155.

⁴² “古有儒釋道三教自明以來。又多一教曰小說。” Yu, *Deyi lu*, 1a.

therefore has reached more people than any of the official teachings could ever manage.⁴³ He recommends confronting the dangerous power of oral culture with a textually bound solution: burn the books and punish their publishers. Qian's essay sets the tone for the entire volume, one which focuses in detail on the banning and burning of illicit plays, novels and songs, and the foundation of groups to advocate for these bans. Though Yu Zhi echoes and elaborates Qian's suppression of vernacular story and drama, he pairs this with the promotion of popular morality literature, especially drama.⁴⁴ His endorsement of the vernacular is all the more significant because he is unrelenting in restating his conviction that, when wielded in the service of immoral tales, it was unimaginably destructive.⁴⁵

To Yu, one of the biggest problems with drama was how it exposed people to literature that endorsed immorality – leaping over walls for illicit trysts, rising up against imperial power, and disrespecting monks and temples, among other things. Yu writes that few, if any, are able to watch immoral drama coolly and without having their emotions stirred.⁴⁶ He repeatedly turns to a statistic that claims after watching a play about illicit love; nine out of every ten widows in the audience will abandon their chastity vows.⁴⁷ Even virginal maidens are tempted into beginning

⁴³ “小說演義之書未嘗自以為教也。而士大夫農工商賈無不習聞之。以至兒童婦女不識字者。亦皆聞而如見之是其教較之儒釋道而更廣也。” Ibid., 1a.

⁴⁴ Yu's essay, “Jiaohua liang dadi lun 教化兩大敵論” (The Two Great Enemies of Education) can be found in *Deyi lu* 11:31a-34b. Included in his promotion of drama is a scheme for rehabilitating debauched actresses by means of group homes in which wise old women from the community instruct them in spinning silk and weaving cotton for a year or two. Yu, *Deyi lu* 11:37a-b.

⁴⁵ For example, in describing the benefit of getting female performers off the stage and into rehabilitation (or at least banned from the area), Yu writes that taking one woman off the street prevents harm to thousands of people. “收禁一灘簧婦。可免數千百人之害。” ibid 37b.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11:35a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11:32a and 11:35b

secret romances.⁴⁸ Of particular concern is how the harmful effects of immoral popular literature are not limited to the uneducated and ignorant. In another example, a virtuous teacher who had taught for ten years looked through an immoral text and immediately found himself corrupted.⁴⁹ Yu declaims that all the good, moral things this teacher had learned were not enough to defend him from the contents of the immoral book.⁵⁰ The benefits gained from hearing one hundred lectures by the community compact cannot compare with the harm done by watching one immoral play.⁵¹

Underneath these grim warnings runs a deep vein of anxiety. Regardless of orality or textuality – what Qian seemed most concerned with – Yu ascribes greater power to immorality than morality. Though he hopes that promoting good vernacular literature could help inculcate Confucian values in the populace, he also knows that as long as immoral literature remained easily accessible, the danger is ever present. Popular audiences have an uncontrollable thirst for entertainment. Facing an enemy that circumvents rationality and stirs up passions regardless of educational or social status, Yu could only emphasize the importance of turning its power against itself. Having essentially given up on classical pedagogy and his beloved community compact lectures, Yu's compromise is an attempt to meet the need for entertainment without instilling immorality. Even while attempting to burn all the copies that he and his associates could find of old, evil plays, he personally toured Jiangnan with a troupe of actors performing morality plays

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11:32a

⁴⁹ This does not necessarily refer to erotica, which Yu refers to specifically with the term *chungong* 春宮. *Yinshu* includes works like *Shuihu* 水滸 (即五才子), various novels from Fujian 小說各種(福建板) and the short story collection *Shidian tou* 石點頭. Ibid, 12a-13b.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11:32a

⁵¹ *ibid*, 32a.

from his newly composed repertoire.⁵² Condemning the salacious songs and tales in popular *tanci* and songbooks, he composed and orchestrated the publication of *baojuan*, illustrated morality books, posters and poetry collections filled with gripping tales of gruesome heavenly justice and scenes of last-minute redemption, hoping to attract and hold the fickle attention of the ignorant masses.

Though Yu's vernacular works display varying degrees of influence from all three of the traditional religious schools, all three are not treated equally, with Confucianism maintaining prime place. Both *baojuan* discussed in this chapter call upon features of Buddhist and Daoist traditions – the *baojuan* genre itself, various deities and the kinds of piety they reward – but uphold the fundamentals of Confucian morality above all. To Yu Zhi, Confucianism was not only the moral foundation of Chinese civilization; it was also the foundation of stable governance. In an undated essay entitled “Shang dang shi shu 上當事書,” Yu advises those in power on matters of national policy that should be taken to mitigate threats to the primacy of Confucianism. He develops a logical chain that starts with the heart and ends with the stability of the empire, calling up associations to the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), one of the four books of Confucianism, but inserting different intermediaries between individual and state.⁵³ The heart, Yu writes, is the determinant of all the trends under heaven, and governance and philosophy determine its state. Just as the heart cannot be divided against itself, neither is there an art to successfully guiding the people when governance and philosophy are also divided. After

⁵² *Zun xiaoxue zhaji* 年譜: 12a.

⁵³ The *Daxue* itself is a chapter within the *Liji*, 禮記 (*The Book of Rites*), one of the five Classics of Confucianism. The passage suggested here, beginning with (古之欲明明德於天下者、先治其國) reaches the heart (欲脩其身者先正其心) via steps recommending harmonizing the family and cultivating the self.

discussing the nature of the threats to Confucianism, he lays out eight points by which Chinese can defend themselves against its decline.⁵⁴

Unlike the internal threat posed by popular fiction and drama detailed above, in this essay, the threat was foreign and definitely religious. Daoism and Buddhism, Yu writes, at best do nothing to interfere with the fundamental primacy of the Confucian system, and therefore are schools that support China's long standing unity of its governing philosophy and moral philosophy. The destabilizing force comes in the form of Christianity, the spread of which in China threatens to divide the people's moral teachings (*jiao* 教) from the principles of their governance (*zheng* 政). Unlike the Muslims, who Yu Zhi believed kept peaceably to themselves in the border regions, Christians do not self-isolate.⁵⁵ Instead the easy salvation that does not require vegetarian fasting and non-killing entices many Chinese converts.⁵⁶ Though this doctrine works for its Western adherents, it is inappropriate, he emphasizes, for Chinese. By severing their relationship with Confucianism, the foundational philosophy of the Chinese empire, it becomes a threat to imperial unity. Since the Christians made such an effort to proselytize their foreign philosophy, Yu described how ardent conservatives should respond in kind in order to combat

⁵⁴ Yu, Zhi. "Shang dang shi shu" *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* 文3:5a-15b. A condensed version of this essay also appears among the prefatory materials to Yu Zhi's collection of morality plays, *Shujtang jinyue* 1:22a-25a. These materials were prepared by Yu Zhi in early 1874, with the intention of publishing a three part set of his morality plays, but the project was put on hold due to his death later in the year. The collection was not published until 1880. In the condensed version, all references to Christianity have been removed.

⁵⁵ This view of Islam may help date the essay, given that in 1856 the first of three major Muslim uprisings of the late Qing began in Yunnan. Either Yu was ignorant of this or the essay was written beforehand. On the Muslim uprisings in the late Qing, see Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard J. Smith, "The Military Challenge: the north-west and the coast" in *The Cambridge History of China Volume 11: Late Ch'ing (1800-1911), Part 2* eds. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 211-225. Yu's exposure to Muslims may also have been limited to the sinicized Muslims residing in Nanjing, who lived in peace with their non-Muslim neighbors and did not attempt to oppose the Qing or seek converts.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 文3:6a.

the spread of destabilizing foreign ideas.⁵⁷ The concrete steps he suggests taking include strengthening the *baojia* 保甲 and community compact system, expanding village lectures on the Sacred Edict, composing and collecting popular songs about virtue for publication, increasing the publication of morality books and ensuring their delivery to remote areas, and reforming the drama world so that morality plays can positively influence their audiences.⁵⁸ In fighting evil influences, both from the enemies within Chinese culture and the ongoing invasion by a foreign philosophy, Yu's approach was to adopt the enemy's tactics and use them to further his own ends.

As Yu Zhi continued to advocate for such approaches to national strengthening at the local level, at the highest level, following the death of the Xianfeng 咸豐 emperor (lived 1831-1861, reigned 1850-1861) in 1861, conservative forces took hold of the regency of the child Tongzhi 同治 emperor (lived 1856-1875, reigned 1862-1874) in an attempt to likewise institute a restoration of the Confucian values throughout the empire.⁵⁹ One major component of the Tongzhi Restoration included the strengthening of the *baojia* system, the first tactic on Yu Zhi's list of eight approaches in the essay summarized above. Reading Yu's suggestions alongside the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 文3:8b

⁵⁸ Ibid., 文3:7b-15b. The *baojia* system grouped households together into groups of ten, with the group held responsible for any criminal activities perpetrated by its members. It was a means of mutual policing that had varying degrees of success, but the intent was to extend the limited scope of centralized bureaucratic authority into the intimate space of the individual home, significantly increasing the government's ability to hold its subjects accountable for breaches of legal code. Fearing joint punishment, members of a *baojia* unit were motivated to report on each other so that only the guilty individual might be punished, rather than the whole unit. For more on the practical application of this system, see Kung-chüan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth-Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 43-83. Interestingly, Yu specifically mentions the composition of morality *tanci* and *pinghua*, having previously called out *tanci* for their detrimental influence in the women's quarters in Yu, *Deyi lu* 11:3a.

⁵⁹ Mary Clabaugh Wright. *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism the T'ung-chih restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 18.

practices of these conservative elites who shaped society from the top down places Yu within a larger national movement “animated by the traditional values of the universal Confucian society,” but also highlights where his approaches, perhaps stemming from being embedded within the society he sought to reform, deviated from the way that Restoration leaders have been represented.⁶⁰

The moral declension narrative in which Yu Zhi frames the Taiping War as heavenly retribution defined a troubling reality for moral and social conservatives such as himself. Restoration leaders did not frame the conflict with such religious overtones but the conflicts of the mid-nineteenth-century still brought about reflection on national and international policies, reflection grounded in the certainty that Confucian moral values would guide the nation back to a stable equilibrium.⁶¹ Though it seemed to Restoration leaders and local gentry alike that people were discarding Confucian morals, Yu Zhi was one of the few to point out that the traditional methods of inculcating values seemed to make little progress towards stemming the decline. Where does his approach place him in the strain of Confucian fundamentalism that became increasingly prevalent at this time?

Confucian fundamentalism, defined by Goossaert as “the rejection of all ideas and practices absent from the Confucian canonical scriptures,” would on the surface seem to be the guiding principle behind both the Tongzhi Reformation and Yu Zhi’s grassroots efforts.⁶² Goossaert also observes the close relationship between Confucian politics and religion, noting how fundamentalists in power mounted campaigns against various aspects of popular religious

⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁶¹ Ibid., 5.

⁶² Vincent Goossaert, “1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 2 (2006): 308.

culture not because of they threatened state stability but because they were seen to contravene the moral order of the Confucian universe.⁶³ As Goossaert elaborates on his definition of Confucian fundamentalism, he observes certain assumptions held in common across differing religious convictions held by these fundamentalists. For the purposes of this chapter, the third assumption he identifies is key in marking Yu's moral crusades as evangelical but not fundamentalist. Goossaert writes:

Third, criticism concerning communal celebrations: opera, large processions, nightly activities, voluntary devotional associations (pilgrimage associations, Buddhist pious societies), and, in particular, those in which women participated. Elite opposition to such forms of celebration was grounded in both concerns for social order (fear of trouble arising in mass celebrations, sometimes real, often phantasmic) and considerations of orthopraxy, or "style," and theology (communal celebrations were condemned as sacrilegious).⁶⁴

In stark contrast, Yu's *baojuan* are an endorsement of popular religious performance, unofficial gathering, and women's communal religious devotion, both public and private. Even if we were to discount the *baojuan* from his corpus, his composition of religious drama itself would disqualify him as a fundamentalist by Goossaert's criterion since operatic ritual itself was also a target of bans for threatening the orderliness of the Confucian fundamentalist moral universe.⁶⁵

Goossaert echoes William Rowe in calling the attempt by literati elites to enforce fundamentalist values and suppress Buddho-Daoist popular practices a "religious war."⁶⁶ By characterizing the elite antagonism against local, popular religious society as religious war, then we can see how Yu Zhi positioned himself between the attackers and the attacked, calling out the failures of both sides to bring about hoped-for results. Popular entertainments masquerading as

⁶³ *ibid.*, 310.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 317-318

⁶⁵ *ibid.* 310

⁶⁶ *ibid.* 318

religious ritual (i.e. immoral plays performed for the gods at temple festivals) created heavenly demerit instead of blessing, bringing disaster. Meanwhile, Confucian fundamentalist educators pressing pure study of the classics failed to reach broad audiences or even instill unshakable values in those who spent their lives in study, failing to avert disaster. His many justifications suggest that Yu was aware that his approach was unconventional, and potentially problematic, especially perhaps when it came to his *baojuan*, which did not even bear mentioning or signing his name to.

Yu certainly shared Tongzhi Restorationist views on the prime place of Confucianism in empire-wide values and the future of the dynasty. His writings are full of calls for the same reforms they hoped to carry out – strengthening the *baojia* system, etc. Before the War, Yu Zhi listed vernacular fiction and drama among the root causes of social collapse. The War and the crises it compounded across Jiangnan compelled him to call for reforms that turned the mechanisms behind the collapse – the affective, attractive ways in which the foreign religions of vernacular fiction and Christianity were proselytized – back on themselves to fight against loose morals and lack of social cohesion. His was not a restoration so much as the creation of a new order of Confucian morals suffusing sanitized varieties of previously illicit literary genres, with racy folksongs replaced by paeans to the emperor's kindness and salacious dramas thrown offstage in favor of dramatizing Granny Wang's righteous grain collecting. Although *Pan Gong* ends with an idyllic village lecture and a utopian vision, we cannot forget the fact that it was written during war by a man who fretted that salacious literature could undermine in an instant all the good work done by years of classical study. Writing dramas, *baojuan*, and heavily illustrated works was a leap of faith, a hope that by assuming the generic forms of literature that corrupts, the literature that heals might restore communities to unity and health. Did these works,

pregnant with the potential of vernacular literature and restorative virtue, affect Jiangnan as strongly as Yu hoped?

Pan Gong baojuan

Of all that Yu Zhi wrote, it is unlikely that any work became as popular or as enthusiastically endorsed by as many different preface writers and donors as *Pan Gong baojuan*. Between the twenty-two editions recorded in *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, uncatalogued editions found in other archives in China and Taiwan, and the lost editions alluded to in some prefaces, over thirty editions of *Pan Gong* were published between 1854 and 1922. More certainly existed. Why, of all Yu's works, did this three-volume work garner such a response? *Pan Gong* assumes the form and style of a *baojuan*, particularly with the final volume's opening meditation on the saving grace of Guanyin that comes before the body text: an extended lecture on morality spoken by Pan Gong himself to a crowd of adoring peasants. However, once we look past such features that dress the text up to look like a Buddhist *baojuan* – another example is the image of Guanyin and her saving boat that opens some editions – its contents appear firmly grounded in Yu's other works of morality literature and it wears its Buddhist trappings lightly.⁶⁷ While the *baojuan* promises to prevent disaster and suffering through its reproduction, this claim is not a new one, neither within the genre of *baojuan* nor the broad range of Chinese religious texts.⁶⁸ *Pan Gong*, bearing a message of redemption and hope that echoes much of Yu's other classical and less popularly adopted vernacular writings, gained social capital from its portrayal of a protagonist

⁶⁷ Notably, this image is not reproduced in most later editions, particularly those which included prefaces written by Guandi 關帝 devotees.

⁶⁸ For more on the talismanic qualities attributed to canonical religious texts, see Robert F. Campany, "Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Function of Sutra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1991): 28–69.

from a prominent Jiangnan family and the high value of philanthropic rhetoric during and after the War. By the very composition of this *baojuan*, Yu Zhi implicitly positioned himself as the new carrier of the mantle laid down at Pan's death in early 1853, and in reprinting and redistributing the book, aspirants to the *shanren* title appointed themselves as Pan's heirs too.

Pan Zengyi, the deified protagonist of *Pan Gong*, died on the 20th day of the 12th month of Xianfeng 2 (January 28, 1853).⁶⁹ Within Xianfeng 3, (February 8, 1853 - January 29, 1854), less than a year after his death, the writer of a preface to a later edition recalls that the first volume of the *baojuan* was already circulating in the area around Suzhou and Changzhou.⁷⁰ In this volume, composed a few months after the March 1853 fall of Nanjing, Pan Gong (Lord Pan) appears in dreams to warn his relative of the city's impending fall and gives detailed, concrete advice for living morally in ways that would help to avert (or escape) future disasters. Some months afterwards, the middle volume, consisting mainly of 10-character (3-3-4) line poems lamenting the destruction of Nanjing in great detail, followed by even greater detail on the social ills that brought about Nanjing's destruction, was published along with the final volume. The middle volume also includes a short narrative about another Nanjing resident fortunate enough to escape the city's destruction. This simple schoolteacher ascends to heaven and assists the overworked City God in rectifying the heavenly account books to sort the survivors, those who listened to Pan's advice in the first volume, from the soon-to-be dead, those who disregarded it.

⁶⁹ Yu Zhi's preface, dated 1855, included in the 1858 Dejian zhai edition. On the historical Pan Zengyi, see Wang Weiwei 王伟伟, "Qingdai zhongqi Jiangnan diqu de cishan shiye - yi Pan Zengyi wei zhongxin 清代中期江南地区的慈善事业-以潘曾沂为中心" (master's thesis, Suzhou University, 2007) and Wang Yeping 王卫平 "Qingdai Jiangnan diqu de cishan jiaxi pu - yi Pan Zengyi wei zhongxin de kaocha. 清代江南地区慈善事业慈善家系谱-以潘曾沂为中心的考察" *Xin huawen diao*, 18 (2009): 61-65.

⁷⁰ For information on early circulation, see Li Tongfu's 1857 preface to *Pan Gong*, included in many editions.

After this service, he and his aged mother are permitted to escape before the fall. The last volume imagines a bucolic encounter between Pan Gong and his tenants on the occasion of collecting the annual rents. He lectures them on the proper respect to be paid to the emperor and the values of honoring written paper, grains, and all life (infants and animals alike), which will assure the preservation of their utopian society from fire, flood, famine, plague and war.⁷¹

Pan Gong tells a number of stories, not all of them well. As a work written over the course of a couple of years, the contents of these three volumes are more united by their relationship to Yu Zhi's collected writings in *Deyi lu* and *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* than they are to each other in the shape of a coherent narrative. Instead, loose frame stories provide excuses for lists of proverbial "good sayings," evil deeds, and virtuous behaviors, and for expository poetry and prose on the pithy sentiments included on the lists. The text also endorses Yu Zhi's other writings, recommending them as useful tools for the moral reforms described by the work's unnamed narrator. In concert with the heavily referential use of language and themes from Yu's other texts, this self-promotion serves as another strong indicator of Yu's authorship. In light of its loose internal narrative coherence and the situationally bound first and middle volumes on the fall of Nanjing, the *baojuan*'s persistence in the print world of post-Taiping China (Jiangnan and beyond) becomes a particularly interesting question, one that we will return to below.

In volume one, *Pan Gong* combines a narrative about the deified Pan Zengyi appearing in a dream to his relative to warn him of the impending fall of Nanjing and disaster throughout the region with the detailed presentation of a set of twelve "good sayings" (十二句好話) and an unenumerated set of shorter admonitions. When Danran sheng (淡然生, Student of Tranquility,

⁷¹ For a detailed summary of the contents of this *baojuan*, see Meyer-Fong, 52-60.

a pseudonym that the narrator explains is given to the character to protect him from gaining fame for his philanthropic acts) dreams of Pan Gong, he arrives in Pan Gong's heavenly residence and peruses the heavenly registers of upcoming deaths of both the virtuous and the evil. Upon waking, he dedicates himself to spreading Pan Gong's twelve good sayings and other sundry writings. The good sayings are comprised of "if-then" statements about what to say when confronted with particular sinful behaviors, followed by either two or four rhyming couplets versifying the admonitions.⁷² The narrator explains that they come from the Sutra of Making a Vow (立願經), written by Pan Gong himself during his lifetime to admonish the world to do good. Whether or not he titled his list as such, Pan Zengyi was known to have developed twelve good sayings during his lifetime.⁷³ Here, Yu Zhi builds his detailed moral injunctions on the firm base of a set of morals that had already been circulating in Jiangnan during the elder philanthropist's years of active service, strengthening the implicit association between vernacular morality literature Pan is presumed to have written and Yu's new compositions.

The narration continues by admonishing its audience to read and recite *Liyuan baojuan* 立願寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Making a Vow*) for more detailed explanations of the twelve good sayings. Conveniently, this was another *baojuan* published by Dejian zhai. Emphasizing the public nature of this reading, the narrator promises, "Hearing it even causes those who don't know how

⁷² This two or four couplet difference is one means of tracing the movement of variant editions across Jiangnan. The 1858 Dejian zhai edition, the one that seems to have had the most guidance from Yu Zhi in its form, of course includes the longer poems. Meanwhile the Jiande zhai shufang edition (held in the Fudan University Library Rare Books Collection), printed in Jinchang, a district of Suzhou, also in 1858, uses the shortened poems.

⁷³ Wang Weiwei, 39. However, Wang lists no primary source for this connection between Pan's "Twelve Good Sayings" and the ones listed in *Pan Gong*. Extant collections of Pan's works include his *nianpu* and collections of poetry, but nothing vernacular. If indeed an unnamed relative under the pseudonym Danran sheng took to distributing his collected morality writings in advance of the fall of Nanjing, no record has been left of this effort.

to encourage goodness to naturally be able to speak out.”⁷⁴ *Liyuan* itself does in fact reproduce the twelve good sayings with great prolixity, framing them as texts revealed to a desperate pilgrim at Putuo Shan by a mysterious old Daoist.⁷⁵ Such parallels between *Pan Gong*, Yu Zhi’s credited corpus, and the other uncredited *baojuan* published by Dejian zhai, help establish his authorship of this text, and these features have already been well documented by previous scholars.⁷⁶ Instead, I will therefore focus here on the religious implications of the intense, lyrical description of the destruction of Nanjing in the middle volume, which renders poetic the painful meditations in Yu’s 1853 essay “Great Waves in a Sea of Disaster” with which I opened this chapter, and consider the role that the public and private identities of its deified protagonist played in the text’s popularity.

In the middle volume, from pages 2a-6b, a narrative ode describes the fall of Nanjing and the plight of its residents in vivid colors and dynamic shifts of action. This ode is dramatically different from the pedantic list-poems and brief lyrical recaps that occupy most of the second volume. These list-poems feature repetitive line constructions with little to no rhyming structure. Line openings include “And then there were those...” in a litany of sinful types of people who died in the city’s fall and “Some people...” followed by a succinct description of their fates, and

⁷⁴ “聽即使他不會說好話。也自然會說了。” *Pan Gong*, 1:15b, (facsimile, 200).

⁷⁵ “我有一本寶卷奉贈。說罷。遂即從懷中。取出一本書來。付與寶山觀看。” *Liyuan baojuan* (Suzhou: Dejian zhai, 1869), 8a. (Digitized by Waseda University Library; wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/he19/he19_03295) After this revelation, the frame tale about Baoshan recedes into the background as the text goes into detailed arguments about the same twelve moral rules briefly detailed in *Pan Gong*. *Liyuan*, although more vernacular and lighter in tone than *Pan Gong*, does not reach out to female audiences as *Xigu* did. Instead, it explicitly assumes a male reading and listening audience, evidenced by the argument against female infanticide where the narrator says, “Being incarnated as a man or a woman are both the same, alike in life and alike in birth. Your mother and your wife are both women, so why do you look down on the value of women?” (23b.) The narrator also cites two instances of snake-babies being born as a further warning against infanticide, one of which choked its mother to death, the other being the one who spoke out from within the womb to protest its earlier death. (24a.)

⁷⁶ Lai, 124-135. Meyer-Fong, 37-52.

series of couplets on the pattern “Once you were admonished... instead you stubbornly...” and “Regretting how at first... now this morning...”⁷⁷

In contrast, the ode laments:

With a shout, the bandits have arrived, the ground is dark and the sky obscured,
So scared, everyone’s souls are startled out of their bodies,
Wholeheartedly wishing to escape, to fly away in an instant...⁷⁸

and

There is no exit in the earth, no road in the heavens, so they beg the gods.
With good luck, one escapes the city and isn’t numbered among the dead,
With no luck, delayed by only a moment, the bandits are at the gates!
The blackness of a sandstorm, the red of flames and smoke, their blades flash white as snow.
Horses hung with yellow, clad in battle uniforms of green, looking like spring willow leaves,
Coming into the city, frightened people scatter in disorder, they chase and kill them.
Where they raise their hands, heads fall and roll down the center of the lane,
Or they chop at legs, or at arms, and victims fall when they try to rise.
Or their chests are gaping, or their stomachs are pierced, how heart-breaking it all is!
Bodies piled up in a mountain, blood like a river, heaven is filled with the stench.⁷⁹

Written in the midst of violent conflict, long before Qing restoration was a foregone conclusion, the sanguinary tone of *Pan Gong's* middle volume, albeit shocking, also serves as an explanation. This vivid poetry commemorating the fall of Nanjing is part mournful funeral ode,

⁷⁷ These series are not only repetitive in terms of their word choice, but also in the topics covered. Many of the same sins occur within at least three of the four list-poems, if not all of them. For example: “更有那 輕五穀 狼籍滿地。” *Pan Gong*, 2:8a, (facsimile, 231); “曾勸你 拾字紙 愛惜五穀。你偏是 多拋棄 毫不關心，” (v.2, 9b); “悔當初 輕字紙 狼籍米穀。到今朝 災難到 心裡分明。” *Pan Gong*, 2:11b, (facsimile, 238); and “某人五穀多輕棄。災難臨時餓眼昏。” *Pan Gong*, 2:16b, (facsimile, 248).

⁷⁸ “一聲喊 賊到了 地黑天昏。嚇的來 个个人 魂靈出竅。一心想 逃性命 立刻飛奔。” *Pan Gong*, 2:2b, (facsimile, 220)

⁷⁹ “地無門 天無路 求拜神明。時運好 逃出城 不在數內。時運低 緩一刻 賊到城門。風砂黑 烟火紅 刀鎗雪白。馬掛黃 戰袍綠 楊柳秀青。進城來 嚇煞人 亂追亂殺。手起處 人頭落 滾在街中。或斬腳 或臂肩 登時跌倒。或開膛 或破肚 好不傷心。屍如山 血如河 熏天臭氣。” *Pan Gong*, 2:3b-4a, (facsimile, 222-223). Note the similarity of the last line with the opening of Yu’s 1853 essay, “The land shakes; people are trampled like mud and ashes, with bodies piled like mountains, blood flowing to become a river. Hearing it hurts the heart, speaking of it stings the nose.” Yu, “Jichai huilan shuo shang” in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 文:1:7a.

part desperate warning cry. Overall, in fact, the middle volume is drenched in blood, not just in its opening descriptions of the fall of Nanjing. Its final list-poem features lines beginning with “Some people...” followed by their sins and the recompense given by heaven. Punishments include a spear through the throat, gushing with blood, for the sin of saying evil things, a severed head for opening a teahouse with storytellers, and being skinned and fried alive for the gluttonous.⁸⁰ Such imagery borrows more from Buddhist and Daoist depictions of the ten courts of hell than it does from the standard tropes of heavenly punishments dealt out in Yu’s other works; his usual favorite punishments arriving in the form of thunder from heaven and house fires.⁸¹ Here the punishments are much more personal, much more intimate deaths for seemingly inconsequential transgressions. The fall of Nanjing was as close to hell on earth as Yu could imagine. Framing such gore as punishment for everyday evils is an attempt, however strained, to make sense of the unimaginable slaughter of civilians and soldiers.

Explaining violence on a horrific scale, so close to home, means defining the scope of behaviors that draw down heaven’s judgment so broadly that minor transgressions incurred in the course of daily living take on disproportionate significance. Transgressing heaven becomes incredibly easy to do, even unintentionally so. Living life as a truly moral person likewise becomes incredibly difficult. The middle volume hammers this point home with every drop of blood split and every lament. Without the final volume of the *baojuan*, promising peace, security, health and safety to those who follow Pan’s advice, audiences would be left in despair. But, as in

⁸⁰ *Pan Gong*, 2:15b-16a, (facsimile, 246-247).

⁸¹ For more on the development of the Ten Kings and their courts of judgment and punishment, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the making of purgatory in medieval Chinese Buddhism*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994). For an illustrated morality text featuring detailed woodblock carved illustrations of the Ten Courts see *Xiaozai yanshou yanwang baojuan* (消災延壽閻王寶卷). According to the entry in *Zhongguo baojuan zhongmu*, the earliest extant edition of this text was published by Dejian zhai in 1874. An undated edition with illustrations matching Dejian zhai’s typical style is freely available online in a scan from Waseda University library at wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/bunko19/bunko19_f0399_0076.

the case of the infanticidal mothers given second chances in *Xigu*, discussed at the end of this chapter, Yu's aim is to further the spread of his salvific formula of repentance and second chances, not just castigate the lost. The dead, deserving though they were of their fates, still also deserve to be memorialized in poem and song. Audiences were meant to draw inspiration from their suffering, like the pregnant women who heard stories of Granny Wang's suffering in *Xigu*, and take advantage of the second chances afforded them.

In the end, the most coherent, compelling story told by *Pan Gong* is this one: anyone can become a moral paragon like Pan Zengyi. Danran's dreams fade; the virtuous schoolteacher returns to the mortal realm after seven days of heavenly bureaucratic service, and spirits of thousands of Nanjing dead dissipate into the fog of history. What remains is an identity that Yu Zhi lays claim to – that of the vocal, inspirational philanthropist – and the ambitious hope that a man like Pan Zengyi can, through his very words of moral exhortation, restore a broken world to its agrarian utopian past, one that must have seemed very far away in the midst of war. This story, compellingly told by a man who wanted to write himself into it, was one which other aspirational philanthropists could write themselves into by a variety of means, but particularly through the re-publication of the core text. The truly dedicated wrote new prefaces as they sponsored the text's spread throughout south China, signing their names to this anonymously written text, linking their act of reading and distributing the texts with the moral acts Pan Zengyi had become famous for during his lifetime.

Pan Gong, Pan Zengyi, and Yu Zhi

Should we take *Pan Gong* as an appropriation of Pan's well-known voice and image in order to promote values espoused elsewhere in Yu Zhi's corpus, like the author of *Liu Xiang zhong*

juan did with Xiangnü? At first glance, it might appear shameless, capitalizing on the reputation of a beloved pillar of the Jiangnan community so shortly after his death. Looking more closely, it becomes clear that because Yu Zhi held Pan Zengyi in such high esteem, *Pan Gong* was in fact a respectful, albeit odd, way of mourning the lost moral exemplar. Furthermore, it was an attempt to honor him by carrying on his work of supporting Jiangnan through disasters. Yu's reverence for Pan is clear in the detail with which he constructs *Pan Gong*, both its text and paratext. In the midst of war, Yu even acquired a copy of Pan's *nianpu* (chronological biography) and appended a nearly identical version of the portrait of Pan included in the *nianpu* to the 1858 Dejian zhai edition of the work. Furthermore, in life, Pan was known for having prescient dreams.⁸² His posthumous appearance in dreams meant to warn worthy men in Nanjing of coming disaster makes a certain degree of sense. Although Buddhism was little more than an afterthought in Yu Zhi's own ranking of the relative importance of religions in China, *Pan Gong* displays a real effort at speaking Buddhist language.⁸³ From the extended meditation on Guanyin and her boat of mercy that opens the third volume, to the handwritten preface of the 1858 edition that nods to the bodhisattva vow to save all living beings, Yu Zhi is trying to speak with a new vocabulary, that of the gentleman Buddhist.

Yu Zhi and his friends were eager to map their smaller scale philanthropic efforts onto the model provided for them by greats like Pan Zengyi and Xie Yuanqing (謝元慶).⁸⁴ For

⁸² Pan and Pan, 40a, (facsimile, 568). Pan Zengyi compiled his own biographical entries for the years between his birth and 1823 (1a-27b, (facsimile, 489-542)). Subsequent entries were written by his son, Pan Yifeng, after his father's death in 1853, according to a note by Yifeng on 27b (facsimile, 542).

⁸³ Yu Zhi. "Shang dang shi shu" *Zunxiaoxue zhai ji*, 文3:5a.

⁸⁴ Lai, 22-3. Feng Guifen, an influential contact of Yu's who supervised the compilation of the Suzhou gazetteer that was compiled in the Tongzhi era, explicitly compared Yu Zhi with these two luminaries of the Daoguang era. Feng Guifen also wrote a preface for the first printed edition of *Deyi lu* and a *muzhiming* (epitaph) for Pan Zengyi.

example, Yu Zhi's *nianpu*, compiled by his friends after his death, highlights how, in 1841, the soup kitchen he founded in an effort to relieve the famine caused by the 1840 flood attracted attention and donations from higher status philanthropists, including Pan Zengyi himself.⁸⁵ Notably, Pan is one of only two names on the list not from his hometown, Wuxi.⁸⁶ This donation, which must have been one of many that Pan made to worthy causes that year, was too insignificant to bear mentioning in his own *nianpu* for the same year.

Just how far below Pan's attention Yu existed becomes painfully clear in the following anecdote. In an 1855 preface to *Pan Gong* by Hong Fusheng 洪福生, Hong waxes sorrowful over how, when he and Yu Zhi visited Suzhou in 1849 and called upon Pan Zengyi, they were unable to gain admittance to see him.⁸⁷ Pan Zengyi's *nianpu* entries for this time show that although he maintained active social correspondence and concern for the state of the world outside his estate, he had not left the house in nine years.⁸⁸ Pan and Yu's *nianpu* for 1849 serve as perfect contrast in the difference in their approaches to community work. The year began for Pan Zengyi with his composition of a decorous pair of couplets pasted onto a stage he had constructed during the

⁸⁵ *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 年譜:6a.

⁸⁶ The other name, unsurprisingly, is Xie Yuanqing. Lai, 126.

⁸⁷ “與錫邑余君連村登門叩謁以公處不及瞻韓為恨。” *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan quanji* 潘公免災寶卷全集, (Jiangxi: Jiaxu fang Yili zhai kezidian, 1858), preface material, 3a-b. This edition is kept in the archives of the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, Taiwan. Many subsequent editions reprint Hong's preface, but this is the earliest edition I encountered it in. No mid-nineteenth-century occurrences for Hong Fusheng can be found in gazetteers (one mention exists in a Qianlong era work, but this must have been a different man). According to his signature on the preface, Hong hailed from Guilin in Sui'an County, an area southwest of Hangzhou. Curiously, his name does not occur in Yu Zhi's *nianpu* even though they apparently traveled together, suggesting that Hong presents himself in his preface in a manner akin to how Yu's biographers link him with Pan Zengyi. Alternately, this again may have been conscious identity building on the part of Yu Zhi's memorializers. His *nianpu* makes no mention of Hong Fusheng joining him on this 1849 journey, and why should it, if Hong was a no name in Jiangnan philanthropic circles?

⁸⁸ The *nianpu* entry for 1847 records how Pan, having not stirred beyond his door for seven years, declined attendance at his stepmother's seventieth birthday celebration. “府君在家為兩老人祝雙慶始一出門謝客蓋自庚子[1840]年塲莊道中返里後足未出戶者已七年矣” Pan and Pan, 41b, (facsimile, 570).

Lantern Festival that drew attention to the difficulty of cultivating oneself during boisterous celebration. This couplet made such an impression that a local artist made a painting to commemorate the event.⁸⁹ In contrast, that spring found Yu Zhi working to establish an infant protection society. He mounted the stage in front of an assembly of peasants at what must have been a boisterous celebration to register his critique as well. Knocking his head against the floor, weeping, and remonstrating, he moved the hearts of all assembled and the rain which had been falling for so long broke into sunshine, impressing the peasants all the more with heaven's response to his passionate virtue.⁹⁰

Later in the year, responding to another bout of flooding that once again left Jiangnan's poor on the verge of starvation, Yu Zhi composed "A Man of Iron's Tears for the Flood" with twenty-four illustrations.⁹¹ He sent copies of this work to wealthy families as a means of soliciting donations. Ironically suffering from illness that left him unable to eat, he still travelled throughout Suzhou and Changzhou seeking financial support for the starving.⁹² Presumably it was on one of these trips that he and Hong Fusheng attempted their unsuccessful audience with the great Pan Zengyi. In response to the same flood, Pan Zengyi, confined to his hermitage, sent out people to buy grain in unaffected areas for distribution in those where crops were ruined.⁹³ Yu genteelly begged for aid while Pan already possessed the funds to distribute wealth wherever his assistants reported it was most needed. As much as Yu considered himself among the superior class of

⁸⁹ Pan and Pan, 42b-43a, (facsimile, 572-573).

⁹⁰ *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 年譜:8a.

⁹¹ This is clearly a precursor to *A Man of Iron's Tears for Jiangnan*, published by Dejian zhai in the Xianfeng era (1850-1861).

⁹² *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 年譜:8b

⁹³ Pan and Pan, 42b-43a, (facsimile, 572-573).

people (recall his dialogue justifying his composition of vernacular drama quoted above), and as much as his biographers focused on his associations with the elite, Yu Zhi remained a man with his feet planted firmly in the lower classes, aspirations notwithstanding.

Yu Zhi's failure to achieve any success at even the lowest level of imperial exams or any degree of wealth placed him in a liminal category of Qing local elites, men with more aspirations than conventionally measurable successes. The more scholarship on Qing popular culture that is produced, the more the definition of elite has broadened to include not only the narrowly defined wealthy literati at the top of the social hierarchy, but other kinds of people who played an influential role in late imperial society.⁹⁴ Yu clearly falls into the latter grouping, although he interacted with many of those considered elite in the narrowly defined sense of the term. According to his *nianpu*, in 1852 after the fifth time he had failed the exam, he lamented the years lost on studying when he could have been doing good and resolved to dedicate himself to inculcating morality in the general populace.⁹⁵ As a consequence, he came to command the attention of a vast network of social and political über-elites of the late Qing. His views on licentious popular literature influenced Ding Richang's 丁日昌 (1823-1882) famed book banning campaign in 1868. He was known to General Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901) during his life, and reformer Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) by posthumous reputation.⁹⁶ His published works, both in life and in death, drew the sponsorship of many who shared his social and religious priorities. Ying Baoshi 應寶時 (1821-1890), Shanghai *daotai* from

⁹⁴ Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 173.

⁹⁵ *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 年譜:9a-9b.

⁹⁶ Lai, 19 and 22.

1865-1868, and later provincial judge of Jiangsu province, co-founded charity organizations with him in Shanghai, appointed him a principal of the Shanghai Foreign Language School, and wrote the first introduction to his *nianpu*.⁹⁷ Feng Guifen 馮桂芬 (1809-1874), Confucian political scholar, wrote the first preface for Yu's *Deyi lu*.⁹⁸ Yu Zhi himself was neither a scholarly success nor wealthy, yet he influenced men of wealth and stature and those of lesser status seeking to establish their philanthropic reputations. Together, these men of different classes supported efforts across Jiangnan that established infant protection societies, soup kitchens, grain and written-paper collection societies, protocols for burying abandoned dead, and maintained local militias. As a failed exam candidate, without the prominence that his philanthropic efforts eventually afforded him, he fit squarely in the category of highly literate men who never managed to climb the ladder of bureaucratic success, most of whom faded into historical obscurity.

In contrast, the Pan family wielded significant clout not only within Suzhou, but all the way up to the highest levels of the court for much of the nineteenth century. Pan Zengyi's father, Pan Shi'en 潘世恩 (1770-1854) was in high favor in Beijing, having served as the president of the Board of Rites (1801-1802), Board of War (1802-1804), Board of Revenues (1804-1806, 1813-14), Board of Civil Appointment (1806-1813, 1827, 1831-33) and the Board of Public Works (1830-1831). He was promoted first to Grand Secretary (1833-1850), then shortly after also made a Grand Councilor (1834-1849).⁹⁹ The Pan family influence did not dim with the elder Pan's death in 1854. Pan Zengyi's nephew, Pan Zuyin 潘祖蔭 (1830-1890), was also a

⁹⁷ Leung, *The Shanghai Taotai*, 136.

⁹⁸ "Feng xu 馮序," *Deyi lu* 1:1a-4a.

⁹⁹ *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 2:607-608

central figure in Taiping and post-Taiping gentry-official patronage networks in Jiangnan and Beijing.¹⁰⁰

About Pan Zengyi himself, sources like *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* are less useful because he lacked the civil service accomplishments of his half-brothers and his nephews. Zengyi is merely noted for attaining *jurem* status in 1816 and having two posthumous collections of writing published in 1879.¹⁰¹ According to his *nianpu*, in his younger years, Pan Zengyi had ambitions of obtaining a position in the capital. But after attempting five times to secure a position at the Board of Rites and failing to be chosen each time, his 1823 *nianpu* entry records his lament that when he asked why, he was accused of being overeager.¹⁰² Feeling unsatisfied with himself, the long entry for 1823 would prove to be the last autobiographical one in his *nianpu*, which he then abandoned, leaving his second son to compile the document after his death.¹⁰³ What happened?

Polachek writes that in 1824 Pan retired from the capital to return to Suzhou to look after family matters, citing the preface to Pan's *Fengyuzhuang benshu*, a book on farming.¹⁰⁴ But reading between the lines in Pan's *nianpu* provides a different story, one that would have been of particular interest to Yu Zhi. Pan was growing increasingly frustrated with his failure to secure a good position in the capital as he reached his mid-thirties. In entries leading up to and during

¹⁰⁰ For analysis of Pan Zuyin as a political lobbyist and influencer in Jiangnan and Beijing, see James Polachek, "Gentry Hegemony: Soochow in the T'ung-chih Restoration" in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*. eds. Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Carolyn Grant. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 211-256. Pan Zuyin is particularly scrutinized from 236-244.

¹⁰¹ *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 2:607.

¹⁰² Pan and Pan, 23b (facsimile, 534).

¹⁰³ Pan and Pan, 27b, (facsimile. 542).

¹⁰⁴ Polachek, 622

1823, he records exchanges with contemporaries musing on the emptiness of making so much effort for so little return, comparing it with planting grass and trees but getting no flowers. This final entry begins with Pan's frustration at being offered a job solely on the basis of an official's friendship with his father, with Pan complaining that the minister could not conceive of a friend's son calling on him for any other reason! After this incident, he became all the more cautious about visiting his father's friends.¹⁰⁵ The entry ends, however, with a long story about Pan's participation in gathering relief for flooded areas. Exhausted by the endless social politics and dramas of the capital, Pan's attention was steadily being drawn away from superficial concerns of capital elites to the real suffering of the peasantry.

In addition, 1823-1825 was a particularly bad time for Pan personally. After marrying in 1810, his *nianpu* records the steady births of daughters, in 1813, 1815, and 1816 before Pan took a concubine in early 1818 and a son Tinggao (庭誥) was born later that year.¹⁰⁶ But in 1824, having excused himself from the capital to return home to celebrate his grandfather's eightieth birthday, this only son died at age seven *sui*, leaving Pan with three daughters, no heir, and no job. In 1825, the chronic lung disease that would eventually kill him first began to trouble him. He turned to Buddhism. Later, according to the epitaph by Feng Guifen, Pan had one of his visionary dreams and learned that he was a reincarnation of a monk from Mount Fudu in Anhui.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, it was this religious and philanthropic dedication that established a name

¹⁰⁵ Pan and Pan, 23b-24a, (facsimile, 534-535).

¹⁰⁶ Pan and Pan, 13a, 15a, 16b, 18a, (facsimile 514, 517, 520, 523). Whether to his wife or his concubine is not said but the child was either his wife's, conceived with the concubine before he officially took her into his house, or was born premature.

¹⁰⁷ Pan and Pan, 1a, (facsimile, 469). For more about the history of Mount Fudu, see: *Fu shan zhi* 浮山志, ed. Shu Huo 疏获 (Anhui: Huangshan shuju, 1994).

for him in Jiangnan, an exalted position that years of networking in the capital, under the shadow of his accomplished father, had failed to achieve.

Privileged enough to shut out the hustle of social maneuvering he had grown so tired of, Pan's stature was guaranteed instead through acts of philanthropy with an emphasis on doing practical, concrete good. Although his devotion to Buddhism was inconsistent with terms of Confucian primacy espoused by Yu and others, Pan explained his devout Buddhism in terms of his study of Confucian doctrine. He couched it in Confucian terms and concerns for practical change as much as spiritual growth. His son records a few of Pan's favorite sayings in the 1825 entry about his newfound religious dedication, including that "Buddhist doctrine is the Confucian doctrine of yore, wherefore Confucian doctrine was Buddhist doctrine yet to come." and "The achievements of the three doctrines all arise from efforts of feet firmly planted on the ground."¹⁰⁸ Obliquely, perhaps, Pan was suggesting an evolution of Confucianism into Buddhism.¹⁰⁹ Those who may have been put off by this profound claim could find comfort in Pan's assertion that, when it ultimately mattered, the three doctrines all did practical, grounded good, no matter which one gave precedence to.

¹⁰⁸ “佛是過去之儒。儒是方來之佛。” and “三教功夫總自腳踏實地做起。” (Pan and Pan, 28b, (facsimile, 544). Special thanks to Charles B. Jones and Graham Sanders for assistance with the final translations of these aphorisms. Curiously, when Feng Guifen repeats the latter of these two aphorisms in the epitaph that opens Pan's *nianpu* (1b), the number of doctrines has been reduced to two. Whether this was a clerical error or a conscious decision to ignore either Daoism or Confucianism is unclear.

¹⁰⁹ In a sense, this is the reverse image of the polemical *Laozi huahu jing* 老子化胡經, a text which undermined Buddhism by claiming that Laozi had either taught or become the Buddha and established the barbarian religion as a lesser version of Daoism. For more on the *Huahu jing*, see Eric Zürcher, "The Conversion of the Barbarians', the early history of a Buddho-Daoist Conflict," in *The Buddhist Conflict of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 288-307. In the aphorism quoted here, it seems Pan was suggesting that Confucian doctrine laid the groundwork for Buddhism, and that like the stages of practice the Buddha went through to achieve enlightenment, Confucianism is one stage which China (or the individual practitioner) has gone through on the way to finding Buddhism.

All this is to say that that for men like Yu Zhi and the upstanding coterie of the middle-aged schoolteachers that he wrote his tales about and for, Pan Zengyi was not only an example of admirable philanthropy, but also of someone who found success and fame without having climbed very high on the civil service ladder.¹¹⁰ Pan also had expressed frustration with traditional Confucian doctrine and looked beyond it for solutions. He found Buddhism; Yu found vernacular literature. The parallel of five failed attempts at advancement only to abandon the effort and retire to a life of philanthropy, experienced first by Pan and later by Yu, albeit at different levels of the economic and social hierarchy, is also significant. In writing *Pan Gong* and elevating Pan Zengyi to the heavenly civil service, Yu made him progenitor of a lineage of benefactors, placing himself second in line.

Given the Pan family's political clout at the time of the *baojuan*'s appearance in Jiangnan, had they objected to its contents or representation of their relative, it is unlikely that *Pan Gong* could have maintained such sustained popularity in Jiangnan. A handwritten note on the cover of an 1883 Ma'nao jingfang edition by Pan Chengbi 潘承弼 (1907-2003), a famous book collector and librarian, reveals that this had become part of family lore. Dated 1939, he writes: "The drama in the first volume, with the matter of my great-uncle Gongfu appearing in a dream, is a matter of family history... This insignificant one reminisces nostalgically about his ancestor's virtue."¹¹¹ Indeed, the Pan family may even have approved of this *baojuan*, adding as it did to the widespread recognition of their family and even contributing, perhaps, to the effectiveness of the

¹¹⁰ Presumably Yu's works feature such men not just because they reflected the author himself but because he hoped that audiences would respond well to their virtuous instruction and example.

¹¹¹ "頭卷演唱 先曾伯祖功甫公托夢事是亦吾家故實...小子追懷先澤" This copy is in the collection at Peking University Library.

philanthropic rhetoric Pan's nephew used to press for tax reforms that would benefit wealthy Suzhou families during and after the war.¹¹²

In a dismal counterpart to the idealism and sincerity expressed in the *baojuan* discussed above and the paratext discussed below, the Pan family and other Suzhou elite families, many of them supporters of Yu's efforts, used their reputation as philanthropists to line their own coffers. In a case study on tax reform lobbying by antebellum and postbellum Suzhou gentry, Polachek narrates a real-life drama, featuring cast of characters that make appearances throughout Yu Zhi's collected works as preface and appendix writers. Noting the difference in representation between an idealized picture of the Tongzhi Restoration made up of "hardy backwoods gentrymen, charged with concern for their imperiled native communities and untainted by the petty careerism common to the normal run of bureaucrat... taking command of the struggle to put new life into the corruption-wracked state," and the caustic tone in which one of Feng Guifen's neighbors writes an essay accusing him of hypocrisy and greed, Polachek describes a movement in which members of the gentry sought to consolidate local power bases at the expense of the grand ideals of the Tongzhi Restoration.¹¹³ Feng, Wu Yun 吳雲 (1811-1883),¹¹⁴ Pan Zengwei 潘曾瑋 (1819-1886),¹¹⁵ and Pan Zuyin¹¹⁶ applied philanthropic rhetoric to strengthen their arguments that the most heavily taxed prefectures of the Jiangnan region,

¹¹² Polachek, 217.

¹¹³ Polachek, 214.

¹¹⁴ Wu Yun wrote the second preface to *Deyi lu* and a preface to *Xuetang riji*. For more on Wu, see Wang Erh-min 王爾敏, "Shanghai zhongwai hui fangju jingye shimo 上海中外會防局經營始末," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan suo jikan* 51, no. 1 (March 1980): 71–95.

¹¹⁵ The younger brother of Pan Zengyi. See *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*, 2:608.

¹¹⁶ Nephew of Pan Zengyi, see n. 100 above.

primarily where these men and their gentry allies lived and owned property, should have an immediate reduction in the amount of rice quota demanded of peasants and landowners.¹¹⁷ This relief, granted for three years initially, was extended for years after the war ended, to the great benefit of these Suzhou landowners, and “put great limits on what even the most idealistic of Kiangsu’s [Jiangsu] provincial intendants could do to reverse the encroachments of the Soochow [Suzhou] patriciate.¹¹⁸” In essence, the famous men who championed Yu Zhi as an exemplary *shanren* had vested interests in co-opting the language of aid and relief in order to line their own purses. The ideals of the Tongzhi reformers in Beijing, expressed in high-minded theoretical terms, were in practice stymied by Jiangsu gentry who used their charitable concerns as defenses against threats to their social and economic status rather than considering the real needs of the peasants tilling their land.

Edition history and paratext: asserting identity through print

Nevertheless, even though *Pan Gong*’s reputation as a popular *baojuan* was predicated on its protagonist’s reputation and his family’s continued prominence, it also depended on the complicated desires of countless donors balancing their sense of loss (of imperial stability, of potential career advancement, of home and family) with their hopes for restoration (of Qing supremacy, of social reputation, and of culture itself). *Pan Gong*, as a material object moving through Jiangnan in wartime, suffered destruction, loss, and recovery in tandem with its residents during successive waves of advancing and retreating military forces. In this sense, efforts to reprint it also became part of a larger effort to shore up and restore traditional values and lost

¹¹⁷ Polachek, 243, and 245.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 248.

cultural heritage. Against the fear of social collapse, a fresh edition of *Pan Gong* was a measurable sign of hope, both in the ability for concrete reconstruction and restoration, and of the abstract promise of preventing future disasters. It was incredibly popular. Lin Tongfu's 李同福 1857 preface reports that demand for the first volume of *Pan Gong* in Suzhou and Changzhou was so high when it came out in 1853 that the blocks wore out within a year.¹¹⁹

Many *Pan Gong* editions include pages of prefaces and illustrations, emphasizing that those who reprinted it were eager to link their names to this text.¹²⁰ This suggests that *Pan Gong* was a higher status work than *Liu Xiang*, to which such additions were rare, seemingly unnecessary. The importance of *Liu Xiang* rested in the ability of the story to provide the fundamentals of lay Buddhist practice to audiences who themselves could not have read Liezheng's literary preface or Li Xiyuan's allusive afterword. With *Pan Gong*, the act of adding commentary when reproducing the work became significant because the audience among whom it became popular was clearly both literate and attentive to the social meanings of contributing paratext. The edition most influenced by Yu Zhi himself, published by Dejian zhai in 1858, included three illustrations (one of which is Pan Zengyi's *nianpu* portrait) and three prefaces, two of which were signed by Yu Zhi using his studio name. Editions published elsewhere in Jiangnan in the same year do not share the same paratextual materials and have slightly modified the contents of the core text for brevity.¹²¹ Later versions add their own paratext, subtracting from his or from the other early

¹¹⁹ Li Tongfu's preface to *Pan Gong* is included in many editions, including the Songyun xuan edition cited below.

¹²⁰ Although I have seen three different editions dated 1858, I have seen no verifiably earlier editions of the work.

¹²¹ For example, the 1858 edition published in Jinling Dayuecheng 金閶大越城 by Jiangde 內講德齋書房 includes only two couplets of poetry after each of the twelve good sayings, while the edition from Dejian zhai has four couplets. For example, for good saying number five, that baby girls should not be drowned, the poem that follows goes, “從來男女本天生，是男是女一般情。淹死他時終討命，生下孩兒難長成。一命須當一命抵。將

editions, positioning themselves around the core text in stances that reflect differing priorities and perspectives.

These paratextual materials prove common and provide highly informative glimpses into the motives and priorities, not just of Yu Zhi, but also of the many named individuals who added their voices of praise to the text as it was reprinted across southern China. Although perhaps there were cases in which, through the use of *baojuan*, Yu managed to reach out to new audiences who were more Buddhist than Daoist, that is, more like the deified protagonist Pan Zengyi than the author himself, close examination of paratextual variants reveals that, for the most part, rather than expanding his reach, *Pan Gong* was most successful among the demographic of men just like the author himself.¹²² The paratext shows that there was an aspirational aspect to reproductions of *Pan Gong*, a degree of social capital that *Liu Xiang zhong juan* and *Xigu* certainly did not carry, and *Liu Xiang baojuan* held only to a limited degree. Reprinting *Pan Gong* was about more than its contents; it was also about identity creation. Long after the immediacy of poetry about the brutal fall of Nanjing had faded from relevancy, *Pan Gong* still remained important because its broader contents figured into the identity that donors sought to assert for themselves.

男抵女也該應。（急速要）勸人勿溺親生女，（乃可以）將功贖罪免災星。” whereas the other edition, also published in Suzhou, simply reads “從來男女本天生，是男是女一般情。淹死他時終討命，生下孩兒難長成。” Interestingly enough, this appears not to have been a woodblock and paper saving issue as the version with shorter poems includes only nine lines of twenty characters each per page, in contrast with ten lines of twenty two characters each in the longer text. The shortened version thus reaches 24 folio pages long, while the longer version of the text is only 22 folio pages long.

¹²² One edition, with a preface dated to 1870, seems an exception to this case. The paratext frames the *baojuan* between traditionally Buddhist materials. The usual prefaces have been stripped away and a new preface in clerical style script added, signed by Chen Guangrong 陳光榮 (which is a rather common name in Qing gazetteers) from Jiyang 暨陽 (an alternate name for Jiangyin county, directly south across the Yangtze from Jinjiang, where Mark Bender did his fieldwork on present-day *baojuan* performances). The preface is standard fare. Following the full text of *Pan Gong*, printed in such a way as to cram one and a half couplets per line rather than a single one, the edition continues with the Heart Sutra, the Guanshiyin Sutra (an alternate version of the *Liuzi shenzhou wangjing* 六字神呪王經 according to the entry by Charles Muller on “Guanshiyin jing 觀世音經” at *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, [www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?89.xml+id\(%27b89c0-4e16-97f3-7d93%27\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?89.xml+id(%27b89c0-4e16-97f3-7d93%27))), and assorted short dhāraṇī.

In this case, *Pan Gong* is also a producerly text, inviting its readers to make it their own through its physical recreation. Whereas adaptations in other oral performance genres – Fuzhou *pinghua*, Shanghai *yueju* – spun out of *Liu Xiang*, the producerly readers of *Pan Gong* made the paratext their realm of popular production.

Most prefaces to *Pan Gong* nod to the virtuous benefactor who spearheaded reprinting the text, a rhetorical flourish customary in the latter half of most *baojuan* prefaces.¹²³ Rather than analyzing too many of the varied but formulaic prefaces that were attached to *Pan Gong* editions, we should briefly examine a set of commonly reprinted opening inscriptions and the two detail-rich prefaces with early dates (1855 and 1857) that had staying power through many successive editions even as other prefaces came and went. Beginning on the reverse side of the cover or title page, readers first encounter four neatly written three-character proverbs attributed to Guandi 關帝.¹²⁴ Following this is Hong Fusheng’s signed and dated “Hundred Character Inscription of Five Good Vows.” The first four vows expand on each of Guandi’s admonitions, while the final vow ties them all together guiding readers to promise to preserve good hearts 存

¹²³ For example, in a preface dated 1858, reprinted in an 1862 edition from Tainan, Taiwan, the writer explains how the original blocks were kept in Hangzhou and Suzhou and conditions made it too difficult to print there and safely transport the books out, so new blocks had been commissioned. Where these new blocks were carved is forever obscured by the writer’s concision however, as he recommended that gentlemen interested in obtaining their own copies for distribution come with paper and supplies to Sentai General Store (森泰廣貨店) in Hezhen (河鎮 lit. “River town”), which could refer to one of three towns in Anhui and Jiangsu. In another, dated 1863, the preface writer describes that he understands that the older blocks, kept in Hangzhou, had been destroyed, but Jiu Tongzhi (鳩同志) donated the money to have them recarved.

¹²⁴ “Read good books, say good speech, do good deeds, be a good person.” “讀好書。說好話。行好事。做好人。” The earliest instance I can find of this phrase is in Lu Zhan 廬湛 and Wang Yushu 王玉樹, eds., *Wu sheng Guan Zhuangniu yi ji tu zhi* 武聖關壯繆遺蹟圖誌, (1921), 6:4a-b, a mid-Qing text revised and expanded during the late Qing. Some editions of *Pan Gong* advertise it as specially written by a named calligrapher Zhu Tailai 祝泰來, about whom I have found no biographical data. The 1862 edition published by Songyun Xuan 松雲軒 in Taiwanfu 台灣府 (present day Tainan) has recarved each proverb in a different calligraphic style, in essence advertising the skill of its calligraphers and block carvers. Little drawings that fill what in other editions is simply blank space below poems or at the end of volumes act as further stylistic flourishes unique to this edition alone and testaments to this frontier publisher’s skill.

好心。Following the hundred-character inscription, Hong's preface begins with text that he says comes from the *Guansdi jueshi jing* 關帝覺世經, printed in oversize characters that he recommends copying out for use as a spring couplet in devotees' homes.¹²⁵ He also recommends that devotees copy out his "Hundred Character Inscription" and hang it in a prominent place in the central hall. In connecting *Pan Gong* with the cult of Guandi, Hong further emphasizes its connection to Confucian movements of the mid-nineteenth-century. During the Taiping War, the Qing promoted Guandi to the same level in the register of official sacrifices as Confucius in an attempt at what Duara refers to as an "massive effort" to Confucianize the deity.¹²⁶ Replacing the prefaces Yu composed using Buddhist language and the image of Guanyin on her boat of mercy, this popularly reproduced Guandi-oriented preface turns the reach of *Pan Gong* inward towards the community of petty philanthropists among whom Yu's other works already circulated.

Li Tongfu's 1857 preface usually comes next. Although it is titled "Written after Hong Fusheng's Hundred Character Inscription," the main focus is placed on *Pan Gong* itself as a text, not Hong's inscription or Guandi reverence. Li goes into great detail about the text's transmission up to the point of his writing.¹²⁷ Li describes how in 1855, while in Hangzhou, he first glimpsed Volume 1 of *Pan Gong*, which had been available in the area around Suzhou and

¹²⁵ "滿腔仁慈加福增壽。一切善事添子益孫。" Hong, "Hundred Character Inscription of Five Good Vows," in *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan quanji* 潘公免災寶卷全集, (Jiangxi: Jiayu fang Yili zhai kezidian, 1858), preface material, 1b.

¹²⁶ See Prasenjit Duara, "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (1988): 778–95, doi:10.2307/2057852, for more on the development of the Guandi cult. For its rise in popularity in the Ming and Qing, see in particular 782-784.

¹²⁷ While precious for its detail, it is also tragic for the possible fate of its composer, who the Nanchang gazetteer names as having died in Fujian in 1858 when bandits invaded the city in which he was supervising military matters. "李同福從九職咸豐八年在浦城豫防局勦辦軍務禦賊城破被殺福建巡撫徐題奏矜卹" *Nanchang gazetteer*, 66 vols. (1873), 46:60b.

Changzhou already in 1853. People vied to obtain copies such that, within months, the blocks had worn out from use. Whether or not this was artistic hyperbole meant to enhance the value of the text that he was prefacing, Li's attention to detail on the text's history still indicates it made a strong impression on him from the moment he first encountered it. He also records the history of his encounters with the middle and final volumes of the work.¹²⁸ The latter half of his preface expresses his wishes that the text will soon be known all over and that readers and listeners will swear vows to do good. In a lyrical conclusion, Li describes these vows as extending from one or two people out to millions. These are all extensions, like ripples in a pond, of the vow that led Hong Fusheng to compose the preceding paratextual materials, which itself is a result of the great vow Guandi himself swore to admonish and instruct the world.¹²⁹

Cherishing grains: a story for women

Xigu, another of Yu's *baojuan* and first published around the same time as the three-volume *Pan Gong* editions were coming together across Jiangnan, provides many illuminating points of contrast to *Pang Gong*. A narrative text featuring a female protagonist, like *Liu Xiang*, *Xigu* confines its concerns to the intimate space of the home and the village, not empire-wide catastrophe. Its preface (but nowhere in its contents) presents this short work as a natural companion to the *Pang Gong* by directly referring to the discussion of grain-cherishing

¹²⁸ Li Tongfu “Shu Hong Fusheng wu hao yuan bai zi ming hou 書洪福生五好願百字銘後” in *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan*. (Taiwanfu: Songyun xuan, 1863), 5b. Li writes that by fall 1854 Hong Fusheng and Ye Zhaifeng donated funds to have the single-volume *baojuan* printed with the opening inscription of Guandi's proverbs and the prefatory materials written by Hong. In 1856, Li became aware of the middle volume, which Hong and Ye reprinted and distributed with the first volume. He notes that in the same area as before both the middle and final volume were already in circulation in 1854. Finally, in the spring of 1857, Hong and Ye were able to obtain all three volumes and carve blocks for a printing of all three together.

¹²⁹ Li, 7b.

societies in its final volume, even though these works were incredibly dissimilar in form, approach, and audience. Supporting the theory presented above that the varying paratextual materials included with *Pan Gong* were tied to the text's value in displaying their writers' philanthropic credentials to other highly literate men, editions of *Xigu* generally include only a single folio page of paratext, half of which is occupied by an illustration rather than words. This work was meant for women to listen to, not men to posture with, read, or admire. The unsigned preface, on the verso, mimics the large character, simple style of the unsigned preface in the 1858 *Pan Gong* edition published by Dejian zhai. It briefly explains that this story is “the number one book for advocating morality.”¹³⁰ The preface also makes explicit the karmic arithmetic that should drive its replication. “One who is able to print ten books and give them away can be absolved from all the disasters in one's life. Those who print a hundred books and give them away can absolve the disasters of their whole families. If you can recite it a hundred times, this also can absolve all the disasters of one's life. Reciting it one thousand times also can absolve the disasters of an entire family.”¹³¹ *Xigu* asked little of its potential donors, offering them little incentive to widely reprint it, given that merely ten volumes were enough to absolve an individual of a lifetime of disasters. *Pan Gong*, at twice the length, sold for between sixty-eight and eighty-five cash in the late 1850s. Ten volumes of *Xigu*, a significantly shorter work, would probably have cost a donor little more than 400 cash. This is an amount smaller than even the smallest donations from married women recorded on the donor list that closes the 1869 edition of *Liu*

¹³⁰ “為勸善中第一好書” *Xigu*, ib.

¹³¹ *Xigu*, ib.

Xiang and slightly more than half the amount that *Xigu*'s protagonist Granny Wang pays to a destitute widow to glean fallen grains after the harvest.¹³²

Zhongguo baojuan zongmu lists 12 editions of *Xigu*, eight of which are woodblock prints published between 1858 and 1909.¹³³ The remaining four entries include one recent reprint and three hand copied manuscripts, all undated. This limited data shows that *Xigu* attained moderate but limited success and did inspire some degree of devotion among audiences in Jiangnan. The three extant manuscript editions illustrate that *Xigu* was valuable for its performability, in one of two senses, either or both of which may be true. A manuscript copy might indicate a personal copy made for a performer of the text, a script to aid in oral performance. Manuscript copies might also indicate performance of religious devotion by copying out the text for the sake of creating merit. Even so, its mark on the popular culture, particularly of the women for whom it was written, was minimal, at best.

In the creation of *Xigu*, Yu Zhi rewrote and recast his earlier writings in the shape of a compelling, complex short text, one that reveals the particularly powerful features of *baojuan* that Yu hoped to harness. In adapting a play into a *baojuan*, changes in plot make clear the potential inherent in *baojuan* performance that made it an attractive genre of vernacular literature to further spread Yu's ideals. After all, despite the Buddhist trappings of Putuo Shan and Guanyin, this work concerns the fundamentally Confucian values that were at the heart of Yu Zhi's literary efforts. *Xigu* embodies loss and restoration, themes that echo throughout his work, unsurprising given the time of their composition during and after the Taiping War. Yet given the publication

¹³² Granny Wang pays the widow 700 cash; *Xigu*, 8a-8b. See Chapter 1, Appendix 3 for a discussion of the size of donations to reprint this 1869 edition of *Liu Xiang* and the value of those donations at that time.

¹³³ This work falls between the widely reprinted *Liu Xiang*, with 42 editions listed in the catalog, and *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*, not listed at all.

date of the earliest edition of *Xigu* –1858 – perhaps the real surprise is that war receives no mention at all. Even so, an unspoken sense of Yu’s understanding of the war runs throughout in the form of heavenly punishment for sins, known and unknown, and the need for repentance to secure a future free from further disasters. At a pivotal moment in the plot when the main antagonist, Squire Chen, misses his chance for redemption and seals his terrible fate for good, Yu’s philosophy about the Taiping War and the appropriate response to its cataclysmic destruction is laid out the most clearly. Suffering is heavenly punishment for sin and a warning from heaven that scant time is left in which to repent before the full punishment is meted out. The redemptive performances that Yu seems to have hoped to inspire by *Xigu*, discussed in detail below, were ones within a space he personally could not access – the women’s quarters, particularly at the moment of childbirth – and ones that even if successful would have left less of an abiding mark than the self fashioning of literary men and *Pan Gong*.

Prescriptions for Cherishing Grain: Staged and Unstaged Performance

Xigu features four main characters from whom moral lessons can be drawn: a kitchen charwoman named Granny Wang 王老娘, her employer Squire Chen 陳員外, and two of his serving men: Zhou Fengshan 周鳳山 and Jiang Futian 蔣甫田. *Xigu* displays a close relationship to Yu Zhi’s morality drama *Lao nian fu* 老年福 (*Blessings in Old Age*), sharing sections of dialogue and songs that match word for word and plots that, from the simpler drama to the longer, more complex *baojuan*, fundamentally remain the same. These parallels, a direct reference to *Pan Gong* in *Xigu*’s brief introduction, and the first publication at Dejian zhai in Suzhou, are the primary pieces of evidence that support attributing this *baojuan* to Yu Zhi. In both the *baojuan* and the drama, the elderly female protagonist of each work is richly rewarded for her dedication to

honoring grains while her dissolute employer (surnamed Lu in the drama) is burned to death as heaven's punishment for his many sins and insincere attempt at earning merit to wipe his heavenly record clean. In the *baojuan*, the additional characters, Zhou and Jiang, fill out the spectrum between Granny Wang's extreme goodness and Squire Chen's extreme badness with less intense examples of religious dedication and negligence.

The first half of the text is spent delineating the full extent of behaviors associated with the practice of cherishing grains. It introduces the sound of thunder as a precursor to being struck down by heaven for treating grains with disrespect, particularly with regard to fecal contamination: a half-eaten bun dropped down an outhouse hole, for instance. Unhusked rice must be carefully picked out before cooking because, due to its indigestibility, these grains pass through the body and into the outhouse, where their presence upsets heaven.¹³⁴ We are also introduced to Zhou and Jiang, a pair of average men, one of whom respects Granny Wang's moral efforts and helps her while also dedicating his free time to gathering written paper, the other who believes that doing good makes no difference in his eventual fate.

The second half of the *baojuan* concerns Squire Chen's decision to deliver a large donation of rice and silver to the monks on the holy island of Putuo, hoping for a blessing in return to cure his wife's illness. This donation is purely transactional; Chen speaks of it in terms of buying heaven's favor. Wang begs to come with him so that she might donate the small measure of unhusked (and therefore indigestible) rice she saved from picking through uncooked rice before making dinner for the family. Chen, Wang, Zhou and Jiang all travel by boat to the holy island, where Chen discovers that the monks will have nothing to do with his beneficent gift because it

¹³⁴ Extraordinarily, according to the text, these undigested grains salvaged after cleaning the outhouse can be taken medicinally, and cure Granny Wang of a chronic illness. Once washed and dried in the sun, they are imbued with healing power, perhaps through the merit earned in rescuing them from pollution.

was motivated by greed, but welcome Wang's donation with solicitous gratitude because it was motivated by pure devotion. Called out for his selfish charity, Chen fails to realize that he is being given a chance to reform his behavior. He heaps abuse on Granny Wang once they return home, and lightning strikes him down where he stands. Upon the death of her master, Wang moves in with her son's impoverished family, but their fortunes begin to change due to their continued dedication to cherishing grains and papers. Eventually, heaven even bestows riches upon them when they discover gold under their house after fixing a broken wall. Granny Wang lives to be 100, surrounded by respectful grandchildren.

Lao nian fu was among the first set of Yu's morality plays, published in 1860. Though published after *Xigu*, it is likely that the play was written before the *baojuan*. The *baojuan* has features of the narrative that seem uncharacteristically play-like, with Granny Wang introducing herself as if she has just come on stage when she first appears in the narrative, and extended sections of dialogue mimic the quick back and forth of spoken parts in traditional theater. Running only seventeen folio pages in comparison with the *baojuan*'s thirty-four folio pages, the stage play is at the same time more focused and more scattered than the *baojuan*. The play's plot is simple and linear, beginning with Granny Wang at home in Squire Lu's kitchen. The details of her grain collecting unfold in this domestic space that only shifts when Squire Lu decides to visit Putuo Shan and Granny Wang convinces him to take her along. It ends with three climactic moments: the monks at Putuo accept Granny Wang's meager rice offering but reject Squire Lu's overgenerous donation; Squire Lu dies dramatically; and Granny Wang and her son uncover riches buried in a field as a heavenly reward for her virtue. The seventeen pages of dialogue and song are significantly padded with colorful exchanges that do not advance the plot but add entertainment value. For example, the final scene of silver discovery is played for laughs, begun

by setting off firecrackers backstage to signal the arrival of the God of Wealth. Granny Wang's son, played by the clown, runs onstage afterwards, wailing that his vegetable field is being invaded by white rats coming out of a mysterious hole in the ground. Upon excavating the hole, he finds "horse hooves," a common shape for silver ingots but mystifying to the ignorant man. Granny Wang recognizes them as silver, upon which her son exclaims, "But how could silver ingots grow when we didn't plant silver ingot seedlings?" followed by suggesting that this windfall is ill-gotten, not heaven sent. Expected by the conventions of the stage, the clown's joking nonetheless subtly undermines the morality play's earnestness.

In crossing genres to become a *baojuan*, the same story takes on new elements and becomes more than just a tale about meticulous rice collection and the importance of one's underlying intentions when trying to earn heavenly merit. Unconstrained by the size of a theater troupe, role types, and the realities of staging, in *Xigu* Granny Wang's tale of honoring grains grows to fill the broader narrative space, involving a larger and better developed cast of characters, many more teachable moments, and no attempts at humor. In terms of adding another character, instead of Granny Wang herself sneaking away from her work in the kitchen to sweep fallen grains up during the harvest, in the *baojuan* she pawns some of her clothes in order to get 700 cash (for the approximate value of this, see discussion of money in Chapter 1, Appendix 3) to pay a destitute widow named Zhou 周 to sweep grains for her. No extra actor is required by the addition of this character to the *baojuan* as it would for the drama, and this moment now better illustrates one of the solutions Yu Zhi proposes for effective use of one's philanthropic resources: hiring poor men and women to do the menial, detail-oriented work of

gathering grains and written paper, thus earning double merit for layered acts of charity.¹³⁵ The *baojuan* also features an extensive section on the cleaning of outhouses, for example, which would be difficult to dramatically act out on stage. Two detailed scenes contrast the professional night soil collectors hired by Granny Wang to clean Squire Chen's outhouses with an enthusiastic but bumbling local man who, not knowing precautions like stuffing his nostrils with garlic and drinking warm wine first, almost dies in his attempt to clean undigested grain from his outhouse. Anticipating that *baojuan* audiences would respond to Granny Wang's example with enthusiastic imitation, Yu Zhi is careful to instruct them in the finer points of the benefits and risks involved in this dirty business.

The incident in which Granny Wang finds herself miraculously transported home from Putuo Shan via Guanyin's magic further illustrates the potential of a *baojuan* to include dramatic details that further the plot and strengthen the tale's impact. In the stage play, Guanyin enters the stage briefly and pronounces her intention to help Granny Wang, who Squire Lu has abandoned out of anger at the monks' preference for her paltry grain offering over his extravagant one. She dispatches a heavenly attendant to help Granny Wang return home. Coming upon the abandoned woman, the attendant promises to assist her if only she will close her eyes for a moment. When she opens them, the attendant has disappeared and Granny Wang exclaims that she has found herself at home once again. It is easy to imagine how the limitations of staging pared the miraculous journey down to this single moment. In contrast, on Granny Wang's journey home in *Xigu*, Guanyin herself appears in the disguise of an old fisherwoman, offering to take her home. Once sitting comfortably in the boat, Guanyin asks Wang to close her eyes for a moment, and in an instant, they are back at the Chen family mansion. Drawing on

¹³⁵ “宜方惜穀養老之法。另僱貧老男婦一二。專司收拾遺粒。打掃內外。以免以免拋零。一年所費工食有限。既惜福。又養老。一舉而兩善備焉。” Yu, *Deyi lu* 12:29b and Yu, *Xuetang riji*, 17b.

common imagery of Guanyin disguising herself as a fisherwoman or possessing a magic boat that can traverse great distances in an instant, this scene in the *baojuan* resonates with familiar literary tropes that audiences would have easily recognized and identified with in ways that were missing in the staged version.¹³⁶

Finally, and most significantly, in *Lao nian fu*, Granny Wang's background that led to her speech on the importance of honoring grains, with which the play opens, is sketched out in only the broadest strokes. Simply, she is an elderly widow whose husband died while she was still young, poor enough that she needs to support herself by working in her old age. Her motive for collecting wasted grains is uncomplicated: she sincerely wants to earn merit to ensure a better rebirth. But what is missing is the impetus for the specific act. Why grains? Why not reciting Amitâbha Buddha's name or collecting written paper?

Loss and Restoration: Cherishing grains and babies

In *Xigu*, roughly the same plot, embellished with such details as the lack of staging allowed Yu Zhi to insert, unfolds within the space of a new frame story. The tragedies of Granny Wang's life began after she drowned her third-born daughter at the insistence of her mother-in-law, setting in motion the heavenly punishments that led to her poverty. She still regrets this infant's death even after she finds happiness with her son's family in her old age. References to infanticide and regret bookend the simple tale about Wang's painstaking devotion to cherishing grains, turning it into another piece of anti-infanticide literature.¹³⁷ In translating the tale from a

¹³⁶ For more on Fish-basket Guanyin, see Chün-fang Yü. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. p. 432-438. Guanyin is herself compared with a boat that ferries the suffering to safety in a gatha published in an early nineteenth century text, quoted by Yü on 83.

¹³⁷ Yu Zhi was famous, in part, for his involvement with the anti-infanticide movements in southern China that produced this kind of literature. Meyer-Fong, 37.

play to a *baojuan*, expanding the plot with additional details about grain cherishing practices would not have immediately suggested such an addition. Infanticide and grain cherishing are not linked in other morality literature. This detail of Granny Wang's past infanticide is more than embellishment on the order of a secondary character or a magical flight through space on Guanyin's boat. Instead, this was a calculated, considered addition to the story; one that suggests Yu had a greater purpose for this *baojuan* than simply reproducing his rhetoric on the importance of cherishing grains. Drawing on the performative potential of *baojuan*, Yu is making an attempt to recruit audience members into his vocal anti-infanticide movement. It is a demonstrable effort to use the potentially destabilizing power of vernacular performance literature to reach into women's inner chambers and inspire socially stabilizing moral values.

As a consequence of the infant daughter's death, a few years later, her mother-in-law and oldest son both sicken and die. Her husband also dies of unspecified causes. Yet Wang is given a second chance when she learns that she can atone for her karmic demerit by carefully honoring grains, assuring that not a single tiny one is wasted. Although the connection between infant death and cherishing grains is not explicitly made clear, implicitly the relationship is obvious enough. The *baojuan* (and play) open by observing how grains are a source of life giving sustenance without which no one would live. Wang repays the debt created by denying her daughter the chance to live by collecting, grain by grain, the gifts heaven sends to sustain life. With her knowledge of cherishing grains, she rescues a destitute widow from starvation, saves a careless bun-dropping maid named Chunmei from death, cures herself of a long-term illness, and is able to contribute a widow's mite of rice to the holy monks of Putuo Shan, earning their respect and gratitude. Wang's acts of merit directly sustain life, making up for her single act of destroying it.

But still, why make the exemplary protagonist into a murderer, rather than invent a less central character like a wife for Zhou or Jiang, Squire Chen's serving men? Aside from further emphasizing the preservationist theme that pervades the text – not only grains and written paper, but also baby girls, completing the trifecta of seemingly disposable objects that ought to be saved – of what narrative value is portraying the preachy protagonist as an infanticidal mother? After surveying typical anti-infanticide tales, including those distributed by Yu Zhi, King stated, “women... *never* got second chances,” while Mungello asserted that “mother's voices are so absent from these tales that it is hard to know what their thoughts and feelings were.”¹³⁸ What does my discovery of another, earlier example of an infanticidal mother who does not die and lives to tell the tale mean about these conclusions drawn by Mungello and King about this genre? More importantly, what was Yu trying to do by twisting the expected fate for an infanticidal mother, an expectation he otherwise reinforced again and again in the preponderance of his anti-infanticide literature?¹³⁹

On the most basic level of reasoning, in terms of narrative *baojuan*, it would be difficult to feature a female protagonist who is killed by heavenly justice at the beginning of the tale.¹⁴⁰ However, there is more going on here than narrative expediency. Mothers who live are related to difference in function between *baojuan* and other morality literature, specifically their ability to make producers of their audience members, requiring their active engagement with the story and its moral implication for their lives. For a *baojuan* to fulfill its function as didactic literature that

¹³⁸ King, 49. Mungello, 20.

¹³⁹ For example, the snake-baby tale examined in Chapter 2 appears in the following works written and compiled by Yu: *Deyi lu* 1 24b. *Xuetang riji*, 35b, and *Yu guai tu*.

¹⁴⁰ Although this would not be impossible, as *baojuan* with female protagonists who visit the courts of hell and are later resurrected do exist, the chief of which is *Xiangshan baojuan*. *Xiumü*, addressed in the conclusion, also includes this motif.

continues to entertain its audience, it has to be able to both convince its listeners/readers of their errors while reassuring them that the karmic debts they have created are not insurmountable. They are, instead, debts that can be repaid by performing the activities specifically described within the text *and* participating in reproducing the text, either by republication or recitation.

Granny Wang in *Xigu* and the two mothers from the snake-baby episode of *Liu Xiang zhong juan* go on living after murdering their daughters. These women are only made aware of the sinfulness of their actions later by clerics who come along and explain them, allowing the women to then seek redemption. Their stories become tales of heavenly mercy instead of punishment. These ignorantly sinful women and the wandering clerics become proxies for the *baojuan* audience and narrator. When such tales are performed, the narrator (even if she or he is a layperson) takes on this role of the cleric, explaining morals to an audience that may include individuals who realize that they too have been living sinfully, amassing a karmic debt that heaven will collect on sooner or later. Within the seemingly simple, black-and-white moral framework repeated throughout most *baojuan*, “good bears good returns, evil bears evil returns 善有善報,惡有惡報,” heaven’s delay in executing its justice provides a gray area in which repentance is possible. The *baojuan* is the vehicle of delivering its listeners’ second chances, even if they are murderers.

Infanticidal mothers who live are an integral part of the work that a narrative *baojuan* does to and for its audience. In addition to generating life-saving merit through textual performance, such *baojuan* featured exemplary protagonists meant to inspire further meritorious actions in the audience. As Xiangnü herself demonstrated in the story of her exemplary religious life, being inspired by a *baojuan* performance did not translate into mimetic imitation. Instead, in that text as

in *Xigu*, the protagonist is responsible for modeling a number of strategies for creating merit and avoiding demerits that audiences can apply to their daily lives.

Stories of women who die after drowning daughters inspire only fear (or a sense of moral superiority) and leave no room for imitation. In both *baojuan* exceptions to the rule, guilty women who should have died instead become vocal campaigners. In *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, Xiangnü meets the mother-who-lives preaching on the street, flanked by her mute husband, performing penance for her infanticide by speaking up about the reprieve heaven has given her. In *Xigu*, Granny Wang, likewise, is comfortable in her old age but not overwhelmingly rewarded by heaven with hidden wealth until she takes to the streets of her village and advises young women not to make the same mistake she did. For any woman reading or listening to *Xigu*, the *baojuan* itself, as sounded text and object in hand, is a practical solution to the evangelical imperative of anti-infanticide rhetoric. Having been given a second chance, exemplary fictional figures become street preachers. Inspired average women then had a variety of opportunities to imitate them, whether it be mimetically by directly speaking about their experiences of infanticide, financially by sponsoring the recitation or republication of the *baojuan* itself, or, if possible given their own constrained lives, privately by allowing their next infant daughter a chance to live.

Xigu is one of the few pieces of anti-infanticide literature in which the mother does not bear the brunt of karmic punishment *and* is given a voice with which to speak about her experience in the first person. However, as with the mothers in the tale of the snake-baby that I explored in the previous chapter, Granny Wang's first-person voice cannot be taken as one of a woman speaking from authentic true experience. Infanticide was almost never addressed in sources written by Chinese women or sources that recorded historically verifiable individuals.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ King, 13.

The speaking mothers of anti-infanticide *baojuan* still exist within the framework of anti-infanticide literature created by men for the sake of convincing audiences that the practice should be abandoned.¹⁴² Though their existence requires that we take a step back from saying that such literature was, as a rule, concerned with depicting punishments dramatically enacted on unredeemable female bodies, that step back should not go along with assuming that women were held in higher regard than we once assumed. A handful of exceptions to the previously pervasive exaction of painful retribution on the bodies of mothers, regardless of acknowledged social and economic pressures, does not lessen underlying reality of women's low hierarchal position and these works' assumption of female ignorance in these fraught moments.

It could be argued that in short pieces like the four panels on the Dejian zhai anti-infanticide broadsheet, the two pages in *Xuetang riji*, or the classical-language anecdotes in collections of morality literature cited by Palatre, Mungello, and King, the shock value of graphic punishments is merely an aid to making effective, pithy statements discouraging the killing of infants. The mothers bear the burden of this message on their bodies without the need for words and such works leave no time for the mothers to speak. But if silent women were solely the result of the necessity for brevity, then longer form anti-infanticide works like *Yu guai tu*, Yu Zhi's snake-baby play, would be more likely to broaden the experience of infanticide to include the most active character of the birthing room – the laboring mother herself. Yet this is most certainly not the case. In *Yu guai tu*, the pregnant mother begins with a small speaking role, but she is reduced to crying about the pain, then onomatopoeic wailing and finally unconscious

¹⁴² Such that it was actually a habitual practice is up for debate, but it certainly did occur. For a consideration of the limited hard data on infanticide during the Qing, see James Lee, Cameron Campbell, and Guofu Tan. "Infanticide and Family Planning in Late Imperial China: The Price and Population History of Rural Liaoning, 1774-1873" in *Chinese History in Economic Perspective*. ed. Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.), 145-176.

silence during the birth of her monster-child.¹⁴³ Though the stage directions indicate that she recovers from her faint and lives, she has no further speaking lines in the play and may as well be dead.

The shift to the *baojuan* genre, not the expanded length, is still the likeliest reason for creating a speaking role for an infanticidal mother. Plays, we should note, were performed for a passive audience. Although the audience may well have provided commentary on the scenes playing out before them, they would have been unlikely to pick up a script and become actors themselves in another staging of the work. In contrast, the audience of a *baojuan* could very well become performers of the texts themselves. Listening to a *baojuan* was a social experience that created room for a variety of social actions. *Baojuan*, by nature of their performability and the flexibility in the identity of their performers and performance contexts, are works that empower speech. Passive listening to the text creates some merit, but actively propagating it is worth even more. A *baojuan* that fulfills its purpose is a producerly work, whereas *baojuan* that do not inspire rereading and recreation remain, in the end, readerly works that fall through the cracks in library catalogues, like *Liu Xiang zhong juan*.

Even so, Granny Wang's first words in the text acknowledge her womanly limitations before reassuring the audience that she still knows a thing or two about right behavior. In small, vindicating ways in the first half of the text, and in the great moment of vindication upon her visit to Putuo, the story establishes that she was right all along about the value of cherishing grains. But her ultimate success only comes at the close of the *baojuan*, where for all her efforts to cherish

¹⁴³ She is married to the clown figure, whose role includes cracking jokes at her expense about her impending labor by comparing the size of her belly to a chamber pot. One wonders if the women in the audience who the play was supposed to inspire were amused. At the same time, the comparison is a disturbing foreshadowing of the fetus' potential fate should it be born female – it is just the right size to fit into the waiting chamber pot of water.

grains and repay her karmic debt, the loss of her infant still rankles. It is her speaking, not her gathering, that finally brings her peace.

Buried behind the language of female ignorance that opens the *baojuan* is the idea that, once enlightened, women serve as the best source of instruction to other women. Motivated by loss that no amount of meticulous preservation can allay, Granny Wang becomes a vocal activist at the village level, for a moment becoming a female avatar of Yu Zhi himself. She calls attention to the infanticide she committed out of ignorance, pleading with young pregnant women to observe how the loss of a girl who lived for less than a day rippled out into the loss of her first son, the loss of her husband, and the loss her status as a woman with a household of her own. She says, “I am someone who has already suffered for my sins, everyone should take me as an example.”¹⁴⁴ She urges them to come to her for help if poverty makes feeding another mouth onerous, promising that “even though I am powerless, I will still do my best.”¹⁴⁵ Translation hides the powerful parallelism of this pithy statement: “我雖無力。尚能勉力。” Granny Wang can reach audiences that Yu, for all his maleness and knowing much more than a thing or two about propriety, cannot. This covert sort of empowerment inherent to *baojuan* is what Yu Zhi is looking to harness here, in *Xigu*, and in a sense, all his popular didactic literature. But how much could these socially powerless mothers actually do? What power had *baojuan* endowed?

King astutely observes the difficulty of creating an infanticide scenario that also included a good mother. In the ninety-three morality tales she surveyed in her research, not one mother is rewarded for saving a daughter, although she might benefit from the blessings heaven showers down on her virtuous husband if he proves the deciding factor in letting the girl live. If pressured

¹⁴⁴ “我是過來人親身受報。各位當把我做前車之鑒。”*Xigu*, 33a.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33a.

by her mother-in-law or husband, a filial wife could not very well oppose their authority for the sake of the new lowest status member of the family.¹⁴⁶ Therefore in every case where a girl dies, the mother does too, silently bearing the weight of heaven's wrath whether she had a choice in the matter or not. Though it seems impossible to conceive of how a woman who commits infanticide can still be innocent, I believe that in *Xigu* and the figure of Granny Wang, there is a real example of how a moralist could reconcile infanticide with giving mothers a second chance.

Granny Wang introduces herself as a woman whose suffering is the result of giving into the pressure of her mother-in-law to drown her third daughter at birth. This testimony about her experience drowning her daughter, like the experiences shared in *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*, gains power from its first person voice and its inclusion of the supposed inner thoughts and feelings of the usually silent infanticidal mother. She portrays her younger self as not really understanding the great wrong she had committed in drowning her third daughter.

Wang describes being torn between her mother-in-law's derisive inducement to drown the infant and the midwife's insistent pleas to let her live. "When I heard it, my heart was completely distraught. But I could do nothing but harden my heart and drown the living daughter I'd given birth to."¹⁴⁷ Translating the final moments of her daughter's brief life, as I do here, diminishes the impact of the original text, which gives great weight to the *life* of that baby girl, cut short by a cold basin of water. In the space of nine characters it calls attention to the infant's helplessness (把), the action of her mother in laboring to bring her to life (生下), the potential of her life as a child (女孩), the wriggling vitality of her small form (活活), the moment of drowning (淹), and the life which ends abruptly (死). The sentence ends on the word "death,"

¹⁴⁶ King, 47-48.

¹⁴⁷ “我一時聽了。心中十分懊惱。不得也硬了心腸。把生下的女孩。活活淹死。” *Xigu*, 3a.

illustrating with brutal finality the stillness of Third Daughter's corpse. This moment of infanticide is brilliantly detailed with great pathos because, as the tale goes on to illustrate, if women only were made aware of infanticide's negative consequences, they would not be willing to go through with it and would be inspired instead to oppose it.

Wang says that she could not go against her mother-in-law's wishes, no matter what the virtuous midwife said to her or how upset she felt. Her lack of understanding and her reluctance to carry out the act, even though she has to give in to her mother-in-law's pressure, save her from direct condemnation. This rare tale in which her body is spared from the brunt of heaven's retribution allows for discussion of infanticide in which women are, through their ignorance of heaven's true principles about the value of human life and powerlessness to oppose the demands of their superiors, actually innocent. The social hierarchy is unavoidable; Wang "dared not disobey, and could only be compelled to drown her."¹⁴⁸ Confucian moralists could not very well aim their critique at web of hierarchical relationships they were seeking to strengthen with morality literature. Instead ignorance had to become their target.

By reaching out to women with *Xigu*, Yu expands the reach of his movement into a space he had so far been excluded from by reasons of propriety: women's inner chambers, in particular the birthing chamber itself. Repeatedly imagined and depicted in his anti-infanticide literature, it remained a real space about which he was largely ignorant, in turn, a place where he feared that ignorance held innocent lives in the balance.¹⁴⁹ In effect, Yu Zhi deputizes the women in the *baojuan*'s audience as specialized anti-infanticide campaigners for the women's quarters. No more can they claim innocence through ignorance. Armed with the knowledge that infanticide

¹⁴⁸ “不敢不依。只得淹死。” Ibid., 3a.

¹⁴⁹ His *nianpu* mentions a wife but does not mention the birth of his own children.

contravenes heaven's will and draws down its punishment on the family unit, particularly on any more valuable sons, they are bearers of moral responsibility as well as children. And, if coerced as Wang was, they are also given some measure of absolution in the form of a second chance. Inspired by Granny Wang's example, *Xigu* presents a raft of options for earning back heaven's favor.

Conclusion

One of the three main questions I asked in the introduction concerned the position and uses of religion in this period of religious war and conservative cultural backlash, with religious war most explicitly referring to the Taiping War itself. This chapter gives new meaning to how the term “religious war” characterizes the post-war atmosphere of conservatism Yu Zhi navigated in promoting his philanthropic efforts. Yu Zhi was not a Confucian fundamentalist, according to Goossaert's definition of a predominant literati elite attitude towards displays of popular religious practices like temple festivals and theatricals. This war, according to Goossaert came to a head in 1898 when the Guangxu 光緒 emperor (lived 1871-1908, reigned 1875-1908), at the suggestion of fundamentalist Confucian reformists at his court, promulgated an edict proclaiming that all temples not registered to perform imperially sanctioned rituals of the state religion would be taken over and turned into schools. Although the edict was soon rescinded, it set in motion forces that led to more temple confiscations throughout the last decade of the Qing and into the Republican era. Destroying temples was just as much the point as creating schools, since reformers believed China must leave behind its superstitious past to become modern. *Baojuan*, although not explicitly targeted, were the collateral damage of this increasingly popular new mindset.

Given the tenor of religious debate, particularly the anti-popular rhetoric of the fundamentalists at court in 1898 (and we see their predecessors in the Tongzhi Restoration discussed above), Yu's *baojuan*, tactical deployments of the vernacular against the twin evils of *xiaoshuo* and Christianity, take on a new role. It is worth noting too that by the end of his life, Yu had befriended an American missionary in Shanghai and expunged the explicitly anti-Christian pieces from the revised version of "Shang dang shi shu" published as a preface to his posthumous drama collection.¹⁵⁰ Echoing the tone of cooperation expressed in the Buddhist monk's preface to *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*, both *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* exhibit Yu's concern with reaching out to all kinds of audiences using the terms they would best understand, not confrontational destructiveness of temple seizures and contempt for Buddhist practices. The ignorant populace targeted by fundamentalist Confucians was the audience that concerned Yu Zhi the most, the ones he most steadfastly and creatively attempted to engage with.

Considering that the experiences of illiterate Chinese from this time are almost entirely inaccessible, literature intended to edify the illiterate at least gives us one local, contemporaneous perspective on the perceived problems faced by the segment of the population Yu Zhi defined in his drama preface as "ignorant." Though *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* may not give direct access to the voices and experiences of those unrecorded in history – nearly all women and most professionally unaccomplished men – these works are still a place where we can find those on the margins of nineteenth-century change. After all, even Yu Zhi was marginal in the grand scheme of nineteenth-century China: he was just better than most at putting himself into the center of every

¹⁵⁰ "Yu Liancun xiansheng zuogu 余連村先生作古" *Wanguo gongbao* (1875), 266. In this obituary, presumably written by the periodical's editor, American Methodist missionary Young J. Allen, the writer cites friendship and fond memories of conversations with Yu, but notes his disappointment that Yu had not converted to Christianity before his death.

philanthropic concern in Jiangnan.¹⁵¹ Although Yu Zhi and his biographers worked to play up his encounters with the truly famous movers-and-shakers of Jiangnan, even so, in the end he was still a man who wept and knocked his head on stage before a crowd of peasants while great *shanren* like Pan Zengyi penned volumes of classical poetry and decided from afar how their wealth could be best distributed for the greatest good.

Yu Zhi was also concerned about doing the greatest good, but in his case that was constrained by limited resources: his own lack of substantial wealth and civil service success and, on the part of his audiences, their lack of money, time, strength or social capital. The many prefaces and donor lists appended to editions of *Pan Gong* prove largely to be dead ends as to the biographical details of the real people involved in the text's explosive spread across southern China in the 1850s and 60s. Most of the men adding their names to draw upon the legacy of Pan Zengyi's philanthropic reputation (and his family's ongoing political importance in postwar Jiangnan) made no other names for themselves. *Pan Gong*'s popularity and spread offer a parallel to *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, on the surface appearing to be another appropriation of a popular figure. Upon closer examination, it proves to be motivated by fundamentally different concerns about the Taiping War and the hope of a utopian moral future. Even so, its famous protagonist seems to have actually played a major role in the work's sustained popular acceptance. Although Yu adopted the genre, imagery, and form of *baojuan* in an attempt to reach a more diverse audience, he ultimately succeeded in appealing most to people who were like him, in their failure to achieve record-worthy careers, but unlike him in the even greater obscurity of their philanthropic efforts.

¹⁵¹ Research in the last decade, mainly by Lai Jinxing, Rania Huntington, Tobie Meyer-Fong, and Michelle King has brought Yu Zhi's work back to the attention of Qing historians.

While not directly relating the experiences of how women in the late Qing responded to and coped with the national trauma of war and a reconstruction that eventually turned the *baojuan* they responded to the most (*Xiangshan* and *Liu Xiang*) into targets for anti-superstition contempt, *Xigu* still speaks to the potential that Yu Zhi believed to be latent in female audiences. His preface to *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo* considers the dearth of appropriate educational texts for young women to be a tragedy, given that women form a natural counterpart to men in the order of the universe. One counter to female infanticide, one of Yu's greatest concerns, was to establish the fundamental value of female life. In some cases, this meant reminding predominantly male audiences that their mothers and wives were women who escaped death at birth.¹⁵² In others, it meant reminding audiences that women were merit makers and active forces for the propagation of good morals through society, even given the difficult situation that hierarchical obligations placed them in. *Xigu* exemplifies Yu Zhi's hope that even powerless pregnant women and their elderly mothers-in-law could be drafted into his moral crusading. Yu could not appear personally on every stage in Jiangnan to weep, knock his head, and beg people to change their habits. Hopefully, in the absence of his vocal person, his writing and its inherent vernacular potential as words that could be read aloud over and over again, might reach people's hearts and induce heaven into clearing the skies after a long, wearying rain.

¹⁵² Credit for this crisp encapsulation of women who were raised from infancy to adulthood is due to an article by J. Dudgeon, "The Small Feet of Chinese Women," *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* (1868-1912), October 1, 1869. He writes, "Woman comes into the world at a discount; and so she is brought up and continues through life, until her mother-in-law dies, or she becomes an elderly matron... She escapes death at birth, to meet with disregard, inattention, and all the adverse circumstances heaped upon the sex."

Appendix 6: Dejian zhai and Yu Zhi's corpus

Dejian zhai (得見齋), a morality book publisher located in Yuanmiao Guan (元妙宮) in Suzhou, was where many, nearly all, first editions of Yu Zhi's credited works were published.¹⁵³ In fact, upon examining the broad range of morality literature that circulated in the late Qing, particularly texts related to preserving grains, written paper, and infants, we are continuously led back to Dejian zhai as the source of their publication. Founded in the eighth century, the Daoist temple which housed Dejian zhai was located at the heart of Suzhou and included courts to many Daoist and Buddhist deities, with the largest hall dedicated to worshipping Dongyue dadi 東嶽大帝 (The Great Emperor of the Eastern Peak).¹⁵⁴ The preeminent place of this deity, who was integrated into the belief systems of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism alike, along with the central location of the temple, likely led to the temple's centrality in the life of Suzhou residents.¹⁵⁵ Aside from the activities associated with large temples – community rituals, markets, and yearly festivals – the temple became a central location for the weavers and spinners guilds to meet, and as such became the central location of textile industry riots and strikes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁵⁶ When Taiping forces threatened Suzhou, local elites

¹⁵³ The temple was named Xuanmiao Guan 玄妙觀 (Abbey of Mysterious Wonder) after a rebuilding campaign in 1295, but was renamed Yuanmiao Guan in the Qing due to a naming taboo associated with the Kangxi Emperor. It is now once again called Xuanmiao Guan. For a brief summary of the temple's history, see Paul Katz, "Xuanmiao Guan" in *The Encyclopedia of Daoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1135-1136.

¹⁵⁴ Li Hsiao-t'i 李孝悌, *Zhongguo de chengshi shenghuo* 中國的城市生活 (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2005), 189.

¹⁵⁵ For more on Dongyue dadi, see Vincent Goossaert, "Dongyue dadi" in *The Encyclopedia of Daoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (New York: Routledge, 2008), 377-380.

¹⁵⁶ Yinong Xu, *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 183-199.

and officials gathered at the same temple to discuss plans for defending the city and offering relief to refugees.¹⁵⁷

The earliest work crediting Dejian zhai as its publisher is a commentary on *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (*Treatise of the Exalted One On Response and Retribution*) dated to 1839.¹⁵⁸

No other works are recorded until the Xianfeng era, when Yu Zhi's *Jiangnan tielei tu* 江南鐵淚圖 (*A Man of Iron's Tears for Jiangnan*) was printed to encourage relief donations to ease the suffering of refugees from Taiping destruction, and the anonymously written *Pan Gong* and *Xigu*, both dated 1858.¹⁵⁹ Whether this gap is due to an ambiguity in the dating of the 1839 text or the whole-scale loss of all Dejian zhai texts published in the intervening decades, it is impossible to say. On June 2, 1860, Taiping forces occupied Suzhou. Xuanmiao Guan, which by the Qing had grown to encompass more than thirty halls, was destroyed such that only the main gate and the halls to the Lord of Thunder, the Mother of the Dipper, and the Great Emperor of the Eastern Peak remained intact.¹⁶⁰ Restoring the print house must have been part of restoring the temple after its destruction, however, as the next books on record from Dejian zhai were printed in 1866: *Gonghou jian* 公侯鑒 (*A Mirror for a Marquis*) by Yu Zhi, and *Xiqi baojuan* 希奇寶卷 (*The Amazing Precious Scroll*), a scatological *baojuan* that vividly dramatizes extreme filial piety.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 190.

¹⁵⁸ Zhang Yichen 张祎琛, "Qingdai shanshu de kanke yu chuanbo 清代善书的刊刻与传播" (master's thesis, Fudan University, 2010), 64-65. Since I have not personally examined this edition, I remain skeptical of this attribution. In many cases, works published later are accidentally given earlier dates when catalogers take the date of preface composition to be the date of publication in absence of a title page.

¹⁵⁹ See Table 2, below.

¹⁶⁰ Katz, 1135.

¹⁶¹ Of all the *baojuan* that were first published at Dejian zhai, this one is the most difficult to attribute to Yu Zhi, due to the sheer ridiculousness of its subject matter and its parodic features that are otherwise missing from his body of work.

Following this, we find an assortment of Daoist and medical texts, Yu Zhi's elementary primer *Xuetang riji*, and a number of *baojuan*. In addition, Yu Zhi's exhaustive 16-volume collection of regulations and literature associated with the foundation of philanthropic societies, entitled *Deyi lu* (得一錄), which was originally compiled in 1849, finally came into print in 1869 thanks to the combined support of his friends, and was printed at Dejian zhai. French Jesuit priest Gabriel Palatre's monograph on infanticide in China, *L'infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine*, published in Shanghai in 1878, also includes an anti-infanticide broadsheet comic that was printed at Dejian zhai.

All told, barring republished older *baojuan*, cataloguing works published at Dejian zhai shows a group of *baojuan* beginning with *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* published during the war, followed afterwards by *Xiqi*, *Liyuan*, and *Sanmao zhenjun*. As the table below shows, the publisher also printed more generic *baojuan* like *Xiangshan* and *Miaoying baojuan*, but these were widely circulating before Dejian zhai joined in reprinting them, unlike the five *baojuan* listed above which seem to have made the move from manuscript to print at this press.

Table 2: Dejian Zhai publication catalogue

The table below is compiled from data in library catalogues accessed via Worldcat and CALIS, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* by Che Xilun, personal archival work and the table on pages 64-65 in Zhang Yichen's 2010 master's thesis.

TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR
太上感應篇		1839
潘公寶卷		1858
惜穀寶卷		1858
江南鐵淚圖	余治	咸豐
希奇寶卷		1866
公侯鑒	余治	1866
陰嘴文製藝	彭殷壽	1868
得一錄	余治	1869
幾希錄良方		1869
怡性善堂善通四種	怡性 堂主人	1870
至寶錄		1871
一心普度		1871
女二十四孝圖說	余治編	1871
香山寶卷		1872
感應篇直讲		1873
消災延壽閻王經		1874
學堂日記	余治	1875
金剛般		1876
妙英寶卷		1877
三茅真君寶卷		1877
庶幾堂今樂	余治	1880
敬灶全書		1883

[Table 2: Dejian Zhai publication catalogue]

[Table 2 *cont.*: Dejian Zhai publication catalogue]

尊小學齋文	余治	1884
急救時症經驗良方	俞陳甫	1887
順天急生篇	趙璧撰	1887
惜穀寶卷		1887
三聖救急寶訓	佚名輯, 朱思泉增補	1895

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I looked closely at four *baojuan* – *Liu Xiang*, *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* – all texts that circulated during a time of great struggle and change in Jiangnan. Related to the revival of traditional religions that arose in response to the heterodoxy and destruction of the Taiping War, these deeply conservative works offered their audiences an opportunity to take part in rebuilding what had been lost, one heart at a time. My work allowed me to bring out two narratives about the literature of this period: the first about *Liu Xiang baojuan*, a text that, bridging the sometime-divide between early and late *baojuan*, attained and sustained great popularity in the late Qing; and the second about an evangelical movement among conservative Confucians, among whom Yu Zhi proved most vocal, which advocated the potential of vernacular literature as a tool to propagate their empire-restoring morality. Without this promotion of the popular as a tool for ensuring moral and political stability, it is questionable whether *Liu Xiang* would have experienced such a surge in reprinting and popular interest far exceeding its stable pre-war circulation. Furthermore, were it not for the popularity of *Liu Xiang* by the late 1860s, *Liu Xiang zhong juan* would never have been conceived of as a viable intersection between popular lay Buddhism and the morals in Yu's *Xuetang riji*, making the latter accessible to *baojuan* audiences rather than primary school boys.

In asking questions about why and how these *baojuan* attracted popular attention and acceptance (or in the case of *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, the converse), I explored the significant social and religious functions of this body of vernacular morality literature in this period, particularly once Confucian elites, recognizing its affective value, adopted similar strategies to inculcate conservative values into what they perceived as a crumbling society. Tying *baojuan* from this

understudied era into local and national history – linking unattributed texts to verifiable people, places, events and movements – demonstrates their significance as sources for studying the complex religious and cultural debates of the period. Through *baojuan*, we gain more complex perspectives on both large-scale cultural movements in the final decades of the Qing, as I discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, and small-scale moments like the disagreement explored in Chapter 2 over approaches to moral proselytization.

The dense intertextual web that ties the *baojuan* explored in this dissertation together, now and in nineteenth-century Jiangnan, is something like the writerly text that Barthes postulates in opposition to straightforward readerly works. The totality of this web presents the reader of literature and culture with a plurality of entrances into exploring Qing society and culture “before the infinite play of the world... is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system.”¹ Here, we have used a handful of *baojuan* as entries into this period, texts that have helped us to qualify and answer questions about *baojuan* as literature and the role of religion after religious war. Yet the idealized image of the writerly does not address the moralistic and conservative tones that dominate the culture supporting the widespread reproduction of these texts. Fiske’s concept of the producerly work offers a way to bridge Barthes’ division between the infinite potential of literature that makes writers of its every reader and the static cosmos of the easily grasped readerly text. The producerly text is one whose meaning may seem simple at first glance, its potential to be written anew limited by a controlling narrative voice, but closer examination reveals breaks and imperfections in this facade that invite the creation of new, alternate, or even contrary meanings. It is through exploring the producerly nature of *baojuan* – explicitly prescriptive literature, often intended particularly for women – that we can see past

¹ Barthes, 5.

simplistic readings and understand how playing religious empowerment and social constraint against each other actually resulted in insufficiently coherent (readerly) conclusions, and left multiple avenues open for producerly interpretation.

The two narratives I have developed in this dissertation, one of *Liu Xiang's* producerly popularity, the other of Yu Zhi's vernacular advocacy, are not linearly related, but woven together across space and time. For *Liu Xiang* to become exceedingly popular in the post-Taiping era, much had to be made of the importance of the performance of morality literature as a socially reconstructive act. Yet for Yu Zhi to have chosen to write his own *baojuan* during the war, however, *baojuan* must already have been seen an effective tool for proselytization among specific audiences, a genre with powerful potential. The creation of a text related to both, *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, is like embroidery across the surface of cloth woven of the warp of Yu's defense of the vernacular and the weft of the sudden rise in popular interest in *Liu Xiang*.

Performativity and producerliness

Popular late Qing *baojuan* are complex, not as much in their contents as in the social practices and meanings that were determined and redetermined by their repeated performances.² Here, I use performance in a broad sense. Performance necessarily begins with the recitation by a professional performer, clergy or lay, or an amateur who depended on the performance instructions and pronunciation guides coded into the text. Performance also characterizes the audience's role in the recitation as they echo the leader in the call and response of Amitábha Buddha or Guanyin's name, actively listening with the buddhas and bodhisattvas who have descended to fill the ritual space. The concept of performance extends still further,

² Fiske, 122.

taking into account how a *baojuan* protagonist like Xiangnü performed her piety after attending a *baojuan* recitation, to include how audience members themselves might make their own meanings out of the tales that overflowed with interpretive and performative potential. Late Qing *baojuan* were a social phenomena: a means by which postwar social order could be restored to an antebellum utopia, an opportunity for lay devotees to pool donations ranging between mere hundreds of cash and dozens of silver dollars for the text's reprinting, an occasion for activists to create literature that healed rather than harmed, an entreaty to women to speak up and engender moral change in their families and neighbors.

On the topic of producerly popular texts in the twentieth century, Fiske writes that “the object of veneration is less the text and more the performance.”³ Yet as helpful as Fiske's analysis has been in terms of explaining the producerly dynamics that link *baojuan*'s simple contents with the widespread interest they generated, in the case of the *baojuan* examined in my study, it is clear that they were venerated for their performability, not just their performances, as much as they were for their stories. The social functions of *baojuan* mean that their inherent value, as stand-alone works of Chinese literature is muted. The textual poverty of these works, from the simple building blocks of the limited vocabulary of the functionally literate to the straightforward, unsubtle narratives they constructed, can easily (and rightfully) be critiqued as simplistic and exaggerated. In the preceding chapters, we have seen, however, that this simplicity does not preclude the potential of such works to be enthusiastically adopted into popular culture by audiences of the unrecorded and forgotten who found these *baojuan* compelling enough invest in their reproduction. The potential meanings of *baojuan* are best determined in consideration of their performances. The intertextual fabric created by the works' need for readers who are

³ Fiske, 125.

familiar enough with the traditions fills in the gaps and imperfections gives them their producerly potential.

Applied intertextuality: *Xiunü baojuan*

As an illustration of how the web of intertextual relationships established in the preceding chapters might be used to better understand and illuminate the productive plurality of other late Qing *baojuan* when they are seen properly in context, we will take a late Qing anonymously composed text called *Xiunü baojuan* 秀女寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Xiunü*), whose earliest extant edition is dated 1877, as our example. With twelve entries in *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, just as many as *Xigu*, it neither rivaled *Liu Xiang* nor was fated to the obscurity of *Liu Xiang zhongjuan*.

The protagonist of *Xiunü* is a virtuous, beautiful young woman, who, with her parents' support, plans to chastely dedicate her life to practicing piety. The family goes on a pilgrimage to a famous temple, where they offer incense, worship at altars to Buddhist and Daoist deities, and listen to a nun's sermon. The nun preaches about the different karmic burdens of men and women and gives a month-by-month narrative of a woman's pregnancy. After the sermon, *Xiunü* is kidnapped from the temple by bandits and sold into concubinage in Shandong.⁴ The primary wife repeatedly beats her because she refuses to have sex with her husband and produce a much-needed heir, instead spending her nights in meditation and *nianfo*.⁵ Dispatching her loyal maid to carry a message to her parents in Shanxi, *Xiunü* earns the wife's ire and is brutally

⁴ On human trafficking, particularly in concubines, in Shanxi and Shandong in the late Qing, see research by Johanna Ransmeier, particularly Chapter 1 in her forthcoming book.

⁵ Though this seems at first glance an odd shift from the mother-in-law to daughter-in-law conflict explored in *Liu Xiang*, it actually captures the pressure that sonless first-wives were under to produce heirs for their husbands by any means necessary. Should *Xiunü* produce a boy, the child would have been adopted by the wife as her child. For more on the benefits and tensions of such an arrangement outside of fiction, see Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1997), 356-358.

murdered by the incensed woman and her evil maid. Xiunü descends to the realms of the dead and tours of the ten courts of hell. There, she encounters the Daoist immortal He Xiangü 何仙姑, who asks Xiunü to become her disciple, after which she returns Xiunü's soul to her now-healed body.⁶ Miraculous recovery from death notwithstanding, Xiunü is still trapped at her husband's home. However, he and his wife now fall ill in accordance with the evil karma they built up by abusing her. In the end, the loyal maid's rescue mission succeeds and her parents arrive to save her. The evil maid and the kidnappers are killed by thunder and condemned to the lowest realms of hell, never to be reborn. Xiunü, her parents, and her loyal maid practice austerities and ascend to heaven, meeting Guanyin and the Buddha.

At only sixty-four folio pages, half the length of *Liu Xiang*, the plot and internal structure of *Xiunü* is simple – even simplistic – denying its audience both the extended tension and drama that *Liu Xiang* delivers and the fully delineated moral guidelines Yu Zhi included in both *Pan Gong* and *Xigu*. It leaps from spectacle to spectacle – kidnapping, karmic revenge, a maid who inexplicably knows both literary and martial arts, murder, a miraculous return from the dead – each more excessive than the last. It is a bewildering amalgam of dramatic tropes, breaking Barthes' "law of solidarity which governs the readerly: everything holds together, everything must hold together as well as possible."⁷ The gaps and imperfections of *Xiunü* are manifold.

⁶ Though He Xiangü emerged during the Tang and was a popular figure in *neidan* (internal alchemy) Taoism for more than a thousand years before her appearance here, more immediate to Xiunü is that she was also the protagonist of her own *baojuan* that became popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though *Xiunü baojuan* was set during the Sui, before the emergence of He Xiangü in the Tang (according to the date given in her *baojuan*), this seems to be outside the concern of Xiunü's author. See Che, *Zongguo baojuan zongmu*, 105-106 for twenty-three editions recorded between 1880 and 1940. For more on the religious context of this *baojuan*, see Wu Guangzheng 吳光正, "He Xiangü baojuan de zongjiao neihan" *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu*. 1 (2004):47-52. and for more about He Xiangü's pre-*baojuan* religious background, see Wu Guangzheng "Cong He Xiangü chuanshuo kan zongjiao chuanzhuo yu minjian chuanshuo de hudong" *Hainan daxue xuebao: renwen shehui ke xueban*. 22, no. 1 (2004): 54-59.

⁷ Barthes, 181.

Textually impoverished if taken out of the intertextual context of popular *baojuan* culture, *Xiunü* is rich with potential associations if reinserted into its cultural matrix. Barthes' reminds us how the "T which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts;" that readers interpret writerly texts using their assembled collections of all the texts they have previously read (or we may add, *heard*), each collection individual to the reader. Because texts like *Liu Xiang* and *Pan Gong* were so widespread in the late Qing, they, or something like them, were certain to constitute a portion of the plurality of texts that made up the reader/listeners of *Xiunü*'s audience. *Xiunü* makes little enjoyable sense to audiences not familiar with its textual antecedents or immersed in late nineteenth-century society.

In this sense, *Xiunü* deftly combines its precedents. In popular literary shorthand, it evokes the ups and downs of female religious devotion established by *Xiangshan baojuan* and *Liu Xiang* and the moral stipulations that form the substrate of Yu Zhi's wide body of literature. Like *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, the existence of *Xiunü* was likely in part due to the preeminence of *Liu Xiang* in popular religious performance literature. It was printed with the assumption that it would be read aloud in performance. Like *Liu Xiang baojuan*, clear direction is given at the open and close of the text for ritual lighting of incense and closing invocations honoring the buddhas and bodhisattvas called down during the opening rituals. At the first break for the *nianfo*, small print instructions remind the performer to allow the audience to respond in kind.⁸ It also includes interlinear small characters acting as pronunciation guides for characters that its unknown editor assumed would have been difficult for a reader to know.

⁸ *Shanxi Pingyang fu Pingyang cun Xiunü baojuan quanji*, Harvard-Yenching Library Baojuan digitization project (Hangzhou: Ma'nao jingfang, 1908), <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4739469>. 2a. “下和佛皆同” (Hereafter cited as *Xiunü*.)

On a structural level, *Xiunü* cannot be understood without Xiangnü and *Liu Xiang*. The protagonists are related through the orthography of their names: 秀女 and 香女. Then, their home provinces, Shanxi 山西 and Shandong 山東, also pair neatly. Their internal structures are largely parallel. Like Xiangnü, Xiunü is good from birth. They listen to sermons given by nuns that not only focus on the same topics, but also include, word for word, some similar material.⁹ Both women suffer and die for their devotion; the violence incurred the result of their physical beauty and unwillingness to give their bodies in service of their husband's patriarchal lineage. They lead their parents and household staff to rebirth in heavenly realms that exempt them from further suffering. However, the literary sisterhood between Xiunü and Xiangnü cannot account for all the narrative gaps incongruities in this newly-written *baojuan*.

Unlike Xiangnü, Xiunü is concerned not only with vegetarianism and *nianfo* but also with cherishing written paper and grains, concerns introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. Admonitions to her loyal maidservant include an extended meditation on Guandi 關帝, a deity that appears nowhere in *Liu Xiang* but does in many of the prefaces to *Pan Gong* and widely in contemporaneously circulating spirit-written texts. Xiunü's kidnapping while burning incense at the temple indirectly endorses fundamentalist Confucian criticisms of excessive female religious devotion that take women beyond the sphere of the home and potentially destabilize society.¹⁰ The narrator's emphasis on heaven's swift punishment with thunder and lightning would not seem out of place in any of Yu Zhi's morality *baojuan* and poetry collections. Continuing to reread *Xiunü* would likely uncover more literary resonances, connecting this densely packed, imperfect tale with late Qing society and religion.

⁹ On 8b, *Xiunü* copies directly from *Liu Xiang* 1:6b-7a, (facsimile, 70-71).

¹⁰ Goossaert, 324.

Xiunü is not a coherent work *unless* texts like the *baojuan* I analyze in this dissertation are used to fill in its narrative gaps. Such patches enable its flawed heroine and fractured plot to tell new stories for readers familiar with the genre. *Baojuan*, as generally author-less works, do not lend themselves to be read as crafted objects, but as works grafted into an existing network of potential meanings.

A History of Literary Producers

Donors, whose names are recorded at the opening and close of the unstudied *baojuan* that fill archives in China and beyond, frequently left no other record of their existence in the rolls of successful exam candidates or local gazetteers. These named (yet historically obscure) individuals, men and women both, provided support for a preserve of traditional culture simultaneously holding onto conservative values while innovating the means by which they were taught. Newly written texts like *Xigu* and *Xiunü* had storehouses of material to draw upon, directly and referentially – storehouses that we must reassemble if we are to fully grasp what made these works compelling to so many at such a crucial time.

The literary and cultural history of the Qing is far from a readerly text. Using *baojuan* as the entry into this tumultuous period, my research and the two narratives I have constructed in this dissertation reveal new perspectives on how obscure individuals living between the heavily documented, rarefied realms of the bureaucratic elite and the textually invisible worlds of the illiterate, engaged in moral activism, religious practice, and literary creation and appreciation. Yu's mid-century politicization of the vernacular presages literary movements at the beginning of the next century, another period of cultural and political unrest. He deputizes his audiences of financially uncertain but morally affluent listeners to donate their words whenever and wherever

possible, for the sake of millions of individual hearts upon whose state of goodness the fate of the empire rested. In a sense, *baojuan* were *pianyi* 便宜 (cheap/convenient). This does not, however, diminish their value or make them disposable, another term Fiske uses to characterize popular texts. In his analysis, their disposability stems from a critique of the capitalist structures that commodify culture and attempt to profit from minimal production costs.¹¹ Fiske's twentieth-century analysis is again limited when it comes against the historically different features of Jiangnan society; even so, the minimal production cost was a feature of popular vernacular literature that Yu highly valued. The ability for their values to spread via word-of-mouth rather than inaccessible text on a page increased their moral and social capital.

In exploring the writerly qualities of literary examples that, on the surface, appear simplistically readerly, the fertile middle ground of the texts' producerliness opens up. This allows us to consider the popularity of *Liu Xiang* in direct relation to the dominant readings of the text that led its elite readers to characterize it either as a simple instructive work for ignorant women or a charter for marriage resistance. The first is little different from hundreds of other late Qing works; the latter is related to a socially marginal practice, neither make sense as "popular," which *Liu Xiang* was. Both are readerly interpretations of surface narratives that go only so far. Neither accounts for complexities that escape from their confines, complexities which spark questions about competing interpretations of filial piety, the role of clergy in religious practice, and the ability (or inability) for women to shed their roles as objects of sexual desire and transcend societal expectations. This text allows audiences to actively participate in the creation of their own versions and understandings of Xiangnü's practice; it makes producers of even those unable to read.

¹¹ Fiske, 123.

The concept of producerliness also allows for us to understand how *Pan Gong* could have excited sustained attention among a more literate audience during and after the war. Its contents differ little from the rest of Yu Zhi's oeuvre and its interpretation of the Taiping War dead as sinners directly opposes their official commemoration by the state after the war.¹² However, in dozens of reprints, donors added prefaces proudly signed with their names and proudly detailing their involvement with the work's spread. Here, the social value of linking themselves with the deified Pan Zengyi and his greatest fan, Yu Zhi, constituted a claim on the part of these historically unknown preface writers and donors that their philanthropic efforts were on the level of these socially prominent great do-gooders (*dashanren* 大善人).

Late Qing *baojuan* are literature whose value is inextricable from history. Rather than exposing their inadequacies as coherently crafted works of art, we have explored the abundance that the late Qing offers readers attentive to its pluralities, intent on becoming producers themselves of potential interpretations and meanings. We read in search of and for the sake of the nameless listeners of *Liu Xiang*, *Xiuniu*, and other simple vernacular texts that cannot stand alone, but must, like their listeners, find meaning in the social space of collective ritual and cooperative creation.

¹² Meyer-Fong, 17.

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