

**AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF CHAPTERS 21-30 OF THE LATE
MING DYNASTY NOVEL, *XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN* 醒世姻缘傳
(MARRIAGE DESTINIES TO AWAKEN THE WORLD)**

by

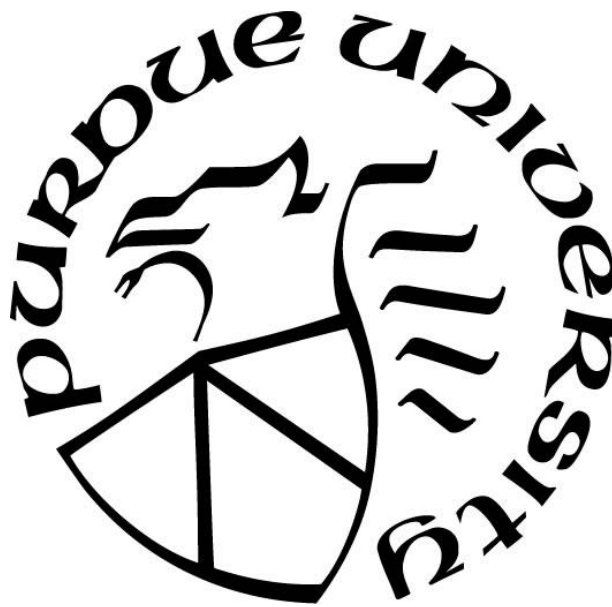
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Dedicated to the memory of 王正规 Wang Zhenggui (1928-1997).



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ABSTRACT

Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan 醒世姻緣傳 is a vernacular Chinese novel which was composed in late Ming or early Qing dynasty by an anonymous author in what is now modern Shandong province. Like most of the counterparts to this novel during the same era, *Xingshi* was composed not as an “art for art’s sake”, but as a vehicle for moral edification and education; it discusses many pressing social issues existing at a time of social turmoil, such as government corruption, moral depravity, migration of peasants due to natural disaster and agricultural involution, roving bandits, the subversion of the gender roles, etc. The novel discussed the social issues through the lives and activities of the residents of an ordinary Shandong town named Mingshui, a microminiature of Qing dynasty China, and presents the golden era of Mingshui which is a microminiature of an idealized Chinese society. This dissertation is a study on the Utopian chapters of this novel with the texts translated into English language with annotations; these chapters are both a continuation of Chinese Utopian literature tradition, as well as the embodiment of the author’s unique understanding of various philosophical and religious schools. Up until now, due to limited resources and texts, little is known about the life and thoughts of the author of *Xinshi* and the study on the Utopian chapters will shed light on further explorations of the identity and political philosophy of this author.

INTRODUCTION

A SYNOPSIS OF XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN 醒世姻缘傳 (MARRIAGE DESTINIES TO AWAKEN THE WORLD)

The vernacular novel *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* 醒世姻缘傳 which consists of 100 chapters is believed to have been written by an anonymous literati who lived in what is now Shandong 山東 province in eastern China during the turbulent era between the end of the Ming dynasty¹ and the beginning of the Qing dynasty², when the orthodox Chinese dynasty collapsed and was replaced by the non-Chinese Manchu regime. The novel was constructed based upon the theological foundation of karmic retribution (*yinguo* 因果) and the reincarnation theory of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition which believes that one's current life is predestined by the karma this person accumulated through his or her previous lives: while good karma produces a happier reincarnated life or even liberation from the mundane world (*moksha*), karmic debts will inevitably result in sufferings and a miserable rebirth; the karmic debts, however, could be counterbalanced by pious acts or the patient bearing of one's sufferings. This novel consists of two comparatively independent stories with their respective male and female protagonists, yet they were tactfully woven together by the theological theory of karmic retribution so that the second story mainly narrates the repayment of the karmic debts incurred by the reincarnated characters as explained in the first story. This repayment takes the form of suffering from a dysfunctional and painful marriage. Eventually, the male protagonist receives enlightenment from a Buddhist monk, having finally counteracted all his karmic debts through sincere devotion to Buddhist principles, becoming the source of his own salvation. Intertwined within the two major stories are hundreds of anecdotal stories with minor characters from various representatives of the social classes in a village located in Shandong province: there are small merchants, vendors, peasants, retired government officials, squires, monks, nuns, soothsayers, prostitutes, etc. The novel therefore presents a kaleidoscope of

¹ 明朝 *Ming chao* (The Ming dynasty) (1368-1644)

² 清朝 *Qing chao* (The Qing dynasty) (1644-1912) was the last dynasty of the feudal China, and also a dynasty established by non-Chinese rulers.

a collapsing social system, the values, customs, social conduct and ethics of a typical village in eastern China of the 17th century and its family clans.

The first story comprises the first 22 chapters of the novel and presents the story of Chao Yuan 晁源, a prodigal son of a local official, Chao Zhixian 晁知县.³ Chao Yuan's father, Chao Zhixian, was promoted to be county magistrate⁴ by means of bribery and by this he gained access to power and wealth. His son Chao Yuan takes advantage of this and becomes more and more unrestrained and dissolute. He begins to be disgusted with his wife, Ji Shi 計氏, to whom he was indebted for the help her family provided in his obtaining scholarly success and consequently securing an official rank in the government. After a short time, Chao Yuan becomes infatuated with a prostitute, Xiao Zhengge 小珍哥, and marries her as his concubine. Xiao Zhengge, however, who has the ambition to replace Ji Shi in the family register as first wife, lodges a false accusation against Ji Shi for committing adultery with a monk. In his reaction, Chao Yuan proceeds in tandem with Xiao Zhengge and starts to abuse Ji Shi. Under the pressure and maltreatment from Chao Yuan, Ji Shi had no choice but to prove her innocence and chasteness by committing suicide. Meanwhile, to add to his accumulation of bad karma, Chao Yuan shoots a fox spirit to death, while out hunting.⁵ She had initially shape-shifted into a beautiful woman to enchant him but later ran towards him in her original shape as a fox seeking protection from the hounds, and this act of killing a harmless fox spirit became the reason he was henpecked and tortured in his marriage in his next reincarnation, in which the fox spirit reincarnated as his wife. Afterwards, during his probation period as a criminal, Chao Yuan committed adultery with a married village woman, Tang Shi 唐氏, and was killed by her husband, Xiao Yar 小鴉兒, who was led to discover this adulterous affair through the help of the ghost of the fox spirit.

The remainder of the novel, 78 chapters, takes place in Mingshui 明水, a town hundreds of miles away from Wucheng county, 武城縣 *Wuchengxian*, in the North-east of Shandon

³ For a translation of chapters 1-20, see *The Bonds of Matrimony: A Seventeenth Century Chinese Novel = Hsing-shih-yin-yüan-chuan*, trans. Eve Alison Nyren, Vol. 1. (Lewiston: Mellen, 1999) [chap. 1-20 only. No More Published].

⁴ 知县 *zhixian*, county head magistrate.

⁵ 狐狸精 *hulijing* fox spirit). See Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 222 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 32, 326

Province, where the first story of the Chao family takes place. This second part involves the motif of the dysfunctional marriage between Di Xichen 狄希陳, the reincarnated Chao Yuan, and Xue Sujie 薛素姐, the reincarnated fox spirit. This story begins with a description of the Utopian and simplistic life of Mingshui 明水 town, in the fictional Xiujiang County, 繡江縣 *Xiujiangxian*, in the center of Shandong Province, which attracted the Xue family to settle permanently in this town.⁶ As the friendship and intimacy between the Di and Xue families develops, they decide to enhance their family ties through two arranged marriages: Di Xichen 狄希陳's engagement to Xue Sujie 薛素姐, and Di Qiaojie 狄巧姐 (Di Xichen's sister) 's engagement with Xue Rubian 薛如卞. Soon after their weddings, Xue Sujie changes her mild temperament into an abusive one, and begins her retaliation by maltreating and beating her husband, Di Xichen.

The author continues to give vivid and detailed descriptions of Xue Sujie's behavior in torturing and punishing her husband, Di Xichen, who loved her but was also scared of her; her means of torturing Di Xichen include beating, biting, ironing, starving, shooting arrows, imprisonment, etc. As a result, both Di Xichen's mother, the paralyzed Di Pozi 狄婆子, and Xue Sujie's father, Xue Jiaoshou 薛教授 become so infuriated by Sujie's atrocity that they die from stroke. As a contrast to Xue Sujie's violent nature, the author emphasizes Di Xichen's frailty, his submissive behavior to his virago wife, and his endurance of his sufferings, as if his sufferings are a reasonable atonement for his killing of the fox spirit in his previous life.

In this section, the author's major focus in the narration remains the subversion of family roles between the two genders: the traditional patriarchal role of male is constantly challenged by and by the defiant female, while the female as the head of family governs all the family business. This major theme is embodied in many stories, such as Sujie's challenging of Di Xichen's role as a husband, Madam Di's 狄婆子 (Di Xichen's mother)'s capability of governing family affairs in contrast to her husband Di Yuanwai 狄員外's uselessness; the cleverness and articulacy of Madam

⁶ See the map in Daria Berg, *Carnival in China: A Reading of the Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*, China Studies 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xiv.

Tong 童奶奶 (mother of Di Xichen's concubine) who saved her husband from bankruptcy and prison, and the wit of Zhang Zhijie 张智姐 who punished Di Xichen's mischief through the hands of other people, etc. The subversion of the gender roles exemplifies the fall and collapse of the Confucian ethical system, since the husband-wife relation was regarded by Confucianism as the foundation of the entire social ethic system, and one of the essential five relations (*wulun* 五倫) in a Confucian society; this collapse of social ethics therefore presages the collapse and failure of orthodoxy throughout Chinese society.

From chapter 75 to chapter 100, the novel narrates that in order to escape from Xue Sujie's tortures, Di Xichen changed his career and resettled in Beijing city, abandoning and unofficially divorcing Sujie. In Beijing city, Di Xichen married his childhood friend, Tong Jijie 童寄姐, the daughter of a silversmith and the reincarnated Ji Shi 計氏, as his concubine. Although Ji Shi was not as brutal as Xue Sujie, under karmic influence she cannot control, she also started torturing Di Xichen in retaliation for her sufferings in her past life. Meanwhile, because Xue Sujie could not find Di Xichen to vent her anger, she buys a monkey as a substitute for Di Xichen and starts beating the monkey brutally; the monkey bites Sujie who loses an eye and her nose from the bite. She then decides to go to Beijing in search of Di Xichen.

Chapters 94 to 100 bring the novel to a conclusion. In this section, Di Xichen is so appalled at Xujie's abrupt appearance at his secretive residence in Beijing as well as her discovery of his newly wedded concubine that he becomes ill as a result. Sujie moves into the Di residence in Beijing, and secretly plots to kill Di Xichen in revenge. She attempts to shoot him to death, but fails, as Di Xichen is rescued by Hu Wuyi 胡無翳, a Buddhist monk who was under his patronage in his previous life. The monk suggests chanting the Buddhist scripture, *The Diamond Sutra*,⁷ to remedy Di Xichen's miserable marriage. Following Hu's counsel, Di Xichen gradually atones for his misconduct in his past life, and he finally regains peace and harmony in his family life.

⁷ 金剛經 *Jingang Jing*, short for 金剛般若波羅蜜多經 *Jingang Borepoluomiduo Jing* (The Diamond of Perfect Wisdom Sutra), one of the most important scriptures in Chinese Mahayana Buddhist tradition. See Yongyou Shi, *The Diamond Sutra in Chinese Culture* (Hacienda Heights, CA: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2010).

THE DEBATE ON AUTHORSHIP

It was not uncommon for Chinese novelists who lived during the Ming and Qing dynasties to conceal their true identities under a pseudonym, since China was traditionally a society that was obsessed with the orthodoxy, whereas novels and fiction, especially when written in vernacular rather than classical Chinese, were considered unorthodox in comparison to Confucian literature. The authors of novels and fiction, therefore, were at a risk of being marginalized by the society. For example, although the authorship of *The Outlaws of the Marsh* 水滸傳 *Shuihu Zhuan* was attributed to Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 in most of the published editions, there is still debate over the question of authorship, and the life of Shi Nai'an is quite obscure. Another example is the question of the authorship of the famous vernacular Ming novel entitled *The Plum in the Golden Vase* 金瓶梅 *Jin ping mei*, which was written by an anonymous author under the pseudonym Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng 蘭陵笑笑生 (The Scoffing Scholar of Lanling), whose true identity still remains unknown. Researchers have suggested that the real author may have been any one of a number of Ming authors, such as Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593), or Jia Sanjin 賈三近 (1534-1592) without being able to come to any definite conclusion. There is a similar authorship problem with *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*, because the author only identifies himself as, Xizhou Sheng 西周生 (“Scholar of the Western Zhou”).

The first mention of the authorship of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* appeared in an unofficial compilation of historian records entitled *Menglan Suobi* 夢闌瑣筆 (At the End of Dreams, Tiny Bits from the Pen) by Qing dynasty author Yang Fuji 楊復吉⁸; in this book, Yang Fuji attributed the authorship to Pu Songlin 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), whose “courtesy name,” 字 *zi*, was “*Liuxian*” 留仙, the author of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*), stating that “*Liuxian* still had a novel entitled *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*, for he had certain issues being addressed

⁸ Yang Fuji 楊復吉 (1747-1820).

in this novel.”⁹ This statement was echoed by late Qing author Li Ciming 李慈銘¹⁰; in his personal diary and compiled literary notes, *Yuemantang Dushuji* 越縵堂讀書記 (Diary of Readings from the Study of Utmost Frugality), Li stated: “*Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* was written by Qing dynasty author Pu Songlin. The book is mature and tactfully constructed and contains teachings that are worth following.”¹¹ In 1931, Hu Shi 胡适,¹² a Chinese philosopher and prolific author, and a distinguished scholar specializing in pre-modern vernacular Chinese novels, supported this statement with a comparative study between the vernacular fiction *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* and Pu Songlin’s “Jiangcheng”, a short classical Chinese novel from *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Hu pointed out that the similarities between the structures of both works both were constructed on the frameworks of reincarnated lives with the same theme of henpecked husbands; both stories involve the killing of innocent animal spirits, which later were reincarnated into human females, married the male protagonists, and tortured their husbands to avenge themselves; the male protagonists of both novels obtained salvation through enlightenment through sincere devotion to Buddhism. Other minor similarities include both works described abrupt and seemingly unnatural transformation of the temperament of both female protagonists; the female protagonists of both works indirectly killed their parents or parent-in-laws with their unfilial behaviors; the male protagonists of both works received guidance and enlightenment from Buddhist monastics. Additionally, Hu Shi pointed out certain similarities between both works in the choice of vocabulary and languages. Therefore, Hu Shi make the audacious statement that the author of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* is most likely Pu Songlin, or at least, a friend of Pu Songlin’s.¹³ Hu Shi’s statement was supported by his friend, Sun Kaidi 孫楷第¹⁴, a renowned scholar of Chinese vernacular fiction; the latter used the geographical settings of both works to determine the residence of the authors, and concluded that both authors came from central or northern Shangdong Province, and could possibly be the same

⁹ *Zhaodai Congshu* 昭代叢書 (Book Collection of the Glorious Era), photocopied edition, book X.

¹⁰ Li Ciming 李慈銘 (1830-1895), a literati and poet of the late Qing.

¹¹ Li Ciming 李慈銘, *Yuemantang dushuji* 越縵堂讀書記 (Diary of Readings from the Study of Utmost Frugality) (Shenyang, Liaoning: Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001) 802.

¹² Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), a renowned Chinese philosopher and author. One of the authors who initiated the New Culture Movement.

¹³ Hu Shi 胡适, “醒世姻緣傳考證 *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* kaozheng (Research on the *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*), 胡适文存 *Wen cun* (Collected Writings), 4 vols. (Huangshan: Huangshan Shushe, 1996), 1: 234-79.

¹⁴ Sun Kaidi 孫楷第 (1898-1986), a renowned scholar of premodern Chinese novels.

person; Sun further determined that the novel was completed in the era of Kangxi¹⁵ under the light of a comparative study between local meteorological records and the descriptions of weather within the novel, as well as a study on the dialects present in it.¹⁶ However, although this opinion was sufficiently influential that several published editions of this novel attribute the authorship to Pu Songlin, it began to encounter objections in the 1950s. Some scholars questioned Pu Songlin's authorship of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*, because after a thorough research of Pu's entire oeuvre, including novels, essays, poetry, lyrics, correspondence, journals, and epitaphs, they could not find a single mention of the novel *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* in either Pu's works or his friends' records.¹⁷

Beginning in the late 1950s, some scholars began to surmise that the author of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* may have been another novelist from Shandong province named Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (1599-1669), who was also the author of a vernacular Chinese novel entitled *Xu Jinpingmei* 續金瓶梅 (*A Sequel to The Plum in the Golden Vase*). The opinion was expressed in mainland China in a textbook on Chinese literature that was published in 1962 that "some scholars stated this book (*Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*) was written by Pu Songling, while others suggested it was written by Ding Yaokang."¹⁸ This view was subsequently echoed by Taiwanese scholars.

¹⁵ Kangxi era refers to the era of Emperor Kangxi's reign, namely, the period starting from 1661 to 1722.

¹⁶ Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, "A Letter on the Study of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* 一封考證《醒世姻緣》的信," 沧州后集 *Cangzhou hou ji* (Cangzhou Collected works) (Cangzhou: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985).

¹⁷ Lu Dahuang 路大荒. "The Authorship Problem of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan* and *Guci Ji* from *The Entire Collection of Liaozhai*", *Guang Ming Daily*, 04 Sep. 1955.

¹⁸ Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 中国社会科学院 *Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan, A History of Chinese Literature* 中國文學史 *Zhongguo wenshueshi*, 3 vols. (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1962), 1: 1031.

THE UTOPIAN CHAPTERS OF *XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN*

In contrast to the systematized Western Utopian literature tradition which was first established by Sir Thomas More's book *Utopia* (1516) and continued by Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1622) and Tommas Campanella's *Città del sole* (City of the Sun; first draft in Italian, 1602), first published in Latin as *Civitas Solis* (1623), pre-modern Chinese Utopian literary works are often created in much more fragmented forms; they were usually presented in unorthodox Taoist anecdotes, private historical records, and vernacular novels, and the Confucius¹⁹ and Laozi²⁰, the two most influential Chinese philosophers, had respectively conceptualized their Chinese counterparts of a Utopian society as “大同”(“ultimate harmony”) and “小国寡民”(“small kingdom with few people”)²¹, and then the poet Tao Qian 陶潜 (Tao Yuanming 陶淵明) (365-427) established the classical model of Utopian narratives was established by his *Tao Hua Yuan* 桃花源 (The Peach Blossom Spring) which was composed around 421 CE; the Chinese Utopian works as a literary genre was further complemented by Taoist hermits and the lay people, and the followers of other indigenous religions and their accounts of the excluded *Xianjin* 仙境 (fairyland), a secluded utopian residence for fairies or immortal beings; the *Xianjin* was often described as the home of elixir of immortality so that the fleeting happiness of the mundane world would be sustained in the excluded space and become everlasting; it is also often described as the embodiment of a mixture of monastic lifestyle and sensual pleasures. However, both Western Utopian literary tradition and many Chinese Utopian narratives are still similar regarding their imagination of the otherworldliness, their tendency to escape reality, and their goal to criticize social issue or to construct a non-existent space as the embodiment of the author's political aspirations.

Within the Confucian tradition in China, the *Mao shi zhua* 毛詩序 ([Confucian] Mao commentary), one of the four early commentaries in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry, or *The*

¹⁹ 孔子, Kongzi (Confucius, 551-479 BCE).

²⁰ 老子, Laozi (6th cent. BCE).

²¹ Pi-twan H. Wang, “Utopian Imagination in Traditional Chinese Fiction” (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980), chapter 1. Laozi 老子, *Daode Jing Jiaoshi* 道德經校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), chapter 80, p.190

Book of Poems) elaborates that the pragmatic nature of any literature or artistic work is to satirize the oppressive government, to dispose social issues, and to express one's political aspirations. This literary theory was observed as the orthodoxy by most pre-modern Chinese authors. In the novel, *Xingshi*, the author also treated the fiction as a vehicle for his political voices. For example, chapter 21 to 30 function as the transition between the two reincarnation story lines. In this section, the author digresses and delineates a town hundreds of miles away from Wucheng named *Mingshui* 明水²² where the second story took place. The Chinese character 明 *ming* means "bright, clear, wise" and the character 水 *shui* means "water," therefore, the connotation of Mingshui would be "clear and pure social governing sans any external contamination". The Mingshui town was initially described as the perfect exemplification of both a Confucian and Taoist Utopia, where all the residents maintained a harmonious relationship both among themselves and with the nature. The author then compared Mingshui town to the ancient Xizhou²³ or Western Zhou Dynasty, which was regarded by Confucianism a golden era of civilization that was achieved by the wise governing of sage-like kings. In this section, the Mingshui town was initially portrayed as a utopia that maintained its Confucian orthodoxy from any outside disruption; it exemplified a Confucian Utopia in which the five essential relations, *wulun* 五倫,²⁴ were observed by all the residents and these relations were able to be sustained and continued through the generations with affluence. The Mingshui town was also described as an affluent society under benevolent rule and with timely precipitation and wind for the crops to grow, and the village men and women in Mingshui town lived in contentment with their simplistic and naturalistic lifestyle so that they could be entirely self-reliant to maintain and continue these five essential interpersonal relations.

Since the outward manifestation of the orthodoxy of a Confucian Utopia lies in its resemblance to the golden prehistoric era ruled by sage-like kings, in the "Utopian chapters," on a superficial level, the author seems to be considering his work as a vehicle for the advocacy of the

²² 明水 *Mingshui* means "clear water" in Chinese.

²³ 西周 *Xi Zhou*, *Western Zhou*, the period (1046–771 BCE). This period was famous for its codification of political rules, ceremonies and moral values which continued to have a profound influence on subsequent centuries.

²⁴ 五倫 *wulun* refers to the five basic inter-personal relations: the relation between the ruler and the subordinate, the relation between the parents and the children, the relation between brothers, the relation between husband and wife, and the relation between friends. Confucianism regards these five relations as the basic founding stone of the society which is indispensable for a society to function properly.

restoration of the ancient rites (*fugu* 復古) of the Xizhou dynasty, as did many of his contemporary authors of vernacular fiction, and this is clearly indicated by his quite self-explanatory pseudonym, Xizhou Sheng 西周生, which literally means “a young scholar of the Xizhou dynasty” and could be interpreted as an embodiment of his political aspiration of reestablishing the ethical values and moral conducts of the society.

From the preservative of Confucianism, the political system and the rites of Xizhou era which were created for morals externalized as social values emphasizing respect for those who are worthy of respect; being filial; distinguishing the different roles between the male and the female. These matters are embodied in the discussion at the beginning of chapter 23 of *Xingshi*, where the author presents an ideal society characterized by filial piety, loyalty, integrity, righteousness, rituals and a sense of shame. He thus described the simplistic style of life in Mingshui town, and according to the author, such a style of life is in accordance with the standards set by the pre-historical Zhou dynasty.

It was an era not far away from the simplicity and honesty of the beginning of this dynasty, which was nurtured under the edification of His Majesty. Everyone held filial piety and fraternal duty in esteem, and each household advocated a sense of propriety, justice, honesty and honor.²⁵

Then the author continues to make a comparison between the lifestyle of the dwellers in the Mingshui town with the residents of the Zhou dynasty, along with his lamentation over the loss of this simplicity, as stated in the beginning of Chapter 26:

The social customs of the world are merely fixed to favor one and discriminate against the other, who knows why they degenerate over time. To see places that are ungenerous and evil which are not able to recover their original state of simplicity; the places that have extremely honest and simple customs also degenerate just like when filtering vinegar—the newer the batch, the worse it becomes. Such is the situation in the region of Mingshui town, that few decades ago, although it dared not to compare itself with the era of the Emperor Yu,²⁶ it was comparable to the Western Zhou period. Unexpectedly, as the older generation gradually passed away, these simple and honest customs deteriorated; the younger generation of philandering and frivolous children was gradually born, mean behavior overwhelmed the consciousness and decorum gradually disappeared; the practice of bad habits became the custom, indulgent behavior

²⁵ *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), Chapter 23. “去國初淳龐未遠，沐先皇陶淑綦深。人以孝弟忠信是敦，家惟禮義廉恥為尚。”

²⁶ 大禹 Da Yu, Emperor Yu the Great, c. 2200 – 2101 BC. A legendary king, who was considered an ideal ruler.

became second nature—Mingshui did not resemble what it used to be in former times!²⁷

However, also during the Western Zhou period (1046–771 BC), the Taoist philosophers Laozi and Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (a.k.a. Zhuangzi 莊子 (*fl* c. 260 BCE) advocated the minimum interference of governing a country, *wuwei* 無爲 (effortless action or non-action); they believed that observing the principle of non-action and allowing universe to balance itself is the ideal solution to most pressing issues in a society. The Utopian chapters of *Xingshi* also conceptualize these major principles from the *Dao de Ching* 道德經 of Laozi and other Taoist cannons in that the Mingshui town, the embodiment of the author's Utopia, abandons material culture as well as political overlordship, while embracing the tranquility of the mundane, which makes this Utopia much more approachable and inviting for an ordinary Chinese audience especially the educated who were attracted to a hermit lifestyle. From this perspective, the pseudonym, Xizhou Sheng 西周生, also has the connotations of “recovering and returning to one's original simplicity”.

An example of this is in chapter 23, in which the description of the life of the ordinary residents of Mingshui town incorporates the Taoist idea of the relativity of moral behaviors:

Wealthy families, as well as ordinary ones, were ignorant of religious practices such as fasting and praying, nor did they have any knowledge of burning incense and chanting the scriptures.²⁸

From the author's perspective, the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Mingshui is in natural harmony with *dao* 道 (the path), therefore there is no need of resorting to religious or spiritual remedies such as performing rituals. Because all the devotions, such as chanting the scriptures, burning incenses, or observing a vegetarian diet, are practiced as atonement for a sinful lifestyle, or as a deal with divine beings in exchange for tangible improvement of one's living condition. In a Utopian society, the natural loving nature of people is preserved, therefore, the Buddhist reward-punish system of reincarnation is automatically abandoned.

²⁷ *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1981), Chapter 26.

“天下的風俗也只曉得是一定的厚薄，誰知要因時變壞。那薄惡的去處，就是再沒有復轉淳龐。且是那極敦厚之鄉也就如那淋醋的一般，一淋薄如一淋。這明水鎮的地方，若依了數十年先，或者不敢比得唐虞，斷亦不亞西周的風景。不料那些前輩的老成漸漸的死去，那忠厚遺風漸漸的澆漓；那些浮薄輕儇的子弟漸漸生將出來，那些刻薄沒良心的事體漸漸行將開去；習染成風，慣行成性，那還似舊日的半分明水！”

²⁸ *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1981), Chapter 23: “大家小戶都不曉得甚麼是念佛吃素，叫佛燒香。”

Daoism also advocates abandoning human wisdom in order to return to the initial pure and simplistic state of mind. In chapter 58 of the *Dao de Ching*, the author continues to argue for a non-interfering, or the *laissez-faire* attitude from the government as being most beneficial for the well-being of the entire society. The verse states:

The government that seems the most unwise,
Oft goodness to the people best supplies.
That which is meddling, touching everything,
Will work but ill, and disappointment bring.²⁹

Such teachings are also presented in the Utopia chapters. In chapter 24, when the author attempts to describe the ideal relationship between the ordinary people and the government officials:

It was during the era of Emperor Yingzong's comeback³⁰ when the forced labor was light, the taxes thin, and the laws were loose; the harvest from the earth was abundant, while the taxes from the imperial court were light. The ordinary people were just required to pay the grain tax, unlike nowadays when extra burdens were added. As for the law, after the trial, the judge would make a ruling, while nowadays, in addition to making the ruling, additional penalties of grain and silver are demanded. And in the treatment of the wealthy families, a judge would act like a wise doctor storing the elixir³¹ and cinnabar³² for emergencies and cultivating the vitality of his patients, while nowadays, when a judge hears of a

²⁹ Laozi 老子, *Daode Jing Jiaoshi* 道德經校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), Chapter 58, p. 151: “其政悶悶，其民淳淳；其政察察，其民缺缺。”

³⁰ I.e., 1457-1464. 明英宗 Ming Yingzong (1427-1464) was the temple name of 朱祁鎮, Zhu Qizhen, who ruled as 正統帝 *Zhengtongdi* (the Zhengtong emperor) 1436-1449, the 6th Ming Dynasty Emperor, and again as 天順帝, *Tianshundi* (the Tianshun Emperor), 1457-1464, the 8th Ming Emperor. In 1447 he was captured by the Mongol army and succeeded by his younger brother Zhu Qiyu (1428-1457) who ruled as the 景泰帝, *Jingtaidi* (the Jingtai Emperor), (1449-1457), the 7th Ming emperor. After his release by the Mongols, Zhu Qizhen set about regaining the throne, making his comeback in 1457.

³¹ 靈藥 *ling yao*, panacea, elixir, a legendary magic potion possessed by the immortals. See “magic medicine,” Nigel Wiseman and Feng Ye, *A Practical Dictionary of Chinese Medicine*, 2nd ed. (Brookline, MA: Paradigm Publications, 1998), 383.

³² 丹砂 *dansha*, mercury sulfide, cinnabar. See “elixir,” Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 171. According to traditional Chinese medicine and Taoist scriptures, cinnabar is an important ingredient of immortality pills.

wealthy family, they will for sure fabricate a lawsuit to extort every single copper coin from them.³³

Laozi believes that the ruler of a state or a country should make their people lay aside human wisdom and action, so that the people would return to the simplistic way of living, as well as retaining their loving and kind nature; whereas the author of the novel described the dwellers in the Mingshui town as those who “do not know riches and honour but are simple and rustic with an unspoiled mind of an infant³⁴; they are unwise yet contented³⁵—the wealthy don’t suppress the poor, and the powerful don’t mistreat the weak and the solitary—they are just like the unless, common, ignorant masses.”³⁶

The “useless and foolish people”, according to Laozi’s definition, are the people who attained the ultimate *dao*, who lives in accordance with its true nature, and preserves its innate simplicity, treating reality with the attitude of non-action. In order to achieve such state of mind, Laozi states that one should learn to discard human wisdom and stop acquiring knowledge, for the *dao* decreases daily with the gradual accumulation of one’s knowledge of the world. Therefore, the “foolish people” described in the novel, are not the real fools, but people who reach the state of enlightenment through resisting the moral pollution from the outside world.

As an explication of the teaching on discarding one’s wisdom, the author provides a story in chapter 28 in which the Jade Emperor,³⁷ decides to send a flood to purge the wickedness of the Mingshui town and keep the righteous people. Also, in chapter 28, when the divine messenger, sent by the heavenly emperor, decides to cure the diseases of the Mingshui dwellers,

³³ *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she. 1981), Chapter 24: “那時正是英宗復辟年成，輕徭薄賦，功令舒寬，田土中大大的收成，朝廷上輕輕的租稅。教百姓們納糧罷了，那像如今要加三加二的羨餘。詞訟裡邊問個罪，問分紙罷了，也不似如今問了罪，問了紙，分外又要罰穀罰銀。待那些富家的大姓，就如那明醫蓄那丹砂靈藥一般，留著救人的急症，養人的元氣，那象如今聽見那鄉裏有個富家，定要尋件事按著葫蘆搥子，定要擠他個精光。”

³⁴ 道德經, *Dao De Jing* of 老子, Laozi (6th cent. BCE), chapter 55: 含德之厚、比於赤子。han de zhi hou, bi yu chizi (He who has in himself abundantly the attributes [of the Dao] is like an infant). 欽定四庫全書 *Qinding Siku Quanshu*, 老子道德經下編, p.23.

³⁵ 道德經, *Dao De Jing*, chapter 58: 其政悶悶、其民淳淳。其政察察、其民缺缺。Qi zheng men Zheng, qi min chun chun. Qi zheng cha chun, qi min que chun (When the government is non-intrusive, the people are happy. When the government is one that meddles, the people are anxious).

³⁶ *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1981), Chapter 24: “且單說那明水村的居民，淳龐質樸，赤心不漓，悶悶淳淳；富貴的不曉得欺那貧賤，強梁的不肯暴那孤寒，卻都象些無用的愚民一般。”

³⁷ 玉帝 *Yudi*, the Jade Emperor, the chief god in the Daoist pantheon.

he transformed himself into a Taoist monk, and molds soil into medicine pills, distributing them among the crowd standing by.

The author then commented that only the “foolish people with blind trust” would purchase these soil pills, which later not only cure their diseases, but also protect these people from the flood; the educated ones, however, “For the half-educated dilettantes who were senseless about anything else, they suddenly began to debate with the people about this matter”³⁸ On a superficial level, the author created this story to reinforce the idea of reincarnation and the divine punishment and reward to the human world, making the Buddhist principles more relatable to the audience, the simplistic minded “foolish people”, however, embodied more Taoist teachings such as maintaining a pure heart of a new-born baby and abandoning worldly wisdoms.

***XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN* 醒世姻緣傳 (MARRIAGE DESTINIES TO AWAKEN THE WORLD)**

An Annotated Translation of Chapters 21-30

Chapter 21: Monk Cloudlet is reincarnated in gratitude; Chunying gives birth to a son to continue the family line

It is advised to never create bad blood with others,
Better still is building good karma secretly as one's own protection.
Avoid greed, envy, and wrath,
and cultivate tolerance to eliminate the worries,
and fortune, prosperity, peace, and longevity will be your blessings.
A prodigal son might as well vanish early like the morning dew,
A virtuous son has been bestowed into the swaddling clothes,
Who is a successor, a son that is wise and able, unlike his brother?

³⁸ *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), Chapter 28: “只是那些讀書的半瓶醋，別的事體一些理也不省，偏到這個去處，他卻要信起理來。”

He follows the truth, and guards the family properties,
he is obedient to his parents' will, and serves his silver-haired mother.

To the Tune "Heavenly Fairy."

Now talking about the mobs who rushed over to grab the family's properties³⁹: the six leaders of the mobs together with the fourteen shrews were punished and dismissed instantly. Chao Sicai⁴⁰ and Chao Wuyan were punished with a severe beating and were put in jail. After a month's recuperation, they had both recovered enough to be paraded in a *cangue* through the streets,⁴¹ and were released in two months. Since then, not even the souls and spirits of these mobs have dared to come close to the mansion of Chao. The official sympathized with Lady Chao for being a widow, and exempted her family from all kinds of corvée.⁴² Having heard that Lady Chao was being protected by the local government official, the neighbors dared not to come close to bully her. Although being deprived of her husband and son, Lady Chao was content with her leisure days, and cherished the pregnant concubine, Chunying, as if she were worth countless gold; every morning, every night, Lady Chao prayed to heaven and earth for a son being born into the family.

On the twenty-eighth of *Jiuyue*,⁴³ the doorkeeper entered the room and reported: "Cloudlet Liang and Hu Wuyi⁴⁴ have arrived here from Tongzhou⁴⁵ to visit you Madam." Lady Chao said: "What are they here for? They have travelled such a long distance. Please invite them to the hall and I will get ready to meet them." While Lady Chao was getting ready to greet the guests, she asked the servants to prepare vegetarian meals for them. Both monks were wearing double-layered robes made from chestnut-colored coarse satin, black-colored monk's hats,⁴⁶ and clean shoes and

³⁹ In the previous chapters, 晁夫人 (Chao furen) Lady Chao became widowed as the head of the family died. The relatives of the family rushed over to bully her, trying to rob her of the properties. A local government official stopped by and subdued the mobs.

⁴⁰ 晁思才 Chao Sicai and 晁無晏 Chao Wuyan are both relatives of the Chao family who planned the robbery.

⁴¹ 枷 *jia*; the *cangue* was a large square wooden collar fastened around the defendant's neck. To be paraded through the streets wearing such a collar was a form of public humiliation.

⁴² 差徭 *cha yao*, *corvée*, taxes required in labor or money to finance public works.

⁴³ 九月 *jiuyue*, the ninth lunar month, roughly equivalent to September.

⁴⁴ 梁片雲 Liang Panyun (*pianyun* 片雲 means a piece of cloud). He and 胡無翳 Hu Wuyi were both eminent Buddhist monks deeply indebted to Lady Chao.

⁴⁵ 通州 Tongzhou was a county which belonged to Beijing and is now a district of Beijing.

⁴⁶ 瓢帽 *piao mao*; lit. "ladle hat" A hat worn by monks which is embroidered with images of the *vairocana* (celestial or primordial) Buddha, 大日如来 (*darirulai*).

socks for monks; both kneeled down at the sight of Lady Chao, thanking her unceasingly for her benevolence. On hearing of the deaths of Master Chao and his son, they were both deeply grieved; They said that they used all the six hundred and thirty *liang* of silver⁴⁷ to buy rice⁴⁸ to give to the poor on credit, and by dispensing the old rice on credit and buying new rice with the interest, they had accumulated nearly ten thousand *dan*⁴⁹ of grain within two years. They also said that the first day of *shijue*⁵⁰ was the sixtieth birthday of Lady Chao, therefore they came over to offer birthday congratulations, as well as visiting Master Chao; unexpectedly, both Master Chao and his son had passed away. Lady Chao then inquired about their lodgings, they replied that they lodged at the home of Elder Fayen of the “True Emptiness” Monastery. After finishing the vegetarian meal, they returned to the monastery.

On the first day of *Shijue*, Liang and Hu arrived at the hall of the Chao household; they presented some gifts and asked to be able to congratulate Lady Chao on her birthday. Lady Chao went outside and greeted them. Because Lady Chao was still in deep mourning,⁵¹ she did not accept any gifts from relatives but gave a vegetarian banquet for Cloudlet and Wuyi. The next day, the two monks were about to bid farewell, and Lady Chao put them up for two days; she had made them respectively a double-layered robe made from dark green-colored coarse satin, a monk’s hat, a pair of monk’s shoes, a pair of plush socks, and gave them ten *liang* of silver. She presented a vegetarian banquet for them to finish their visit and they returned home.

The two of them then kept traveling; they got up early and slept late and kept up their discussion on their way. Wuyi said: “Mr. Chao Yuan was extremely mean and Master Chao was not kind either; the pregnancy in the Chao family must not be a male.” Cloudlet said: “In my opinion, although both Master Chao and Mr. Chao Yuan were unkind, they are already dead, and Lady Chao is the head of their family. This lady is a female *bodhisattva* in a million. Since she is still alive, why should God not bless her with a son to serve her? Therefore, the pregnant woman must give birth to a son, not a daughter. I predict that this old lady is blessed with fortune and

⁴⁷ 兩 *liang*, tael. One sixteenth of a catty or approximately 37.5 grams or 1.4 ounces. In the first twenty chapters, Chao Yuan swindled six hundred thirty *liang* of silver out of Liang and Hu; Lady Chao helped to return the silver.

⁴⁸ 米穀 *migu*, lit. “grains of rice,”

⁴⁹ 石 *dan*, a unit of dry measure for grains, equal to approximately 3 bushels or approximately 100 liters.

⁵⁰ 十月 *shiyue*, the tenth lunar month, roughly equivalent to October.

⁵¹ Traditionally, after one’s relative dies, one should observe a mourning period up to three months. During this period, one is expected to wear white mourning clothes and abstain from entertainment.

longevity. Since we are deeply in debt to her, it's best that I reincarnate into her son to pay the debt of gratitude to her.”

In less than a day, they arrived in Tongzhou and met their master; all of them were quite happy. A few days later, Cloudlet began to lose his energy little by little and gradually became ill. One night, he dreamed of *Skanda*⁵² who told him: ‘In her three-year stay in Tongzhou, Lady Chao tried to persuade her husband to do without torture and to reduce punishments; although her husband did not listen to her good advice, she tried her best. The rice purchased with the six hundred *liang* of silver has rescued many people during these two years: therefore, the merits she has accumulated are unlimited and she cannot be without a son to serve her. Since you have the intention of reincarnating as her son to pay the debt of gratitude—which is a really good intention—as a monk you do not lie; if you don't carry out your will, you will escape from that hell where tongues are pulled out⁵³. On the midnight of the sixteenth of *layue*,⁵⁴ you may undertake your journey; it will not delay your pursuit of nirvana; however, do not lose your true self or you will never be liberated from *samsara*.⁵⁵ Cloudlet woke up from the dream which he still remembered clearly; he then told it to the elder and Wuyi. After this Cloudlet becomes sickly and spiritless; however, he was not confined to bed and could still get up to wash and dress himself. On the night of the fifteenth day of *layue*, Cloudlet asked others to boil some water and bathed himself at a heated room, and changed into a new set of clothes. He burnt incense in front of an idol of the *Skanda Bodhisattva*, kneeling down to thank him; then he thanked and bid farewell to the elder and Wuyi, and told them earnestly: “The merits I gained through accumulating the rice to help the poor must be continued; when you get old and your limbs become weak and fatigued, I will return to take over for you hand and foot. Do not bury my body but build a shrine for it; when I come back, I will bury it myself.” Then, he wrote four verses, saying:

He knows gratitude and pay the debt,

his will and heart are determined.

⁵² 韦駄 Wei Tuo, Sanskrit, *Skanda*, is a guardian deity (bodhisattva) in Mahayana Buddhism somewhat similar to an archangel.

⁵³ One kind of hell where liars would have tongues pulled out as a punishment.

⁵⁴ 臘月 *layue*, the twelfth lunar month, roughly equivalent to December.

⁵⁵ 輪回 *lunhui*, Sanskrit *Samsara*, is a word meaning the endless circle of reincarnations. It is one of the major principles of Dharmic religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

One man's life is but one moment,
Do not bother to weep bitterly for him.

The elder spoke with Wuyi: "Although he has had a dream and the dream was quite vivid, how come that he believes in it so sincerely? He should die naturally; don't tell me that he is going to commit suicide?" After Cloudlet finished tidying up, he returned to his Zen room, burnt one stick of incense, got on to his bed for meditation, crossed his legs, and sat on the bed uprightly. The elder then told Wuyi: "Do not go to disturb him and see how he dies. We just need to observe him from a distance in case he kills himself." The two waited until next morning and the sun was rising; everyone at the monastery said: "Since the midnight of the sixteenth day of *layue* has passed, there is no longer any possibility of harm." Upon entering the Zen room, they discovered Cloudlet had already passed away at an unknown hour and two strings of nasal discharges that looked like two jade pillars had fallen onto his knees. All the monks of the monastery were shocked; as the news quickly spread across the capital city, aristocrats as well as eunuchs all rushed to the monastery in Tongzhou city like a crowd of ants to venerate Cloudlet. Their offerings piled up like hills. Following the instruction of Cloudlet, the monks established a shrine at the garden of the monastery to contain his body. Even the empress dowager sent her eunuchs to venerate Cloudlet and the shrine was decorated perfectly.

Since it was the latter half of *shiyiyu*,⁵⁶ Lady Chao was expecting Chunying to give birth any day. She had Old Xu, the midwife who was recommended by the official, Mr. Xu, to live at their home to attend Chunying; Old Xu was never allowed to go out in case she was needed in an emergency and could not be found immediately. Lady Chao had the inner room of her house done up as a heated room, and had a heatable brick bed installed in the room with tunnels for heating; she also found two wet nurses to attend Chunying since she was very young and inexperienced in caring for an infant. They were waiting day by day since *shiyiyu* the fifteenth, but nothing happened. Lady Chao was afraid that Chunying would give birth late and that that would be the source of rumors about her. It was not until on the night of the fifteenth of *layue* that Chunying began to feel

⁵⁶ 冬月 *shiyiyu*, the eleventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to November.

her birthing pangs. Lady Chao did not go to sleep either. She also invited a female fortuneteller over, and the three of them were waited on the *kang*.⁵⁷

Chunying gradually felt more and more pain. They listened carefully to the sound of the night watches, and it was just about to pass nine. The fortuneteller then said: "Nine o'clock to is a very auspicious time! If you don't give birth right away, you may just as well withhold yourself until twelve a.m., which is even more auspicious than nine o'clock." She then joked with Chunying, saying: "Sweetheart, you ought to hold yourself in tightly; don't give birth in the period between nine and eleven!" Everyone laughed and said: "What are you talking about? How can anyone control themselves in when giving birth?" Lady Chao yawned. Old Xu pulled over a pillow and said: "Madam, please have a doze. I will wait here and wake you up when it happens." Lady Chao laid down and fell in deep sleep within a moment. Suddenly, she began talking in her dream: "How can a monk enter my bedroom? Please go out quickly!" Old Xu woke her up and Lady Chao said: "Has Cloudlet left already?" Others said: "It is midnight now; how dare a someone named Cloudlet enter the house?" Lady Chao said: "Isn't it my dream? I saw myself that he entered the room wearing the green coarse satin jacket that I gave him, then he kowtowed to me two times. He said: 'Madam, since you don't have anyone to serve you, I will come to serve you.' I said: 'How could a monk serve me at my bedroom?' He did not respond and walked straight up into the inner room."

While they were conversing, Chunying cried out loud because of her labour pains. Old Xu hastened to run into the room and voila, a baby had been born. Old Xu held the infant in her hands and said: "Congregations, Madam! It's an extremely fine young gentleman!" Then the fortuneteller heard the sound of the night watchman, and it was just twelve o'clock. Lady Chao was so joyful that she had to tighten her legs so that she wouldn't break wind because of happiness. She watched the baby under lights for quite a while and said: "How come that this little boy looks just like Cloudlet?" All the maids also agreed that the baby looked like Cloudlet. She watched the infant's umbilical cord getting cut and the afterbirth buried, then she had Chunying drink a tranquilizing decoction and let her lean against a pillow on the *kang*.

The infant was just born and did not know to fear the light; his eyes were wide open and rolling to look around. Everyone was so pleased seeing this. They had a meal with Old Xu, and

⁵⁷ 炕 *kang*. A heatable brick bed, usually used in northern China.

Lady Chao gave her a cup of celebratory liquor, sent her two *liang* of celebratory silver,⁵⁸ one bolt of red cloth, and one pair of silver floral hair pins. Old Xu also toasted Lady Chao in return. Lady Chao also gave the female fortuneteller three *qian*⁵⁹ of silver. It was three o'clock next morning when they had everything done. Everyone was planning to sleep for a while; but Lady Chao was too happy to fall asleep and kept tossing upon her bed, thinking: "God pitied me and blessed our family with this boy, so that the Chao family can be continued. How can I pay my debits of gratitude to heaven and earth?" Therefore, she planned to accumulate merits and to give alms to the poor; she was also thinking about her relatives: now that the Chao family had an offspring, the relatives should be allowed to visit her.⁶⁰ Since there were only seven or eight of them, each one of them should be given fifty *mu* of land so that they could make a living.⁶¹ She pondered the matter over and over for hours, and it was still not daybreak yet; she then got up to check on Chunying; she had someone make some *congee*⁶² for her to eat and lifted up the cover to check on the infant. She was delighted beyond measure. Lady Chao said to the servants: "Previously, Mr. Xu⁶³ told us himself that when the baby is born, we should report the news to him; he also recommended Old Xu as the midwife. Let someone arrange the breakfast for Old Xu and let Chao Feng⁶⁴ accompany her to the county government offices to announce the good news to Mr. Xu!" It happened that very day that a ceremonial public main hall was being constructed and Mr. Xu had been supervising the interior decoration of the project since morning. Therefore, Old Xu and Chao Feng waited outside the gate.

Zhenge⁶⁵ heard that Chao Feng was near the gate, so she walked to the prison gate and through the little hole for the delivery of food, she called Chao Feng to come over. Chao Feng asked: "Aunt Zhen, have you been doing well in there?" Zhenge said: "Doing well? Since your

⁵⁸ 喜 *xi*, celebratory; applied to items such as drink or money appropriate for a festive occasion such as a wedding or birth.

⁵⁹ 錢銀 *qian yin*, cash silver or mace, a silver coin. *Qian* is also a unit of weight used to measure silver: Ten 分 *fēn*, [candareen, makes one 錢 *qian*, mace, and ten mace make one 兩 *liang*, tael, which is 40 grams or 1.3 troy ounces.](#)

⁶⁰ In the previous chapter, the relatives of Chao family had been despoiling the family's possessions because there was not a male heir in the family.

⁶¹ 畝 *mu*, a land measurement equivalent to .165 of an acre. Fifty *mu* equal 8.25 acres.

⁶² 粥 *zhou*; *congee*, a gruel or porridge usually made of rice.

⁶³ The government official who helped Lady Chao to disperse the mobs.

⁶⁴ 晁鳳 Chao Feng, a domestic servant to the Chao family. In pre-modern China, it was very common for the domestic servant to change his original family name to the surname of his master.

⁶⁵ 珍哥 Zhenge, the concubine of Chao Yuan who had framed the wife of Chao Yuan and had been sentenced in prison as a result.

master died, nobody has attended to me! Chao Zhu⁶⁶ no longer sends me any foodstuff or firewood as he used to. The other day, when you were here walking outside carrying the head of your master,⁶⁷ I saw you. Because I was both scared and still holding a grudge at your master's betrayal, I did not stop you to bid farewell to him. Now what brings you here?" Chao Feng said: "Now that we have had a little master, I specifically came over to announce the news." Zheng said: "Who gave birth to the baby?" Chao Feng said: "It's sister Chunying." Zheng said: "Chunying was the old Lady's maid; whose idea it was?" Chao Feng said: "It was the late old master's will. They were wedded on *eryue* the second."⁶⁸ Zheng said: "All right. Now the Chao family has had a master. Yesterday Chao Sica and Chao Wuyan were cursing in the prison, saying: 'Mr. Xu will not stay here for a hundred years! When Mr. Xu leaves, we shall see what happens!'" While the two were talking, they heard the sound of gong beating: it was Mr. Xu who just finished the installment of the beams⁶⁹ and was being carried to the country in a palanquin, wearing his red crew-neck robe." Chao Feng therefore entered inside with Old Xu. When Mr. Xu was getting off the palanquin, the two knelt down in front him. Mr. Xu was a most observant man: once he saw anyone, he would never forget about them even after a circle of rebirth. Even before they two started talking, Mr. Xu asked: "So was it a boy?" The two replied: "yes." Mr. Xu asked: "When was the boy born?" Old Xu said: "It's twelve o'clock this morning." Mr. Xu: "This boy must be a blessing! How otherwise would he have me receive the announcement in my most auspicious clothes?" Mr. Xu asked the clerk of the treasury to wrap up two *liang* of silver in red pockets and wrote on the cover which said: "congee rice silver two *liang*." Then he asked the clerks to bring a red folded note and wrote three characters: "Name: Chao Liang." He instructed the servants, saying: "These two *liang* of silver is the equivalent for my gifts of the *congee* rice⁷⁰; I will not send anyone else but you to bring it over to the Chao family and congratulate Lady Chao. I have just returned from the installation of roof beams therefore I will name him Chao Liang." Then he asked Old Xu: "What are you carrying in your hands?" Old Xu replied: "They are the gifts and reward money that Lady Chao gave me." Mr. Xu said: "It is convenient for you." Then he asked the clerk to award each of the two a hundred coins.

⁶⁶ 晁住 Chao Zhu, another domestic servant to the Chao family.

⁶⁷ Chao Yuan was beheaded by the husband of the woman, Tang, while the two were having an affair.

⁶⁸ 二月 *eryue*, the second lunar month, roughly equivalent to February.

⁶⁹ 梁 *liang*, roof beam.

⁷⁰ Waste rice that was used specifically for making congee.

The two expressed thousands of thanks and returned to report to Lady Chao, saying: “Mr. Xu had just installed the roof beams and returned in auspicious clothes, and he named our little master Chao Liang.” Lady Chao said: “This is strange: I dreamed of the Monk Liang entering my bedroom when the baby was being born; I was thinking myself to name him Chao Liang, and it happened that Mr. Xu named him the same. This is not accidental, and this little boy must be some blessing for us.” The news spread among the relatives of the Chao family, and not a single one of them was not thanking heaven and earth for Lady Chao that things had worked out so well.

On the third day after the birth of the infant, those who came to give gifts of *congee* rice began to gather in a throng: the chefs had been ordered in advance to prepare alcoholic beverages for the guests. Lady Chao invited all the housewives of the village to help with making dough for the steamed buns⁷¹ to give away to the poor; she also arranged banquets outside the house to which she invited Chao Sicaï and other seven relatives of the Chao clan, in addition to the fourteen shrews who robbed the Chao household. She had asked the servants to invite them the day before. On the eighteenth day of *layue* was welcomed into the Chao household; the other relatives who came to give *congee* rice also arrived one after another: all of them watched the infant having its ritual third-day bath. According to the local custom, a family into which an infant boy was born should boil eggs and dye the egg-shells with red food dye⁷² and make noodles to give to relatives, friends, and neighbors; those who come over to watch the infant having its ritual third-day bath should place some money, be it silver or copper coins, inside a basin—this is called “enriching the basin”—in the end the money would be collected by the old ladies. On that day, Lady Chao placed in the basin a silver ingot that weighted two *liang*, a pair of gold curettes⁷³ that weighted three *qian*, and other things like dates, chestnut, green onions, and garlic; later she added five *liang* of silver as thank-you gifts, two bolts of silk, one batch of head coverings, and four handkerchiefs. The “enriching the basin” money that Old Xu collected was worth approximately fifteen or sixteen *liang* of silver.

On that day, Lady Chao also had the servants to send one hundred dyed eggs and two large boxes of home-made noodles to Mr. Xu, who accepted the gifts and awarded the servants one hundred copper coins. She also sent the gifts to relatives, friends, and neighbors, including the

⁷¹ 饅頭 *momo*, steamed buns.

⁷² 紅曲 *hongqu*, a red food dye made from yeast.

⁷³ 耳挖 *erwa*, curette or ear-pick.

eight relatives of the Chao clan. Some of these people sent head coverings and handkerchiefs in return, some sent silk yarns; their gifts varied from one to another.

One the same day, out of the eight families of the Chao clan, seven had sent their members over to offer congratulations, all except the family of Chao Sicaï. He said: “In the past, we said that her family did not have a son and were going to divide her family property; now that she’s got a son, she has invited us over, so that she can humiliate and silent us in our presence. Additionally, I have suffered much loss because of her and have not avenged myself yet; how would I have the face to visit her?” Others said: “Even if it is to silence us, her servants have already come over with the invitation, we ought to get ready for the banquet. Could it be said that we did not have the time to appear? Moreover, it was our fault on that previous occasion: it was all right that we should obtain some of her family property, but why did we try and drive her out.? She did not report us to the government herself; it was God who sent the officials to punish us; how could we blame her for the loss? Since she had the servants bringing gifts to invite us, how can we refuse her?” Therefore, some of them brought boxes of noodles as gifts, some brought boxes of sesame seed salt,⁷⁴ some brought over ten eggs, and some brought a pork belly and two pig knuckles; Lady Chao accepted all their gifts.

The women of the Chao clan were afraid that if they arrived in the morning to watch the infant’s ritual third-day bath, because they would have to “enrich the basin” with silver; therefore, they made an agreement to arrive together after midday. The family members of the Chao clan, except for Chao Sicaï, were all a generation younger than Lady Chao, so they all kowtowed to Lady Chao to congratulate her. Lady Chao gladly received them. When talking about the incident that happened on that previous occasion, they apologized to Lady Chao. Lady Chao said: “You have suffered a great loss because of me and I should be the one to apologize; how could I have you apologize? Now it is a joyful day for all of us, I suggest that we not talk about that incident anymore and get along well from now on. Since we belong to the same clan and our clan does not have many members, we should consider everything from the long-term perspective; don’t be so short-sighted.” Those shrews—some of whom should be called “aunt,” some should be called “Madam”—all hastened to kowtow to Lady Chao, saying: “On that day, if it were not because of madam’s mercy and your begging twice to spare us, we would have already received three times forty severe strokes of the rod on the street in front of tens of thousands of people—if this had

⁷⁴ 芝麻鹽 *zhima yan*: sesame seed salt a condiment. It is a mixture of ground fried sesame seeds and fried salt.

happened, how could we be not have been ashamed to face people in the future?” The wife of Chao Wuyan said: “On that day, when the official called some old ladies over, I felt like a blow hitting on my head and thought: ‘what are these old ladies here for?’ Then Madam Seven interjected saying: ‘It doesn’t matter! The official searched us and found nothing, so he must think we are hiding the stolen goods in our vaginas, and he has summoned those old ladies to search our private parts!’ Then I said: “Private parts! How can you have your private parts searched?” It was not until afterwards did I learn that old ladies were here to check on sister Chunying.” Her words made Lady Chao and other ladies to burst out in laughter.

While the women were talking and laughing, a maid ran over and said: “Madam, our little master has pooped a large amount of a sticky black stool and Aunt Chunying is asking you to take a look.” Lady Chao said: “That is the baby’s first poop,⁷⁵ how could it not be black?” Lady Chao then entered the inner room and others followed her to check on the infant. Lady Chao held the legs of the infant with both hands to wipe him clean; while the infant’s eyes were rolling to look at the people, he urinated unto Lady Chao’s face and nose, and the entire family laughed out loud.

All the relatives finished eating and drinking and all took their leave in order to return home one after another: they were either in palanquins, or on wheeled vehicles, or on horseback. The shews who had previously missed out on a good beating were also ready to go home; Lady Chao sent them off with rice *congee* and a box filled with full with pastries, meat dishes, etc., and gave each one of them three *chi*⁷⁶ of indigo-colored fabric for making the upper parts of cloth shoes, one pair of double-knee trousers,⁷⁷ and one head covering decorated with silver flowers. Although they were a group of rough people, yet they were not able to nonchalantly receive these delightful items, but their heads resemble a four-bucket well where one bucket goes down as the other goes up, as they kowtow to Lady Chao. One of them said: “I make good shoe soles.” Another said: “I make good shoe uppers.” This one said: “I am good at washing and starching clothes.” That one said: “I am good at making clothes. Madam and aunts, if you need any clothes made, I can come to help.” The seven clansmen, each of whom had devoured the meal like snoring monks, entered from outside to thank Lady Chao before their returning home. Lady Chao said: “Please return

⁷⁵ 臍屎 *qishi*; a newborn infant’s first bowel movement or *meconium*. It is thick, sticky and dark coloured.

⁷⁶ 尺 *chi*; a unit of measurement. Depending on the part of the country and the usage it varied from 12-14” (31-36 cm).

⁷⁷ 雙膝褲 *shuangxi ku*; the *ku* was worn as an undergarment and in this variant the legs resemble a pair of long stockings.

home. I don't know if you are available before the new year⁷⁸ or after New Year's Day, for I may have some words to tell you then." All of them said: "Madam, aunt, if you have any orders, just send us a messenger and we would come immediately. We dare not to be tardy." Lady Chao thanked them and said: "You are already lacking money since it's towards the end of year and I should not have had you waste your money on gifts." Then these people were dismissed.

Lady Chao entered the room of Chunying and seated herself on the *kang*; she asked the wives of Chao Shu and Chao Feng to attend the wet nurse at the heated room, saying: "If you attend her well, by the time the infant has completed his first month, I will award you; if not, I will smear dog dung on your mouths one by one." In *layue*,⁷⁹ the daylight is short, and time passes quickly, and without being noticed, the end of year came. Although she had lost both her husband and son recently, Lady Chao had also the joyous event of a baby boy being born and so she did not feel either very lonely or sad.

Time passed quickly and New Year's Day had passed. Lady Chao had been so busy preparing for the celebration for the first month of the infant⁸⁰ that she almost neglected the Lantern Festival.⁸¹ On the sixteenth day of the month,⁸² Chunying got up to wash and attire herself and came out from the dark room. Lady Chao also got up early to attire herself, then she burnt some joss paper for heaven and earth and offered sacrifice at the family temple; Chunying was following her to kowtow to the shrine of ancestors. Then the entire family, both young and old, congratulated Lady Chao. Chunying then kowtowed to Lady Chao who told the entire family to start calling her "Aunt Shen" instead of her given name; since she was originally the daughter of Shen the tailor, she was addressed by her maiden name Shen. Then Lady Chao gave the baby a pet name "Little Monk."⁸³ After the family finished the breakfast, they checked the almanac and discovered that the sixteenth day of the month was an extremely auspicious day that was under the blessings of

⁷⁸ 年下 *nianxia*, lunar new year.

⁷⁹ 臘月 *layue*, end of year month, another name for the twelfth lunar month, roughly equivalent to December.

⁸⁰ 滿月 *manyue*, an infant's one-month-old birthday celebration.

⁸¹ 燈節 *dengjie*; the lantern Festival celebrated on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. See Carol Stepanchuk and Charles Wong, *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts: Festivals of China* (San Francisco: China Books and Periodicals, 1991), 33-39.

⁸² That is, the first lunar month, 正月 *zhengyue*, roughly equivalent to January.

⁸³ 小和尚 *xiao heshang*, little Buddhist master.

many benefic elements. The *Shagong*,⁸⁴ *Bazhuan*,⁸⁵ *Mingtang*,⁸⁶ *Huangdao*,⁸⁷ *Tiangui*,⁸⁸ and *Fengnian*⁸⁹ all indicated that it would be an excellent day to have one's head shaved; in addition, the weather was sunny and warm. Therefore, Lady Chao invited a barber with whom the Chao family was well-acquainted to shave the foetal hair⁹⁰ of Little Monk. Lady Chao first awarded the barber with five hundred copper coins, one head covering, one big floral handkerchief; after the barber had finished the shaving, Lady Chao invited him for a meal and liquor. Afterwards, the women of the Chao clan as well as the wives of the relatives all visited the Chao family and gave gifts to celebrate the first month of Little Monk; they also gave gifts to Little Monk. Even the women of the Chao family gave gifts such as silver ingots and little silver bells which weighted five to six *fen*.⁹¹

Previously, Chao Sicai thought that Lady Chao invited him for the purpose of humiliating and silencing him; unexpectedly, when his family members were invited to visit her family, they were very well well-received and was given gifts before returning home, therefore, he was indeed very regretful. On the day of the first month of Little Monk, although he was not invited, he bought two boxes of tea and pancakes, ordered one little silver bell, and dragged his wife who was an old crooked thing to visit the Chao household. His wife first entered the hall to greet Lady Chao; her mouth was as sweet as jar of honey and she hastened to say: "Dear Aunt, please accept my kowtow: you deserve even ten thousand times kowtows. On that previous occasion, if it had not been for my aunt's merciful rescue, I would have already been dragged out in the street to receive a severe flogging that would beat the shit out of me, old secret whore that I am! My aunt has the most excellent judgement: it was all because of Chao Wuyan, that goddamn traitor, that we suffered a

⁸⁴ 煞貢 *Shagong*, a benefic star according to Chinese astrology, a day under the influence of this star is an auspicious day for building a house, weddings, migration, and ceremonies.

⁸⁵ 八專 *bazhuang*, refers to the eight days within sixty days when the *qi* energy is the strongest according to Chinese astrology.

⁸⁶ 明堂 *mingtang*, originally refers to the place where ceremonies and rites of sacrifices were celebrated by the emperor. In Chinese astrology, it refers to a day that is auspicious for every kind of activity.

⁸⁷ 黃道 *huangdao* refers to the days that are under the influence of six benefic planets and therefore auspicious for all kinds of activities.

⁸⁸ 天貴 *Tiangui* refers to a benefic planet which gives out good results, such as integrity, honesty, and talent, to a person who is under the influence of this planet.

⁸⁹ 鳳輦 *Fengnian*, originally refers to the vehicle of the immortals. In Chinese astrology, it refers to a benefic planet which gives good results of great success, power, and authority.

⁹⁰ 胎頭 *tai tou*, the lanugo or fine downy hair that sometimes covers an infant.

⁹¹ 分 *fen*, is a unit of measure which equals approximately 3.125 grams.

great loss. He is stirring us up every day, so that that old goddamn husband of mine agreed to his plan, and bit you like a rabid guard dog!”

Unexpectedly, the wife of Chao Wuyan had already arrived at the interior room and heard every sentence clearly; she walked outside at once like a fierce-looking demon. The wife of Chao Sicai saw her and hastened to say: “Ai Yah! when did you arrive?” Chao Wuyan’s wife did not reply but merely said: “Er! Just attend to your own conscience! Was the whole thing stirred up by that goddam Chao Wuyan? It was you who came over three times a day to persuade us, saying that you will lead us and will take all the responsibility if anything happened! Later you were only punished with a hundred strokes, whereas I received two hundred! Did anyone take your goddamn old husband there by force? God in heaven, please listen! Please give whoever instigated the fighting another good beating!” Lady Chao said: “Today is a joyous day for the baby and I invited you over to share the joy; did I invite you over for quarreling? If you want to quarrel, just move your ass and quarrel at your own home! I have had enough of quarrels here!”

Then the servants entered to report: “Master Seven wants to see you Madam.” Lady Chao said: “Please let him in.” Chao Sicai did not enter the room but knelt at the courtyard to kowtow. Lady Chao also knelt to greet him back. Chao Sicai said: “Congratulations, my aunt! The day when we heard about the birth of our nephew, we were both so happy, that we kept skipping like crazy, hopping as high as eight *chi*! Our house is a little low, so whenever I hopped, I bumped into the roof, and later on I felt that the top of my head hurt; I had forgotten that it was the result of me keeping bumping at the roof. My wife remembered and said: ‘Did you forget? Yesterday you were so happy that you kept skipping and bumping into the roof!’ Alright, alright! God in heaven! If we have this nephew, our family properties are now worth tens of thousands *liang* of silver and nobody will dare to stare covetously at them! They will only dare to glance sideways at them! On that previous occasion those goddam ones who deserved to be decapitated did not listen to my advice, and they caused me to suffer such big losses for nothing!” Lady Chao said: “Do not mention that former matter. Please be seated outside. Thank you for spending your money to buy gifts and silverware for the baby.” Chao Sicai said: “Sister-in-law, the matter is settled indeed.; the gifts are only to covering up for the disgrace of your poor brother-in-law.”⁹² The other day, when my nephew had his ritual third-day bath, we both were getting ready to come, but a guest arrived and we needed to entertain him; therefore, we did not come to the third day celebration for my nephew.” His wife

⁹² Referring to himself.

said: “Ai yo! You are aged; how come you are this forgetful? You were jumping for joy that you hurt your head! It was as swollen as an untreated persimmon!”⁹³ It hurt so badly that you had me massage it for you; was it not? What are you talking about?” Chao Sicai said: “Yes, yes! You recall things as they were!” Lady Chao said: “Be it true or false, please be seated outside.” Then she asked the young servants: “Hurry up and get the pastries and dishes outside ready! It’s time for us to be seated.” Chao Sicai then went outside.

The wife of Chao Wuyan asked to go outside to talk with her husband. Lady Chao said: “Don’t go outside. I expect there is nothing else to talk about other than wrangling. Please be seated inside.”⁹⁴ She then invited all the female guests over to the table, distributed liquor to them one by one, and had them seated according to proper order. Ten female performers arrived and started to pluck the strings of the *pipa* with amber lyrics⁹⁵; they opened their mouths and started singing so loudly as if they were competing their neck-stretching skills. Nurse Xu arrived with Little Monk in her arms and come over, saying: “Please stop the music for now. My little master is coming to pay his respects to you.”

Old Xu carried Little Monk over in front of Lady Chao. Little Monk was wearing a monk’s hat on his bluish white-colored forehead, a light moon blue jacket, and was wrapped in a blue cotton-padded blanket; he looked like:

He has bright red cheeks, light blue scalp.

Both eyes radiating vigor, like the autumn river.

His torso is full of spirit, like the spring mountain.

One blue vein passes through his scrotum to his anus,

A sharp *fluxi* bone⁹⁶ separates the bridge of his nose and from his forehead.

⁹³ Persimmons were usually artificially ripened; if not, they would remain in a greenish white color.

⁹⁴ It was customary for women and men be seated separately. Usually, the males were seated outside the room and females inside.

⁹⁵ 琵琶 *pipa*, a four-stringed lute.

⁹⁶ 伏犀 *fluxi* is a bone on the forehead that starts from the forehead to the hairline. According to Chinese physiognomy, those with a sharp *fluxi* bone are blessed with great accomplishments and power.

His ears may not be long enough to drop down to his shoulders,⁹⁷ but they are thick and heavy.

His two arms may not be long enough to reach his knees,⁹⁸ but his fingers are long.

Looking at his adorable appearance:

if he is not the avatar of a *bodhisattva*, he must be the reincarnation of a saintly man.

Indeed, the entire family were transported with joy; no wonder that Chao Sicai bumped his head on the roof out of joy. On that day, the sky was clear, and moon was bright, and the streets were decorated with festive lanterns; Lady Chao persuaded the guests to stay and the wives all stayed until between nine to eleven o'clock. Then the guests were dismissed.

As the old saying goes, “a fortunate person is a blessing for the entire family”; had it not been for Lady Chao being a merciful person, how would the declining family have reversed its fortunes? Even though the infant had lived for an entire month, how could one know if he would be brought up successfully or not? However, based on his mother’s merits, his fortune could be easily predicted.

Please continue to the ensuing chapter to know what happens thereafter.

⁹⁷ According to Chinese physiognomy, the ear indicates the longevity and power of a person. A person with long ears dropping to his shoulders would be a man of authority and power.

⁹⁸ Long arms are another indicator of a powerful man according to Chinese physiognomy.

Chapter 22: Lady Chao shares the farmland to harmonize the clan; Old Magistrate. Xu hangs up an inscribed banner¹ to award the virtuous

Prime Minister Fan Wen² could harmonize his relatives and neighbors,
by enclosing public farmland³ to share with his clansmen⁴.

Indeed, the man lives a happy and prosperous life who can support his
entire family with the emolument from the emperor.

His exemplary conduct is to be praised eternally. All the virtuous men
before and after him, are not able to tread in his fragrant tracks.

Such a list ought to have a woman walking carefully in his steps
sharing her farmland, being loyal to her friends, transcending vulgar
customs.

To the tune “Butterflies in Love with Flowers.”⁵

The first month celebration of Little Monk came to an end. On the nineteenth of *zhengyue*,⁶ Lady Chao ordered the servants to leaven the dough for steamed buns and to chop meat to make dishes to prepare for the twentieth. The wife of Chao Shu asked: “Madam, what do you need all those dishes and steamed breads for?” Lady Chao said: “I am going to invite the eight people in my clan over and distribute to them several *mu* of land,⁷ so that they can plough and sow on the land to feed themselves. Since your master was an official, it is reasonable for us to consider our clansmen. If they are many, it can’t be blamed if we don’t care for them; but now there are only

¹ 扁旌 *bin jing*, lit. “square banner”: a banner displayed in public with an inscription commemorating an individual or an event.

² Prime Minister 范文 *Fan Wen* refers to Fan Wencheng 范仲淹 (989-1506) who was a Song dynasty author and politician.

³ 公田 *gongtian*, public land. The transfer of public land to private ownership accelerated during the Qing Dynasty.

⁴ 親族 *qinzu*, clan, male members of the same extended family.

⁵ 蝶戀花 *die lian hua*. A popular tune associated with *Ci* poetry. See, Xu Yuanzhong, ed. and trans., *Three Hundred Song Lyrics: Bilingual Edition* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 72-73, 110-11, 130-31, 190-91, 256-57, 494-95.

⁶ 正月 *zhengyue*, the first lunar month, roughly equivalent to January.

⁷ 畝 *mu*, a land measurement equivalent to .165 of an acre.

seven or eight of them, every one of whom is exhaling white vapour with the cold as a panting mule. If we don't care for them, how shall we meet our ancestors when we die?" The wife of Chao Shu said: "Madam, you have nothing to be blamed for. Although we have farmland, we'd rather share it with strangers than those god-dammed ones! As the saying goes: 'With no rain for eighty years, we can remember the good sunny days.'⁸ If it were not for Mr. Xu's help, I can't imagine how much would we have been oppressed and aggrieved!" Lady Chao said: "Why was it that he did not oppress us? He himself was oppressed by being tortured with such a leg-vise⁹ and a severe beating with a bamboo rod! Those god-dammed ones were ruthless; they did not say a single kind word from the start! At first, I was filled with anger too; however, when I think over and over again, I found fault in myself too. The first or second year since I wedded, Chao Seven and Chao Pu visited twice in the New Year.¹⁰ We were living a humble life then: the kitchen stove was cold as there wasn't food being cooked; we did not even offer them a cup of cold water. That's because I was a newly wedded wife and had a mother-in-law above me; how could I make the decision myself? They saw that we were not very hospitable and did not visit us again for several years. That's because they disliked our poverty. It was not until your master became an official later on that they resumed visiting us. Originally your master despised them; moreover, your uncle¹¹ complained: 'How come that we didn't have anyone, not even a ghost, show up when we became a *xiuca*?¹² Even after we were elected as *gongsheng*,¹³ they said that we were only a tutor and would not be very successful. So, they never paid attention to us!

⁸ "Good sunny days 好晴兒" is a pun on "good favor 好情兒."

⁹ 夾棍 *jiagun*, leg-vise, a torture instrument.

¹⁰ 年下 *nianxia*, lunar new year. Here it must mean the first lunar month.

¹¹ Uncle is a respectful way of addressing a man who is of similar age of the speaker's father. Here it refers to Chao Yuan.

¹² 秀才 *xiuca*, cultivated talent, a licentiate, someone who passed the *xiuca* examination offered at the county, prefectural or town level. See, Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 659.

¹³ 貢生 *gongsheng*, tribute students selected from among those *xiuca* with excellent academic records who then became eligible to study in the Directorate of Education in Beijing (國子監 *guozijian*) and were eligible candidates for government officials.

Now that they see we have been assigned as a magistrate, they all come over to flatter us! Poverty has us being humiliated to death!’ So, neither the father nor the son was willing to greet them. I begged them repeatedly to invite the relatives to stay for meal, but they did not comply in any way whatsoever! Later when they became officials, not only did they not give the relatives a single coin, but also, they did not invite them to share the steamed buns after previously venerating the ancestors! This is the outcome of having a clansman who is an official! So, if they released their grudges when given an opportunity on that previous occasion; how can we blame them? I think we have acquired more than enough property. Moreover, for an unknown reason, Mr. Xu has favored us and exempted us from any corvée: If Mr. Xu would be promoted elsewhere, as a wealthy household we would have all the accumulated corvée to fulfil. There are sixteen *qing*¹⁴ of land at Yongshan hill which was purchased for building a farm; we would keep it. The four *qing* near the tomb must kept be intact.¹⁵ The four *qing* which were purchased with cash by the late master could be distributed to them. As for the remaining eight *qing*,¹⁶ which was half purchased and half usurped by your uncle, I will ask the former owners over and return the land to them.” The wife of Chao Shu said: “If Madam distributes all the land, on what would our little uncle¹⁷ depend when he grows up?” Lady Chao said: “If by God’s mercy that he can be brought up, he can survive even by begging; not to mention that we still have twenty *qing*¹⁸ of land which is sufficient to provide for him.” The wife of Chao Shu said: “Won’t Madam give us servants anything?” Lady Chao said: “You have already had one or two *qing*¹⁹ of land, how much more do you still need? Is it because you have a *xiucai* or a country gentleman in your family that you need to keep up appearances?” The wife of Chao Shu said: “My land is my property; how can it be said that my land was gifted by Madam?” Lady Chao said: “Look at this women’s impudent remarks! Did you procure

¹⁴ 頃 *qing*, hide = 100 *mu*, c. 16½ acres. 16 *qing* = 264 acres = 107 hectares.,

¹⁵ Four *qing* = 66 acres = 26.7 hectares.

¹⁶ Eight *qing* = 132 acres = 53.4 hectares.

¹⁷ Little uncle refers to Little Monk, their young master.

¹⁸ Twenty *qing* = 330 acres = 133.5 hectares.

¹⁹ Two *qing* = 33 acres = 13.4 hectares.

your land by stealing? You earned it through serving the master when he was an official! The two *qing* of yours, together with your property in the city, worth nearly one thousand and two or three hundred *liang* of silver! If you can maintain it, what else would you lack? Now go outside to ask one of the servants over; I will send him to invite the clansmen.”

The wife of Chao Shu asked Qu Jiuzhou to come over. Lady Chao instructed him: “Please invite the eight clansmen here tomorrow. I have some words to say to them.” Qu Jiuzhou then invited them one by one and all of them said: “We will be there tomorrow.” Qu Jiuzhou returned and reported back to Lady Chao.

The next morning, everyone arrived early at the house of Chao Sicai. They discussed matters among themselves and said: “Why has Lady Chao invited us? Before the beginning of the New Year, she said that she needed to talk to us but she said she had no time before she was finished preparing for the celebrations.” Chao Wuyan said: “I can guess this riddle: it’s for nothing else but to ask us to share the rent for that *mu* set aside as a cemetery.” Chao Sicai said: “It’s not for this. Although the land was set aside for the tombs of the clan, which one of us has ever farmed on it? Why should we pay the rent? Her family has erected *Jiaolongbei* stele²⁰ and built a memorial arch; why should she not pay the rent? Why does she have us to pay the rent? This is not reasonable. If that old woman wants to discuss this topic, I will fall out with her!” One of the clansmen named Chao Bangbang said: “Uncle Seven, a few days ago you explained to Aunt Three that you suffered a great loss due to some goddamned individual, and now you are falling out with her?” Chao Sicai said: “Brother Three, don’t you know how I conduct myself? Do I have any dignity? Don’t mistake the facial hair growing above my mouth as a moustache; it’s all dog hair.”

The wife of Chao Sicai rushed in and said: “You don’t have to make blind guesses. It must be that because we have sold the two cypress trees growing on the tomb. She must have heard about it and called everyone over to give us a scolding.” Chao Wuyan said: “Mr. Seven, when did you sell the trees? That tomb land belongs to

²⁰ 蛟龍碑 *jiaolong bei*, a stele or monument featuring a scaly, hornless aquatic dragon.

everyone here, how could you sell the trees and make money for yourself? Even I am against that, let alone Lady Three!” Chao Sicai beat Chao Wuyan around the head and said: “You are against it, you are against it! So, what can you do to me? Now that the head of the clan has passed away, I am the new head who owns the gold throne! You are against me selling some trees belonging to the graveyard, but now I am going to sell your wife! You can’t stop me!” Chao Wuyan said: “Your words are disgusting! If you were a man of integrity and righteousness, no one would dare to say that you are not the head of us; but now there is nothing that you dare not to do, and you even want to sell other people’s wives! You may have sold the trees of the graveyard, but you won’t ever sell someone else’s wife!” Chao Sicai then came over to grab him and Chao Wuyan defending himself; Chao Sicai was about to drag him to the government magistrate to complain about him. Chao Wuyan said: “I am going there myself! If I were a little bit scared of you, I would not be called a man! At worst we both may both be seen as immoral men in the eyes of Mr. Xu. I will take the beatings and be put in the jail with you again! I will ask my wife to get a lover to support my expenses for food in the jail. You don’t have a wife who is capable of earning money for you.” He therefore dragged Chao Sicai outside shouting in the process. The wife of Chao Sicai rushed out to grab them both, saying: “You goddamned thief! Your wife is young and pretty, and she can find a lover for herself in order to earn money! I am an old woman and even if I lie down on the streets, nobody will cast a glance at me!” Chao Wuyan paid no attention to her but dragged Chao Sicai towards the *yamen*.²¹ Seeing that he cannot subdue Chao Wuyan, Chao Sicai changed tactics and began to scold his wife instead: “Old secret whore! Don’t be so gossipy and meddlesome! Did you see me selling the trees from the graveyard? —Brother Two, please release me. There are many clansmen here. We are fighting against each other inside the clan; be it my fault or your fault, but don’t let outsiders laugh at us.” Everyone began to separate them and to mediate between them, saying: “Lady Chao is expecting us to go to her. If we want to

²¹ 縣門口 *xian menkou*, “the county gate” that is the gate of the 衙門 *yamen*, the local regional government office.

go, we should set out now; if not, then let us return home to make some sticky *congee* to nourish the stomach, which is the right thing to do. You have been quarreling all the time from before sunrise until now!” Chao Sicai said: “Brother Two, what they say is very reasonable. Please release me and let us set out to the Chao family. We need to make peace and care for the others.”

Chao Wuyan then retreated; they then walked towards the Chao household together. When Qu Jiuzhou saw them, he entered the hall and reported to Lady Chao, who went outside to the hall to greet the clansmen. Chao Sicai said: “Yesterday my sister-in-law sent someone over and told us that you had some words you wanted to share with us and asked us to come over early. I don’t know what my sister-in-law’s instructions for us are?” Lady Chao said: “I lost my son the other day. As for my properties, you said that they belonged to you and I should be expelled from the house with a stick...” Chao Sicai did not wait for her to finish and continued her line, saying: “What is my sister-in-law talking about! Who dares to have such a hard heart? My sister-in-law please don’t listen to others.” Lady Chao then said: “Now God has had mercy on me; although I don’t know about the future, I have a son now. Since I have a son, the family property will remain mine.” Again, Chao Sicai did not wait for her to finish and said: “Is that the reason why my sister-in-law invited us here? Just to tell us that?” He was about to utter something else, when Chao Wuyan said: “Mr. Seven, if you have things to say, please wait until Lady Three finishes her words first.” Therefore, he cut off Chao Sicai’s words.

Lady Chao then continued: “Now that the family properties become mine, I will not monopolize them. Since we all originated from the same ancestor, if all of you could have an estate to support yourselves, my heart would be fulfilled.” Chao Sicai again did not wait Lady Chao to finish her words and said: “Is my sister-in-law going to give us several *dan*²² of grain as foodstuff, since now it’s too early in the spring to harvest grain? Yesterday when the servant invited us, I knew that my sister-in-law had good intentions

²² 石 *dan*, a unit of dry measure for grains, equal to approximately 3 bushels or approximately 100 liters.

like that, and sure enough I was correct! I must kowtow to my sister-in-law!” Chao Wuyan said: “Mr. Seven, why do you keep interrupting Lady Three? If we wait for Lady Three to finish her words from the beginning to the end and then say what should be said and kowtow if needed, then what could you miss?” Lady Chao then continued: “What I mean is that I would like to distribute the four *qing* of land accumulated by the old master for you. There would be fifty *mu* for each person, so that the eight clans would have farmland for cultivation—the master’s working as an official will not be fruitless for our clan. I have altogether four *qing* of farmland and you may divide it up among yourselves. I will also give five *liang* of silver to each family, in addition to five *dan* of grain, so that you can build your farm.”

Chao Sicai rubbed both his earlobes several times and said: “Am I listening to these words in a dream or in reality? The farmland accumulated by the old master is worth four *liang* of silver per *mu*, therefore the four *qing* would worth one thousand and six or seven hundred *liang* of silver; is my sister-in-law willing to give it to us freely?” Lady Chao said: “Look at you! If I don’t give it to you freely, would you pay me the money?” Chao Sicai said: “Namo Amitābha!²³ Sister-in-law, I don’t think you are a mortal person from this world; you must be the reincarnation of either Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva²⁴ or the woman born on the summit.²⁵! You are a bodhisattva who can live for more than one thousand years!” Chao Wuyan said: “Look at Mr. Seven! Would our sister-in-law use your lifespan to live? She deserves to live more than ten thousand years!”

Lady Chao said: “Don’t talk nonsense. Let’s get down to business. I will need to give you a deed. Who can write it?” Chao Sicai said: “Brother Two has excellent handwriting; let him write the deed.” Lady Chao said: “Look how confused you are! If one writes the deed and keeps the deed himself, who else could be the witness?” Chao

²³ 阿彌陀佛 *emituo fo*, Amitabha Buddha or the Buddha of the Western Paradise = merciful Buddha!

²⁴ 觀音 *Guanyin*, the Bodhisattva of Compassion or Goddess of Mercy (= Sanskrit Avalokiteśvara)

²⁵ A reference to the 泰山娘娘 *Tiashan Niangniang*, the Lady of Mount Tai, also known as 碧霞元君 *Bixia Yuanjun*, the Goddess of the Blue Dawn. She is said to be the daughter or the consort of the 东岳大帝 *Dongyue Dadi*, The Great Deity of Mount Tai and is the Daoist equivalent of Guanyin.

Sicai said: "I have something to say and I don't know if I should speak it or not; now I will try to say it, but it is up to sister-in-law to decide: now that Brother Three has passed away, I am the oldest man in the clan. Sister-in-law can give me all the properties on the farm." Lady Chao said: "Which one over here says that you are not the oldest? However, although you are the oldest in the eyes of the younger generation, in the eyes of our ancestors, you are a child just like them. I will not give that estate on the graveyard to any of you; it is for everyone to rest in when you go to the graveyard to worship the ancestors. The house is worthless except for being a shelter for you to rest in and cook meals on rainy days. There is not a single one of you that is considering your long-term interests but all are arguing about how to divide the properties; it is not good to turn my good intentions into your quarrels. I advise you all to manage your own family business slowly like a swallow build its nest. Unless God intends to take them back, your properties will never be exhausted." Chao Wuyan said: "What Madam said is very reasonable. Let us thank Madam first and talk about other things later." Lady Chao said: "Now we can be peaceful. You may finish settling your business before thanking me." Chao Sicai said: "Shall we need to kowtow more if we do it after finishing the business?" Lady Chao said: "It's too late now. Please have dinner first." She ordered the servants to prepare the dishes and present the steamed rice and place steamed buns and soup on big plates.

Later Lady Chao entered the inner room for a moment. Suddenly Li Chengming entered and told Lady Chao: "Master Hu has come from Tongzhou to pay Madam a respectful visit." Lady Chao asked: "Did Master Liang not come along with him?" Li Chengming said: "I asked him the same question and he said that Master Liang passed away and became an incorruptible last year." Lady Chao was very astonished and thought: "So it's true that our Little Monk is the reincarnation of Cloudlet!" Lady Chao then told the servant: "Invite Master Hu to be seated at the east hall; I will meet him there." After a while, Lady Chao walked to the hall. Hu Wuyi knelt down to kowtow to her four times; Lady Chao kept standing and accepted his kowtows, saying: "The road is long, and weather is cold; thank you for visiting me. How did Master Liang pass away?" Hu Wuyi replied: "First, this poor monk has come here to pay Madam a new

year call; second, I was concerned about whether or not a little master was born? Third, because the death of Cloudlet was very strange, I desired to like to come over and see myself. On the way back to the monastery from here, he felt deeply indebted to Madam during the entire journey. He knew that the little Madam was pregnant and said: ‘Would it be possible to find a way to reincarnate into her son to pay my debit of gratitude?’ As soon as he arrived home, he became sick, and felt fatigue every day. One day, he dreamed of Skanda who told him: ‘During Lady Chao’s three-year stay in Tongzhou, she persuaded her husband to reduce fines and alleviate punishment. Although her husband did not follow her good advice, she did her part. The six hundred *liang* of silver she gave you rescued has many people and she would rescue countless people in the future; she cannot be without a son to serve her. You said that you would reincarnate into her son, which is your own intention; as a monk you cannot lie, and the hell where people have their tongues being pulled is not a joke. On the midnight of the sixteenth of *layue*,²⁶ you may visit the Chao family; this will not delay your pursuit of liberation.’ When he woke up, he immediately narrated his dream to his fellow monks both young and old. We were discussing that although Cloudlet was not as spirited as he was, he was not sick; how could he die suddenly? Around five to seven at afternoon of the fifteenth of *layue*, he boiled hot water and changed into new clothes, dressed himself in the green coarse satin robe that Madam made for him, bad farewell to the *bodhisattvas* at the hall, and kowtowed to the statue of Skanda. He bad farewell to the elder, and exhorted me repeatedly to keep accumulating grain. Then he walked into his Zen room, burnt some incense, and sat on his meditation bed with legs crossed. The elder said: ‘How could such a healthy person die in a moment? Don’t let him commit suicide. Let us attend him from a distance; just don’t enter his room to disturb him. On the daybreak of the sixteenth, the elder said: ‘Now midnight has passed midnight and Cloudlet should be fine. Let us check on him now’. Upon entering, we saw that two strings of nasal discharge that looked like two jade pillars had fallen down to his knees; he had passed away at an unknown hour.”

²⁶ 臘月 *layue*, the twelfth lunar month, roughly equivalent to December.

Lady Chao asked: “How could there be such a miracle! On the early morning of the fifteenth of *layue* the pregnant woman was feeling her labour pains. Between nine to eleven at night, Old Xu said: ‘I guess it’s still early; Madam, please just take a nap’. So, she pulled over a pillow and I fell asleep. I dreamed that Master Liang entered my room and kowtowed to me; he was wearing the green coarse satin robe that I gave him. He said: ‘Since Madam has no son to serve you, I have come specially to serve Madam.’ I believed his words and said in my dream: ‘How can a monk enter my room to serve me? Please sit outside!’ He then went straightforward into the inner room. They saw me talking in a dream and woke me up, and simultaneously the baby was born. It was just the midnight on the sixteenth of *layue*.” Both of them felt so terrified that their hair stood on end.

Lady Chao said: “There is another strange thing. Although I did not say it, in my mind I thought: ‘Since I dreamed of Cloudlet Liang entering the room when the baby was born, I shall name him Chao Liang.’ By chance on that day when we went to the county offices to announce this good news to the county magistrate, we met him in his red crew-neck robe returning from installing the beams for a public hall. The messenger reported to him and Mr. Magistrate said: ‘This child must be a blessing: how could he ensure that I was wearing my auspicious garments to greet the messenger of the good news? Since I just returned from installing the roof beams for a public hall, I shall name him Chao Liang.’ You have not yet had a glimpse of him, but; he looks exactly the same as Cloudlet. Now has the coffin of Cloudlet been carried to the cemetery?” Hu Wuyi said: “He told us not to bury him but to build a shrine to contain his body in the backyard of the monastery; he said he would bury himself when he returns. Now his body is in the shrine at the backyard; many powerful officials and eunuchs from all came over have come to worship him. Even the Empress Dowager has sent the secretary eunuch to burn incense to venerate him. The shrine was decorated perfectly. Now on the second day of *Eryue*²⁷ will begin further major construction on the shrine.” Lady Chao said: “When you finish your vegetarian meal, I will ask

²⁷ 二月 *eryue*, the second lunar month, roughly equivalent to February.

someone to show you the baby.” Then Lady Chao went to the inner room to eat. When the meal was served, Hu Wuyan enjoyed it by himself.

After Chao Sicai and other clansmen finished devouring the meal like a pack of wolves, the servant made it known to Lady Chao. Lady Chao said: “Things turn out too well for this group of people. We lacked a person to write up the deed, and this monk has come at the right time.” After finishing her meal, Lady Chao walked towards Chao Sicai and asked: “Have all of you eaten your fill now? Why did you clear away the dishes that quickly?” Chao Sicai said: “I am full, very full! Why would I dare to do anything fraudulent while I am here?”

Now that Hu Wuyi also finished eating his vegetarian dish; he called the servant, saying that he was about to bid farewell for now and return to True Emptiness Monastery. Lady Chao said: “Please stay for a little while; there is another matter that I would like to rely on your help with.” Then she said to Chao Sicai: “Here is a Master Hu from Tongzhou city whom you may ask to help with the deed.” Chao Sicai said: “Excellent! Where is he? Please invite him over!” Lady Chao then asked the servant to invite Master Hu over. Seeing that Hu Wuyi had red lips and white teeth, and looked just like a pretty nun, everyone felt very respectful to him. They then greeted each other. Lady Chao said: “These are my clansmen. Because my late husband was an official and received an imperial salary, he bought a few acres of land; now I am going to distribute the farmland to them, and we were in need of a person to compose a deed. It is excellent that you are here; now we all depend on you on this matter.” Hu Wuyi said: “I am afraid that my composition is not good. Is there a rough draft?” Lady Chao said: “There is no draft. Please let me compose it and you can write it down and transcribe the script afterwards.” Lady Chao asked the servants to clean the table and bring brushes, ink stone, paper, and ink. Lady Chao read aloud:

The mandated lady of the Chao family, maiden name, Zheng, together with the son Chao Liang: having been bestowed with imperial grace, my late husband assumed the position of a county magistrate²⁸ for four years, and the position of a state

²⁸ 知县 *zhixian*, county head magistrate.

magistrate²⁹ for three years; he thus accumulated his imperial salary and purchased a few acres of barren farmland. Considering that there are eight clansmen who originated from the same ancestors suffering from poverty and cold, me and my son do not have the heart to monopolize the wealth. Now we would distribute the four hundred *mu* of farmland, located at the Old Official Village, which was purchased with one thousand and six hundred *liang* of silver, to my eight clansmen, and give each one fifty *mu* of land in perpetuity. This is to demonstrate my intention to bring harmony to my clan. The properties should be inherited by subsequent generations; they are prohibited to be sold to anyone with a different surname. The cultivator of the land is responsible for both taxes and the related corvée. This is the order of Chao Liang's mother; when Chao Liang grows up, he will not have to be involved in struggles over land. In addition, every clansman will receive five *dan* of grains and five *liang* of silver which will help towards the cost of their cultivating the land. This deed is thus established as a proof.

Hu Wuyi listened and finished writing the draft, and read it aloud to everyone from the beginning to the end; he asked: "Shall I transcribe this script?" Everyone said: "This is excellent. We shall depend on you to transcribe it." Chao Wuyan said: "As the saying goes: one guest would not bother two hosts. Since we are all farm owners now, shall we not be needing an ox? Why not simply give each of us an ox to bring this good deed of Madam's to perfection?" Chao Sicai said: "In god's name, Madam, what Mr. Two said is quite reasonable." Chao Jinren, who was standing next to them, said: "Ah! Don't be so insatiable! Haven't you given any thought to how much silver your fifty *mu* worth? What is the purpose of the silver and the grain that Madam has given us? And you are now even asking for an ox! No wonder Brother. Seven is named 'Chao Sicai'³⁰ and Brother. Two is named 'Chao Wuyan'³¹; you are worthy of your names!" Chao Wuyan opened his thief's eyes wide and looked as if he was about to devour Chao Jinren; he said: "It's alright if you don't want it. Why are you giving the others a lecture?"

²⁹ 知州 *zhizhou*, senior provincial official.

³⁰ 思才 *Sicai*, homophone to 思財 *sicai*, which means "to desire money".

³¹ 無晏 *Wuyan*, homophone to 無厭 *wuyan*, which means "cannot be satisfied".

Lady Chao said: “Even if Chao Jinren had not said these words, I would not give you an ox. I will keep the oxen to plough my fields.”

At first, when Chao Wuyan and Chao Sicai suddenly heard that each one was given fifty acres of land, they were delighted for a while; however, they are the kind of people who after being let into a house, they would ask for a fire to warm themselves; after they had been given a fire, they would ask to sleep on the *kang*; after they have been offered the *kang*, they would ask for fried beans to eat; and if they are not given beans, they would feel very dissatisfied and upset. Additionally, in their minds, they want to acquire more belongings than their relatives do, since one of the two considered himself the clan elder and the other the clan chief. Therefore, the two walked outside and whispered to each other for quite a while, and then they entered the room and said to Lady Chao: “We both would like to have a word with sister-in-law: there is a head for everything; even in a school of soft-shelled turtles³² there would be a turtle leader, and in a group of thieves there would be a thief leader. How can our clan be an exception and not recognize hierarchy? We are planning to leave alone sister-in-law’s possessions but reduce the amount of silver given to the other six clans by one *liang* and their grains by one *dan*; the six *liang* of silver and six *dan* of grain will be divided between the two of us: I will have four sixths of the silver and grain and Brother two have two sixths. Even then there is only a difference of one coin among us, and the hierarchy and decencies of our clan are kept intact, and our faces saved.” Lady Chao said: “Your faces and decencies would be saved, but not those the other six families. Can it be said that only the two of you are the direct offspring of the Chao ancestor, and that the other six families are adopted? Master Hu, don’t bother about them, please go to the east hall to transcribe the deed as planned. When you finish, please bring it over so that I can sign it. Everyone is arguing in this room and causing such chaos.” Lady Chao excused herself and retreated to the back room. Chao Sicai said to everyone: “What I said was true and reasonable; since we both were the tax payers of the clan, we have many

³² 忘八 *wangba*, a soft-shelled turtle; it was a derogatory term which referred to a pimp in premodern China.

acquaintances in the county government, and in the future, we may be able to be of help to you. She only intended to make peace among you. Why don't you listen to us!"

In a short while, Hu Wuyi transcribed eight copies of the contract, and everyone verified it; then they invited Lady Chao over and Hu Wuyi read it aloud to her one more time. Lady Chao had the eight contracts signed by herself and according to the names specified in the contracts, she distributed them among the clansmen for them to keep and put aside the original script for herself; she then asked a maid to carry out a bamboo casket from the back room which contained eight packs of wrapped silver with a total weight of five *liang* each, and gave one pack of silver to everyone. The farmland was scheduled to be transferred to the clansmen on the twenty-second, and the grain would be delivered to them conveniently on the same day. Then everyone kowtowed to Lady Chao. Chao Sicai was desperately trying to persuade Lady Chao to accept his prostration, and Lady Chao said: "It is not reasonable for a sister-in-law to accept the prostration of her brother-in-law; please stand up." Then the younger generation kowtowed to Lady Chao again. Lady Chao said: "The reason I disagreed with your words just now was because: every matter under the sun should be dealt with future, justice and integrity; it is just like a scale: if you show any partiality, the scale would not remain balanced. Since you have been assigned farmland, everyone should be treated fairly like the nose and cheeks.³³ Brother Seven, don't blame me for giving you a lecture: since you are the head of the clan, you should deal everything with fairness, so that other clansmen will be persuaded by you. Now you were being unfair and talking about partiality; although I am an ignorant woman, I knew the character 'partiality',³⁴ was not a good word when I heard it from you, and I knew the character 'justice',³⁵ was a good one when I saw it on greeting cards. The people of this village are good at bullying strangers, and you know this. If all of you are united, they will fear and respect you, because you are many; if you struggle against those who belong to the same clan,

³³ The nose and the cheeks all belong to the face. This phrase means that everyone should be treated in the same way.

³⁴ 偏 *pian*, partiality, bias.

³⁵ 正 *zheng*, justice.

then you don't need strangers to use their daggers against you, because you will kill yourselves!" Everyone agreed with Lady Chao. Then they all bid farewell and returned home.

Lady Chao had Hu Wuyi stay for a vegetarian lunch and sent the offerings of all daily necessities and one thousand coins to the elder at the True Emptiness Monastery as her alms for Master Hu. Then she said: "Send someone to invite the former owners of that eight *qing* of farmland over; while Master Hu is still here, I am afraid I will have to bother him again to write something." After a short time, many of the former owners of the land arrived. Lady Chao entered the hall as before. Some made a bow, and some kowtowed; they all finished greeting each other. Lady Chao said: "Are you gentlemen the ones who sold the farmland to us?" They all said: "We all are." Lady Chao said: "Those *qing* of land were procured by my son when my late husband was a magistrate. But I don't know if he purchased them for the full price. If you were treated unjustly in anyway, please tell me; I will settle it." Those people started to relate their stories respectively; in conclusion, the stories were all about how Chao Yuan first loaned a few *liang* of silver to them with an interest of around ten to twenty percent; then the interests began to be doubled and in ten months, the initial loan in addition to the interest, had increased three or fourfold. Therefore, Chao Yuan was able to procure their land which was worth a hundred *liang* of silver for only twenty or thirty *liang* of silver; even if he needed to give back money to them, he gave them items instead: sometimes it was an old horse, or an old donkey, or an old ox, or an old mule as the equivalent of around ten *liang* of silver; sometimes it was a jar of muddy liquor, which worth less than three or four *qian* of silver as equivalent to eight or nine *qian* of silver; sometimes it was a bolt of indigo fabric, which was purchased for three *qian* of silver as the equivalent of four *qian* and five *fen* of silver. He also exchanged one *liang* of silver for one thousand and four or five hundred of low-quality bronze coins in piles, and gave the debtors a string of a hundred cash³⁶ as the equivalent of one *liang* of silver;

³⁶ 方孔錢 *fang kong qian*, lit. "square holed money" was a bronze or copper coin known in English as a cash, which circulated all throughout the period of Imperial China. The central hole allowed them to be strung together in groups of 100 coins, and early in the Qing dynasty a string of 1000 coins, called 吊

when others disagreed, he would immediately compel them to pay off the debt and the interest, and the debtors had no choice but to pinch their noses to swallow the losses. They said: “Previously seeing that Master Chao had passed away, we planned to bring a lawsuit against the Chaos to the Governor. Unexpectedly, the young master was killed; we then found it embarrassing to continue this lawsuit, for we’d look like someone who was bullying a poor widow because she had lost her husband and son.” Lady Chao said: “I also heard that these *qing* of land were purchased by unfair means and most of the sellers were complaining about it. I have enough farmland to cultivate; if I cultivate the land that was procured against the heavenly principles, I would be accumulating karmic debts for my child! Now I am having you over to discuss the matter: please redeem your land at the original price so that you may have your properties back and cultivate them joyfully.” These former owners all said: “Now this land is desirable, but where shall we get the money from to pay for it at the original price? Frankly speaking, if we had enough money for this original price, we would be able to purchase any land; why should we take the trouble to redeem our former land?” Lady Chao said: “I am not requesting the original price written on the documents, but the actual money that you borrowed from Chao Yuan. I would not ask you gentlemen for the interest, nor the items that were given to you as a substitute for money.” They said: “If that is the case, then that is too much trouble for Madam. We are willing to pay both the original price and the interest and the actual prices of the items; we just want an exemption from the compound interest, and it would be more affordable for us.” Lady Chao said: “That’s alright. I have already made up my mind. You will pay the original price only.”

The people said: “Since Madam is so damned gracious, we would like to return home to obtain the silver and come back later.” Lady Chao said: “You don’t have to go now. I will get the original documents to you to keep.” There were two people among them, one of whom was named Jin Shishao and the other Ren Zhi, said: “It’s better to wait until the silver is paid before giving us the documents. It is a lean year now, and

diao (as here) was standardized as the equivalent of one *liang* of silver. However, *diao* here must refer to something else, perhaps the unit of 100 cash, ten of which joined together made up the string.

everyone is starving and skinny as if there are only bones left under their skin; we don't want to be unworthy of Madam's kindness and have some bad people get the good ones in trouble." Everyone said: "Don't you two have better things to say? How come people are this heartless?" Ren Zhi said: "Do people have hearts nowadays? Now everyone's mouth is as sweet as a honey jar, but just wait and see!" Lady Chao said: "Ordinarily, what you two said is very correct; however, since I have already made the promise, it's not good for me to lie. Please give the documents to the gentlemen here. I fear that I would increase my karmic debts by being unfaithful to the people; could it be said that they are not afraid of having karmic debts?" Ren Zhi and Jin Shishao said: "Alright. Madam, please give the documents to the two of us. One of us is the head of the neighbourhood and the other is the assistant to the head of the neighbourhood. Now we will draw up a receipt for the land and bill for the silver we owe Madam for you to keep. I will collect the silver for Madam; it should be accomplished within ten days. If anyone acts against his conscience, both of us surely have the means to handle him."

Sure enough, both of them created the documents, and everyone received them. They thanked Lady Chao and went outside the gate. Ren Zhi said to Jin Shishao: "Namo Amitābha³⁷! She is indeed a female bodhisattva! I dare to say that the child was a reward for her merits. We should immediately collect the silver to give her; be sure not to betray her good intentions."

Would such a convenient matter be a problem for these twenty people? Now that they had their farmland to rely on, it was easy for them to borrow money from others; some resold the land to others, and the money they earned was sufficient not only for them to pay off their debts but also, they had a sum of money left over. Sure enough, within ten days, they paid off the money to Lady Chao one after another with Ren Zhi and Jin Shishao. The total amount of silver was approximately more than one thousand *liang*. At the beginning, Chao Yuan and Chao Zhu had committed extortion; now according to the records of Chao Zhu, the debts were almost paid off.

³⁷ "Namo" is a Sinicized Buddhist term for the Sanskrit phrase "Namas" (I bow to); Amitābha is the Buddha of one of the Pure Land in Mahayana Buddhist tradition. This phrase was a very popular short prayer in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition of Mahayana Buddhism.

There were three people among them: one was named Mai Qixin, the other was named Wu Yi, and the third Fu Hui; the three of them plotted to cheat Qin Shishao and Ren Zhi, saying: “When we were borrowing silver from others, they did not believe us, saying: ‘How could a woman do such a good deed?’ So, they all wanted to see the documents before lending the money. Can you let us have the documents temporarily to show them? We would return them immediately afterwards. Now everyone else has got their documents back but the three of us, which made us seem to be miscreants. Now we are very ashamed of ourselves; we’d rather hang ourselves with a rope!” Jin Shishao said: “None of you three have paid a single coin, how can we give you the documents? Moreover, we are not very acquainted with each other; it’s not convenient for us to give you the documents.” Ren Zhi said: “What he said makes sense: without the documents, they cannot borrow the money; how shall we handle the dilemma? Let us give them the documents just to show it to others and have them return the documents to us immediately; or I will go with them” Jin Shishao said: “This is workable. Now you follow them for a while.” Then he took out the documents and passed them to the three; Ren Zhi followed them and arrived at the back door of the Eternal Spring Taoist Monastery. The three said: “The money lender, who is a senior General Officer of the Liaodong³⁸ military region, is inside. Since we are asking a favor, we have to be courteous; we should kowtow to him and beg for this favor.” Ren Zhi said: “I am not the one borrowing silver; why should I also beg for any favor?” Fu Hui said: “This is to help us to accomplish this business.” Ren Zhi said: “The three of you may enter, and I will wait for you sitting on the stone in front of the gate.” The three of them said: “Alright. Could you please enter and intercede for us? It would make things easier.” Fu Hui looked at Mai Qixin and said: “Bring over the gifts to give him; we need to have the gifts delivered to the inside.” Mai Qixin intentionally searched inside his sleeves and said: “I was suffering from heat just now and took off the double-layered jacket. The gifts were left inside the jacket.” Fu Hui said: “This matter should be dealt with

³⁸ 辽東 *Liaodong* refers to a peninsula in south-eastern Liaoning province located in northeast China, close to Korea.

smoothly. Just now we were asking for these documents, and that goddamned Jin Shishao made every attempt to make things difficult for us, and sure enough the silver was forgotten! I see that brother Ren has silver wrapped with a handkerchief inside his sleeves—brother, please lend us two *qian* of silver so as to save us the trouble returning home and wasting time. As soon as we arrive at home, we shall return the silver to you.” Ren Zhe, being an honest person, did not wait for them to open their mouths for the second time and took out the wrapped silver from his sleeves. He unwrapped the packet, drew out a small scale from his boots, and weighted the silver; he then passed the silver that weighted more than two *qian* to Fu Hui. Fu Hui said: “We ought to find a piece of paper to wrap it in.” And Ren Zhi found out piece of paper from his sleeve. Fu Hui wrapped the silver and entered the monastery from the back door, saying: “If the long wait should make you feel anxious, please come to the door to urge us to hurry up; ten we will therefore not delay our business in case we have become are too engaged in long conversations.”

Ren Zhi had not had anything to eat since daybreak; he waited until it was almost noon and the three of them had not been seen to come out. Ren Zhi started to feel hungry; seeing a vendor of steamed glutinous rice cakes passing by, he bought a bowl of cake and waited impatiently. It was late in the afternoon, and he still hadn’t seen the three of them; he had no alternative but to walk slowly into the monastery. There wasn’t any doorkeeper at all. He kept walking for a while, and saw a middle-aged nun grinding soybeans to make tofu. He suddenly thought: “Isn’t this place the back hall of Eternal Spring Taoist Monastery? The General Officer of the Liaodong must be lodging here.” The nun said: “Mr. Benefactor, please be seated inside; I will serve you tea.” Ren Zhi said: “Which room is the General Officer lodging at? Did you seen three people coming in early morning?” The nun said: “In the early morning, Fu Hui and Mai Qixin, together with someone I don’t know, came here; each of them finished two bowls of *congee* and left.” Ren Zhi said: “From where they left?” The nun said: “They left from the front gate.” Ren Zhi said: “Have they met with the General Officer of Liaodong yet?” The nun said: “This monastery never provides lodging for anyone. How could there be a General Officer of Liaodong here?” Ren Zhi asked:

“What else did the three people say?” The nun said: “They said: ‘If anyone comes here to look for us, just tell him that we are waiting for him at Wuniu village.’³⁹ Let him come quickly.” Ren Zhi thought: “Where there is a village called Wuniu? Ah! Those dog bones, they asked me to go find them at a Wuniu village; they are mocking me! Utterly detestable!” He couldn’t feel more remorse; how could he face Jin Shishao? He returned and had to relate to Jin the entire story from the beginning to the end. Both felt angry but, they also thought it was funny.

Jin Shishao said: “No matter where they go, we shall find them!” They arrived at the drum tower and saw the three coming out from a bar and they were very drunk. Seeing Ren Zhi, Fu Hui joined his hands together in salute and said: “Thank you, thank you! Without your two *qian* of silver, our mouths would be bored; how could we return home?” Ren Zhi said: “These three guys are not human beings!” Wu Yi said: “Does a human being hold other people’s documents? I will get a donkey to treat the mother of this rubbish talker!” Fu Hui said: “Let’s beat that son of donkey! If I am beaten to death, let there be a life for a life!” There were three of them and the others were only two.; additionally, the three were drunk, how could the two resist them? Ren Zhi and Jin Shishao therefore were badly beaten by the three.

Thanks to the leaders of this neighborhood: seeing the villagers were being beaten, they risked their lives to stop them. One of the little officers ran to report to the county magistrate⁴⁰ who was sitting at the hall working; the magistrate then pulled out three bamboo slips⁴¹ to order three magistracy officers,⁴² followed with more than ten runners,⁴³ to arrest the three suspects; when they arrived in front of the drum-tower, the three villains were still carrying out evil doings. Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi were both

³⁹ 烏牛村 *Wuniu cun*, Black Ox Village.

⁴⁰ 縣官 *xianguan*, district or county magistrate.

⁴¹ The bamboo slips were used by the county magistrate to issue orders of either arresting a suspect or beating a suspect in ancient China.

⁴² 快手 *kuaishou*, officers who execute the magistrates orders.

⁴³ 番役 *fanyi*, special runners employed by the magistrate. On the post in general, see, Bradly W. Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 122-59.

being beaten so badly that they were lying on the ground amid their torn blood and flesh. The three magistracy officers then put handcuffs on the three evil doers and assisted Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi to go to meet with the magistrate. The magistrate questioned Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi, who reported the entire incident in detail; then the magistrate asked the nun of the Eternal Spring Taoist Monastery over for questioning as well. Then he had the three suspects searched and found the three copies of documents. The magistrate was extremely surprised and issued an order to give each of the three thirty heavy strokes on their hips, one pressing of the ankles from both sides with a leg-vise, and one hundred stokes on the legs with a heavy rod. The farmland mentioned in the three documents was eighty *mu* in total, which was worth approximately three hundred and twenty *liang* of silver; the farmland is be redeemed with one hundred and twenty *liang* of silver which will be given to Lady Chao. The magistrate said: “Ask the officer of treasury to withdraw one hundred and twenty *liang* of silver from the silver that was unwrapped the other day and let Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi give it to Lady Chao. Sell the eighty *mu* through the legal process in order to finance the education of poor students; the original documents will be archived here. Drag these three crooked animals out of the gate!”

Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi took the silver; and with the assistance of others, they returned the silver to Lady Chao, to whom they told the entire story. Lady Chao said: “This was initially a good deed, but it was spoiled by these three people! Since Mr. Magistrate has confiscated the farmland to support the students, this is an excellent deed. Now please return this silver to Mr. Magistrate as my donation to help support the students’ education.” She invited Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi to stay for liquor and meals and sent each of them off with one *dan* of millet⁴⁴ and one *dan* of wheat⁴⁵ as a compensation for their pains and sufferings.

Jin Shishao and Ren Zhi, together with Chao Feng, returned this one hundred and twenty *liang* of silver to the magistrate. The magistrate said: “Alright. Since your

⁴⁴ 小米 *xiaomi*, millet, a synonym for 粟 *su*, millet.

⁴⁵ 麥子 *maize*, wheat.

madam intends to make a donation, this eighty *mu* of farmland will be regarded as her donation, and afterwards we will erect a stele⁴⁶ in honour of your madam. I will also hang up an inscribed wooden signboard⁴⁷ in honour of your madam. When you return home, send my regards to your madam.” Then he sent the three people back. Afterwards, he called in the clerk of rites⁴⁸ and order them to make a very well-built inscribed wooden signboard for the door, with the four characters “A Paragon Among Women” inscribed on it.⁴⁹ He selected an auspicious day and procured celebratory liquor, mutton, and fruits; he also had the buildings decorated festively and invited lots of musicians to perform. Then he had someone to hang the wood board over the gate of the Chao mansion.

Hu Wuyi resided with the Chao family for more than a month; Lady Chao had the tailor to make him some spring garments. She gave him travelling expenses and arranged a vegetarian banquet to bid him farewell. After three months, Little Monk began to become more cognizant of his surroundings; Lady Chao asked the servants to carry him to meet with Hu Wuyi. Oddly enough, the moment when Little Monk saw Hu Wuyi, he threw himself at him with his arms wide open and laughed, which amazed Hu Wuyi. Scanning his face, Hu Wuyi discovered that Little Monk looked just the same as Cloudlet. Hu Wuyi then said: “The little gentlemen will be without any difficulties or sufferings; he will grow up smoothly and serve Madam. When I come back on the first of *Shiyue* to congratulate Madam on her birthday I will see you again.” Little Monk was throwing himself at Hu Wuyi wanting to be carried. Hu Wuyi carried him with his arms for a while and then the wet nurse carried him back; Little Monk looked very reluctant to leave Hu Wuyi. Therefore, this indicates that the existence of Karma is supported with evidence; people cannot say that they can do evil because heaven, earth, ghosts, and gods have no eyes. This is indeed:

⁴⁶ 碑 *bei*, an inscribed stele or monument.

⁴⁷ 扁 *bian*, an inscribed wooden signboard. In the introductory poem this was characterized as a 扁旌 *bin jing*, lit. “square banner.”

⁴⁸ 禮房 *li feng*, the clerk of rites. the person in charge of one of the major administrative divisions of the magistrate’s office. On the post in general, see, Reed, *Talons and Teeth*, 31-75.

⁴⁹ 女中義士 *nü Zhong yishi*. lit. “women among, a righteous one.”

He who sows melons, will reap melons;

He who sows millet,⁵⁰ will reap millet.

Karmic retribution is precious: the one who gave away beverages,
received beautiful jades.⁵¹

⁵⁰ 粟 *su*, millet.

⁵¹ This is a literary allusion to a story in the 搜神紀 *Soushen Ji* (In Search of the Supernatural) by 王寶 *Gao Bao* (†336 CE).. A good-hearted man often gave away beverages to passersby and was rewarded by an immortal with a bag of stones. Following the instructions of the immortal, he sowed the stones which later became precious white jades; he then used the jades as betrothal presents and married a beautiful lady.

Chapter 23: Xiujiang County does not have frivolous customs; in the town of Mingshui¹ ancient customs are preserved.

It was an era not far away from the simplicity and honesty of the beginning of this dynasty, which was nurtured under the edification of His Majesty.² Everyone held filial piety and fraternal duty in esteem, and each household advocated a sense of propriety, justice, honesty and honor. The aristocrats were not arrogant, but obeyed the rules inside their houses; the wealthy loved propriety and considered the laws as their standard. They would not taste the food which was not offered (to their ancestors) first, and would not use their assets which were not donated to the public first. The women venerated “the three obediences”³ and the men engaged in hundreds of virtuous deeds. Each family had assets that were undivided for three generations, and people made more friends who were supportive and devoted. People only got married when they were deeply affectionate, and became disciples only if the teachers obeyed the principles of righteousness. In both public and private schools, the chanting of texts echoed from morning to dawn; in both paddy fields and arable land, the peasants labored from winter to summer. The people had permanent property and the officials remained constant. When entertaining guests and friends, people did not indulge in lavish cuisine; when making offerings to gods and ancestors, people used only pure and clean meats. People did not wear luxurious garments but simple fabric and did not reside in extravagant houses but thatched cottages. This great abundance was not limited to material prosperity only and the level of harmony almost exemplified the ultimate *dao*.

¹ 明水 Mingshui on the 繡江, Xiuxiang (River Xiu), is now a 街道, *jiedao* (subdistrict) of the 县级市, *xianjishi* (county level city), 章丘 Zhangqiu, itself administered by 濟南, Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province. In the seventeenth century it was a busy market town on the Grand Canal between 臨清, Lingqing, now a [county-level city](#) administered by Liaocheng City in western Shandong Province and the 地级市, *dijishi* (prefectural-level city) of 濟寧, Jining.

² In 1644 the Ming dynasty was overthrown and a new dynasty known as the Qing began to rule. The Shunzhi Emperor (1638-1661) is probably the Emperor referred to here, although from 1644-1651 power was held by the regent, the Emperor's uncle, Dorgon (1612-1650).

³ “The three obediences” are fundamental Confucian precepts regulating the behavior of women. They require that a woman “obey her father before marriage, her husband when married, and her sons in widowhood.”

Dear readers, you may ask, since the tale of Chao Yuan and his kinsmen happened in Wucheng County, why should I shift the story to Xiujiang County?⁴ Because after their death, Chao Yuan and his people were reincarnated and they gathered together assembled in Xiujiang County and were predestined to become enemies in order to pay their karmic debts. Later in this story, our characters will encounter a Zen Buddhist monk and obtain enlightenment from him; therefore, it is worthwhile to relate the stories that happened in Xiujiang County.

Xiujiang County is located one hundred and ten miles away from the capital city, Jinan. It is a renowned place surrounded by famous mountains and waters, among which is the very well-known Huixianshan⁵ mountain that is said to be one of the ninth earthly fairylands according to Taoist scriptures.

In the twenty first year of the Zhenyuan Era of Tang Emperor Dezong,⁶ Shunzong was enthroned as crown prince.⁷ The emperor dreamed of a peculiar man who proclaimed himself to be the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea,⁸ and who gave him a pill, which he swallowed. Awakened by a painful feeling in his throat, the Emperor called a court maid and asked for some tea, and since that time, the Emperor was no longer able to utter a single word and became mute. He was unable to hold court but remained in the inner palace, giving remarks on the memorials or letters submitted by the government officials. The Empress considers the reason for this: “Since the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea poisoned the Emperor in his dream making him mute, if this is not the result of an old feud, then there must lie some offense behind it which should

⁴ 武城,縣 Wucheng county in Dezhou [德州](#), Shandong, 繡江縣, Xiujiang County is fictitious, although as has been noted Mingshui is situated on the Xuijiang River.

⁵ 會仙山 *Huixianshan*, Mount Huixian, Mountain of the Immortals, is to the southwest of 鄒平 Zouping, a county level city under the administration of 濱州 Binzhou City in Shandon Province.

⁶ 唐德宗 Tang Dezong, Emperor Dezong of Tang (742-805), reign name of the tenth Tang emperor Li Kuo [李适](#), who reigned 779-805. The twenty-first year of his Zhenyuan era would be 805.

⁷ [唐順宗](#) Tang Shunzong, Emperor Shunzong of Tang, (761-806), reign name of the eleventh Tang Emperor Li Song [李誦](#) who reigned 805-06. He became crown prince not in 800, but 780, the second year of his father's reign.

⁸ 龍君 *Longjun*, Dragon King of the Eastern Sea. In [西遊記](#) *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West) he is called 敖廣 Ao Guang.

be able to be remedied by penance.” Therefore, the Empress sent off her trusted eunuch Li Yanzhong,⁹ who carried out the Emperor’s orders, to make a pilgrimage on behalf of the Emperor to the Temple of the Sea Gods in Dengzhou and Laizhou in Shandong province, along with famous incense, precious candles from the royal palace, and an imperial silk robe manufactured in Suzhou and Hangzhou. The imperial envoy was to depart for Shandong province to pray at the temple of the sea Gods in Dengzhou and Laizhou in Shandong province. Whenever he was to pass by a famous mountain or river, he was to stop and pray for the healing of the Emperor’s throat.

Li Yanzhong understood the imperial command and made haste day and night with his journey. When he passed through Xiujiang, he learned about the renowned Huixianshan mountain.¹⁰ Following the imperial orders, he purchased an animal for a sacrifice, went up to the mountain, fasted and slept, and offered the sacrifice next early morning. It was sometime after 3 o’clock in the morning¹¹ when Li Zhongyan was just about to make his prostrations, when he heard loud and resonant sounds of music from the summit of the mountain. He raised his head and saw lights shining as brightly as daylight and countless flying celestial beings dressed in feather garments circling above; this continued for a long time when finally, Li Zhongyan saw immortals riding on tigers, deer, phoenixes and cranes ascending in to the sky. At the end of his mission Li Zhongyan reported to the Emperor about his encounter with the immortals, and therefore the Emperor renamed this mountain as Huixian.¹² On Huixianshan mountain there are numerous flowing springs which form waterfalls or streams, which collect in a misty lake named White Cloud.¹³ In times of drought, the lake never dries up; during the raining seasons, it never overflows.

⁹ 李言忠. The name *Yanzhong* literally means “to speak honestly.”

¹⁰ 會仙山 Huixianshan, Mount Huixian, to the southwest of 鄒平 Zouping, a county level city under the administration of 濱州 Binzhou City. In Shandong Province.

¹¹ 五更 *wugeng*, the fifth night watch (3:00-5:00 am).

¹² 會仙 *huixian*, “gathering of immortals.”

¹³ 白雲湖 Baiyun hu, White Cloud Lake, about 35 miles east of Jinan in Shandong province.

Forty *li*¹⁴ from Xiujiang county, is the town of Mingshui where a temple of Dragon the King is located.¹⁵ A clear and sweet running spring, rising from the base of the temple, also flows into the White Cloud Lake. How could a propitious place like this not produce outstanding people? Moreover, it was only sixty years after the era of Emperor Taizu,¹⁶ and the people were simple, honest, and full of vitality, only the good villagers had children, and those who died young were only the evil and crippled ones. Wealthy families, as well as ordinary ones, were ignorant of religious practices such as fasting and praying, nor did they have any knowledge of burning incense and chanting the scriptures during the four seasons and the eight festivals.¹⁷ They only practiced the worship of ancestors and the fulfillment of filial duties. Although no extraordinarily acts of a Da Shun, Zeng Shen, or Min Sun¹⁸ were discovered, acts of disobedience were never heard of. Not to mention that there was no disobedience towards one's elderly relatives. Even when encountering an elderly acquaintance in among the villagers, the young people would never neglect them but show courtesy to the elderly. As long as a family had a bowl of rice, they would empty out half of the bowl to provide the teacher with sustenance. Ordinary families would band together to invite a private teacher for their children; for families short on money, they would also send their children to the public school in the village for several years. Students with a good academic record

¹⁴ 里 *li*, an ancient measure of length equivalent to around 500 meters.

¹⁵ 龍王 Long Wang, the Dragon King, is the divine ruler of the ocean and can control the weather, especially rainfall.

¹⁶ 太祖高皇帝 Taizu Gao huangdi, the Taizu Gao Emperor of the Southern Qi, reign name of Xiao Daocheng (蕭道成) (427-82). His rule was 300 years in the past not 60 years when on the throne was 唐玄宗, *Tang Xuanzong* (Li Longji, 685-762), the seventh Tang Emperor, 712-56.

¹⁷ The traditional Chinese lunar calendar divides a year into 24 solar terms, and the "eight festival" refers to the eight important solar terms: the Beginning of Spring, the Beginning of Summer, the Beginning of Autumn, the Beginning of Winter, the Spring Equinox, the summer solstice, the Autumnal Equinox and the winter solstice.

¹⁸ 大舜 Da Shun, the Great Shun, a legendary Emperor who is supposed to have reigned 2294 and 2184 BCE and was renowned for his modesty and filial piety; , 曾參, Zeng Shen (505-435 BCE), a student of Confucius and supposed author of the Confucian classic, 大學, *Da xue* (The Great Learning); 閔子, Min Sun (536-487? BCE), another disciple of Confucius. His tomb is in Jinan.

would be educated to partake in the matriculation exams for government officials.¹⁹ Those who are less talented, would be engaged in agriculture, or learn to be skilled craftsmen: nobody was idle or illiterate. Even the vegetable vendors were able to quote from the Confucian canons. Never were there in Xiujiang the smallest theft, nor any condemned criminals in the jail. The women, even those from the humblest families, never made an appearance in public, nor wandered on the streets.²⁰ Stories of henpecked husbands have been very common ever since ancient times, but in Xiujiang, however, the wives were wives and husbands were husbands: the harmony of Yin and Yang was never subverted,²¹ the roles of firmness and softness were seldom out of balance, and the incidents of hens crowing at dawn were rarely heard of. The villagers ploughed and weeded in the spring and the summer, harvested and stored their food in the autumn and the winter; they had to pay their crop taxes²² before consuming their harvest. The head of the district only visited the villages in tax times, not at all conversant with notions such as dunning for taxes. He only distributed the tax notifications to the villagers, and was always received with a sumptuous dinner prepared by the hosts. The scholars studied their books diligently while the weaving maids worked on their spinning wheels; most of them for their entire life would never deal with a government official, with the exception of meeting the magistrate at school. The town of Mingshui, just forty *li* from Xiujiang, is more like a Peach Blossom Spring²³ for hermits, and the villagers live the life of the ancients of previous dynasties. Just to pick out some things concerning them, which the people of our era do not even venture to open their eyes to see, not to mention to make a comparison with themselves.

¹⁹ 舉業 *juye*, the preparatory literary studies for the Imperial Examinations. See Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 659.

²⁰ In premodern China, women's activities were mostly restricted inside their households.

²¹ 陰陽 *yinyang*, Chinese philosophical terms referring to the duality of everything.

²² During the period 618-907, the 租庸調制, *zuyongdiao zhi* (Tripartite Tax System) was in effect. The 租 *zu*, field tax, was paid in grain,

²³ 桃源 Taoyuan, i.e. 桃花源, Taohuayuan (Peach Blossom Spring), is the name of a land concealed from the outside world where everyone lives in harmony as described in a prose work of the same name by 陶淵明 Tao Yuanming (365?-427). It is the Chinese equivalent of Utopia.

There was a government minister named Yang, who retired with full salary, and returned home from his position at an old age. He had no desire to live in the metropolis, but wanted to return to Mingshui. Modestly repairing his former ancestral residence, which bore no resemblance to an official's mansion, he is content with it and refused the servants sent by the magistrate. Whenever he decided to travel around or visit a distant field, he would employ a sedan chair, carried by two porters; if he decided to visit places nearby, he would walk slowly with a bamboo stick and followed by a book boy.²⁴ When passing his old neighbors or aged peasants working in the fields, he would sit down either under the trees in front of local temples, or on the rock in front of the gates, and have chat with them all day long. If he has food and wine bought from the village inns, he would place them on the rock to share with the villagers. Who would be able to find in him any trace of the temperament of a retired government minister? The villagers, on the other hand, don't treat him as a government minister, and still address him by the title appropriate to a relative. There are no weddings and funerals that he does not attend. As for his sumptuous outfits, he only has three: a coarse textured robe for winter, another one for summer, and a starched white robe for spring and summer. Whenever there is a meeting in the village, he indeed arrives earlier than anyone else, and is the last one to return home.

Liu Fangbo,²⁵ a man from the neighboring village was accustomed to visiting Yang, who would invite him to stay and to enjoy the scenery of Xiujiang. One day, when Yang was keeping Liu Fangbo company for breakfast, an old man wearing ragged robe, a pair of torn slippers, with his head uncovered,²⁶ and carrying a pouch, walked into the entrance to the reception hall. Yang immediately put down his chopsticks, and approached the stairs to greet the old man himself. Holding onto his arm, Yang cordially invited the old man to enter the reception hall. Noticing a guest at the table, the old man

²⁴ 奚童 *xi tong*, book boy, the male helper in a private library.

²⁵ 劉方伯, literally "uncle Liu Fang," but 伯 *bo*, uncle, here is just used as a term of respect.

²⁶ In ancient China, traditionally males covered their heads. If a man's head was uncovered, he could either be a monk or have an unconventional and unrestrained temperament.

refused to enter, but asked for a few *dou* of seed-grains for sowing.²⁷ Yang immediately asked a servant to measure out the seed-grains for him. When the old man left, Yang insisted on seeing him off at the gate and asked a servant to carry the seed-grains to the old man's residence. Liu Fangbo asked: "Who was this old gentleman just now? Why have you have treated him with such respect?" Yang replied: "He is an older brother in my extended family. Today he came to pick up some seed-grain for sowing." Fangbo asked: "He is just a peasant; why did you bother to treat him this way?" Yang replied: "If it were not for the brilliant emperor, I could have been just like my brother. My official positions might be higher than my brother's, but his land is much bigger than mine by many acres." His words made Fangbo feel ashamed of his indiscreet remarks.

Outside the village was a small manor belonging to Yang. An ancient river levee lay in front of the manor and below the manor is a running creek. Yang widened the levee by a few feet and built five cottages there. Along the river levee he planted willows and in less than twenty years, the willows were as thick as one's arm. In late spring, the peach blossoms were in full bloom, splendid as silk brocade. A bridge was built over the creek on the river levee, and a blue cloth with wine shop-sign hanging from a pole was erected beneath the trees. Inside the wine shop Yang placed some tables and stools, and a stove²⁸ was also installed. A family servant of Yang's is appointed to attend to the wine shop, and anyone could purchase two to three big bottles of wine, along with complimentary entrees, for a few cents. Although it was an era of peace and prosperity, and all the rice and flour were cheap, his wine shop pub was not opened to make a profit, but rather for the conveniences of the travelers who go there sight-seeing and whose enthusiasm might be spoiled without drinking. If Yang were to serve every visitor, on the one hand he would be pestered beyond endurance, and on the other hand, the visitors would feel uneasy in being treated too frequently. Therefore, while nominally Yang is selling wine, its price is actually lower than half its cost. But there is one drawback: the customers can consume as much as they please, but they are not

²⁷ 斗 *dou*, a dry measure for grain the equivalent of a peck or two gallons.

²⁸ 爐 *lu*, a stove or brazier used to heat the wine. Certain wines such as the 黄酒 *huangjiu*, yellow rice wine, needs to be warmed in hot water before consumption.

allowed to take the wine anywhere else. If anyone wanted to drink on credit, Yang did not mind: he neither kept an account nor tried to collect the money. On the other hand, nobody forgot their bills. Minister Yang often walked into his wine shop for a good time.

One day, the pub was short of side dishes to go with the drinking and Yang ordered his family servants to fetch some. Two passengers crossed the bridge and walked along the river levee to enter the wineshop and to sit down. They asked: “Warm two bottles of wine for us to drink.” Minister Yang replied: “We have enough wine but are in short of side dishes, so the manager has gone home to fetch some and asked me to stand in for him in taking care of the wine shop. Please wait for a while.” The two gentlemen replied: “We have brought our own dishes in our marinating box; please warm some wine for us.” Following their demands, Minister Yang put two bottles of wine himself in the water boiling on top of the stove; he carried the wine to the table himself and sent over two pairs of chopsticks to their table. The two gentlemen took some chicken marinated with fermented soya-bean paste and black bean sauce out of their marinating box, laying it out on two plates, and poured some wine. They looked at Minister Yang and said: “Would you like to drink with us?” Minister declined politely: “Please help yourselves. I never drink.” The two gentlemen said: “Now how old is Minister Yang? Is he still healthy?” Minister Yang replied: “He is about eighty years old and still quite healthy.” The two gentlemen then said: “Namo Amitabha Buddha!²⁹ We hope that he will live for two hundred years!” Minister Yang asked: “Why would you two gentlemen wish him a long life?” The two gentlemen replied: “We love drinking. We are both public errand-runner of Zouping county,³⁰ and we pass this place on official errands at least ten times a year, and there is not a single time that we are not treated with bottles of wine by him.” Minister Yang asked: “Don’t you pay for the wine you drink? You don’t have to be that grateful.” The two gentlemen replied: “We are quite terrified when you mention money; the price for ten bottles here is not

²⁹ 阿彌陀佛 *Emituo Fo*, Merciful Buddha. The Chinese equivalent of the Sanskrit phrase: *Namo Amitabha Buddha*, Homage to the Amitabha Buddha.

³⁰ 鄒平縣. Zouping xian is in Binzhou, Shandong.

enough even for five bottles elsewhere. The old gentleman doesn't want to sound like he giving alms, so he charges a few cents for fun." They continued to ask: "You, sir, must be fifty-year old this year? Where do you live?" The Minister replied: "I also live in this village and am about fifty years old this year." The two men asked: "Do you see Minister Yang often?" The Minister answered: "I am his close neighbor and he is my landlord. We are so close that we act as a man and his shadow." One of the gentlemen asked: "Why are you two then separated today?" The Minister replied: "He will be here very soon." The two men said: "He will be arriving soon?" The minister replied: "He will be here shortly." If he is coming soon, since we are short of cash, we should probably in advance avoid him." The Minister replied: "It was you two gentlemen who are grateful for him just a moment ago; but now it is also you who want to evade him in advance. Minister Yang is but a normal man as you, he has one nose, two eyes. Why are you so afraid of him?" The two men replied: "Although he has only one nose and two eyes, he was the prime minister to the Emperor. Although he is retired with full salary, all the local officials have to have an audience with him every month. How 'normal' he is that you should underestimate him?" The Minister replied: "I am with him always and have never seen a local official greet him." The two gentlemen said: "Initially the officials came several times and Mr. Yang did not decline their requests. Later when the local officials come to see him again, he would invite them for big banquets, and they were too embarrassed to visit him again. Normally we don't overdrink but today the wine is too strong and we cannot drink anymore." The Minister replied: "It is noon right now and the weather is very hot. Take your time drinking and when the manager returns with the side food, have another bottle before you go. If you are hungry, there is ready-cooked rice and please help yourself to some." The two men said: "We have already drunk wine and how could we trespass any more on your hospitality?" The Minister replied: "If you wish to pay, just leave some money for the rice."

While they were conversing, the manager returned with a big basket of side dishes, following by two servant boys, one with two pots and the other with a tin can, and came forward. The manager asked: "There are guests drinking! Who warmed their

wine?" The Minister replied: "It was me." The manager said: "How fortunate you two gentlemen are that the Minister warmed the wine for you himself!" The two men then asked: "Could this be Minister Yang?" The manager replied: "So you did not recognize him at all?" The two men immediately knelt down to kowtow hurriedly. The Minister pulled each of them up with his two hands, smiling: "Just now I was honored to be praised by you two gentlemen, thank you, thank you. I just said that when the new dish arrives you could drink another bottle; now the side dishes have arrived and the rice is ready." He told the servants to open the pots, saying: "Let me see what's inside." There was a big bowl of tender tofu steamed with black bean sauce and meat paste, one bowl of cured meat, one bowl of vermicelli mixed with vegetables, one bowl of sweet pickled cucumbers, one bowl of garlic sprouts, one big pile of pancakes, one big plate of lettuce, one plate of sweet fermented soya-bean sauce, and one big jar of boiled millet with green beans. The Minister told the manager: "Let us offer our dishes to these two guests. I will go home to eat. As for you, I will ask someone else to bring food for you to eat." While he was dragging his bamboo walking stick along behind him, a boy servant, rising up from the stool to go home, opened a cloth umbrella. Yang spoke to the two gentlemen: "There is no appropriate food for you gentlemen at our barren village; please bear with these humble dishes." The two men replied: "We realize we offended you, sir, without reason and may we thank you for your hospitality." The Minister replied: "We were strangers this time, but next time we will be acquainted." Two individuals accompanied the Minister down the river levee and returned to the wine shop. The manager set out their dishes and invited them to eat. The two men said: "This food is so plentiful that we are afraid even the three of us couldn't finish it." Therefore, they invited the manager to dine with them. A lively conversation went on among the three men who were exchanging their comments on the virtues of Minister Yang.

The two gentlemen said: "Such a high official as he is, yet he is even humbler than an ordinary wealthy person. From ancient times to the present, such occurrences have been very rare. If there was such a high official in our county, his insolence would have swollen up to the sky, yet even that would not be enough for the misdeeds of the person in charge his household." The manager replied: "Altogether there are ten to

twenty household managers at our home, but they dare not even wear a long cloth robe, not dare to commit any misdeed!” The two men asked: “Why so? Is it because they couldn’t afford a robe?” The manager replied: “It’s not because of poverty; they could afford even ten satin ones. However, on one hand, even our master himself wears an old white robe, what do we dare to wear? On the other hand, the master doesn’t allow us to wear a robe, fearing that if we household managers were to wear robes, other people would have to bow to us.³¹ That’s why he forbids it.” The two men asked: “Just now we were impressed by your master’s kindness; he doesn’t seem like a severe person.” The manager replied: “If he were severe, he could restrain people’s bodies, but not their minds, so there is a limitation to severity: but he influences people by virtue. However, if anyone acts against his own conscience, the master would rather ignore their wickedness; the person as a result would truly develop a guilty conscience and feel ashamed of himself.” While they are chatting, the two men were about to pay for the wine. The master said: “According to the old policy, if the master sees you drinking here, you will not be charged for the wine.” The two men said: “The master just treated us personally with the food, how could we drink for free? We would pay you a tip, just don’t record that on your account.” The manager replied: “Just now I said, one shouldn’t act against one’s conscience. Did you not hear me?” The two men said: “Exactly, exactly. We are only able to thank the master in person.” Again, they made many bows to the manager until they departed and crossed the bridge.

These were some of the random acts of an Imperial Official in the town of Mingshui.

I will now relate some of the acts of a teacher, which are quite rare in this society.

There used to be a very wealthy family in this village name Li. For generations, they have been exceedingly rich; however, not one *xiucai*³² has emerged from this

³¹ Robes were worn by the privileged class.

³² 秀才 *xiucai*, cultivated talent. Someone who passed the *xuicai* examination which was in effect during the Huangdi Sui and Tang dynasties (518-907). The examination covered statecraft and the Confucian classics. Successful candidates were awarded Official Posts at the rank of 8A and 8B. In all there were 9 ranks 品 *pin*, ranging from 1 (highest) to 9 (lowest). Each rank consisted of two sub-ranks 正 *zheng* (first or A) and 從 *cong* (second or B). Furthermore, each of the sub-ranks in ranks 4 to 9 was

family. One of the members of this family is named Li Dalang, who had been educated by a private tutor since his childhood. So far as working the land and farming was concerned, Li Dalang's mind was really extremely clear; however, so far as studying was concerned, it was as if his mind was completely gummed up with twenty *jin* of cowhide glue.³³ He studied until he was eighteen years old, then he was not able to study anymore; he was like a rock thrown into the water that would not become porous even after several millennia.

However, Li Dalang had a valuable asset that no one could compete with: if he hears about anyone that is willing to study, or anyone who is literate, he would be extraordinarily respectful to them. It happened that Heaven didn't want to disappoint his good intentions, Li Dalang was blessed with a son when he was twenty, and with a second son when he was twenty-two. When the elder son, Xibai, was eight years old and the younger one, Xi Yu, was six, he then invited a teacher name Shu Zhog, who was well known in the town of Mingshui for his kind-heartedness, yet who was considered a dilettante in Xiujiang county. Li Dalang invited him to teach the two children, but he was afraid that he would not agree to teach diligently; therefore, he increased the tuition to obtain the wholehearted devotion of the teacher: in addition to the annual salary of forty *liang*³⁴ of silver, Li Dalang treated the teacher with the utmost respect, providing him with outfits for all seasons, and gifts for festivals of all kinds.

Being grateful for Li Dalang's treatment, Shu *xiucai*³⁵ put his utmost effort into his teaching. Strangely, despite their father's untalented mind, these two students were gifted with extraordinary memory for studying: they retained in their mind all lessons they were taught and all the books they read, as if the lessons and books were firmly inscribed in their minds. Having taught them for three years, Shu *xiucai* reached the limit of his ability as a teacher.

further divided into an upper grade, 上 *shang*, and a lower one, 下 *xia*. In all there were 30 separate ranks from 正一品 *zheng yipin* (Rank 1A) to 從下九品 *cong xia jiupin* (Rank 9B2).

³³ 斤 *jin*, catty. Approximately 500 grams or a little more than a pound avoirdupois.

³⁴ 兩 *liang*, tael. One sixteenth of a catty or approximately 37,5 grams or 1.4 ounces.

³⁵ Shu Zhog is someone who had passed the *xiucai* examination.

If it was an immoral *xiuca*i had taken this position, why should he even care about wasting his students' talents? Even if you carried a stick, you wouldn't be able to drive him away. Nevertheless, Shu *xiuca*i told Li Dalang: "These two students will be outstanding scholars in the future, and you should invite an excellent teacher to cultivate them. Now I am not a competent teacher for them, and I must resign so that I don't delay your sons' education." Li Dalang replied: "We are getting along very well, what makes you want to resign? My elder son is only twelve, and the younger one is only ten, how could you be incompetent for them? It must be that you are being mistreated and making an excuse in order to leave." Shu *xiuca*i answered: "If you were mistreating me, I just wouldn't resign; it's just because you are treating me extremely thoughtfully, I cannot hardheartedly betray your good intentions, and harm your sons' future. Your sons are like precious jade inserted in a hard rock: you must find an extraordinary artisan skilled in carving jade, so that the beautiful jade will be polished. If you let the jade into the hands of the mediocre craftsman, it will be ruined. Despite your sons' young age, they should be educated just like the way wine is made: only good fermentation yeast can produce good wine; if you use sour and deteriorated yeast, you can only produce bad liquor. It would be good if one could easily forget whatever one was taught: when one grows up one could discard these old clichés and learn new things; as for your two sons, they memorize anything they learn firmly, therefore you should take precautions. I would recommend a Mr. Yang to you." Hearing this, Li Dalang had no choice but to accept his resignation.

Sure enough, Shu *xiuca*i recommended a distinguished scholar without a post, a Mr. Yang, to fill the position. After teaching for two years, the older son, who is only fourteen years old, entered the county school.³⁶ After another two years, the older son achieved a first-class pass in the Imperial Examinations coming in as number ten; The younger son also entered the county school when he was fourteen years old. All the wealthy family wanted to marry into the Li family.

³⁶ A county school is a local school in premodern China.

Having admiration for the conduct of Shu *xiucai*, Li Dalang learned that he had two daughters, one fifteen years old and the other thirteen. Although Shu was from a humble family, it had produced Confucian scholars for generations and their wives had come from noble families as well. Entrusting the task to a matchmaker, Li Dalang repeatedly made marriage proposals on behalf of his sons for the Shu daughters. Shu Zhong said: “Given the humble nature of my family, how could we ally ourselves with a wealthy family? On the other hand, I love and respect these two students tremendously.” Shu Zhong declined the proposal repeatedly despite the continued pleas of Li Dalang, but in the end, he gave in to him. These relatives by marriage, even better than full siblings, got on extremely well and were very close. The elder Li boy finally became a governor and the second boy became a departmental director in the Ministry of Revenue.³⁷ Shu *xiucai* was elected to attend the Imperial Academy. Later he was elected as the assistant of the magistrate of a prefect, and was finally promoted to the rank of local magistrate.³⁸ Mr. Yang, the teacher, became head minister in the Department of Works.³⁹ Li Dalang was awarded rank II.

Here are some anecdotes concerning village gentlemen in the intellectual circles.

I will relate the story of a truly respectable peasant in the village. His surname is Zhu, and his given name is Qisong. His family had only ten *mu* of land,⁴⁰ and he kept an inn in front of his home. He was married and had a thirty-year-old son, who was chubby with fair complexion. Unfortunately, his son was half paralyzed, but he was married with a wife and a concubine. Although they are not wealthy, they do not lack anything.

One day, Zhu Qisong went to the city to pay the grain tax, and he encountered an official in charge of measuring grain in front of a tavern. He was a Changshan county

³⁷ 郎中 *langzhong*, departmental director, in the 戶部 *Hubu*, Ministry of Revenue. This position was assessed as 正五品 *zheng wupin* (Rank 5A).

³⁸ 通判 *tongpan*, a magistrate who administered lawsuits at the local level, subject to the authority of the county magistrate, 縣令 *xian ling*.

³⁹ 尚書 *shangshu*, Minister, i.e. Head, of the 工部 *Gongbu*, Ministry of Works.

⁴⁰ 畝 *mu*, a land measurement equivalent to .165 of an acre. Ten *mu* equal 1.65 acres.

local who was on his way to Daoli⁴¹ to work and stopped in Xiujiang county. It was still early in the day, so he went into the tavern for a drink; before he left, he found his wallet missing from his sleeve. The official said that his wallet was wrapped with a white handkerchief, and inside was a shiny green satin purse fastened with a toothpick; inside the purse there was seven *liang* of silver. He claimed that his wallet had fallen down in the tavern, and that it was the manager who had picked up the purse and pocketed the money. Therefore, he tore the manager's tasseled hat to pieces, and plucked some very long strands of hair from his beard, while slapping his face. The manager dared not react, because he was afraid of the man's position as a government official, as if he was a ghost being vanquished by Zhong Kui.⁴² They were surrounded by a crowd, who were convinced by the official's accusation and condemned the manager's immoral behavior.

Zhu Qisong said: "You would be prudent not to make rash conclusions. It is very possible that your wallet fell down somewhere else." The official released the manager, and spat on Zhu Qisong's face, saying: "Pah! You village bumpkin! Even the mountain spawn have come inside the city walls to help out! I am so angry!" and he slapped Zhu's face. The crowd said: "He was upset over his lost wallet. Why did you interfere?" Zhu Qisong replied: "As the old saying goes: 'if the road is uneven, people stamp on it'."⁴³ The manager didn't pick up this man's wallet. Why did you tear up his hat and pluck his beard? I just picked up a weighty handkerchief under the fourth precinct gate,⁴⁴ and I have no idea what's inside. We can open it in front of these people, if it matches the description you gave just now, it will be yours." The official said: "My name is Liu Hezhai; my name is embroidered on the lining of the purse." The crowds responded: "That is evidence enough."

⁴¹ 道里, Daoli is a city in the north-east of China.

⁴² 钟馗 Zhong Kui, a Chinese mythological figure and a demi god who is famous for his power to vanquish demons and ghosts.

⁴³ It means that people should fight injustice when they see it.

⁴⁴ 牌坊 *paifang*. In Tang China a city consisted of a number of 坊, *fang* (precinct), each of them surrounded with a wall or fence with a gate; 牌坊, *paifang* is one that was shut at night and guarded.

Zhong Qisong took the wallet out from his sleeve and untied it: as expected, it was a shiny green satin purse, fastened with a toothpick. When it was opened, there were the two characters “Hezhai” embroidered inside. The crowd said: “It was fortunate that this good man picked it up, if not, would this poor devil have been a ghost, would he have died from injustice? Surely you should pay the liquor vendor the silver. It is tough for him to have such long strands plucked out of his beard.” The official said: “There is silver missing. I had seventeen *liang* of silver, additionally there were two five-*liang* ingots!” Then he seized Zhu Qisong firmly. Zhu Qisong said: “I returned the silver wholly intact with all good intentions. You are just acting shamelessly! Are you going to treat me as that liquor vendor? He is afraid of you, but me, this ‘mountain spawn’, I don’t fear you! This place is close to the district government office, and I can take you to see the official! Are you trying to swindle us in Xiujiang county because you are relying on your government position?”

How could the official, angry as a demon, put up with criticism such as this? He grabbed Zhu Qisong, pushed him into the yamen⁴⁵. The county magistrate sat in the main room, listening to the reports of the two witnesses one for each side. He asked the liquor vendor and bystanders for details of the case. He said: “Fetch me the silver, I will measure its weight myself. Maybe you made a mistake.” The official handed over the silver. The county magistrate asked a clerk to weigh it, who reported back: “It weighs seven *liang*.” The magistrate examined the purse and the silver carefully for a while, and said: “You say your silver weighed seventeen *liang*, and this silver weighs only seven *liang*. Therefore, it doesn’t belong to you, and you need to look for your silver elsewhere. This silver should be rewarded to the man who picked it up.” The official said: “Sir, this silver and the purse all belong to me, but two five-*liang* ingots are missing.” The magistrate asked: “Where did you put the ingots?” The officer replied: “Both inside the purse.”

The magistrate then asked the clerk to fetch two five-*liang* ingots from the treasury and passed them to the officer, saying: “Try to place the two silver ingots inside

⁴⁵ 衙門 *yamen*, the official residence of a government official, here the local magistrate.

your purse.” It turned out that the purse was not very spacious and was already full with the seven-*liang* worth of silver. How could another ten-*liang* of silver possibly fit inside? The officer corrected himself, saying: “My two ingots were wrapped inside the handkerchief.” The magistrate asked: “Where are the creases on the handkerchief from its being used to wrap the silver?” Then he ordered: “Expel him!” Zhu Qisong said: “Sir, I will not take money through unrighteousness. Please use it for other purposes.” The magistrate said: “This silver was found by you, please take it. If you don’t want to spend it, donate it to the poor.” Zhu Qisong had to accept the silver. By chance he encountered some orphans from the orphanage going through the county collecting alms, so he donated the silver as well as the purse to them. The official had no choice but look on in despair.

The wine-seller lamented in tears the loss of the hair from his beard which was plucked out. The magistrate said: “I have a solution to let my superior, the chancellor, compensate you for your loss.” He secretly wrote a letter, recording the incident in full details, and sent the letter to his superior. His superior caned the official thirty times, and discharged him from his position. Later the official was selected⁴⁶ as a clerk of Zhangming county *yamen* in Sichuan province,⁴⁷ and while he was there committing wicked deeds against the common people, the magistrate of Xiujiang county was selected as imperial censor⁴⁸ and ordered the Governor of Sichuan to investigate the clerk, who was punished by twenty strokes of the cane and immediately banished. In conclusion:

Every act of kindness and evil will be judged in the end,

And the righteous are always recognized by the divine.

⁴⁶ The political system in China was primarily meritocracy, therefore, when a government official assumed his position, he was often recommended to this position by his superiors.

⁴⁷ 彰明縣 *Zhangming xian*, 四川 *Sichuan* province in southwestern China.

⁴⁸ 御史 *yushi*, here probably standing for 御史大夫 *yushi dafu*, the Censor-in-Chief who was the highest-ranking official in charge of the bureaucracy with particular responsibility for addressing corruption and illegal activities.

Chapter 24: A Time of Benevolent Energy Returns to the Fragrant and Virtuous Place; the Heavens Reward the People Well with a Time of Peace and Security!

The government officials are righteous, and people live a carefree life;
Their souls are pristine, dreams unstirred, and they sleep peacefully.
Household gates remain unbolted, for there are no cunning clever ones;
Lost articles on the roadside are not taken, for the people are wealthy.
The weather is favorable, and the rain and wind never delay;
The five grains are abundant,¹ and every year a bumper harvest.
People remain close to their kindred, and families are reunited;
They are guarded from disasters and turmoil, and live a secure life.
They teach their sons the Confucian canon, and respect the virtuous;
They arrange marriages in a timely fashion, to establish a harmonious union.
Their houses and farmland are inherited for generations,
Such a peaceful and orderly world - one should give thanks to the Heaven!

Now I would like to just provide you with a description of the villagers of the town of Mingshui. They do not know riches and honor but are simple and rustic with the unspoiled mind of an infant²; they are unwise, yet contented³—the wealthy don't suppress the poor, and the powerful don't mistreat the weak and the solitary—they are just like the useless, common, ignorant masses. From the perspective of the people in our sophisticated mundane world, shouldn't these

¹ According to various sources the varieties included in the 五穀 *wugu*, “five grains” differ, but the oldest lists include: 麦 *mai*, wheat/barley/oats; 豆 *dou*, soybean; 黍 *shu* broomcorn millet; 稷 *ji*, foxtail millet; 稻 *dao*, rice.

² 道德經 *Dao De Jing* of 老子, Laozi (6th cent. BCE), chapter 55: 含德之厚、比於赤子。 *han de zhi hou, bi yu chizi* (He who has in himself abundantly the attributes [of the Dao] is like an infant). 欽定四庫全書 *Qinding Siku Quanshu*, 老子道德經下編, p.23.

³ 道德經 *Dao De Jing*, chapter 58: 其政悶悶、其民淳淳。其政察察、其民缺缺。 *qi zheng men men, qi min chun chun. qi zheng cha cha, qi min que que* (When the government is non-intrusive, the people are happy. When the government is one that meddles, the people are anxious).

who are “guarding a tree-stump expecting a rabbit”⁴ starve to death? Who, however, would have thought that the Heavens⁵ would have their own calculations and sense of fairness to elevate the humble? Not only are they not adverse to the people of Mingshui, they bless them abundantly. If the year was as bad as nowadays, so that the waters in the Huixian mountains dry up, how would the waterfalls flow into the White Cloud Lake? If the rain is ceaseless so that it causes floods in the mountain, not only would the White Cloud Lake overflow, but it would also wash away the villagers. However, for many years, the weather has been timely and favorable: the wind it blows every five days, and it rains very ten days; the wind does not howl and the rain does not burst the hills—it nourishes the earth at nights and stops in the daytime—what a prosperous and peaceful scene! The divine mountains are full of precious woods, and the families, whether they are big or small, all possess a piece of the hillside. The fish, crabs, water chestnuts,⁶ and fox nuts⁷ in the lake are inexhaustible and in endless supply; the water in the lake is channeled to irrigate the arid lands, rice fields, and vegetable gardens, and to fill the kitchen well—it’s almost like the Land of Pure Bliss.⁸

The Divine one, who resides above in the Heaven of Jade Purity,⁹ opens widely his enormous eyes and reaches out with his extremely long arms to select the most honest, most benevolent, and most humble men to act as magistrate of Xiujiang County. Such is the truth since ancient times, that both the extremes of goodness and evil breed the same kind. If the region is governed by a demonic ruler, he will induce demonic spirits, demonic rains and winds, demonic sun and moon, demonic constellations, demonic thunder and dew, demonic snow and frost, demonic hail and lightning; he will also generate a crowd of demonic ministers, demonic government clerks, demonic lictors¹⁰ and demonic bailiffs.¹¹ For this gang of demoniacal beings,

⁴ 守株待兔 *shou zhu dai tu* (Guarding a tree-stump waiting for a rabbit to knock itself out on it). Based on the story of a foolish farmer in the 韓非子 *Han Feizei* of Han Fei (ca. 281–233 B.C.), book 19, chapter 49, 49: 五蠹 *wu du* (Five Pests).

⁵ 老天爺 *liaotanye*, God or the Supreme Being.

⁶ 菱 *ling*, water chestnut, *trapa natans*.

⁷ 芡 *qian*, fox nut, *Euryale ferox*.

⁸ 極樂的世界 *jile de shijie*, Land of Pure Bliss, The Pure land of the West, Sanskrit *Sukhavati*, a concept in Amithaba or Pure Land Buddhism, one of the branches of Mahayana Buddhism.

⁹ The highest of the three levels of heaven in Taoist cosmology.

¹⁰ 皂隸 *zaoli*, lictor or bodyguard. The lowest rank of those petty officials classified as 差役 *chaiyi*, yamen runners. See Reed, *Talons and Teeth*, 124.

¹¹ 快手 *kuai shou*, bailiff or yamen runner responsible for arresting criminals.

the weak and feeble common people are just like Xuanzang,¹² Piggy¹³, Sandy¹⁴ and the Monkey King,¹⁵ something desirable to be steamed and consumed. If the country was governed by a good god, then these demons would naturally perish of themselves, and another crowd of good people would assist him to accomplish his goal. Why were there a succession of integral officials in Xiujiang County? If it were like nowadays, when the government raises taxes and increases levies, demands beans in addition to rice and wheat, imposes charges for army provisions in addition to normal taxes — all are included in the official's evaluations as criteria as to whether additional penalty will be inflicted— then it would be challenging to behave as a good official.

It was during the era of Emperor Yingzong's comeback¹⁶ when the forced labor was light, the taxes insignificant, and the laws were loose; the harvest from the earth was abundant, while the taxes from the imperial court were light. The ordinary people were just required to pay the grain tax, unlike nowadays when extra burdens are added. As for the law, after the trial, the judge would make a ruling, while nowadays, in addition to making the ruling, additional penalties of grain and silver are demanded. And in the treatment of the wealthy families, a judge would act like a wise doctor storing up the elixir¹⁷ and cinnabar¹⁸ for emergencies and cultivating the vitality of his patients, while nowadays, when a judge hears of a wealthy family, he will for sure fabricate a lawsuit to extort every single copper coin from them. In the good old days, how could the villagers of Mingshui even dream of such bitter hardship as this? Every single family was so wealthy and

¹² 唐僧 *Tang seng*, i.e. Xuanzang (c. 602-664), a Tang dynasty Buddhist monk who traveled to India 629-645 and who served as the inspiration for the classic novel, [西遊記](#) *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West).

¹³ 豬八戒 *Zhubajie*, Piggy, one of the principal characters in [西遊記](#) *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West).

¹⁴ 悟淨 *Wujing*, Sandy, one of the principal characters in [西遊記](#) *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West).

¹⁵ 孫行者 *Sunxingzhe*, the Monkey King, one of the principal characters in [西遊記](#) *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West). During their journey west, these characters encounter many demons.

¹⁶ I.e., 1457-1464. 明英宗 Ming Yingzong (1427-1464) was the temple name of 朱祁鎮, Zhu Qizhen, who ruled as 正統帝 *Zhengtongdi* (the Zhengtong emperor) 1436-1449, the 6th Ming Dynasty Emperor, and again as 天順帝, *Tianshundi* (the Tianshun Emperor), 1457-1464, the 8th Ming Emperor. In 1447 he was captured by the Mongol army and succeeded by his younger brother Zhu Qiyu (1428-1457) who ruled as the 景泰帝, *Jingtaidi* (the Jingtai Emperor), (1449-1457), the 7th Ming emperor. After his release by the Mongols, Zhu Qizhen set about regaining the throne, making his comeback in 1457.

¹⁷ 靈藥 *ling yao*, panacea, elixir, a legendary magic potion possessed by the immortals. See “magic medicine,” Wiseman and Ye, *A Practical Dictionary*, 383.

¹⁸ 丹砂 *dansha*, mercury sulfide, cinnabar. See “elixir,” Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 171. According to traditional Chinese medicine and Taoist scriptures, cinnabar is an important ingredient of immortality pills.

the men had abundant harvests and the women had abundant clothing. They were like the residents of Huaxu city.¹⁹

As for the scenery of the Huixian mountain, a *Ci* poem²⁰, to the tune of “A River Overflows with Red,”²¹ gives a vivid description of Mingshui:

Surrounded by the screen-like mountain,
The dense emerald forest dissolves itself into the smoky frost.
Time elapses, things change, so does the scenery, the red is pale and green deep.
The mountain creeks, cold as jade;
Crystal waterfalls separate this fairyland from the dusty world,²²
Flowing ceaselessly since ancient times, they converge in White Cloud Lake.
Tiled roofed houses,²³ scarcely a trace of human beings;
No worldly concerns, a realm of nirvana stillness.
Mulberry trees, flax, rice seedlings and millet everywhere,
Stocks of carp and sand perch close by the river bank.
No tax collectors knocking at the gates,
No corvee labor disturbing the old and the young.
Listening to the wind in the pine trees, singing birds, and the reading aloud of books,
Finishing their tasks of cultivation and weaving.

¹⁹ 華胥城 *hua xu cheng*, a fictional Utopia recorded in chapter two, 黃帝 *Huangdi* (The Yellow Emperor) of the Taoist classic entitled 列子, *Lie Zi* (Master Lie) attributed to 列御寇 (Lie Yukou) who lived during the 戰國, *Zhanguo* (Warring States Period, 5th cent.-221 BCE).

²⁰ 詞 *Ci* is a type of lyric poetry in classical Chinese literature.

²¹ 滿江紅 *man jiang hong*. A poem by this name and in the same metre is attributed to the Song Dynasty general, 岳飛 Yue Fei (1103-1142). See Xu, *Three Hundred Song Lyrics: Bilingual Edition*, 670-73 (there: “The River all Red”)

²² 塵凡 *chen fan*, dusty world. 長安 *Chang'an* in the vicinity of modern 西安, Xi'an, was the capital of China during 唐朝, Tangchao (The Tang dynasty 618-907). It was described as a city of 紅塵 *hongchen*, red dust, because of the clouds of red dust caused by the heavy traffic. Therefore, the term “red dust” or “dusty city” refers to a city that is bustling and prosperous.

²³ 屋魚鱗 *wu yulin*, fish-scale house, a house with a roof whose tiles look like fish scales.

It is a place of mountains and rivers, and was blessed with appropriate rain and tender winds; the heaven lowered and the earth raised.²⁴ The mountains reflect themselves in the clear lakes, everywhere there is peaceful scenery covered by the smoky mist of the Lake. Both sun and moon are magnificent,²⁵ and the stars are never erroneous²⁶: when spring arrives, the weather gets warmer and warmer every day, the trees begin to leaf, and there is never any sudden change of weather. In households, big and small alike, the men plough the fields and sow them, and the women feed silkworms and harvest their cocoons. Gradually, as the wheel of the seasons moves, the blossoms bloom and the weather becomes warm, and when the Qingming and Cold Food Festivals²⁷ arrive, every family has red-bud²⁸ and flowering crab-apple,²⁹ Japanese roses³⁰ and lilacs,³¹ tree peonies and herbaceous peonies³² blooming one by one; the peach and willow trees surrounding the Lake and the varieties of the flowers around the mountains are just in the Golden Valley Garden of Shi Chong.³³ If people would walk along these Shanyin paths,³⁴ their eyes would be overwhelmed by the beauty of the scenery.

Therefore, someone composed another *ci* poem, also to the tune of “A River Overflows with Red,” to describe the spring scenery of Mingshui:

The peach blooms, soft and tender,

²⁴ 道德經 *Daodejing*, chapter 77: 高者抑之，下者舉之, gao zhe yi zhi, xia zhe ju zhi (The high shall be lowered, and the low shall be raised).

²⁵ Taoism worships celestial bodies such as sun and moon and believes that they are able to influence human activity.

²⁶ Taoism worships the stars and believes in a mystical correlation between the movement of the constellations and human society as well the activities of nature.

²⁷ 清明 *Qingming*, pure brightness. The Qingming festival also known as Tomb Sweeping Day, the first day of the 5th lunar month which places it in early April. The 寒食 *hanshi*. Cold Food Festival, begins the day before Qingming and lasts for three days. See Stepanchuk and Wong, *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts*, 61-70.

²⁸ 紫荊 *zijing*, Chinese redbud, *Cercis chinensis*.

²⁹ 海棠 *haitang*, flowering crab apple, *Malus spectabilis*.

³⁰ 薔薇 *qiang wei*, Japanese rose, *rosa multiflora*.

³¹ 丁香 *dingxiang*, lilac, *Syringia vulgaris*.

³² 牡丹 *mudan*, tree peony, *Paeonia suffruticosa*, and 芍藥, *shaoyao*, herbaceous peony, *Paeonia lactiflora*.

³³ 石崇, Shi Chong (249–300) was one of the wealthiest men of his time. His famous garden was named 金穀 *Jingu*, Golden Valley.

³⁴ 山陰 *shanyin dao*. This is a reference to the poem 終南別業 *zhongnan bie ye* (Villa on Zhongnan Mountain) by 王維 *Wang Wei* (701-761). See Nanxiu Qian, *Politics, Poetics, and Gender in Late Qing China: Xue Shaohui and the Era of Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 191-92. It refers to a path that is long and winding but very picturesque.

The willows, pale green, toss in the light breeze.
The meadow invades the sky,
Orioles singing among thousands of trees,
Red and white all over the mountains.
After celebrating the Hanshi and Qingming festivals,
The paddies are planted with rice.
See the thrush basking in the sun
After last night's rain,
Dry your raincoats while the sky turns clear.
At dawn industrious men everywhere till the fields,
And joyful women carry their meals to the fields
Walking fast as weaving shuttles.
Encountering celebrations at local shrines,
Gathered are all the youths and the elderly alike.
Taking their seats in every direction,
No rude old men would find a seat there.
Drunken, all are heavy headed with light feet,
Forgetting who are the hosts, and who are the guests.

After the planting cotton, maize,³⁵ broomcorn millet,³⁶ foxtail millet,³⁷ grain and sorghum,³⁸ the fourth month of the lunar year arrives³⁹; people are busy again making cords with hemp and harvesting the wheat. The women also engage in reeling off silk from the cocoons. After the harvest of wheat, the rice needs to be planted in the paddy fields and the soybeans in dry

³⁵ 蜀秫 *shu Shohei*, maize or “Sichuan millet.”

³⁶ 黍 *shu*, broomcorn millet, *Panicum miliaceum*.

³⁷ 稷 *ji*, foxtail millet, *Panicum italicum*

³⁸ 粱 *liang*, sorghum.

³⁹ That is, 四月 *siyue*, roughly equivalent to April.

ground. The peasants are occupied all day without a single moment of rest during the three months of summer; the seedlings planted in the spring need to be cultivated, the young plants need to be hoed, the vegetables need to be harvested, the bolts of garlic need to be racked. Even their masters, despite their being inactive physically, have to rise early and sleep late to manage the work. Therefore, someone composed another *ci* poem to the tune of “A River Overflows with Red” to describe the summer scenery of Mingshui town:

Thatched cottages, tall and spacious,
Who needs a glorious mansion with ornate windows?
Near the mountains, the waterfall is like a crystal screen,
Expelling the summer heat.
Scattered in the courtyard are the graceful bamboos,
And every tree standing by the gate is luxuriantly green.
Holding a book of light reading,
Taking advantage of the cool breeze
Reading it on your high pillow,⁴⁰
Tie up your books when tired,
Take a nap and rest your eyes.
When you wake from the village of black and sweetness⁴¹,
The meal is cooked.⁴²
After you finish your meal, the sun is low on the horizon, the heat dissolves.
Throw on your coat, take a stroll, play a melody clear as running water.⁴³

⁴⁰ 暑伏 *gaozhen* (high pillow) indicates a care-free state of mind in the Chinese literary tradition.

⁴¹ 黑甜乡 *hei tian xiang*, the village of black and sweetness, refers to the world of dreams.

⁴² This may be an allusion the 黄粱梦, *Huang Liang Meng* (Yellow Millet Dream) by 吕洞宾, Lü Dongbin (born c. 796). In the story the dreamer falls asleep as his millet is cooking. He dreams of an eighteen-year span of time in which he rises to wealth and prosperity only to lose it all and be left dying on the street. At this he wakes up to find his millet is now cooked.

⁴³ 清流 *qingliu*, clear stream, also refers to people, especially scholars and officials, of honesty and moral integrity.

Under the shades of the willow,
Find a hot spring, and immerse yourself.

With the passing of the seventh lunar month,⁴⁴ the villagers reap the ears of maize with sickles, harvest the broomcorn millet, reap the foxtail millet, pick the cotton, and harvest the rice; they then prepare the land for fall, plant wheat, reap soybeans and black beans, gather in all the gains, pile up the straw, thresh rice—even if they work day and night in succession, there is still more to be done. Therefore, the “three autumns” period⁴⁵ is the busiest and most toilsome season. However, it was an era of peace and prosperity, and the people, although having thick calluses form on their palms and their soles of feet,⁴⁶ felt satisfied and cheerful, and did not feel at all exhausted. Therefore, someone composed a *ci* poem also to the tune of “A River Overflows with Red,” just to narrate the autumn scenery of Mingshui:

Yellow leaves, cinnabar-red maples,
All the mountains covered in purple and green,
Their reflections merging into the glassy lake,
And a solitary wild duck flies alongside the sunset clouds.
Evening dew and gentle breeze expelling the remaining summer heat,
Rippling river, frosted moon, more limpid than bathing water.
Ten thousand fertile fields are harvested, sufficient for the autumn tax.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ That is, 七月 *qiyue*, roughly equivalent to July.

⁴⁵ 三秋 *san qiu*. According to Chinese lunar calendar, the “three autumns” refers to the three months in autumn: July is called “early autumn”, August “mid-autumn”, and September “late autumn.”

⁴⁶ This is a phrase that describes someone who has done hard manual work.

⁴⁷ The taxes, in the form of grains, were collected during the summer and autumn seasons.

Under the bamboo fence, clusters of chrysanthemums;⁴⁸

Inside the barns and the cellars is drying millet;

On the threshing floor, piles of new grain.

The fish and crab are bountiful and fresh, as the rice becomes ripe,

Near the bedside, the newly brewed liquor is being filtered.⁴⁹

One drinks ceaselessly with guests and friends and sings songs,

Until completely drunk.⁵⁰

When it reaches the first day of the tenth lunar month,⁵¹ when the thanks to the God of Soil have been made and the report of the harvest has been presented,⁵² this usually marks the completion of agricultural activity; but based on such scenes of bumper harvests, the normal harvest period might be prolonged for half month. After mid-*shiyue*, it would be the time for enjoyment and leisure for the farmers: large barns full of reaped grains, big urns full of home-brewed liquor, extensive sties full of pigs, flocks of sheep, hundreds of domestic ducks and geese which you do not have to feed, but which are released on the lakes in the mornings and later called back home—you just need to send someone to the lake and shout out; the ducks and geese are already very tame, and when they hear a familiar voice, they all waddle after it to go home—and when you count the numbers, not a single one is missing. When those who are skilled in farming poultry observe that any of their flock is about to lay an egg, the farmer cages it for a while and waits for it to lay it egg, and then releases it outside. Every family makes preserved meat, marinated chicken, salted fish, salted duck eggs, marinated crabs and shrimp. Everyone harvests from the valley chestnuts, walnuts, gourds, jujubes,⁵³ dried persimmon, dried peaches, date-plums and so

⁴⁸ The 籬落 *li luo*, bamboo fence, and 菊 *ju*, chrysanthemum, *Chrysanthemum indicum*, are symbols of a hermetic or secluded life.

⁴⁹ 陶淵明 Tao Yuanming (365?–427), also known as 陶潛 Tao Qian, was an important poet and the most famous hermit in Chinese history. He is often said to have filtered his liquor with his headscarf.

⁵⁰ This is an allusion to Tao Qian, who was renowned for his drinking and who used to drink and compose poetry with his friends until he was completely drunk. Many other famous Chinese hermits, such as 劉伶 Liu Ling (221–300) and 阮籍 Ruan Ji (210–263) were also renowned for their indulgence in alcohol.

⁵¹ That is, 十月 *shiyue*; roughly equivalent to October.

⁵² 土神 Tu shen, God of Soil also known as 土地公 Tudigong, Lord of the Soil and the Ground. The ceremony described here appears to be the 秋報 Qiu Bao (Autumn report), celebrated on the 15th day of 八月 *bayue*, the eighth lunar month, roughly equivalent to August.

⁵³ 棗 *zao*, or 紅棗 *hong zao*, jujube or Chinese red date, *Ziziphus jujube*, the fruit of a small thorny tree.

on. And every family dries in the sun and stores for winter large bundles of eggplants, pumpkins, bottle gourds, white gourds, green beans, Chinese toon sprouts,⁵⁴ bracken fronds, and cauliflower. People also pick out and fell the trees in the woods which are unsuitable for lumbers, and burn the wood to make charcoal, and make large piles of it in empty storerooms. In the mornings, you sleep until the sun turns red, get up and wash, and warm your stomach with a cup of warm liquor.⁵⁵ You can then stuff your stomach with the mung bean and millet sticky porridge cooked with the sweat spring water, which is yellow and warm with pleasant aroma, and the snow-white jellied bean curd. Then, you can wear a thick cotton-padded jacket and take a walk outside, with two or three friends, relatives, or neighbors, facing the sunshine and discussing stories such as “The Monkey King and the Upheaval in Heaven,”⁵⁶ “Li Kui Strikes at the Shishi Mansion,”⁵⁷ or “The Tang Emperor Travels in Hades.”⁵⁸ You can chat until noon and go home. After lunch, if you have children or grandchildren, you can wait until sunset when they come back from school; then you can herd your sheep and cows into the cattle pens, lock the front and back doors, drink a few cups of wine, and go to the *kang*⁵⁹ early with your children and wife, and your wigs and hats gathered at one place. In bad years, there might be fears of robbers entering your yard, or an enemy committing arson; but it was an era of *datong*,⁶⁰ or great harmony. You did not need to lock your gates. Now if you encounter corrupt officials, all sorts of disasters will fall upon you from the heavens; but back then, the country magistrates were kind, just like your own parents. If someone knocks on your door in the middle of the night, it could be your lazy neighbor who has forgotten

⁵⁴ 椿 *chun*, toon, *Toona sinensi*, also known as the Chinese mahogany or Chinese cedar.

⁵⁵ Usually 黄酒 *huangjiu* (yellow rice wine, should be warmed in a metal container with hot or boiling water before consumption. According to traditional Chinese medicine, drinking warm yellow wine can increase blood circulation and thus warms one up during the winter.

⁵⁶ 孫行者大鬧天宮, *sunxingzhee danao tian gong*, “The Monkey King and the Upheaval in Heaven.” an incident in the opening chapters (1-7) of , 西遊記, *Xi you ji* (The Journey to the West) in which the Monkey King rebels against the heavenly palace.

⁵⁷ 李逵大鬧師師府, *li kui danao shishi fu*, “Li Kui Strikes at the Shishi Mansion.” A story from 水滸傳, *Shuihu Zhuan* (Water Margin), chapter 72. 李逵 Li Kui is number 22 of the 三十六天罡 *sanshiliu tian gang*, 36 heavenly spirits, who along with the 七十二地煞 *qishi'er di sha*, 72 earthly fiends, make up the 108 outlaws of the Marsh and in this episode he contends in the mansion of the famous courtesan, 李師師 Li Shishi.

⁵⁸ 唐王游地獄, *tang wang you diyu*, “The Tang Emperor Travels in the Hades,” an incident in the early chapters (8-12) of 西遊記, *Xi you ji* (The Journey to the West), in which the Tang Emperor was invited to travel to Hades as a punishment for his failure to keep his promise to save a dragon king.

⁵⁹ 炕 *kang*. A heatable brick bed, usually used in northern China.

⁶⁰ 大同 *datong*, great harmony. A utopian vision of society first mentioned in the 禮運 *Liyun* (Conveyance of Rites), chapter 9 of 禮記 *Liji* (The Book of Rites), a text which in its current 49 chapter form dates to the second century CE, although containing material dating back to the 戰國, *Zhanguo* (Warring States Period, 5th cent.-221 BCE).

to preserve his fire, and who during an emergency such as delivering a baby or having a stomach ache, comes to you for some embers; no matter how loudly he knocks, you need not feel frightened. You fall asleep in the middle of the night snoring, and if you have to pee, just urinate; if don't have to, then store it up until next morning, and then you may "settle the accounts."⁶¹

I will not narrate how the rich and flourishing families enjoy the good fortune of peace and security and blissful life, but I will relate a story of a *xiucai*⁶² with the surname You. His full name is You Xicu⁶³ and he is about forty years old. His wife's surname is Luo and she is about thirty-five-years old. She knows a few characters, is able to drink, and knows how to play go.⁶⁴ Their oldest son is named Xun, and he is around sixteen years old; their daughter is named Shugu and is fourteen years old; and their youngest son is named Yong, twelve years old—their birth times are quite close. They have a thirteen-year-old maid named Ming'er, and a female servant in charge of the kitchen. They have around sixty to seventy *mu* of land,⁶⁵ a thatched cottage as residence, a vegetable garden to east of their residence, with flowers and trees appropriate to all the four seasons planted inside. On the southeast side, they built a studio, which is tidy and clean, and more elegant than the residence. You *xiucai* set up an agenda for his studies and pours over his books daily in his studio. There are two large, drooping poplar trees⁶⁶ in the garden and a stone table, surrounded by four stone stools, under the trees. From the third lunar month,⁶⁷ to the Mid-Autumn Festival⁶⁸ in the eighth lunar month, You would just attend to his study agenda in his studio during the daytime, and even his lunch is sent to the studio. All his household business is managed by his wife. In the daytime, Mrs. You would manage the housework while teaching needlework to her daughter. At sunset time, You *xiucai* would cease studying, Mrs. You would have a rest, and their sons return from school; the whole family would sit down on the stone stools in the garden, place some sophisticated side dishes that go well with wine on the table, and light a

⁶¹ 算帳 *suan zhang*, settle the accounts, wait for the appropriate moment.

⁶² 秀才 *xiucai*, cultivated talent, someone who passed the *xiucai* examination which came into effect during the Sui and Tang dynasties (518-907).

⁶³ 游希酢 You Xicu. 酢, *cu* is a variant of 醋 *cu*, vinegar, and an outdated and pedantic *xiucai* is referred to as being "vinegary."

⁶⁴ 圍棋 *weiqi*, go, a strategy board game for two players using black and white counters..

⁶⁵ 畝 *mu*, a land measurement equivalent to .165 of an acre. Ten *mu* equal 1.65 acres. Here, ten to twelve acres.

⁶⁶ 楊樹 *yangshu* (poplar tree).

⁶⁷ That is, 三月 *sanyue*, roughly equivalent to March.

⁶⁸ 中秋中秋節 *Zhongqiujie*, the Mid-Autumn or Moon Festival, held on the fifteenth day of *bayue*, the 8th lunar month, the date of the full moon. Also known as the 月餅節 *yubingjie*, Mooncake Festival. See Stepanchuk and Wong, *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts*, 51-59.

fire in the small stove that was to the side. With a cup of liquor on his hand, he would chat and laugh with the family, or discuss the books his sons have studied at school, or stories of virtuous ladies with his daughter, or he would play go with Mrs. You. After finishing his liquor, he would tidy up the table; this is the family routine. On winter nights, the family would gather around the stove and light the candles. Around the table lit by the light of two candles, You's sons would study their books, Mr. You would attend to some business, and Mrs. You and her daughter would do needlework. After everyone had finished their tasks, they would eat some side dishes that go well with wine, drink some wine, and then go to bed. Except for the two examination seasons when Mr. You could travel to the city; he was not seen in public for years and months at a time. Therefore, someone composed a *ci* poem, to the tune of "A River Overflows with Red," to describe the winter scene in Mingshui:

The snow covers the forested mountains,
Clusters of icicles hang down from the thatched cottage.
Having no pressing affairs, wearing a cotton jacket and fur hat,
Leaning against the wall to greet the rising sun.
Leisurely enumerating the shortcomings of Shou Yu,⁶⁹ and composing a poem
about Lu Su,⁷⁰
Perhaps discussing Sunjiang and the thirty-six Heavenly Spirits.⁷¹
When the sun sinks to the west,
Watch the jackdaws⁷² flying into ancient woods.
Close the gate in the fence, eat your evening rice porridge,
Trim the lamp wick, and read books until midnight.

⁶⁹ 周瑜, Zhou Yu (175-210), a famous general during the late Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), He was the victor of the 赤壁之戰 *Chibizhizhan*, Battle of the Red Cliffs, 208 CE, and is also one of the major characters in the fourteenth-century novel, 三國演義 *Sanguo yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), one of the four great classical novels.

⁷⁰ 魯肅 Lu Su (172-217), diplomat, general, and politician, also a major character in 三國演義 *Sanguo yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

⁷¹ 宋江 Song Jiang, principal hero of 水滸傳, *Shuihu Zhuan* (Water Margin). He is number 1 of the 三十六天罡, *sanshiliu tian gang*, 36 heavenly spirits.

⁷² 寒鴉 *hanya*, Eurasian jackdaw, *Coloeus monedula*.

Drink a few cups of newly brewed liquor,
Take off your head-covering and retire for the night.
There is no business to worry about in the peaceful mountains,
What harm is there in sleeping peacefully on your high pillow⁷³
Until your sleep is sufficiently satisfied when the red sun rides high tomorrow
morning?

One can find simple enjoyment in all the times and in all things: the day, the night, the sunny days, the cloudy days; the moon, and wind, the snow and the rain. During the daytime, there are views on all sides of the green mountains, the jade-green tress, the mirror-like surface of the lake and houses as dense as fish scales. Many would compose poems after enjoying the scenery, and I will quote just one couplet:

A hundred *zhang*⁷⁴ of rosy clouds, decorated in iridescent lights.
A thousand layers of green jade, emerging from the mountains on both sides.

In the evening, after the temple bell rings, all the gates are closed, the chicken and dogs are silent, the neighboring families can hear the sounds of each other doing laundry, and reading books aloud. If you watch from the mountain top:

In all four directions, the smoke from kitchen chimneys is thick as rain.
All round, the lights are dense like the stars in the sky.

Dark clouds emerge from all four directions, the cool winds gently blow; there is approach of distant thunder and lightning bright as molten gold. Climb to the top story and look down: the cattle hurry home, the birds fly quickly into the trees; woodsmen bearing firewood, return home in an endless stream; following on their heels, fishermen carrying carp, head for home one after

⁷³ 高枕 *gao zhen*, high pillow. A literary allusion meaning to enjoy a care-free life.

⁷⁴ 丈 *zhang*. A unit of length (=3 1/3 meters)

another. A sudden rain causes waterfalls in the mountain and rivers to flow in the ravines, and a gentle rain is like the mist in *sanyue* on the Xiaoxiang river.⁷⁵ There is also a couplet describing the scene:

Running waves mixed with the sound of the Yellow River,⁷⁶

The green mountains reflect each other like glass.

A delayed rainbow stops the rain and brings an end to the lightning and restrains the thunder; to send away the dark clouds, there must be wind. The jade ornaments tinkle in the bamboo garden. The sweet melody of the bamboo flute emerges from the pine trees.⁷⁷ It brushes your cheeks without being cold, and it causes the blossoms to be blown away. There is a couplet describing this:

The sound of the birds and leaves of the trees alternate,

The melody of the running spring and of the pines is in harmony.

As for the beauties of the moonlit night, there are fine scenes to be seen in all four seasons: in all four directions there is silence and there is not a sound to be heard; above the sparse forest; the jade mirror hangs high in the sky, and the gold disk bathes itself near the lake; I do not know where the beautiful, melodious sound of the flute come from. The faintly discernable sounds of bell must have descended from the heavens. There is also a couplet for this scene:

The mountains on all sides build a fortress of sand,

A thousand houses are surrounded by the trees of the jade-green forest

As for the scenery when the snow arrives, snowy weather is even more beautiful than fine weather and yet different. Imagine a vast land of rivers and mountains, transformed from top to

⁷⁵ 潇湘 Xiaoxiang. The “lakes and rivers” region of Hunan Province. Xiaoxiang Poetry is one of the traditional genres of Classical Chinese verse.

⁷⁶ 黄河 Hwanghe, Yellow River. It flows into the sea at Dongying in Shandong Province.

⁷⁷ This is a description of the sound of wind.

bottom into a world adorned with powder and cut jade. In the same way, when covered by snow, even dangerous ridges and streams look as flat as an avenue. Besides, is there such a place? It almost resembles the moon palace⁷⁸, or a pot made of ice or jade,⁷⁹ which makes one feel immortal and void⁸⁰ of one's old self. There is also a couplet for this scenery:

A three thousand *qing*⁸¹ lake composed of pearl tears,⁸²

A mountain of a million layers of Lantian jade.⁸³

Admittedly, among the six prefectures⁸⁴ in Shandong province, Mount Taishan⁸⁵ and the East Sea are impressive spectacles under heaven and are undoubtedly important. However, for places like Mount Huabuzhu by Jinan⁸⁶, Mount Han,⁸⁷ Mount Que,⁸⁸ Mount Bao,⁸⁹ Mount Hong,⁹⁰

⁷⁸ 廣寒宮闕 *guanhan gongque* or 廣寒宮 *guanhan gong*, Guanhan Palace. A palace on the moon, the residence of the moon goddess.

⁷⁹ A literary allusion to an official who is honest and upright.

⁸⁰ 空 *kong*, void, emptiness. A Taoist term, the equivalent of Sanskrit *Śūnyatā*, emptiness.

⁸¹ 頃 *qing*. A measurement of land equal to 100 畝 *mu*, that is, 16.5 acres. Here 465 acres.

⁸² According to the 搜神記 *Soushenji* (In Search of the Supernatural) by 干寶, Gan Bao (? -336), pearls are the tears of mermaids, 泣淚成珠 *qi lei cheng zhu* (she sobbed tears which became pearls).

⁸³ 藍田, Lantian, a city in Shanxi Province, famous for its jade.

⁸⁴ 府 *fu*, prefecture, an administrative district. Here has to be included the fictional 繡江縣 *Xiujiangxian*, *Xiujiang* district, on the 繡江 *Xiuxiang* (River Xiu) in which the real town of 明水, *Mingshui* is situated (also on the 繡江 *Xiuxiang*, River Xiu). Its beauties are compared to the scenic features of the following districts of Shandong Province: 兗州府 *Yanzhoufu* (Yanzhou Prefecture), a region in the southwest now under the administration of the 地級市 *dijishi* (prefectural-level city) of 濟寧, *Jining*; 東昌府區 *Dongchangfuqu*, *Dongchang* Prefecture Region, part of the modern 地級市 *dijishi* of 聊城, *Liaocheng*, Water City; 青州府, *Qingzhoufu*, *Qingzhou* Prefecture, a former administrative district in the north; 登州府, *Dengzhoufu*, *Dengzhou* Prefecture, a former administrative district on the northeast coast; 萊州府, *Laizhoufu*, *Laizhou* Prefecture, a former administrative district on the coast to the west of *Dengzhoufu*.

⁸⁵ 泰山 *Taishan*, Mount Tai. The eastern most of the 五嶽 *wu yue*, five great mountains.

⁸⁶ 濟南的華不注 *Jinan di Huabuzhu*, a mountain north-east of 濟南 *Jinan* City in Shandong Province.

⁸⁷ 函山 *Han shan*, Mount Han, to the southeast of 泰安 *Tai'an* City, Shandong Province.

⁸⁸ 鵲山 *Queshan*, Mount Que, Magpie Hill, one of the 九座孤山 *Jiu Zuogu Shan*, Nine Solitary Hills, in the Yellow River valley within and to the north of Jinan City in Shandong Province.

⁸⁹ 鮑山 *Baoshan*, Mount Bao, a mountain in the vicinity of Jinan City

⁹⁰ 嶺山 *Hongshan*, Mount Hong, in the vicinity of the modern 地級市 *dijishi*, 淄博市 *Ziboshi*, Zibo City, Shandong Province.

Jia Valley,⁹¹ Changbai,⁹² Mount Xiaotang,⁹³ Ziyu,⁹⁴ Mount Culai,⁹⁵ Mount Liaofu,⁹⁶ Dashi,⁹⁷ Pingyuan,⁹⁸ Lake Daming,⁹⁹ Baotu Spring,¹⁰⁰ Wenwei,¹⁰¹ Zhuoying Spring,¹⁰² although all these are recorded as famous for their scenery in books, how could they surpass Mount Huixian and White Cloud Lake?

There is Mount Ni¹⁰³ in the Yanzhou district,¹⁰⁴ which, although not being a scenic spot, is the place where the Holy Mother Yan¹⁰⁵ prayed and gave birth to Confucius. If one visits the valley where Yan gave birth, one will see that even the leaves of the grass and the trees all stand erect, whereas in the valley where Confucius was born, the leaves of the grass and the trees all droop. This is the place where the Sage Confucius¹⁰⁶ came into the world, how can one determine whether it's good or bad? And according to ancient myth, Lake Leize¹⁰⁷ was inhabited by a god with a dragon torso and human head; when it hit its stomach, it would make the sound of thunder.¹⁰⁸ According to *Records of the Grand Historian*,¹⁰⁹ Shun¹¹⁰ used to fish in this place, Lake Leize.

⁹¹ 夾谷 Jiagu. Located about 90 kilometers northeast of 曲阜 Qufu, the home town of Confucius in present-day 莒縣 Jiawu xian, Jiawu County, Shandong Province.

⁹² 長白山 Changbaishan, Changbai Mountains, south of modern 鄒平 Zouping, Shandong Province.

⁹³ 孝堂 Xiaotang, a mountain in the western part of Shandong Province.

⁹⁴ 紫榆 Zi yu, purple elm, the heartwood of 榔榆 lang yu, Chinese elm, *Ulmus parviflora*, used in furniture making. There is a 紫榆山 Zi yu shan, Purple Elm Mountain, south of 肥城 Feicheng, a 縣級市 xianjishi, county level city in the 泰安縣 Tai'an xian, Tai'an District, Shandong Province,

⁹⁵ 徂徠 Culai, a mountain in the 泰安縣 Tai'an xian, Tai'an District, western Shandong Province.

⁹⁶ 梁父 Liangfu, a mountain in eastern Shandong Province.

⁹⁷ 大石 Dashi a mountain in 高唐縣 Gaotangxian, Gaotang District, Shandong Province.

⁹⁸ 平原縣 Pingyuanxian, a district in northwest Shandong Province.

⁹⁹ 大明湖 Daminghu, Lake Daming, a lake by 濟南 Jinan city in Shandong Province.

¹⁰⁰ 趵突泉 Baotquan, Spouting Spring, a famous spring in Jinan City.

¹⁰¹ 文衛 Wenwei, a spring in Jinan City.

¹⁰² 濯纓泉 Zhuoying, Washing out the Tassel Spring, a spring in Jinan City.

¹⁰³ 尼山 Nishan, Mount Ni, the traditional birthplace of Confucius, southeast of 曲阜 Qufu City, Shandong Province.

¹⁰⁴ 兗州 Yanzhou, is a former 地級市 dijishi in the southwest of Shandong Province, now administered by 濟寧 Jining.

¹⁰⁵ 聖母顏 Shengmu Yan, Holy Mother Yan. This refers to 顏徵在 Yan Zheng-zai, the mother of 孔子 Kongzi (Confucius, 551-479 BCE).

¹⁰⁶ 孔聖人, Kongshengren.

¹⁰⁷ According to the 山海經, *Hanhaijing* (Classic of mountains and seas), in its current form dating from the 戰國, *Zhanguo* (Warring States Period, 5th cent.-221 BCE), in 雷澤湖 Leizehu (Lake 'Thunder Pond', modern 太湖 Talhu) in the Yangtze delta.

¹⁰⁸ This being is 雷神 Leishen, a popular daoist divinity.

¹⁰⁹ 史記 Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian), attributed to 司馬談, Sima Tan (†110 BCE).

¹¹⁰ 舜, Shun, a legendary Emperor who is supposed to have lived between 2294 and 2184 BCE.

Holy places such as these should be exempted from criticism. As for Mount Fang,¹¹¹ Mount Gui,¹¹² Mount Yi,¹¹³ Mount Jun,¹¹⁴ Changping,¹¹⁵ Nanwu,¹¹⁶ Dantai,¹¹⁷ Taibai,¹¹⁸ Xixia,¹¹⁹ Gucheng,¹²⁰ Maling,¹²¹ Nanwu¹²²—all are famous mountains in the Yanzhou district. Hui,¹²³ Ji,¹²⁴ Wen,¹²⁵ Si,¹²⁶ Zhu,¹²⁷ Si¹²⁸—all are ancient rivers within the boundary of the Yanzhou district. Fanli Lake,¹²⁹ Shushan Lake,¹³⁰ Peach Blossom Stream,¹³¹ Canglang Pools,¹³² Nanchi Pond,¹³³ Ajing Well,¹³⁴ Zhehua Pond¹³⁵—all these waters are sources of beautiful scenery in Yanzhou. There is also Lake Liangshan,¹³⁶ which was a hiding place for the outlaws, but should not be counted as a scenic spot. All these waters cannot compete with the scenery of beautiful Mingshui Town.

¹¹¹ 防山 Fangshan, Mount Fang, in the southern part of the 兗州縣 Yanzhou xian, Yanzghou District, south-western Shandong Province.

¹¹² 龜山 Guishan, Mount Gui. This mountain lies in the eastern part of Yanzhou District.

¹¹³ 嶧山 Yishan, Mount Yi. Probably the Mount Yi Reserve southeast of Jinan in Shandong Province.

¹¹⁴ 君山 Junshan, Mount Jun. Unidentified.

¹¹⁵ 昌平山 Changpingshan, Mount Changping, a mountain east of Jinan in Shandong Province.

¹¹⁶ 南武 Nanwu is a mountain range east of Jinan in Shandong Province

¹¹⁷ 澹台 Dantaishan, Mount Dantai. Unidentified.

¹¹⁸ 太白 Taibai, Mount Taibai, a mountain in southwestern Shaanxi Province.

¹¹⁹ 棲霞 Xixia, Xixia County-level City, a hilly and mountainous county in 煙臺 Yantai City, eastern Shangdong Province.

¹²⁰ 穀城 Gucheng, Mount Gucheng. Unidentified.

¹²¹ 馬陵 Maling, Mount Maling, a mountain in southern Shangdong Province.

¹²² 南武 Nanwu, is a mountain range east of Jinan in Shandong Province. This reference was given earlier.

¹²³ 會河 Huihe, River Hui. Unidentified.

¹²⁴ 濟河 Jihe, River Ji, a river by Jinan which became absorbed by the 黃河, Hwanghe (Yellow River) in the nineteenth century.

¹²⁵ 汶河 Wenhe, River Wen, a river in western Shandong Province

¹²⁶ 汜河 Sihe, River Si, a branch of the Yellow River originated in 新密 Xinmi County in Henan Province.

¹²⁷ 洙河 Zhuhe, River Zhu. The name of a river north of Laixi in Shandong Province.

¹²⁸ 泗河 Sihe, River Si, flows through Yanzhou in southwestern Shandong Province.

¹²⁹ 范蠡湖 Fanlihu, Lake Fanli, a lake in 荷澤 Heze City in southwestern Shangdong Province.

¹³⁰ 蜀山湖 Shushanhu, Lake Shushan, a lake in 汶上 Wenshang County, 濟寧 Jining City, southwestern Shangdong Province.

¹³¹ 桃花澗 Taohuajian, Peach Blossom Stream, in 平度 Pindu City in central Shangdong.

¹³² 滄浪淵 Canglangyuan, Blue Wave Pool, is a deep pool in 棗莊 Zaozhuang City, southern China.

¹³³ 南池 Nanchi, South Pond, is a pond in 濟寧 Jining City, southwestern Shangdong Province.

¹³⁴ 阿井 Ejing. The name of a well famous in Han times. It was situated in what is now 阿城鎮, Achengzhen, 陽谷, Yanggu, western Shandong.

¹³⁵ 澤華池 Zehuachi, Moist Flower Pond. Unidentified.

¹³⁶ 梁山泊 Liangshanpo, Lake Liangshan, in 梁山縣, Liangshanxian (Liangshan District), administered by Jining in southwestern Shandong Province. Mount Liang was the headquarters of the outlaws in the novel, 水滸傳, *Shuihu Zhuan* (Water Margin) and there is a nearby lake which is described in chapter 11 as having a length of 800 *li*, or around 250 miles.

There are also Mount Hui,¹³⁷ Mount Tao,¹³⁸ Mount Li¹³⁹ and Mount Ji,¹⁴⁰ which are not worth mentioning, in Dongchang district.¹⁴¹ People furiously argue that this is the Mount Li where Shun used to plow, and that Mount Ji is where Xuyou¹⁴² lived in seclusion. But, the capital of Shun was Puzhou in Shanxi Province, so what reason would he have to plow in Dongchang?¹⁴³ Why would Xuyou abandon big mountains such as Mount Shouyang¹⁴⁴ and Mount Zhongtiao¹⁴⁵ and follow Shun to Dongchang? There are only scenic spots in Mount Mingshi.¹⁴⁶ The mountains there are a hundred or more *zhang* in height, and if struck, they sound like the chiming of a bell. In ancient times, a man who lived there in seclusion under a rock used to see a man in white wandering above the rock and who left at daybreak. He saw this many times until one day, he pulled the man's sleeve and asked who he was. The man said: "My family name is Wang and my courtesy name¹⁴⁷ is Zhonglun. I lived an ascetic life at Mount Shaoshi during the era of King Zhou Xuanwang.¹⁴⁸ When I passed by this place, I liked the melodious sound of this rock so I come here often to enjoy it." The other man insistently asked him for the magic of immortality, and he left him a stone as big as a sparrow's egg, and disappeared. If one keeps this stone in his mouth, one would not feel hungry for many days.¹⁴⁹ In this way a mountain like this could be considered in the same league as Mount Xian,¹⁵⁰ but it doesn't have any natural resources; how could a mountain as such

¹³⁷ 徊山 Huaishan, Mount Huai. Unidentified.

¹³⁸ 陶山 Taoshan, Mount Tao, a mountain in 肥城 Feichang City in western Shangdong Province. It is one of the 泰山 Mount Tai mountains.

¹³⁹ 歷山 Lishan. Also known 千佛山 [Qian Fo Shan](#), Thousand Buddha Mountain, southeast of Jinan in Shandong Province

¹⁴⁰ 箕山, Jishan. Mount Ji, is a mountain Peak to the west of 聊城, Liaocheng City.

¹⁴¹ The legendary Emperor Shun (see footnote 106) is supposed to have plowed in the vicinity of Lishan, although there are at least three other mountains with the same name which also claim the same association with Shun.

¹⁴² 許由 Xu You was a famous hermit during the reign of the Emperor 堯, Yao (c. 2356 – 2255 BCE).

¹⁴³ Shun's capital is said to have been 蒲州 Puzhou, southwest of 蒲阪 Puban, modern 永濟 Jongji in 山西 Shanxi, a province to the east of the Huanghe (Yellow River) in eastern China.

¹⁴⁴ 首陽山 Shouyangshan, Mount Shouyang, south of Emperor Shun's capital of Puzhou in Shanxi Province.

¹⁴⁵ 中條山 Zhongtiaoshan, The Zhongtiao Mountains, a mountain range in southern Shanxi Province.

¹⁴⁶ 鳴石山 Mingshishan, Mount Mingshi, a hill in 魯山 Lushan Mountain in central Shangdong Province.

¹⁴⁷ 字 zi. Courtesy or style name bestowed on males at age twenty to indicate adulthood and to convey respect.

¹⁴⁸ 少室山 Shaoshishan, Mount Shaoshi, one of the peaks of 嵩山 Songshan, Mount Song, the central mountain of the 五嶽 *wu yue*, five great mountains. 周宣王 Zhou Xuanwang, was the eleventh King of the Zhou dynasty and reigned 828-782 BCE.

¹⁴⁹ According to Taoism, the amount of food one consumes is predestined. Therefore, to obtain immortality, one should give up eating. See Stephen Eskildsen, *Daoism, Meditation, and the Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25-220) to the Tang Dynasty (680-907)* (Albany; State University of New York Press, 2015), 50ff.

¹⁵⁰ 仙山 Xianshan, Mount Xian, the Mountain of the Immortals.

be even comparable to Mount Huixian? There are waters like the Zhang River,¹⁵¹ Mingdu River,¹⁵² Wei River,¹⁵³ Huzi River,¹⁵⁴ Luochuan River,¹⁵⁵ and Hezhu¹⁵⁶ in the Dongchang district. There is also the spot where Zhuangzi¹⁵⁷ used to fishing on the river-bank of the Pu River¹⁵⁸. In ancient times, there was a Music Official,¹⁵⁹ whose name was Shiyan, who composed obscene lyrics for King Zhou.¹⁶⁰ When King Wuwang overthrew King Zhou,¹⁶¹ afraid that Wuwang would kill him, Shiyan threw himself into the Pu River and drowned. Later, when Duke Ling of Wei¹⁶² spent a night by the Pu River, he heard the sound of musical instruments such as drums and zithers, and summoned his music official, Shijuan, to listen and to learn the tune. Shijuan listened for a while, and said: “This is a tune presaging the collapse of a state, what’s the use of learning it?” However, waters such as this are also recorded in historical books.

In Qingzhou district,¹⁶³ there are Mount Yunmen¹⁶⁴ and Mount Niu¹⁶⁵ where Duke Jing of Qi used to shed tears.¹⁶⁶ There are also Mount Gu,¹⁶⁷ Mount Yi,¹⁶⁸ Mount Ling,¹⁶⁹ Mount

¹⁵¹ 漳河 Zhanghe, River Zhang, flows eastwards out of Shanxi Province.

¹⁵² 鳴犢河 Mingduhe, River Mingdu, an ancient river originating in 高唐 Gaotang County, 聊城 Liaocheng City, western Shandong Province.

¹⁵³ 衛河 Weihe, River Wei, the largest tributary of the Huanghe and which flows through Shanxi Province.

¹⁵⁴ 瓠子河 Huzihe, River Huzi, a river in 荷澤 Heze City in southwestern Shandong Province.

¹⁵⁵ 漯川 Tachuan, Ta Creek, a stream originating in 茌平 Chiping County, 聊城 Liaocheng City, western Shandong Province.

¹⁵⁶ 鶴渚 Hezhou, Crane Islet. Unidentified.

¹⁵⁷ 莊子 Zhuangzi, Master Zhuang, that is, 庄周 Zhuangzhou, a Taoist philosopher who lived in the 4th century, BCE during the 戰國, *Zhanguo* (Warring States Period, 5th cent.-221 BCE).

¹⁵⁸ 濮水 Pushui, River Pu, also known as 黃浦江 Huangpuhe, Huangpu River, flows out of Shandong Province and through Shanghai.

¹⁵⁹ 樂官 Yueguan, a government official in charge of music at the court.

¹⁶⁰ 紂 Zhou that is 紂王 Zhou Wang, the [posthumous name](#) of 帝辛, Di Xin (1105-1046 BCE), the last king of the [Shang dynasty](#) (c. 1600-c- 1046 BCE).

¹⁶¹ 武王 Wuwang, King Wu of Zhou, the first [king](#) of the [Zhou dynasty](#) who ruled 1046-1043 BCE.

¹⁶² 衛靈公 Wie Ling Gong, Duke Ling of Wie, (c. 534-492 BCE).

¹⁶³ 青州 Qingzhou, now a 县级市 *xianjishi* in northern Shandong Province. Situated to the west of the 地级市, *dijishi* 濰坊 Weifang, in central Shandong Province.

¹⁶⁴ 雲門山 Yunmenshen, Mount Yumen or Mount Cloud Gate, close to Qingzhou.

¹⁶⁵ 牛山 Niushan, Mount Niu, south of the ancient city of 臨淄, Linzi, capital of the State of Qi, now part of the 地级市 *dijishi* of 淄博, Zibo, central Shandong Province.

¹⁶⁶ 齊景公 Qi Jing Gong, Duke Jing of Qi, ruler of the State of Qi, 547-490 BCE.

¹⁶⁷ 孤山 Gushan, Mount Gu, to the southwest of Zibo.

¹⁶⁸ 沂山 Yishan, Mount Yi, one of the peaks of 泰山 Taishan, Mount Tai. See footnote 81.

¹⁶⁹ 靈山 Lingshan, Mount Ling, a mountain in 青島 Qingdao City, Shandong Province.

Daxian,¹⁷⁰ Mount Langya,¹⁷¹ Mount Jiuxian,¹⁷² Mount Fulai,¹⁷³ Mount Dabian,¹⁷⁴ Mount Sanzhu,¹⁷⁵ Zimian River,¹⁷⁶ Bai River,¹⁷⁷ Kanglang River,¹⁷⁸ Gebei River,¹⁷⁹ which are just common scenic spots. But there is the Fangong Spring,¹⁸⁰ which is located on the west side of the capital city, which is named after Fan Zhongyan¹⁸¹ who was renowned for good governance. The spring suddenly gushed forth sweet well water, when Lord Fan served as governor there. Nowadays, physicians draw water from this spring to manufacture a pill named the “White Pill of Qingzhou”¹⁸², which is not effective in local area, but very effective in curing phlegm syndrome in areas outside of Qingzhou district.

¹⁷⁰ 大岷山 Daxianshan, Mount Daxian, a mountain in the vicinity of 潍坊 Weifang, Shandong Province.

¹⁷¹ 琅琊山 Langyashan, Mount Langya, a mountain on the south eastern coast of Shandong Province, south of the modern city of 胶南, Jiaonan.

¹⁷² 九仙山 Jiuxianshan, Mount Jiuxian, in southeast Shandong Province in 五莲县, Wulianxian, Wulian County, administered by the 地级市 *dijishi* of 日照 Rizhao.

¹⁷³ 浮莱山 Fulaishan, Mount Fulai, is in the western part of 莒县 Juxian, Ju county, administered by the city of 日照 Rizhao.

¹⁷⁴ 大弁山 Dabianshan, Mount Dabian, southeastern hills of 沂山 Yishan, Mount Yi in 临朐 Linqu County, 潍坊 Weifang City in central Shandong Province.

¹⁷⁵ 三柱山 Sanzhushan, Mount Sanzhu, is in the 东港区 Donggangqu, Donggang District, of the city of 日照 Rizhao.

¹⁷⁶ 淄澠水 Zishengshui, River Zisheng, a combined name for both 淄水 Zishui, River of Zi and 澠水 Shengshui, River of Sheng. Zishui is the old name for Zihé River in Shandong Province. Shengshui is a river originated in 淄博 Zibo City in central Shandong Province.

¹⁷⁷ 白河 Baihe, River Bai. This could be another name for 白浪河 Bailanghe, River Bailang in 潍坊 Weifang City in the central region of Shandong Province.

¹⁷⁸ 康浪水 Kanglangshui, River Kanglang, the old name for 东康河 Dongkang River, a river in 青州 Qingzhou City, Shandong Province.

¹⁷⁹ 葛陂水 Gebeishui, River Gebei, a river in 莒南 Junan County, 临沂 Linyi City which is in the south of Shandong Province.

¹⁸⁰ 范公泉 Fangongquan (Lord Fan's Spring), a spring on the south bank of the Nanyang River on the western side of 青州, Qingzhou, famous for its curative qualities.

¹⁸¹ 范仲淹 Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), one of the founders of Neo-Confucianism and also famous for his 詞賦, *cifu* (Ci poetry). He served for a time as governor of Qingzhou.

¹⁸² 青州白丸子 *qingzhou bai wanzi*, Qingzhou White Pills. A Chinese medicine still in use to heal paralysis. Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 739.

As for Dengzhou district,¹⁸³ there are Mount Danxia,¹⁸⁴ Mount Tianheng,¹⁸⁵ Mount Yu,¹⁸⁶ Mount Lai,¹⁸⁷ Mount Zhifu,¹⁸⁸ Mount Kunlun,¹⁸⁹ Mount Wendeng,¹⁹⁰ Mount Zhaoshi.¹⁹¹ In addition to the East Sea, there is an island in the sea.¹⁹² According to legend, there is found the “Grass of Immortality”¹⁹³ which resembles the sprouts of Manchurian Wild Rice¹⁹⁴ growing in clusters, and one plant is able to revive one person. During the era of Emperor Qin Shi Huang,¹⁹⁵ the Daoist priest, Xu Fu,¹⁹⁶ along with five hundred virgin boys and five hundred virgin girls, were sent to this island to obtain the Elixir of Immortality,¹⁹⁷ but afterwards their whereabouts is not known. This is another total falsehood.

Finally, in Laizhou district¹⁹⁸ there are Mount Huang,¹⁹⁹ Mount Zhilai,²⁰⁰ Mount Tianzhu,²⁰¹ Mount Gu,²⁰² Mount Lu,²⁰³ Mount Dazhu,²⁰⁴ Mount Buqi.²⁰⁵ During the Han dynasty, when a man named Tong Hui was the county magistrate of Buqi county, there was a man-eating

¹⁸³ 登州, Dengzhou, modern 蓬莱市 Penglaishi, Penglai City, a 县级市 *xianjishi* under the 地级市 *dijishi* 烟台 Yantai, in the northeast coastal region of Shandong Province.

¹⁸⁴ 丹崖山 Danxiashan, Mount Danxia, is a hill or rather cliff on the coast in Penglai City.

¹⁸⁵ 田横山 Tianhengshan, Mount Tianheng, is a hill in Penglai City.

¹⁸⁶ 羽山 Yushan, Mount Yu, is a mountain in southeastern 临沂 Linyi City, Shandong Province.

¹⁸⁷ 莱山 Laishan, Mount Lai, is a hill in Yantai City.

¹⁸⁸ 之罘山 Zifushan, Mount Zifu, a hill to the west of Yantai City on the coast..

¹⁸⁹ 崑崙山 Kunlunshan, Mount Kunlun, a mountain to the southeast of Yantai City.

¹⁹⁰ 文登山 Wendengshan, Mount Wendeng, a mountain to the southeast of Yantai City

¹⁹¹ 召石山 Zhaoshishan, Mount Zhaoshi, a mountain in 荣城 Rongcheng City, Shandong Province.

¹⁹² The Divine Island, 祖州 Zuzhou.

¹⁹³ 不死草 *busicao*, The Grass of Immortality. According to the 海内十洲記, *Hainei shizhou ji* (Ten Islands in the Inner Seas), a work attributed to 東方朔 Dongfang Shuo (154-93 BCE), this grass grows on the island of 祖洲, Zuzhou.

¹⁹⁴ 菰 *gu*, Manchurian Wild Rice, *Zizania latifolia*.

¹⁹⁵ 秦始皇帝 Qin Shi Huangdi, Emperor Qin Shi Huang, ruled 247-210 BCE. He was the founder of the 秦朝 Qinchao, Qin Dynasty, and the first ruler of a united China.

¹⁹⁶ 徐福 Xu Fu (born 255 BCE). He was sent by Qin Shi Huang on two expeditions to find the secret of immortality, and did not return from the latter.

¹⁹⁷ 药 *yao*, medicine, that is, the 长生不老药, *changshengbulao yao*, The Elixir of Immortality.

¹⁹⁸ 莱州 Laizhou, a 县级市 *xianjishi* under the 地级市 *dijishi* 烟台, Yantai.

¹⁹⁹ 黄山 Huangshan, Mount Huang. Unidentified.

²⁰⁰ 之莱山 Zhilaishan, Mount Zhilai. Unidentified.

²⁰¹ 天柱山 Tianzhushan, Mount Tianzhu, a mountain southeast of Laizhou.

²⁰² 孤山 Gushan, Mount Gu. Unidentified.

²⁰³ 陸山 Lushan, Mount Lu. This might be another name for 博陸山 Bolushan, Mount Bolu which is in 昌邑 Changyi City, 县级市 *xianjishi* (county level city) in northern Shandong Province.

²⁰⁴ 大珠山 Dazhushan, Mount Dazhu, a mountain in the western coastal region of 青島 Qingdao City, Shandong Province.

²⁰⁵ 不其山, Buqishan, Mount Buqi. This is the old name for 鉄騎山 Tianqishan, Mount Tianqi, in 青島 Qingdao City, Shandong Province.

tiger in the region. Tong Hui prayed to the mountain god for help in capturing the man-eating tiger. As expected, within two days, the hunters caught two tigers. Tong Hui instructed the two tigers: “If you are the ones that eat people, lower your head and admit your crime; if you didn’t eat people, raise your head to prove your innocence.” One tiger remained still, lowering its head. Tong Hui commanded them to free into the mountains the captive tiger who raised its head, and to execute the tiger who lowered its head. Later this mountain was renamed as “Tame Tiger Hill.”²⁰⁶ As for the waters, in addition to the ocean, there are the Ye River,²⁰⁷ Jioa River,²⁰⁸ Wei River,²⁰⁹ and Furong Pond²¹⁰—all are inferior to Mingshui River.

All the scenic spots are made famous by people, but as for Mingshui, it was the mountains and waters that nourished its people. Therefore, I endlessly give praise to Mingshui and describe it lavishly, with the sincere hope that heaven and the earth will always give rise to good people, and these good people will always do good deeds, so that its vitality may be strengthened, and the mystic grace endowed by Nature would remain guarded. However, from the past to the present, fortune does not remain constant, nor do the customs of people remain long simple and honest.

Again, we will see this in the next chapter.

²⁰⁶ 馴虎山 Xunhushan, Tiger Taming Hill, is a hill in 青岛 Qingdao City in eastern Shandong Province.

²⁰⁷ 掖河 Yehe, River Ye. This might be the old name for the 萊州河 Laizhouhe, Laizhou River in 萊州 Laizhou City, which was formerly known as 掖县 Yexian County, in Shandong Province.

²⁰⁸ 膠河 Jiaohe, River Jiao, is a river in eastern Shandong Province.

²⁰⁹ 濰水 Weishui, Wei River. This might be the old name for 濰河 Weihe, Wei River in Shandong Province.

²¹⁰ 芙蓉池 Furongchi, Furong Pond. This might be the old name for 芙蓉泉 Furongquan, Furong Spring in 濟南 Jinan City, Shangdong Province.

Chapter 25: Pedagogue Xue Settles down in the Mountains; Landlord Di Arranges a Marriage at the Store

Prudently consider the neighborhood when buying the property

Is what a wise man would do. And is any other place comparable

To the beautiful scenery here?

No need for vermilion gates and jade mansions¹,

This place is Peng Lai.²

Additionally, there is the predestined marriage of a daughter,

The red string is secretly knotted³.

To the tune “Pure Serene Music.”⁴

There is a wealthy man in Mingshui Town whose family name is Di. His given name is Zongyu, and his courtesy name,⁵ Binliang. Although he is not an accomplished *xiucai*, he is quite a dabbler and within his stomach, there is always half a bottle of vinegar⁶ sloshing around and ready to spill out. Because his family business is well-off, he is quite chivalrous and observant of ancient traditions and habits; he has a refined restaurant in the neighborhood to receive government officials of the three eastern prefectures.⁷ As for the charges for meals and forage, a moderate profit is sufficient for him—unlike other restaurateurs who immediately seize the “dead snakes”⁸ and squeeze out of them as much as they can get away with. If Di encounters a well-bred passer-

¹ “Vermilion gates and jade mansions” refer to the heavenly residences of the immortals.

² 蓬萊 Peng Lai, fairy land in Chinese mythology.

³ In the tale, “The Old Man Under the Moon” (月下老人 Yue Xia Laoren, the lunar god of matchmaking), found in the collection, 續玄怪錄 *Xu xuan guai lu* (More Records of the Mysterious and Strange), by the Tang dynasty writer Li Fuyan 李復言 (fl. 830-840), a young man named 韋固 Wei Gu encounters an old man in the moonlight who reveals that he arranges all marriages by tying a red thread to the feet of the predestined couples.

⁴ 清平樂 qing ping yue. A popular tune associated with Ci poetry. See Xu, *Three Hundred Song Lyrics: Bilingual Edition*, 74-75, 124-25, 138-39, 210-11, 278-79, 488-89, 554-57, 632-37.

⁵ 字 *zi*, courtesy or style name bestowed on males at age twenty to indicate adulthood and to convey respect.

⁶ 醋 *cu*, vinegar. A pedantic scholar or *xiucai* is said to be “vinegary.”

⁷ The three eastern districts refer to the three 府 *fu*, prefectures, to the east of Mingshui town: 登州府 Dengzhoufu, 萊州府 Laizhoufu, and 青州府 Qingzhoufu.

⁸ “Dead snakes” refer to helpless people who, in this context, are customers.

by, he treats him as if a guest and charges nothing; in the end they become friends. All the passers-by address Mr. Di respectfully as Di Yuanwai.⁹

One day, a palanquin, a four-horse sleeping palanquin, along with several few mules, arrived at the restaurant in the early morning. Di Yuanwai asked the waiter: “Who is his lordship who just checked in?” The waiter replied: “It was a monsieur, a madam, a little madam,¹⁰ a maid, two household servants and their families,¹¹ and three stewards. The monsieur is from Weihui city in Henan province, and his family name is Xue. He was a pedagogue at the state school in Yunzhou prefecture, and now he is promoted to the position of instructor at the mansion of Prince Heng¹² in Qingzhou.” Di Yuanwai continued his questions: “How old is his lordship?” The waiter replied: “He is in his fifties. He is extremely kind.” Di Yuanwai walked over and met with Pedagogue Xue, and they introduced each other. Di Yuanwai asked his servant to fetch from his home some tea to drink. During their conversation, they felt that they were old friends already. After he returned home, Di Yuanwai told the servants that they should serve Mr. Xue well. Pedagogue Xue visited Di Yuanwai’s family in return. Di Yuanwai set up a few drinks to entertain him and persuaded him to stay for dinner. After hours of conversation, Pedagogue Xue parted from Di Yuanwai and returned to the inn.

The next morning, Pedagogue Xue sent to the Di family four packages of caramel-nut cakes and two cattys¹³ of celtuce.¹⁴ Di Yuanwai accepted the gifts, and rewarded the steward of the Xue family with 50 copper cash¹⁵; he prepared a gift box and invited Pedagogue Xue to a send-off party. Pedagogue Xue wrapped up five mace¹⁶ of silver to send to Di Yuanwai as a meal fee, which Di Yuanwai firmly rejected. In the end, Pedagogue Xue was forced to give up. As the weather was getting more and more cloudy, and it seemed that it was about to rain, Di Yuanwai strenuously urged Pedagogue Xue to stay, saying: “Twenty *li* from here is Ershili village, and there is nothing

⁹ 員外 *Yuanwai*, a respectful form of address, literally a rich landlord.

¹⁰ 小夫人 *xiao furen*, “little madam,” concubine.

¹¹ Servants and their families were considered as members of the family in ancient China.

¹² 衡府 *hengfu*, is the name for the residence of prince in Ming Dynasty. 成化帝, the Chenghua Emperor (1447-1487) invested his seventh son 朱佑樨 Zhou You Hun as the 衡恭王 Heng Gong Wang, Prince of Heng, whose residence was in Qing Zhou 青州, Shandong Province.

¹³ 斤 *jin*, catty. Approximately 500 grams or a little more than a pound avoirdupois.

¹⁴ 萵筍 *wosun*, celtuce, *Lactuca sativa* var. *augustana*.

¹⁵ 錢 *qian*, cash, a coin distinguished by having a square hole in the middle to facilitate them being strung together. Unless otherwise specified these are copper coins.

¹⁶ 錢銀 *qian yin*, cash silver or mace, a silver coin. *Qian* is also a unit of weight used to measure silver: Ten 分 *fēn*, [candareen, makes one 錢 *qian*, mace, and ten mace make one 兩 *liang*, tael, which is 40 grams or 1.3 troy ounces.](#)

there but small inns which are not capable of handling a palanquin or feeding horses. Twenty miles away from the village is the county seat. It will rain any minute and it's better to wait for a moment. If it were to get brighter then I would of course not dare to detain you; if it rains, here we have the convenience of guest rooms, and forage for the animals, and we are able to provide some homely food.” While Di Yuanwai was repeatedly urging Xue to stay, as expected, it began to rain. Pedagogue Xue was forced to unpack his luggage and wait for the weather to clear up.

The old saying says: “Rain starts when the door is opened and stops when the meal is ready.” However, the weather this day was unpredictable and it rained unceasingly. Towards noon, Di Yuanwai prepared some lunch to send to his guests. Pedagogue Xue discussed the matter with his wife: “It looks as if the rain is unlikely to stop and we cannot move today now. It would be better to take some food, buy some wine and chat with Mr. Di rather than sitting here idly.” Mrs. Xue replied: “Inside there is fermented soya bean paste, fully cooked cured meat, marinated chicken, marinated pork, as well as sweet shrimps, black bean sauce, and celtuce. We only need to send the servants to buy some fresh side dishes to go with the rice.” She also prepared some dishes and brought them upstairs at the back of store. She found a large bottle of premium rice wine, and invited Di Yuanwai for a meal while it rained outside. As the old saying goes: “Difficult the first time, easy the second”, Mr. Xue and Mr. Di soon became all the more well acquainted.

This time they did not chat idly but introduced their families to each other. Pedagogue Xue said that he was from Zuocheng¹⁷ county in Weihui Prefecture, and his name was Xue Zhen, and his courtesy name was Qizhi. He said that he was accepted as an official candidate for the government exam¹⁸ at the age of seventeen, and become a government official¹⁹ at the age of forty-four. His first appointment was as a pedagogue in Jinxiang,²⁰ and his second appointment as a pedagogue in Qi county, Henan province²¹; as for the third appointment, he was promoted to pedagogue in Yanzhou Prefecture in Shandong province; eight months later, he was promoted to the position of pedagogue at the mansion of Prince Heng. He had accumulated some wealth from

¹⁷ 胙城縣 Zuochengxian, Zuocheng county, An administrative district in existence 1380-1726. Now 延津縣 Yanjinxian, Yanjin county, in Henan province.

¹⁸ 廩生, *linsheng*, a student who are eligible to participate in the official government exams and receive financial support from the government.

¹⁹ The 吏部 Libu, the Ministry of *Personnel*, which had available some minor posts which were open to 出貢 *chugong*, candidates who had failed the civil service examination.

²⁰ 金鄉縣, Jinxiangxian, Jingxiang county, in southwest Shandong Province.

²¹ 杞縣 Qixian, Qi county, under the administration of the 地級市 *dijishi* of 開封 Kaifeng, Henan Province.

his tuition, which supported him in a modest life-style. But he had younger brother born of a concubine who was extremely evil and always plotted to murder him, his own elder brother, and he was childless at the age of fifty-two. As a result, he had no alternative but to evade his half-brother; otherwise, he did not need to become an official in another province.

Di Yuanwai asked: "Have you not fostered any children, or have you never had any?" Pedagogue Xue replied: "From the time we were married, we have never had any children." Di Yuanwai asked: "Why not take a concubine?" Pedagogue Xue replied: "Before my departure from Henan province, I married one. But I cannot know the will of God." He asked Di Yuanwai: "How many children do you have? And how old are you, honorable sir?" Di Yuanwai replied: "I am ten years younger than you, sir, and I am forty-two this year. I don't have any children either." Pedagogue Xue asked: "Do you have an honorable concubine?" Di Yuanwai replied: "You, sir, didn't take a concubine until the age of fifty-two, it is thus clear that taking a concubine is a difficult matter. A thousand fortune tellers told me that I won't have a son until the age of forty-four." Pedagogue Xue said: "According to the fortune teller, I would have a daughter at the age of fifty-five, and a son at the age of fifty-six. He also said that I would have three sons to attend my funeral." He then added: "Mingshui town is a place of fertile soil and generous people, it has fine wine, calm winds, beautiful traditions, and really is the happy land of Xianxiang!"²² Di Yuanwai replied: "If we were in the past, our humble town would not dare to reject your compliments; however, nowadays our town is no longer what it used to be. The younger generation has not inherited any of the honesty and simplicity of their parent's generation!" Pedagogue Xue said: "Although it may no longer be what it used to be, yet it still surpasses other places. Take my humble hometown, for example. It has degenerated more and more into a lawless place. I was wondering if your honorable town is receptive to outsiders?" Di Yuanwai replied: "Our humble town does not oppose strangers. However, we don't have any land for sale, because it is all hereditary property which has been passed on for generations. But apart from farming, one can make a living here by doing business as we are near the roads to the three eastern districts. Here we are short of a fabric store. If we need fabric, we have to either travel to the capital city or to the county seat which is quite inconvenient." Pedagogue Xue asked: "Would it be out of the question for an outsider to abandon their hometown in order to open a store here?" Di Yuanwai replied: "Among those who reside in other regions, who would leave their home town and come here to open a store? As for the people of our humble

²² 仙鄉 Xianxiang, fairyland.

town, they only have understanding of farming and agriculture, but they possess no knowledge of profit making in order to earn a living. Take my humble hotel for example: we never intended to make a profit by providing meals, but rather to collect the dung of the horses that rest here, so that we may use it to fertilize the soil. We sell the food and forage at a very low price solely to attract travelers.” Pedagogue Xue said: “No wonder we were determined to stay here yesterday afternoon, traveling only 70 *li* from Jinan city to here.” They continued to drink and chat without noticing that the first *geng*²³ had passed, and the rain was still falling incessantly. Di Yuanwai opened an umbrella, put on the wooden clogs and parted from Pedagogue Xue. He returned home and told the servants to prepare breakfast.

The weather gradually became clear the next morning. Pedagogue Xue got up and, seeing Di Yuanwai didn’t treat him as an ordinary guest, he hesitated to pay for the meals. On his departure, he and Di Yuanwai repeatedly thanked each other, and Pedagogue Xue promised that he would send his servants to express his gratitude. Subsequently, pedagogue Xue took up his post in Qingzhou. The salary of an official to a prince²⁴ is very modest, in addition, a royal palace is notoriously impoverished; he could only live from hand to mouth. When the New Year festival²⁵ approached, he sent a servant by the name of Xue Sanhuai, who took with him twenty cattys of sugar balls, two rolls of silk manufactured in Shouguang²⁶, and a hand-written letter, to pay a courtesy visit to the Di family. Di Yuanwai hosted Xue Sanhuai for two days, and wrote a letter in reply; he included two rolls of home-made silk and two smoked pig shoulders as gifts in return. He also gave Xue Sanhuai three silver cash. From then on, the two men kept in frequent contact with each other, and never ceased to exchange presents. One year in *eryue*, the second lunar month, Pedagogue Xue sent his servant Xue Sanhuang to visit his family’s grave during the Qingming festival²⁷ in Zuocheng, and Mingshui town was on the road he had to take. Since it involved no extra effort, Pedagogue Xue sent Di Yuanwai presents and a letter.

²³ 一更 *yigeng*, the first of the five *geng* which make up the night watch. 7-9pm.

²⁴ 王府 *wangfu*, prince.

²⁵ 年節 *Nianjie*, New Year Festival, now called the 春節 *Chunjie*, spring festival, traditionally ran from the last day of the old year until the 元宵節 *Yuanxiaojie*, lantern festival, celebrated on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. On the New Year Festival, see Stepanchuk and Wong, *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts*, 1-33.

²⁶ 壽光 *Shouguang*, a city in eastern Shangdong Province.

²⁷ 清明 *Qingming*, pure brightness. The Qingming festival also known as Tomb Sweeping Day, is the first day of the 5th lunar month when people pay homage to their ancestors by visiting their graves.

But to speak of Di Yuanwai. On the twentieth day of *zhengyu*,²⁸ his wife gave birth to a son, and the entire family rejoiced as if they had received a priceless treasure. The day when Xue Sansheng arrived in Mingshui town was the celebration of baby's first month of life,²⁹ and all the relatives and friends had gathered for the celebration- Di Yuanwai was busily engaged in entertaining the guests and preparing the liquor. He said to Xue Sanxing: "Your master is ten years older than I am—the fortune teller told me that I would not have a son until I was forty-four, and just as predicted, now I have just turned forty-four, I have a son. Your master told me that a fortune teller predicted that he would have a daughter at the age of fifty-four. I was wondering if there is any good news from the honorable concubine?" Xue Sanxing replied: "Yesterday, which was *eryue* the sixteenth, our little mistress gave birth to a little girl. The day I came here is the little one's second day." Di Yuanwai said: "Based on these two prophecies that have come true, one's future can indeed be predicted." Di Yuanwai invited Xue Sanxing to stay for the night, and sent him off the next day.

Since Pedagogue Xue frequently sent his family servants to visit the Di family during this two year while Di Yuanwai had never sent anyone to visit the Xues in return, Di Yuanwai decided to send birthday gifts on the eleventh of *sanyue*, the third lunar month for the celebration of the little lady Xue's completion of her first month on *sanyue* the sixteenth, at the same time reporting to Mr. Xue that he had a son.³⁰ Therefore, he prepared some silver which weighed five mace, a pair of bracelets which weighed one *liang*, in addition to some edibles. He sent the family servant, Di Zhou, to visit the Xue family on a mule with these presents. When Di Zhou arrived at the Xue family's place, Pedagogue Xue opened the letter and accepted the presents, and invited Di Zhou to stay for two days. He then sent Di Zhou back with letters and presents in return.

The two families were in contact over a long period of time and established a profound friendship as eight years went by. Because an official of the prince made an on-the-spot investigation, Pedagogue Xue had a confrontation with his superior during the examination of the prince's officials, and the latter secretly wrote negative remarks — "old and sick" — on his record. Xue was permitted to retire from his post. Pedagogue Xue said: "I'd rather resign from my position and be comfortable rather than stay here for a miserable pittance — for eight years I didn't

²⁸ 正月 *zhengyu*, the first lunar month, roughly equivalent to January.

²⁹ 满月 *manyue*, a celebration held to celebrate a child's first month of life.

³⁰ 三月 *sanyue*, the third lunar month, roughly equivalent to March.

accumulate any wealth. But if I returned to my hometown, that evil half-brother of mine would plot against me, which I couldn't bear; it would be better to reside in Mingshui town. If it is correctly predicted by the fortune teller, that I will have a son at fifty-six, and a second son at fifty-eight, I could return to my hometown when my sons have grown up a little." Therefore, while he was packing the luggage, he sent the family servant Xue Sanhuai to deliver a letter to Di Yuanwai, asking for his help in finding a house in which to live in Mingshui town for a long-term stay.

After reading the letter, Di Yuanwai told Xue Sanhuai: "Your master is most welcome to stay at the house behind my hotel for the moment; please allow me some time to search for an agreeable house. I will be waiting here for your master." While he sent Xue Sanhuai to deliver the message, Di Yuanwai instructed his servants to sweep the floor and renovate the windows of the house; he brought in clean beds and mats, set up a new stove, installed chairs, desks, household utensils and so on. He made ready rice, noodles, firewood, oil and seasonings of various kinds, leaving nothing to be desired.

Within a day, Pedagogue Xue with his wife and household set out to travel the forty-three *li* to Mingshui and sent Xue Sanxing on ahead to check his residence prior to his arrival. When Xue Sanxing learned everything was ready, he went back at top speed to report. Pedagogue Xue was extremely happy. Di Yuanwai was busily engaged in organizing the preparation of food for Mr. Xue. At last, Pedagogue Xue finally arrived with his family, and upon entering his house, he found out that it was even tidier and more convenient than his own residence. Di Yuanwai paid a visit to Mr. Xue with some simple dishes, and then he returned home. Pedagogue Xue paid a return visit immediately afterwards.

The next day, Di Yuanwai's wife prepared a banquet and paid a visit to Mrs. Xue. On their first meeting, both ladies behaved graciously and courteously; they introduced their children to one another. Lady Xue was six years old. When Mrs. Xue was giving birth, she had dreamed that a fairy woman³¹ in a white dress had entered her room. At once Lady Xue was delivered of her child. She therefore named her daughter, "Sujie."³² Her older son was four years old and was called "Chunge,"³³ and the younger son was two years old and called "Dongge."³⁴ Sujie looked like:

³¹ 仙女 *xiannu*, fairy woman.

³² 素姐 *Sujie*, girl in white.

³³ 春哥 *Chunge*, spring boy.

³⁴ 冬哥 *Dongge*, winter boy.

Clear scalp, raven black hair. Snow white face, rosy lips. A slender pair of jade wrists, a small pair of lotus feet.³⁵ Although she is now just a fresh bud, she will blossom into a cotton rose³⁶ later on.

As for her two sons, they don't look like beggars either. And Mrs. Di requested to be introduced to the concubine, who looked like: Wearing a short pointy wig rolled up in a bun, and wearing on her feet two curved bow-shoes.³⁷ With a reddish tan colored cheek, her appearance ranked as inferior, yet she had a slender body, which would rank her higher. Despite her rootless lower-class birth, she was fertile for breeding handsome ponies.

After the initial meeting, the ladies chatted for half of the day and then went their ways. The next morning, Madam Xue asked the servants to pay a return visit with five cattys of pork, two chickens, two big crucian carp,³⁸ twenty fresh rare crabs, two lotus roots, six cattys of Chinese yams,³⁹ and two plates of light refreshments.⁴⁰ Madam Di asked the servants to prepare a sumptuous banquet and asked her son, Di Xichen, to visit Madame Xue. It came up that they Di Xichen and Sujie at six years old were both the same age, although Di Xichen was born on *zhengyue* the twelfth while Sujie was born on *eryue* the sixteenth and therefore Di Xichen was one month older than Sujie.⁴¹ Although Di Xichen was not particularly handsome, he had sharp eyebrows, large eyes, and firm body. Madam Xue thought: "If we don't go back to Henan, I am willing to let Sujie be their daughter in-law," while Madam Di calculated in her mind: "If they are willing to settle down here, I would be willing to have my son as their son in-law." The two ladies recounted their ideas to their husband respectively, and soon they put the matter to the side.

Sometime later, Pedagogue Xue asked Di Yuanwai to accompany him on a visit to the families of the neighborhood and help him look for a residence at the same time. Because Pedagogue Xue had consulted with Di Yuanwai and had decided to open a fabric store, he was in search of a house with a shopfront. Despite their many efforts, they could not find a suitable residence: either the houses with good shopfronts had limited living space, or the houses with suitable living space had poor shopfronts.

³⁵ Beautiful feet, in this case bound feet, were likened to a lotus blossom. See Dorothy Ko, [*Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*](#) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 32–34.

³⁶ 芙蓉, *furong*, cotton rose, *Hibiscus mutabilis*.

³⁷ 弓鞋 *gongshie*, bow-shoes, Shoes with an upturned end so they look like a bow worn by women with bound feet.

³⁸ 鯽魚 *jiyu*, crucian carp, *Carassius carassius*, a common food fish.

³⁹ 山藥 *shanyao*, Chinese yam, *Dioscorea opposita*.

⁴⁰ 點心 *dianshin*, light refreshments or snacks. Anglicized as "dim sum."

⁴¹ 正月 *zhengyue* and 二月 *eryue*, the first and second lunar months, roughly equivalent to January and February.

While they were in a state of indecision, they encountered the son of a military instructor whose name was Shan Bao. His father is named Shan Yumin, and was the instructor at the public school in the Nanyang prefecture.⁴² Although the position a military instructor in the *yamen*⁴³ was an ice-cold⁴⁴ position without any prospects of making money, he was extremely greedy and became unbearable to the people. There was a vacancy for a pedagogue and he assumed this duty. In the past, new students accepted to study for *xiuca*i examination had to pay a bribe of one *liang* of silver, now they had to routinely pay him two or three *liang* in order to be able to enter the examination room. He demanded bribes in according with the common practices while at the office, and demanded additional bribes privately, based on his own “ancient tradition.” His servants demanded tips and his son demanded his own gifts — some of the newly admitted *xiuca*i were so extorted that they endlessly grumbled and were forced to sell or mortgage their fields. Among them was a student whose name was Cheng Fatang who had lost both of his parents when he was young. He was married and living with his wife’s family, and his mother in-law was a widow, who lived frugally to finance his studies. Because he did not have any silver to bribe the official in charge of the government exams, each time he was not allowed to enter the examination room. However, on one occasion, he was let in by accident, and achieved the second highest score in the examination. Shan Yumin ruthlessly demanded payment from him for having gone in to the examination. And to tell the story fully, he beat him from head to toe many times; Cheng *xiuca*i melted down the jewelry of his wife and mother in-law and pawned his clothes. He also planned to sell off the few acres of land that belonged to his mother in-law to bribe the instructor, but how could the entire family feed themselves if they did not have land to farm? But if he did not sell it, he was afraid that he would be beaten to death.

During the Cheng *xiuca*i’s difficult times, the Dingji festival in *bayue* arrived.⁴⁵ After the ritual, Pedagogue Shan fetched the roster of *xiuca*i students and checked their attendance; for those lazy people who were absent, they became his “tribute missionaries” who were forced to pay him five or six silver cash in turn. Cheng Fatang respectfully responded to the roll call when it was

⁴² 南陽府 Nanyanfu, a prefecture in Henan Province.

⁴³ 衙門 *Yamen*, government office.

⁴⁴ “Ice-cold position” means that one that is undesirable.

⁴⁵ 八月 *bayue*, the eighth lunar month, roughly equivalent to August; 丁祭 Dingji, Ding Day Sacrifice. A sacrifice to Confucius made in the 二月 *eryue*, the second and 八月 *bayue*, the eighth lunar months on the first ding day of the month, that is, the 4th day of the first ten day cycle or 旬 *xun*, in the thirty day lunar month.

being called. Shan asked Cheng to kneel down and said: “Even a gang of prostitutes has their leader, and the gang of bandits has their leader too. How come you group of *xiuca*i don’t have a leader? The forest guard burns firewood from his forest, the river guard drinks from the river he watches. You dirty swine, you get advancement through studying for the examinations but you only give me a few *liang* of silver and leave! I am not happy being the leader of prostitutes!” He then put Cheng over a bench and asked the attendants to beat him severely twenty-five times with a bamboo board. Cheng Fangtang had no place to hide and it was as if the doors to both heaven or hell had all disappeared; his trousers were beaten into pieces and both of his legs became black. He became furious: he had participated in the government exam to advance his family, but now despite losing all the jewelry of his wife and his mother in-law, and his clothes in tatters, he was still being humiliated and had received such a severe beating. Now his wounds became ulcerous sores and he developed typhoid, and he died not four or five days after that.

There was a court eunuch whose family name was Sun. He was an official in the Ministry of War.⁴⁶; When the Jingtai Emperor⁴⁷ planned to oust the crown prince,⁴⁸ son of the Yingzong Emperor⁴⁹, he offended the Emperor by opposing the plan and was demoted back to his hometown. When he heard about this incident, he decided to fight the injustice. He attended the funeral of Cheng Fatang and insisted on examining the wounds on the corpse’s bottom. After discovering that one leg of the corpse was beaten black and blue and the other one was smashed to pulp, he burst out crying, and spared no effort to confront Shan Yumin — he went to the government himself and presented a petition to the court. The court reported to the Commissioner of Education⁵⁰. Subsequently the court found Shan Yumin guilty of corruption and ruthless cruelty and sentenced him to military confinement in Hejian city.⁵¹ The court confiscated seven hundred *liang* of illegally obtained silver, and also had him flogged with a bamboo rod more than two hundred times. The two attendants who flogged Chen Fatang were also sentenced to serve at the posthouse.

⁴⁶ 兵部 Bingbu , Ministry of War.

⁴⁷ 景泰帝 Jingtaidi, the Jingtai Emperor (1449-1457), the 7th Ming emperor.

⁴⁸ Later to become the 成化帝 Chenghuadi, the Chenghua Emperor, the 9th Ming Emperor who ruled 1464-1487.

⁴⁹ 正統帝 Zhengtongdi, the Zhengtong emperor 1436-1449, the 6th Ming Dynasty Emperor who also ruled again as the 天順帝 Tianshundi, the Tianshun Emperor 1457-1464, the 8th Ming Emperor.

⁵⁰ 學道 *xuedao*, Commissioner of Education in Qing Dynasty. “Xue” means education and “dao” refers to a title of government officials.

⁵¹ 河間 Hejian. Now a 县级市 *xianjishi*, county level city east-central [Hebei](#) Province.

Although Shan Yumin did not end up with nothing at all, when he had to return home, he suffered an overwhelming defeat.

This Shan Bao was the only son of Shan Yumin and he was a handsome fellow when he was young. He was not too strongly built, had a white complexion, long beard, and an elegant bearing. He qualified for the government exams at the age of eighteen and was accepted as a student sponsored by the government; he excelled in every examination. He got on well with people, and never talked nor acted improperly. He was capable of drinking, too, but was never a drunkard. He was never enticed to visit a brothel no matter how sweetly his friends talked. He was very filial to his parents and never demonstrated a single sign of disobedience. However, after Shan Yumin was promoted to being a military instructor, the disposition of Shan Bao, who was then thirty, deteriorated, although it still remained decent. But after the death of Chen Fatang, Shan Bao gradually became violent and beat his wife savagely on a daily basis. Fewer than two months later, Shan Bao's wife hanged herself. Whenever Shan Yumin was in his presence, he would glare fiercely at his father, scold and curse him, and clench his hands as if he was going to hit him. He did not speak in an appropriate manner to his parents, but called Shan Yumin an "old bull," and his wife an "old bitch," and he called himself "Master Cheng."⁵² Later, not only did he change his disposition, his physical appearance and voice were completely different than they had been before. His left eye turned up and his nose was twisted to the right; his face looked ugly and ferocious, and his long beard became curly as those barbarians in the west. On occasion, his eyes would not turn up and his nose not be twisted. When he met his parents, he was gentle and obedient like before. When being asked about his previous behavior, he totally denied it and said that he was being made the subject of ridicule.

At times he would behave normally and at other times he would become even more wicked. When he was taking part in the annual examination, he did not compose an essay, but wrote a long and detailed narrative of the complaint of Cheng Fatang. The examination official appreciated his essay and graded his exam paper as coming first place in the sixth rank; he also sent the essay to the county government for them to investigate further. The county government replied: "He is mentally ill." The official said: "He does not suffer from mental disorder but he is seeking karmic retribution for a grievance." After the essay was rejected by the county government, the examination official also dropped the matter.

⁵² 我程老爺 wo Cheng laoye. "I am Master Cheng," i.e. I am Cheng Fatang.

Later, when Shan Bao's father died, he resolutely rejected the use of a coffin to contain the dead body, but demanded his father's body be dragged naked to the grave. When his relatives managed with difficulty to provide a coffin, he demanded continually and determinedly that the coffin be opened. One day, when he was not properly restrained, he overturned the coffin along with the stool on which it was placed and broke open the coffin-lid. The entire village was nearly suffocated by the foul smell and they complained to the government official and demanded that he be arrested. Without Shan Bao's knowledge, his mother engaged a craftsman to seal up the coffin again with lime. She got him at the fourth watch⁵³ to lift the coffin with help on a strong carrying pole and take it to be buried.

After the burial of Shan Yumin, Shan Bao's mental state deteriorated, and often he was in a state of drunken madness. Whenever he came across a gambling den, he would take a seat and gamble, regardless of the immediate company of hooligans and beggars. If he lost, he would present the exact amount of money; if he won, he never asked for his money. Whenever he came across a prostitute, regardless of their looks, he would sleep with them, and in the end, he was infected with syphilis.

The properties which had been purchased by Shan Yumin were all sold off so that only one house remained which was the bequest of his grand-parents. This house was right opposite the house of Minister Yang, and had three storefronts in the front and two residences in the rear which were complete with living rooms and study rooms. Pedagogue Xue was very pleased with his find but was concerned about the closeness of its location to Minister Yang's residence; therefore, he made a concession and let Minister Yang's grandson purchase the house. He then beseeched Di Yuanwai to rent the house on his behalf. The Yang family completely agreed and said: "We had no choice but to purchase this house because it is in our close vicinity, but actually we do not need it. Please feel free to move in at your convenience. I spent one hundred and fifty *liang* of silver to buy this house; I could rent it for one *liang* and five *qian* of silver each month." Di Yuanwai returned and told Pedagogue Xue about it and Pedagogue Xue wrapped nine *liang* of silver as the half-year's rent, along with one *liang* and eight *qian* of silver for a management fee, and sent Di Yuanwai with the money to the Yang family. Minister Yang received the rent and said: "Should there be any need to spruce up the property, you may decorate it as you please. You can take the expenses out of the house rental." Pedagogue Xue immediately started renovating the house. He

⁵³ 四更 *sigeng*, the fourth watch of the night, (1:00-3:00am).

picked an auspicious date, and moved in. Di Yuanwan invited some neighbors to take part in a house-warming celebration, and Mrs. Di also presented some housewarming gifts to Mrs. Xue. From the time Pedagogue Xue moved in, he and his family members lived there safe and sound. He and Di Yuanwai often discussed the fabric store which they wanted to open.

One day, a group of fabric traders, who came from Qingzhou, were heading to Linqing⁵⁴ to buy fabric. Usually, Mingshui was not on their itinerary for normally when they left Linqing, they would stay in at an inn in Jinan city twenty-five *li* to the east for three days, and on the fourth day stop in Xiujiang county. However, on this day, it started raining so that they had no alternative but to spend the night in Mingshui instead. Di Yuanwai and the guests have a conversation together, and they speak about the fabric business. The guests explained it thoroughly. Di Yuanwai told them that a relative of his planned to open a fabric store here and the guests replied: “What’s so difficult about it? We are always travelling through here three days of the month. When we return next time, he could travel with us. This is a very profitable business. When we reach Qingchou, we expect to easily make a twenty percent profit. If we stopped here, we would easily get a thirty percent profit. The textiles sell well so that one can even make a profit when one only sells half a *chi*⁵⁵ or a few *cun*.⁵⁶ However, a tradesman has to behave appropriately. If he gorges himself on the journey or visits prostitutes, or if he is short changes money in the shop or is easily fooled into accepting counterfeit silver, he will definitely fail. You ask him to follow us and then he will understand clearly how not to diverge from the straight path.” Di Yuanwai asked: “When will you be back? I will have him be prepared.” The guests replied: “We come by regularly every twenty days; if it rains, it will delay us only half a day.”

When the guests took out their wallets to pay for their meals, Di Yuanwai rejected refused to accept payment. When he sent them off, he informed Pedagogue Xue to get ready the money and servants and to wait for when the merchants returned so that he would be prepared to make the journey with them. They tidied up the storefronts so that as soon as the merchandise arrived, they could open the store. Pedagogue Xue gathered together five hundred *liang* of silver as his capital with which to buy cloth and spent fifty *liang* of silver in purchasing a selection of

⁵⁴ 臨清 Lingqing, Now a 县级市 *xianjishi* administered by 聊城 Liaocheng City in western Shandong Province.

⁵⁵ 尺 *chi*, the distance measured from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger, “span”. The Chinese “foot.” Now standardized at 13.123 inches.

⁵⁶ 寸 *cun*, the width of the thumb at the knuckle, “inch”. Now standardized at 1.3123 inches. There are ten *cun* in a *chi*.

headscarves, towels for the summer heat, socks, linens, handkerchiefs and so on. He made ready to send both Xue Sanhuai and Xue Sanxing on the journey so that they could in turn take care of the merchandise.

The merchants returned on the expected day and Di Yuanwai introduced them to Pedagogue Xue, who treated them with liquor and meals. Immediately, his two servants were ready to leave with them. Within a few days, the Xue servants returned with the merchants, having purchased a great deal of fabric which had been loaded on to the back of mules. On an auspicious day, the fabric store opened. It was the only fabric store in a wide area, and Pedagogue Xue sold twenty or thirty *liang* worth of goods on a daily basis. The two Xue servants managed the store and purchased the goods in turn.

Pedagogue Xue had nothing else to do but was selling fabric at his store every day. Whenever Di Yuanwai had some free time, he would take a seat at the Pedagogue Xue's store and chat with him for hours. In time, the friendship between the two families was enhanced and their wives become close friends as well. Following his father's example, Di Xichen often went to play at Pedagogue Xue's store and also went into the living quarters at the rear. But, Sujie, the daughter of the Xue family, would immediately hide herself in her locked room whenever she heard the arrival of Di Xichen. Her mother said: "Your hair is still not tied up⁵⁷ and you are a child; feel free to play with him. Why do you hide yourself like that?" Sujie answered: "I don't know either, but whenever I see him, I get angry, so I don't bother seeing him." Her mother laughed and said: "You naughty little girl! Is it because you are mad at him eating your share of snacks? In the future we will have him as our son-in-law." Sujie replied: "If he becomes your son-in-law, I will beat him to death at night, if not in the daytime. In that way my anger would be calmed!" Her mother laughed: "Don't talk nonsense, you little girl." Talks such as this were very normal, and it was just like a breeze passing by one's ear—nobody took it seriously.

Two years passed, and Pedagogue Xue's business prospered greatly. Considering the wealth and business potential of Mingshui, Pedagogue Xue made a resolution to settle down there and not return to Henan. He often discussed the issue with Di Yuanwai, who said: "If Mingshui pleases you, why not settle down here? Nowadays, it is no longer comparable to what it was and many here are selling off their lands and houses. Let me talk with an estate agent tomorrow to see if he knows of any suitable houses and so that he may keep us informed."

⁵⁷ Tying up a girl's hair signifies her adulthood.

This year, Di Yuanwai had another daughter, and because she was born on the seventh of the seventh lunar month,⁵⁸ she was named Qiaojie.⁵⁹ Pedagogue Xue had another son, who was born in the tenth lunar month at *lidong*,⁶⁰ and he named him, Zaidong.⁶¹ The Di and Xue family exchanged gifts of rice and rice porridge.

One day, Pedagogue Xue sent a matchmaker named Laotian to the Di family, asking that Qiaojie should be engaged Zaidong. Di Yuanwai told his wife: “We have been friends for exactly ten years and no one else is closer to us than the Xues. But I am concerned that they would return to Henan and dare not permit a formal engagement.” Laotian told Pedagogue Xue this message in reply. Pedagogue Xue said: “I have decided to be settle down here, and I have beseeched Di Yuanwai to help with the purchase of a home. If they cannot be otherwise convinced, I will marry Sujie to Xichen and switch the marriages around.” Laotian took the message to Di Yuanwai with this response. Di Yuanwai said: “If that is the case, I have no more objections.” Laotian brought Pedagogue Xue Di Yuanwai’s reply, and on an auspicious day, the two families exchanged the engagement documents and betrothal presents of jewelry through the intercession of Laotian.

Mrs Xue teased Sujie and said to her: “For what reason did you say that you get mad at sight of him, but as was expected, you will now become his wife.” Sujie said: “I have nothing else to say but I will avenge myself. Just wait and see.” Her mother said: “Stop talking nonsense! Or I will never speak to you again.” Sujie said: “I need to speak honestly, why are you so angry, mother?” The two families were already intimate friends, and now they would be more closely connected through marriage. They treated one another with great reverence and courtesy, and were close just like glue and lacquer. One Shandong family and one Henan family united through the bonds of marriage despite the distance of thousands of *li*. Just as the old saying goes: “Fate can bring one to meet over a thousand *li*.” However, Sujie’s prophetic remarks are not at all propitious.

⁵⁸ That is, 七月 *qiyue*, roughly equivalent to July.

⁵⁹ Traditionally, the 7th day of the 7th lunar month is the 七夕節 *Qixijie*, Double Seven Festival. See Stepanchuk and Wong, *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts*, 81-83. It celebrates the love story of the weaver girl and the cowherd which is first mentioned in the 詩經, *Shijing*, Book of Songs. On this day, unmarried girls pray for the cleverness of the weaving maiden. The name 巧姐, Qiaojie means “a clever girl”.

⁶⁰ 立冬 *lidong*. The celestial year is divided into twenty-four 節氣 *jieqi*, solar terms, each of which is equivalent to 15° of longitude. *Lidong* is the 19th solar term when the sun passes from 225° to 239° of latitude. It is the traditional date for the beginning of winter and occurred in October in the Julian Calendar, but now occurs in November in the Gregorian one.

⁶¹ 再冬 *Zaidong*, means “another winter.”

We do not know the outcome of this story yet and we will tell you about what happens in the next chapter.

Chapter 26: Sinful Creatures Fill their Record full of Misconduct; Frivolous Matters Erode the Conscience.

People are powerless when social customs change,
And ignorantly spend their time until old age.
The honest gradually degenerate into the fraudulent,
The trustworthy progressively became thieves.
People regard their social relationships as illusions,
And their family members as enemies.
They are snobbish and oppressors of the weak,
Flattering the wealthy, intimidating the poor,
They should be ashamed to lead such a depraved life.

The social customs of the world are merely fixed to favor one and discriminate against the other, who knows why they degenerate over time. To see places that are ungenerous and evil which are not able to recover their original state of simplicity; the places that have extremely honest and simple customs also degenerate just like when filtering vinegar—the newer the batch, the worse it becomes. Such is the situation in the region of Mingshui town, that few decades ago, although it dared not to compare itself with the era of the Emperor Yu,¹ it was comparable to the Western Zhou period.² Unexpectedly, as the older generation gradually passed away, these simple and honest customs deteriorated; a the younger generation of philandering and frivolous children was gradually born, mean behavior overwhelmed the consciousness and decorum gradually disappeared; the practice of bad habits became the custom, indulgent behavior became second nature—Mingshui did not resemble what it used to be in former times!

The powerful families would dispatch numerous lackeys just to poke their noses into other families' business: if they discovered a spendthrift son, they would first lure him into their house,

¹ 大禹 Da Yu, Emperor Yu the Great, c. 2200 – 2101 BC. A legendary king, who was considered an ideal ruler.

² 西周 Xi Zhou, *Western Zhou*, the period (1046–771 BCE). This period was famous for its codification of political rules, ceremonies and moral values which continued to have a profound influence on subsequent centuries,

pretend to befriend him, and then inveigle him to squander his family fortune without his father and elder brothers' knowledge. They would load him silver with an interest rate of tens of percent. If he could not pay it by the due date, they would add the interest onto the principal and charge him compound interest. For example, if the principal was one hundred *liang* of silver, in less than ten months, it would generate a total principal plus interest of five-hundred *liang* of silver. As for the original principal of one-hundred *liang* of silver, they would not pay him in good quality silver: considering the reduced value because of the low purity of silver, the fee for guarantor and the commission for the servants, the borrower would only get seventy *liang* of silver at best. If only one powerful family exploited this spendthrift son, he would be able to repay them without too much trouble; but there are many other powerful families exploiting him just like the numerous harriers and eagles hovering above a dead chicken or a dead duck on the ground—this is how the powerful oppress the weak.

There is another sort of victim who are not spendthrifts and whose families own some nice libraries, or pavilions and gardens, or fertile farmland and estates; they do not want to sell their properties but others drool over them. These people force the victims to marry their children in order to gain an advantage of a favorable position; if they cannot gain their ends, they expose the victims' private affairs in league with some strangers, and just like the household devil who plots against the household god, they would rip apart the victims' families and squeeze every coin out of them.

If the victim's family has just adequate food to eat, but they have only a daughter and no sons, these people frequently will marry their sons to the daughters of the targeted families by force regardless of their ranks or positions in the social hierarchy, so that they can get their hands on the properties belonging to these families. Even if the victims have sons, but they are weak and incompetent, and once the father of their daughter's husband passes away, these people will carry off all the family possessions leaving nothing behind; they will even the wives of snatch of their sons' brothers-in-laws and take them as their own concubines. They would squeeze out every possible advantage from the victims' family regardless how closely they were related.

If someone passes the government exams by luck but does not understand the books and is unable to pause at the end of a phrase or sentence,³ such a person would prepare some study rooms

³ Classical Chinese texts do not have punctuation and the scholars must be able to provide the punctuations for the texts.

and advertise for students who required tutoring. He would accept any students regardless of their intelligence or qualifications. Since he would not be able to manage all these students, very often, the elder students would recite the books to the younger ones, and student Zhang would write student Li's assignment. He could not care less if the students could memorize the texts or not, or if they could write characters correctly, or if they could put the date at the head of their book, or if they could copy the first sentence from the book, nor did he teach the standards of writing characters, nor correct the misspellings in the students' assignments. He would prepare an annotated textbook, sit at the front desk, gather all of his students together, regardless of their age and academic performance, and read out all the annotations to the textbook regardless of whether the students understand them or not — he calls this giving a lecture! When he teaches composition, he makes an issue of not teaching first how to construct an essay, how one ought to break into the topic,⁴ how one ought to write the narrative,⁵ how one should arrange the opening argument and follow it up,⁶ how one should construct the central part of the narrative,⁷ whether the essay should be shortened, whether there should be openings, what kind they should there be, what kind of ideas should there be, how should the main body of the essay develop these ideas, afterwards what kind of overview⁸ and what kind of conclusion.⁹ He just threw the title to the students, let them write gibberish, scribbled a few remarks and wrote a few comments irrelevant to the compositions which, just like a donkey's lips, doesn't match a horse's jaw! If there was a student who had a question he wanted to discuss with him, he would strike a pose and roar at the student: "Do you dare ask a respected scholar¹⁰ such a trivial question? — He used such words to evade the question because he had no proper answer. Now lessons are strictly devoted to the Five Classics,¹¹ and basic

⁴ This passage deals with how to construct a 八股文 *baguwen*, eight-legged essay, which was the mainstay of the Imperial examination system during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The first leg was the 破題 *poti*, breaking into the topic, two sentences which constitute the opening.

⁵ The second leg, 承題 *chengti*, undertaking the topic. Five sentences elaborating and refining the theme.

⁶ Leg three, 起講 *qijiang*, to begin the narrative, an initial exposition and leg four, 起股 *qigu*, to begin the argument, sentence pairs amplifying the initial exposition.

⁷ Leg five, 中股 *zhonggu*, middle section, parallel sentences expounding the central argument. and leg six, 後股 *hougu*, latter section, parallel sentences covering other points or continuing the central argument.

⁸ Leg seven, 束股 *shugu*, summation or final argument.

⁹ Leg eight, 大結 *daijie*, the big knot or conclusion. On the 八股文 *baguwen*, see Elman, *Cultural History*, 380-420.

¹⁰ 宗師 *zongshi*, a scholar respected for his learning and integrity.

¹¹ 五經 *Wujing*, the five classics of Confucianism: 詩經 *Shijing*, (The Book of Songs), 書經 *Shujing*, (The Book of History), 禮記 *Liji*, (The Classic of Rites), 易經 *Yijing*, (The Book of Changes), 春秋 *Chunqiu*, (The Spring and Autumn Annals).

questions on the Qin and Han dynasties,¹² and equally distributed between “The Commentary of Zuo”¹³ and “The Spring and Autumn Annals.”¹⁴ He does not have a single section of the “Tong Jian”¹⁵ nor has he ever dreamed of coming into contact with the book. If the students purchase some anthologies of essays and ask him to select some sample essays to study, he would omit all the good essays and select only the commonplace and simple ones. However, when it comes to demanding tuition, he presses for it much harder than the tax collectors do. If some very gifted students, pass the government exams by themselves, the teacher would determine an amount of ten or twenty *liang* of silver to be paid in gratitude; if the students are at all reluctant, he would beat them privately and in addition demand the payment be handed over. If by mistake you found yourself with this individual for a teacher, if you tried to leave him, right away, as if you were an escaped prisoner, he would try and coerce you to change your mind. Only if you want to alter your reputation or you never want to attend school, do you breed enmity with a teacher. For as long as you want to be educated, and for as long as you follow him reciting “Zhao, Qian, Sun, Li,”¹⁶ he will be willing to coerce and swindle you until he is satisfied—none of students would want to become the enemies of the teacher!

If there happen to be one or two good teachers who are unlike those that are described above, then the students will misbehave! When they come to school, they do not pay the slightest respect to the teacher, nor do they even greet him when they meet him. When the younger generation encounter by chance a gentleman who looks like he is ninety-eight years old, when they are on their very best behavior, they either avoid him or laugh behind his back at his stooped posture and his incoherent and muddled behavior; there are even some frivolous creatures who would walk over and bump into the elderly person, and they call this a fun trick! However, on the

¹² 秦漢 Qinhan, the 秦朝 Qinzhao (221-207 BCE) and 漢朝 Hanchao (206 BCE-220 CE), the first two Imperial Chinese Dynasties.

¹³ 《左》 *zuo*, left. An abbreviation for the 左傳 *Zuozhuan*, a commentary on *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, attributed to the contemporary of Confucius, 左丘明 Zuo Qiuming (556 BCE-451 BCE).

¹⁴ 《史》 *shi*, annals. An abbreviation for 春秋 *Chunqiu*, (The Spring and Autumn Annals). Traditionally attributed to Confucius, this text is a chronicle of the Vassal State of Lu (around modern Shandong), the home state of Confucius. It covers a period of 241 years, 722 to 481 BCE.

¹⁵ 資治通鑑 *Zizhi Tongjian*, (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid in Governance), a universal history of China from 403 BCE to 959 CE compiled by the Song Dynasty historian, Sima Guang (1019-1086). It is an immense work in 294 volumes containing about three million characters.

¹⁶ These are the first four family names as they appear in the classical Chinese children’s primer, 百家姓 *Baijiaxing*, (A Hundred Family Surnames), composed in the early 宋朝 *Songchao*, Song Dynasty (960–1279). It was one of three foundational texts used in teaching Chinese to young children.

other hand, not every elderly person resembles these epitomes of nobleness in the older generation: there are old but wicked people and those who take advantage of their seniority.

The members of the younger generation wear bizarre hats and headscarves, and no one can recognize either the style or the names of those accessories. Often you would see an eighteen or nineteen-year-old youth wearing a kingfisher colored Yunchang headscarf¹⁷ made of crepe with golden threads, a casual robe made of duckling-yellow¹⁸ cotton yarn and a pair of snout-shaped shoes¹⁹ made of scarlet satin. Sometimes he also wears a casual robe with red silk lining and Korean paper²⁰ outer cover: the robe barely covers his knees but its sleeves reach down to his instep.²¹ His mouth mutters vulgar slang which no one knows where he learned it from, and at every encounter with a relative, regardless if he is his brother, father, uncle or grandfather, he will snap his fingers in front of this person, saying: “Hey! My son’s brother!” This phrase has become a mannerism among young people and they use it among themselves. Day and night, these youngsters guzzle their liquor like a cow drinks water, and will remain at the wine shop for two or three consecutive days without going home; if anyone, irrespective of his age, refuses to drink with them, these youngsters will twist his ear or pinch his nose and pour the liquor down his mouth and over his clothes. If there happens to be there one or two mature and decent youngsters, they will call them freaks; they say they are behaving as if they are too good for them and putting on airs and in this way isolate the mature young men: otherwise, they gather together to pay them back with an attack. As for the elderly and the respected country gentlemen, these youngsters recklessly address them behind their backs by their personal names.²² They have no knowledge with regards to who their relatives or friends are: they only thing that matters to them is money. As long as you

¹⁷ 雲長巾 *Yunchangjin*, Yunchang headscarf. A head covering modeled after that worn by 關羽 Guan Yu (†220CE), a general whose activities played a role in the collapse of the Eastern Han Dynasty. His courtesy name is Yunchang. He is one of the major characters in the fourteenth-century novel 三國演義, *Sanguo yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

¹⁸ 鵝黃 *ehuáng*, Gosling yellow. This refers to a shade of light-yellow color which resembles the color of the fine hair of a duckling.

¹⁹ 豬嘴鞋 *yuzuijie*, open-toes shoes, lit, pig snout shoes. Chinese Historian Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) recorded in his book 日知錄 *Ri Zhi Lu*, (Notes on the Daily Accumulation of Knowledge), that only noble men are entitled to wear snout-shaped shoes; the fact that young villagers are also wearing such shoes indicates their violation of cultural traditions and hierarchical order.

²⁰ 高麗紙 *Gaoli zhi*, Korean paper, lit. paper of the [Korean] Goryeo dynasty, 918-1392. This is paper made from the Paper Mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). It is strong and waterproof. During the Ming dynasty, Korean paper was often used as fabric for clothing for its bright-white color, suppleness and durability. Korean paper is still used nowadays for making the traditional Korean dress, or *hanbok*.

²¹ It was a fashion trend during the Ming dynasty to wear a robe with widened sleeves.

²² It is considered rude to address elderly or respected people directly by their names.

are rich, they could care less about your family background or their relationship to you: they will fawn over you; if you run out of money in the early morning, these close relatives, friends, even those who are deeply indebted to you, will make every effort to avoid you immediately after breakfast; when the noon comes, they will stop talking to you; at sunset, even if they encounter you face-to-face, they will turn their heads aside to avoid greeting you. If they meet you when they are riding on a horse or perhaps a mule, they will hold their faces high. They don't wear eye shields,²³ and when they run into you, they just walk away. No matter if you are an old friend or an old acquaintance of theirs, if you want to seek help from them and ask for money or half a *sheng*²⁴ of rice from them, you'd better stop dreaming. Not only will they not give alms, but they will also make fun of you and spread slanders about you. They could care less if they assumed the outfits and the residences that they don't deserve: if they made a pile of filthy and vulgar money, these common people will wear robes²⁵ and a cap costing sixty-five *liang*, and buy the residences of high officials and assistant ministers in which to live. They pamper the prostitutes who live on the streets nearby, having them wear hats made from gold thread²⁶ and ride big horses on the street; when the prostitutes bump into pedestrians,²⁷ they just walk away!

One day, four or five musicians, dressed in identical, extraordinarily colorful outfits,²⁸ came walking towards the east followed by several servants and took a break. After a while, one could hear resounding to the skies the sound of music and the beating of drums, and see the servants, carrying several *cailou*,²⁹ inside of which are a number of scrolls, screens, fruit, wine, and hand boxes. This small group of musicians had changed into brand-new silk collars, blue silk lined garments, wingless head-coverings,³⁰ long black boots like those of a government official or someone successful in the provincial exams, a sash around their waists like that of a scholar who

²³ 眼罩 *yanzhou*, eye shield. Made of gauze fabric to protect one's eyes.

²⁴ 升 *sheng*, a dry measure used for grain, a little more than two pints.

²⁵ Robes are garments appropriate for government officials.

²⁶ 冠 *guan*. Such a hat is the traditional head-covering for women. It was used to stabilize hair bun and was woven with either human hair or metal threads. A hat made from gold thread was the head-covering for reputable ladies; the fact that the prostitutes were wearing them implies an inverted social order.

²⁷ Prostitutes belonged to the lowest social class and were expected to avoid pedestrians on the street. Here the not only bump shoulders on the street, they do not even apologize for their rudeness.

²⁸ Outfits could be very political during the Ming dynasty because different styles and colors were assigned to specific social classes. The fact that a musician, who belongs to a lower-class profession, could wear bright colored outfits, indicates the collapse of ordinary social order.

²⁹ 彩樓 *cailou*, colored pavilion. A portable and highly decorative platform used to showcase performed folk art, in particular shadow puppet shows.

³⁰ The prescribed head covering for government officials.

is a candidate for the Imperial Examination, a sparkly silver flower pinned on the head-covering.³¹ Over their shoulders were draped blood-red fancily patterned capes. They were followed by many successful candidates in the provincial examinations and other young men, who are called for a welcome to be given to the *sezhang*.³² They are invited to make music in the courtyard where there is displayed wine in the reception hall as a reward. The elderly people, who are in their seventies or eighties, seeing such a strange phenomenon, were so astonished that they swore in the name of Heaven that their eyes had never seen, and their ears had never heard of such odd things!

There is a *xiucai* named Ma Congwu who is not only the most immoral individual among the people of the six prefectures,³³ but also the biggest rascal since the ancient times! I will prove my statement with a particular story about him: the old saying goes: “even if one consumes a single grain of rice belonging to a Buddhist monk or a Taoist priest, one would not able to repay it for a thousand generations.” How then should one take advantage of a Taoist priest? Additionally, to being a student at a government school, Ma is by no means poor. However, with the excuse of having to study, Ma moved into a Taoist temple of a god named Zhang, and made the temple his home day and night. In the beginning, he would eat with the Taoist priest: if the priest ate rice porridge, he would also eat rice porridge; if the priest ate pancakes, he would also eat pancakes. Gradually, he began to make trouble; he complained that the rice porridge did not satiate him and ordered the priest to make him pancakes; he complained that the pancakes were too dry and ordered the priest to cook several bowls of rice. Later, not only did he ask for rice, he asked for liquor as well; not only did he eat pancakes, he had to eat meat as well! If the priest could not cater to his requests, he would punch and kick the priest. Before this, when the priest, along with his disciple, chanted Taoist scriptures for their clients, they could earn many steamed buns, snacks, grains, in addition to the payments they received, and the tea snacks they stole and hid inside their sleeves—one day of toil is worth three or four days of pleasures. However, ever since the arrival of Ma Congwu, their life was just as the old saying describes it, that “the strong wind uncovers the chin, and the mouth is laid bare.” When both the priest and his disciple went out to make money, there would be some rice and beans left in the kitchen, and Ma Congwu took them to his home to feed his wife and son; there were several items of clothing that he pawned for money and the sole

³¹ These are decorations for those who excelled in the imperial exams.

³² 色長, *sezhang*, he head of a division in the Music Academy of the Imperial Court.

³³ That is, Shandong Province. See chapter 24, footnote 84.

remaining quilt Ma snatched to cover himself. As a result, the priest and his disciple dared not to go out at the same time, but one of them had to remain behind to watch the house. Then there was one less person making money but one more mouth to feed. How could the small temple make ends meet? After suffering from Ma for one year and three months, the priest and his disciple had no choice but to follow the “thirty-six strategies”!³⁴

Ma Congwu waited for one day until the second watch,³⁵ and when he did not see the Taoist and his disciple return, he cursed them both bitterly. He waited until the next morning for the two priests to come home and cook, yet he did not see even their shadow. He determined to break into the priest’s room and take his belongings to exchange for food. When he came to the door and seized the lock, it dropped to the ground with a clunk: it turned out that this lock was without a spring. He burst into the room, and saw that everything, including the reed woven mat on the *kang*³⁶ had disappeared without a trace. He cried out: “You two miserable Daoists! How dare you be so ruthless as to abandon me! I haven’t eaten for the entire day! If I go home to eat, my wife and child will laugh at me! I have no choice but pawn the iron bell³⁷ for some rice.” He entered the main hall and took a look around: not only the iron bell but also the big leather drum had disappeared without a trace.

Ma Congwu gnashed his teeth with hatred, and swore vengeance on the priest and the disciple. Two days later, he filed a lawsuit that charged the Taoists with theft, stating: “While I was residing at Temple of Zhang. I asked the Taoist priest Yang Xuanze and his thieving disciple, Ling Chongxiao, to watch over my study room and provided food for them in return for more than a year. On the eighteenth of this month, when I was out to attend a gathering of intellectuals,³⁸ Xuanze, in the company of his disciple, stole my bedding sets, clothes, antiques, household ornaments, valuable paintings and calligraphy rolls, books, zither³⁹ and swords. I prostrate myself in front of your Honor and plead that your Honor will order them to be arrested.” The Xiujiang

³⁴ 三十六計 *Chenkie anfeng* (The Thirty-Six Strategies). An essay contained in the 齊書 *Qi shu* (Book of Qi), written by 蕭子顯 Xiao Zi Xian (489–537). The essay proposes stratagems to use in war, politics and civil interaction. As the old saying goes, “among all the thirty-six strategies, running away is the wisest one.” This means that the Taoist priest was forced to leave the temple.

³⁵ 二更 *ergeng*, the second watch of the night, 9:00–11:00pm.

³⁶ 炕 *kang*. A heatable brick bed, usually used in northern China.

³⁷ 鐵磬 *tie qing*. A large Taoist or Buddhist percussion instrument, usually operated while chanting scriptures.

³⁸ In the Ming dynasty, scholars, intellectuals and other eminent people held regular gatherings to discuss their studies.

³⁹ 琴 *qin*, that is, 古琴 *guqin*, zither (chordophone). A seven-stringed Chinese musical instrument.

county official accepted the lawsuit and sent two constables to arrest the two. However, these two constables were wise and said: “This Mr. Ma is a notoriously immoral man who fed off Buddhist monks and Taoist priests; how could he possibly have any possessions that the priests might have stolen? This is an absurd order that no one wants to treat seriously.” Therefore, they ignored the order.

Noticing that the two constables did not arrest the priests, Ma Congwu filed another lawsuit with the magistrate, stating: “The items that I lost were worth no less than a thousand catties of gold, how could I abandon them? If your Honor does not arrest them immediately, I am afraid that my valuable books and famous paintings will be lost, which would be a serious situation. The two constables have accepted bribes from the two priests which is why they don’t want to arrest them.” The magistrate pulled out a wooden tally⁴⁰ with an order to arrest the constables for interrogation. The two constables were arrested and replied to the magistrate: “Ma reported that he lost many items but when he was asked to make a list of these items, he refused. How can we find the priests without a single clue?” The magistrate said: “Make a list so that they can search for them.” Ma Congwu picked up a pen, spread out a piece of paper, thought for a long time, and wrote:

One blue cotton mattress, one blue cotton quilt, two pillows, two blue cotton casual robes, two white cotton skirts,⁴¹ two greenish-black cotton lined coats, one greenish-black pair of trousers, one pair of indigo unlined summer trousers, two pairs of woolen socks, several pairs of new and used shoes, two head scarves, five tin incense tables, one tin teapot, two tin liquor pots, one tin lamp stand, one iron wok, one iron griddle and one iron spoon with handles, one hundred or more porcelain items, twenty small and large deity statues, one Kitchen Scripture,⁴² one Three Official’s Scripture,⁴³ one sword, one iron bell, one big drum, one reed pipe, one set of gongs.

⁴⁰ This action means that an order has been issued.

⁴¹ 裙 *qun*, skirt. A piece of clothing that was worn by males during the Ming dynasty as an undergarment.

⁴² 灶經 *Zao jing*, (Kitchen Book), i.e. 五廚經 *Wuchujing* (The Book of the Five Cuisines), a Daoist meditative text.. This text was edited and annotated and presented to the Tang Court in 736 by 愔 Yin Yin (†741). See Stephen Eskildsen, *Daoism, Meditation, and the Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25-220) to the Tang Dynasty (618-907)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 194-95.

⁴³ 三官經, *Sanguanjing* (Three Official’s Book). The full title of this popular Daoist text is: 太上三元賜福赦罪解厄消災延生保命妙經 *Taishang sanyuan cifu shezui jie’e xiaozai yansheng baoming miaojing* (Most Marvelous Life-Protecting Scripture of the Three Principles Granting Happiness, Forgiving Sins, and Averting Disasters). The three “officials,” better 三官大帝 *Sanguan Dadi*, are the Three Great Emperor Officials, as they are titled in Daoism, are: 天官 *Tianguan*, the Heavenly Official (the conferrer of blessings), 地官 *Diguan*, the Earthly Official (the absolver of sins), and 水官 *Shuiguan*, the Water Official (the eliminator of misfortunes).

The magistrate read through the list once from beginning to end and shouted: “Why are all the items you lost Taoist items! Damn it, throw him out!” The constables nullified the original order. Ma replied: “Your Honor, please allow me to provide a reason for this. Because I studied at this Temple of Zhang and asked the priests to take care of my study room, I bought them all these items. Now they stole all these items which are not their property.” The magistrate said: “It seems that you were bullying the priests, so they couldn’t stand it anymore but ran away.” He fetched a ticket and wrote down “arrest the plaintiff.” The magistrate then said: “You go and arrest the two Taoist priests and interrogate them. If you fail to arrest them after three days, and if you fail to interrogate them fairly, your conduct will be graded as “conduct inferior” when the time for the annual examination comes around!”⁴⁴

This is one story about Ma Congwu. His conduct was always the same as this in essentials while differing in the minor details. Two years later, he bribed the instructors and when the annual exam was completed, he was promoted for his “virtues.” All the students, officials, and the ordinary people on the street, as well as the country gentleman nationwide were all stunned and discussed this story as if it was a legend.

While this monster was not eradicated, there appeared another one who was even more wicked. There was a *xuicai* named Yan Liexing who did all kinds of evil which are beyond description; for the moment, allow me relate just one story to exemplify his conduct: using his four skills which are coaxing, cheating, lying and swindling, he got himself a few *mu* of farming land from other people; however, he did not spend a single penny on plows, hoes, scythes, seeds and cow forage but exploited his weak neighbors as his tenant farmers. He acted as if his own farm lands were state-owned and forced these tenants to prioritize his lands over their own. In the times when it should be raining but did not, or should be sunny but was not, or in the times when the land was stricken by a plague of locusts, he would walk to the temple of the local God of the Soil,⁴⁵ point to the face of the earth god with his fingers and swear with every kind of profanity, or he would take a bow and a few arrows to shoot at the statue of the earth god until its body and the seven apertures of the head were pierced with numerous arrows.

⁴⁴ During the Ming dynasty, the conduct and behavior of students were examined and graded annually.

⁴⁵ 土神 Tu shen, God of Soil. Also known as 土地公 Tudigong, Lord of the Soil and the Ground. An Earth God who as a local deity is usually the patron of crops.

Just consider, honorable reader, the statue of the sacred deity was built to warn the hard-hearted villagers against misbehavior; it means that even if you can escape the laws, you can never escape God. However, he would curse the deity non-stop, and always shoot him with arrows; doesn't he need to be afraid of the consequences? Even the Holy Emperor Lord Guan⁴⁶ did not humiliate the God of Soil in this way although he was extremely disrespectful to Him.

Another group of wicked beings are the female housekeepers, butlers, tenant farmers and casual laborers. The female housekeepers often select the prime vegetables and meat from the master's kitchen and devour them, and take the second-class food for their children and husbands—behind the master's back, they bake biscuits, roll pancakes, steam noodle soup and wrap dumplings—everyone devours the master's food and stuffs their faces. The master pays for the food by sweat and labor, and he begrudges it to himself; the female housekeepers, on the other hand, squanders his food in this way; isn't that a grievous sin! However, such conduct is still not a first-rate heinous crime. In addition to eating food behind the master's back, these female housekeepers often collaborated with one another to steal food and exchange it for money or liquor! They eat and steal the food, but if they could use their master's food sparingly in the kitchen, then their sins could be wiped out a little! However, they waste the food. If only three *sheng* of rice was needed, they would use four or five *sheng*; they are so afraid that they will let their masters off lightly, so they add much more rice and much less water when cooking rice porridge, and the porridge is as hard as cooked and dried rice! On the other hand, when they cook liquid rice⁴⁷ which is supposed to be boiled hard and to be chewy, these housekeepers are afraid to economize the food of the masters so they put the rice in boiling water very briefly before they drain it; when you chew the rice, the water comes out and runs down from the corners of your mouth. When they knead pancakes, they are so afraid to economize on the flour of their masters that they press the dough hard as possible; they do this to cheat their masters. As for the leftover food, if they would reheat and eat it next time, that could be considered as an action which would accumulate good karma; or, they could feed the poor with the leftover food. However, they are not willing to do so; instead, they pour all the leftover food into the swill vat! Moreover, they are afraid that they would benefit the masters by letting the pigs eat the swill, so they pour all the swill into the ditches!

⁴⁶ 關聖帝君, Guan Sheng Di Jun, The Holy Emperor Lord Guan, a Daoist deity who is seen as a symbol of loyalty and righteousness. General 關羽 Guan Yu (†220CE) (see footnote 17 above) was deified during the 隋朝 Suichao, Sui Dynasty, 581-618 CE. As such he became very popular object of worship for Daoists and Buddhists.

⁴⁷ 水飯, *shuifan* (liquid rice) is boiled rice immersed in cold water. It is served as main dish.

Such sinful women have already enraged heaven and earth; their sins could have been reduced if their husbands had taught them well, or if the men had acted upon their own conscience when their wives do not listen to them; however, these couples were made in heaven and their husbands are afraid that their wives haven't accumulated enough bad karma so they scold their wives: "Lying bitches! Money-losing women! Are they eating your food? Is that why you are saving food for them? If you leave their house today, you won't ever be able to eat their food tomorrow!" They take out much food as possible, and if they cannot finish it, they pour it in large quantities into the forage used to feed the horses. When there is leftover food after the masters have finished their dinner or entertaining their guests, they are afraid that the leftover food would defile their honorable mouth if they eat any of it, so that they spread all the leftover food on the ground! If the masters ask them to pick up the food with their hands,⁴⁸ they just throw it outside!

As for the tenant farmers who are employed to work for the masters, they would reject the "cold" food from their employers and put every obstacle in their way. For their salary, they demand that they must have wheat and mung beans, or rice and broomcorn millet,⁴⁹ or they reluctantly ask for soya beans.⁵⁰ If the employers mix them some maize⁵¹ and black beans, they will say: "This is food for cattle. Why do you feed people with this?" They will intentionally beat your cows to death, or abuse your mules and horses, or break your farming equipment. Additionally, they will collude with other tenants and the family servants to steal your grain!

And as for the casual laborers, if they work in hot seasons or under the burning sun, it is not unreasonable to demand some compensation from their wealthy employers. However, what's detestable is that they make every attempt to squeeze money from their employers. While at work, they do not plough or reap. If the meal deliverer arrives a few minutes late, they will stop working and sit down on the ground in a group. Not only are they unwilling to work, they are very quarrelsome as well. They demand to eat refined rice for their water rice: they will cover the bowl of rice with another inverted bowl to drain off the water, and they never say they are full until there is a good deal of leftover food inside the rice bucket. If there aren't any leftovers, they would say they are still hungry even if they are not, and will force the employer to cook more food; when the food is cooked, they cannot not finish it even by exerting their utmost strength to eat! They will

⁴⁸ In the traditional Chinese culture, food is sacred and should be treated with respect.

⁴⁹ 黍 *shu*, broomcorn millet, *Panicum miliaceum*.

⁵⁰ In ancient China, very often salary was paid in a quantity of grain.

⁵¹ 蜀秫 *shu shu*, maize or "Sichuan millet."

endlessly argue about the quality of the money they get paid in, so that they can take advantage of the opportunity to exchange their bad coins for quality silver. They also claim their salaries repeatedly or fraudulently!

And as for the craftsman, if you have any urgent work that you need them to work on, they will enjoy their leisure and not stir, saying: “Recently I didn’t want to work, and you didn’t treat me as your guest,” or “you don’t treat me with liquor at every meal.” When they adjust the plough, which should not take more than a little while, they will charge thousands of cash. If you try to negotiate the price with them, they will lose their temper and leave; no matter how hard you plead with them they will take the utmost advantage of you, and ask for an additional thousand cash; furthermore, they will intentionally leave some hidden fault in the work⁵² which is not something you will expect.

That is how carpenters behave. All other craftsman all behave this way. When the silversmith makes silverplate, it would be considered as acceptable if he were just to steal a little silver; however, the silversmith will mix copper into your silverplate, making it totally useless. When the tailors make clothes, they will steal your fabric despite the fact that the fabric measures have already been shortened and narrowed nowadays, and they make your clothes into an “immortal’s skirt”⁵³ that you can barely wear them. After first wash, the clothes will be clinging to your body tightly; after second wash, the clothes will be barely wearable.

Every kind of merchandise is mixed with fake products: the skinny chicken, for example, is butchered and inflated with a pipe until it is bloated,⁵⁴ and the lard is dyed yellow with *huai* flowers⁵⁵ to look like chicken soup and to cheat the customers. There is hill nearby that produces a kind of snow-white soil, which does not taste sandy or rough when you eat it; these merchants will mix such soil into the flour and cheat people into buying and eating it, causing whoever eats it to become severely constipated! And the merchants mix flour into distiller’s yeast and cheat people into buying it and brewing liquor with it, causing their good rice becomes stinky white swill!

As for the family servants of the local officials, they usually rely on their master’s power and prestige to do evil deeds and harm the villagers, which is already extremely repulsive; even

⁵² So that when the hidden fault becomes an apparent problem, the craftsman would be hired again to fix it.

⁵³ Describing clothes that are very short.

⁵⁴ So that it would look fat.

⁵⁵ 槐花, *huai hua*, the flowers of the Chinese Scholar or Pagoda tree, *Sophora japonica*.

those servants of the above-average families will assume an air of importance, sitting in front of the gates and seeing their masters' relatives and friends passing by instead of standing up to greet them; when they encounter their masters' relatives and friends while riding on horses or mules, they don't care to dismount. Initially, they are just disrespectful towards strangers; however, as time goes by, they become increasingly disrespectful even towards their own masters with their arrogant and humiliating attitude, considering themselves as important as heaven so that even their masters are unworthy to order them about. In the past when tradition was still valued, even the butler of the retired prime minister would not ever wear a causal robe; nowadays, everybody wears silk, satin, and embroidered shoes, making a land of simplicity and honesty into such place of luxury! Additionally, regardless of whether they were high or low birth, rich or poor, old or young, men or female, everyone had a small low stool and a four-inch-wide padded-cloth with a hole in the middle to engage in such business! This matter is for you, honorable readers, to comprehend by yourselves; the writer is too embarrassed to take his pen and write it down on paper. Also, the villagers do not care about the ethical code anymore, and the writer cannot bear to write that down. How could the heavens and the earth not be enraged and the gods tolerate such things? I am afraid such degeneration not only corrupts tradition, but will cause calamities as well!

Listen to the next chapter and see the conclusion

Chapter 27: Calamity does not Arrive in Accordance with Reason; the gods have first to reveal their intention

Simplicity and virtue beautify the territory,
Families provide for the people; as if it is Xiaokang.¹
The wealthy are modest, the poor content,
Wandering leisurely,
The seasons are in perfect order, the five grains flourish.²
Wealth corrupts young sons,
Whose prodigal and perverse behavior is an ill omen.
Evil makes the gods become full of anger,
Manifested clearly,
It brings natural calamities, in addition to hundreds of disasters.

To the Tune “South Country Song.”

I will only outline the story of Mingshui town: regardless of its previous conditions, I will recount its story between eras of old Taizu³ and old Tianshun.⁴ During this century,⁵ hundred years, because of the wise noble gentlemen above, and the law-obeying ordinary people below, the heavens only but blessed this town with favourable and timely weather, and its inhabitants lived a prosperous and peaceful life. However,

¹ In Confucianism, 大同 *datong*, “Great Harmony,” represents the ideal society. Next to it is 小康 *xiaokang*, “Small Tranquility,” a society that might over time achieve perfection.

² Concerning 五穀 *wugu*, “five grains,” see Chapter 24, footnote 1.

³ 太祖 Taizu, the Temple name of 朱元璋 Zhu Yuanzhang, (1328-1398), the 洪武 Hongwu Emperor, founder of the 明朝 Mingchao, Ming Dynasty.

⁴ 朱祁鎮 Zhu Qizhen ((1427-1464) was the sixth Ming emperor. He came to the throne in 1439 as Emperor 正統 Zhengtong, but was forced to abdicate in 1445. In 1457 he regained the throne and ruled for the rest of his life as Emperor 天順 Tianshun. His Temple name is 英宗 Yingzong.

⁵ Actually, only ninety-six years. 1368-1464.

because they were accustomed to a prosperous life for too long, the next generation, first by of being exposed to the corrupt morals, and second by being separated from their honest ancestors, acquired frivolous attitudes, which first turned into foolishness, and then this foolishness evolved into self-conceit, at last, their self-conceit evolving into behaviors and atrocities which violated the law. Their actions became wilder and wilder, and in the end, there was no evil that they would not commit. Therefore, the passing immortals and gods in the sky, the *gongcao*⁶ who are in charge of the hours, the day, the month and the year, the kitchen gods⁷ of every family, and the three *shi*⁸ and six *xiang*⁹ of each individual, reported their wickedness to the Jade Emperor,¹⁰, who was enraged at this human wickedness. Therefore, the Jade Emperor ordered the God of Soil¹¹ to return to Heaven, and the God of Crops¹² to return to his barn in heaven. The Rain Master¹³ no longer sent rains on time, but either delays or advances them, prolonging or reducing the rain; the Wind Lord¹⁴ no longer sends gentle breezes or light zephyrs, but storm winds that either devastate the hillsides or rip up the trees. As early as *qiyue* and *bayue*, there was frost, and as late as in *shiyiyue* and *layue* there was still

⁶ 功曹 *gongcao*. Minor Daoist gods who are in charge of recording and evaluating worldly matters.

⁷ 灶君 *Zaojun* = 灶神 *Zaoshen*, the kitchen god (or goddess) who is responsible for recording the good and bad behavior of every family.

⁸ 三尸 *sanshi*, three corpses: Taoism believes that there are three kinds of spirit (尸 *shi*) in the shape of worms reside in the human body. Every 庚申 *genshen*, the fifty-seventh day of a sixty-day cycle, they leave their host and travel to Heaven to report his or her misbehaviors to the 司命 *siming*, Director of Destinies, who deducts a certain period of life for each sin committed. One of many Taoist practices is to kill these three spirits in order to obtain longevity.

⁹ 六相 *liuxiang*, six characteristics. In Huayan Buddhism, all things are comprised of the six characteristics: a general or genetic characteristic, a constituent or particular characteristic, and identity characteristic, a differential characteristic, a collective or integrative characteristic, and an instantiated or destructive characteristic.

¹⁰ 玉帝 *Yudi*, the Jade Emperor, the chief god in the Daoist pantheon.

¹¹ 土神 *Tushen* god of soil, the patron god of farmland and blesses peasants with harvest.

¹² 谷神 *Gushen*, God of Crops, the patron god of harvest. Along with the God of Soil, these two gods were widely worshiped in Chinese agricultural society.

¹³ 雨师 *Yushi*, the Rain Master is the deity in charge of rains.

¹⁴ 风伯 *Fengbo*, Uncle Wind, the Wind Lord, the deity in charge of winds.

thunder and lightings.¹⁵ In the past, one *mu*¹⁶ of farm-land could produce five or six *dan*¹⁷ of grains; but now it produced less than one or two *dan*. Farm lands that could be harvested twice a year in the past, could only be harvested once now and then not harvested in full. If those evil beings only recognized that they had offended heaven and would pray with contrite heart, Heavens would be merciful and would cleanse away their sins and mitigate their disasters; however, their necks were stiff as stone and they continued to offend Heaven. Oh, you are but flesh and blood, how can you act against Heaven? If Heaven is to punish you, it would be as easy as a human being killing an ant. What in it is so difficult for Heaven? Nonetheless, the Creator was reluctant to strike a vicious blow on these people. On the contrary, He repeatedly sent warnings to them.

In the summer of the *bingchen*¹⁸ year, the peasants were able to collect a scanty harvest of grain during one season; afterwards, there was not a single drop of rain until *liuyue* the twentieth,¹⁹ which fooled the peasants into tilling their lands. In that year, the first day of autumn was on *qiyue* the sixteenth.²⁰ if the weather was being normal, one could expect another harvest from their late tillage farming. Contrary to their expectations, however, there were many autumn rains after *bayue* the tenth,²¹ and the wind blew from the northwest, and it was freezing and made people shiver from the coldness. It also deposited a thick layer of frost over the soil, which froze the grain seedlings that just had been planted; consequently, the price of millet and wheat rose to two *liang* of silver per *dan*. It is fair to say that after successive years of prosperity, a year with only a single harvest season would not cause famine. However, these people felt too complacent following the good harvests in the previous years so that they had

¹⁵ That is, the lunar equivalents of July and August, and November and December.

¹⁶ 亩 *mu*, a land measurement equivalent to .165 of an acre.

¹⁷ 石 *dan*, a unit of dry measure for grains, equal to approximately 3 bushels.

¹⁸ 丙辰 *Bingchen* is the fifty-third year of the sixty-year cycle which is the basis of classical Chinese calendrical reckoning. The Western equivalent would be 1444.

¹⁹ 六月 *liuyue*, the sixth lunar month, roughly equivalent to June.

²⁰ 七月 *qiyue*, the seventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to July.

²¹ 八月 *bayue*, the eighth lunar month, roughly equivalent to August.

no knowledge of how to cope with lean years: if they had surplus grain, they wasted it by selling it at very low price in exchange for snacks or clothing; when they unexpectedly encountered famine years, the wealthy, seeing disasters on the horizon, would hide their grain in storage and refuse to sell it while the poor had no grain to eat but fed themselves with tree bark, tree leaves, grass seeds and grass roots. Once these four kinds of objects had been consumed, the poor took the thatch down from their roof, ground the grass into flour and mixed it with water to eat; however, it did not prevent them from being hungry but blocked their stomachs that ten out of ten would die from it—no one could escape from it. Some people would dig the white soil²² from the hills, made it into pancakes and eat them—their stomachs were also blocked that they were unable to relive themselves, and five couples would also die out of every ten people. Aside from those two inedible objects, some had no alternative but to cut off the flesh from the dead bodies to eat, which gradually evolved into eating living people and eventually fratricidal killings I don't have the heart to continue narrating this in detail but I have mentioned it briefly.

In the next spring, those cannibal monsters were attacked by plague and died successively; out of one hundred, not a single one survived. Is this a severe warning from God? However, people never learn their lessons. Just like a patient who has recovered forgetting about his old wounds, they continue to do evil as before. In the *shiyiyu* of the *gengshen* year,²³ around the breakfast time, the air was darkened but not by cloud or fog: it was like wind, but not a wind; it was like haze, but not haze. The air was so dark and misty that people could not see one another; this lasted for about two hours until the air gradually cleared up. On New Year's Eve in the *layue* of the *guiyou*²⁴ year, at around nine to eleven, there was loud thunder and lightning and heavy hail with

²² See chapter twenty-six where there is mention of a white soil that is used to adulterate flour and causing severe constipation among those who eat it.

²³ 冬月 *shiyiyu*, the eleventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to November; 庚申 *gengshen*. This is the fifty-seventh year of the sixty-year cycle. The Western equivalent would be 1440.

²⁴ 臘月 *layue*, the twelfth lunar month, roughly equivalent to December; 癸酉 *guiyou*. This the tenth year of the sixty-year cycle. The Western equivalent would be 1454.

a gale blowing; it rained and snowed simultaneously. In *qiyue* the third of the *bingzi*²⁵ year, the weather remained cold for two days, and suddenly there were black clouds coming from the northeast, and it hailed hailstones as big as a rice bowl or a fist, which accumulated thick on the ground to the depth of as several feet.

There was a Lady Meng, wife of the assistant administrator Meng,²⁶ who was infected with a peculiar disease: whenever she heard the sounds of silver or of iron being forged. And at the sound of the character “xu”²⁷ she would tremble all over to such an extent that if was feared she might die any time. She had had a much beloved maid for five or six years whom she was planning to marry off. When Lady Meng asked the matchmaker what the fiancé’s profession was, the matchmaker replied: “silversmith.” Lady Meng’s former disease immediately recurred.

And there was an entertainer named Diao Junchao whose wife was rather good-looking. One day, a goiter emerged on her neck, that initially looked as large as a goose egg and gradually grew as large as a wicker grain basket.²⁸ Later on, one could hear from the goiter the sound of musical instruments such as the Chinese zither, lute, organ, and chime stone. One day, the goiter split open and a monkey jumped out, saying: “I am an old monkey spirit and can summon wind and call rain. Because I was associated with an old flood dragon²⁹ whom I joined forces with to harm people, when the heavenly soldiers executed the flood dragon and hunted for its accomplice, I fled and hide in here. As my gratitude for your harbouring me, I have a silver ingot inside the hollow willow on the south bank for you. Also, you can heal the goiter by eating one *catty*³⁰ of dried sea hare egg powder.” Diao Junchao fetched from the willow a silver ingot weighted fifty *liang* as promised, with inscriptions stating that it belonged

²⁵ 七月 *qiyue*, the seventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to Jul; 丙子 *bingzi*. This is the thirteenth year of the sixty-year cycle. The Western equivalent would be 1457.

²⁶ 参政 *canzheng*, = 參知政事 *canzhi zhengshi*, an Assistant Administrator..

²⁷ 徐 *Xu*, a common Chinese surname.

²⁸ 柳斗 *liudou*, a small wicker basket.

²⁹ 蛟 *jiao* = 蛟龍 *jiaolong*, a mythical aquatic dragon said to be able to control rain and floods.

³⁰ 斤 *jin*, half a kilo.

to the royal treasury and was made in the seventh year of the *Zhenguan* era,³¹ Bit by bit, Diao's wife ate one catty of dried sea hare egg powder, and her condition was healed. Her neck became as smooth as before without any traces or scars.

And there was a person named Zhang Nanxuan who, in his elderly years, suffered from spermatorrhea day and night. He survived in this state for three years before his death. When being encoffined, his entire body was so transparent that his viscera, muscles, and bones were each one so distinguishable that they were clear as crystal.

The case of Ma Congwu and Yan Liexing, whose stories were narrated in Chapter twenty-six, is even more peculiar. After Ma Congwu occupied the Zhangxian Temple and drove away the two Taoist priests, he innovated another extraordinary method. He heard of a certain Ding Liguang who lived in Shenhuan Village which was located fifteen miles from Mingshui town. Ding made a living by making tofu; he had a wife and no children, and accumulated a fortune of hundreds *liang* of silver. Ding purchased a small residence as well as a donkey for the bean-grinding mill. Since he and his wife had accumulated some property, they began eating quality food; although they did not wear silk clothing, their cotton garments were very well-made. Since they were childless, they were willing to practice charity such as repairing roads and bridges, respecting the elderly, and helping the poor; although they were merely craftworkers and tofu vendors, they were quite respected in the village. There were people who could frequently ask them to lend them silver, and the Ding family would collect three percent interest; the borrowers, valuing their hard-earned money, would return the money on time and never cheat them.

Learning that Ding Liguang was a kind person who was willing to help others, Ma Congwu inquired about the road which Ding must take in trading his tofu and waited for him inside a forest nearby; when Ma saw Ding Liguang approaching with a load of tofu, he started wailing and was about to hang himself in the forest. Seeing this, Ding

³¹ 貞觀 *Zhenguan*, the Era name of the reign of 李世民 *Li Shimin*, who ruled as the Emperor 唐太 *Taizong*, 626-649 CE. He was the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty. The seventh year of his reign was 633 CE.

stopped walking and asked: “Sir, you are quite young, for what reason are you are wailing and attempting to commit suicide?” Ma Congwu said: “Do not interfere in my life; don’t ask me anything else.” Ding Liguó said: “What are you talking about? Even if I see an animal dying, I would rescue it, not to mention if I see a human being in agony. Since you are wearing a head-covering,³² you must be a *xiucai*. Shouldn’t I ask the reason why? No matter what your hardship is, to the best of my ability, I might have a solution for you.” Ma Congwu said: “I am a *linsheng*³³ in Xiujiang public school. I have a wife and a son at home; we survive merely on the compensation for being a *linsheng*. Now half of my compensation has been deducted, and the other half cannot be paid on time; I had a few students to teach, but they stopped coming to school because of the famine. My family members cannot endure being hungry, so the hunger; after long contemplation, I consider that I have no other solutions but to die!” Ding Liguó said: “Luckily I persisted in questioning you, otherwise, you would have died unnecessarily. I thought it was a great crisis, but it was nothing. Are you willing to relocate to my village?” Ma Congwu responded: “I don’t have a fixed residence, is there anywhere that I cannot go?” Ding Liguó asked again: “Are you willing to teach?” Ma Congwu responded: “Teaching was my profession, why shouldn’t I be willing to do so?” Ding Liguó said: “Since you are willing to relocate to my village and to teach, it won’t be difficult for your entire family to make a living.” Fetching about two hundred coins from his tofu basket and handing them over to Ma Congwu, Ding Liguó said: “For the moment you return home to cook and eat your meal; after I tidy up a study room and enroll a few students for you, I can assure you an annual salary of twelve *liang* of silver. If the compensation is still not enough, I can subsidize your living expenses.” Ma Congwu said: “You are only a small merchant; how can you help me so much?” Liguó said: “Since I already promised you, you needn’t worry about that any more. When you come to my village, you only need to search for Ding the philanthropist and tofu-maker, and everyone would know who that is. Later I will make

³² The head covering refers to a soft hat worn by literati during the Ming dynasty.

³³ 廩生 *linsheng*. a top-ranked *xiucai* scholar during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

meal for the three of you and wait for you to attend.” Ma Congwu said: “Really, it is almost as if you are my adoptive parent and I will recognize you as such.” Ding Liguó said: “Amitābha Buddha! ³⁴ I don’t really deserve this. Although I have no children, how should I deserve it?” While they were conversing, they made the arrangements and bid each other farewell. Ding Liguó returned home and told his wife about what had happened. His wife said: “We don’t have any children and he does not have any parents; additionally, he is a *linsheng* scholar, and if we take good care of him, we could also be benefitted — maybe we will be rewarded with success.”

After two days, Mrs. Ding prepared meals and Mr. Ding went out in the early morning to sell his tofu, and return home early for the Mas. They saw Ma Congwu, leading his wife and son. When they arrived at the Ding residence, they had no luggage except for the clothes they stood in.

Ma Congwu’s wife is approximately forty years old, with unkempt hair and a dirty face, and vulgar big feet. Judging from her appearance, she appeared to be a crooked frump. Her linen dress and shirt are untidy. His son is only seven or eight weeks old, mischievous and also stupid. From my observations, he might be a child with potential. He is a lonely child wearing patched shoes and socks.

After entering the gate, the Mas prostrated themselves in front of the Dings at the sight of them, their mouth being full of flattering phrases like “my parents.” Mr. and Mrs. Ding did not reject such an address, and divided the back of the house to provide a residence for the Mas, the extra space being utilized as the classroom for Ma Congwu to teach in. If he heard of any villagers having children of school age, Ding Liguó would pay them a visit to recruit students for Ma Congwu; if the students could not afford the tuition, Ding would pay it for them. As a result, Ma Congwu received a salary higher than the previously promised twelve *liang* of silver; in addition to that, Ding subsidized his living expenses frequently. Moreover, for twenty-five days out of

³⁴ 阿彌陀佛 *Emituo Fo*, Merciful Buddha, The Chinese equivalent of the Sanskrit phrase: *Namo Amitabha Buddha*. Homage to the Amitabha Buddha.

the thirty days of a month, Ma's wife and son would have their meals with the Ding's family.

Ma Congwu was just like the planets *tianmao* and *xingqie*³⁵ of the five planets: once they are placed in their own houses,³⁶ they would no longer be malefic. The Mas lived in the Ding's residence for ten years, and gradually they started to interact as parents and children. In the eleventh year, Ma Congwu left as a tribute student for a position in the capital,³⁷ Ding Liguó advised Ma to purchase more than ten *mu* of land with all his accumulated salary, and paid the traveling expenses as well as the living expenses at the Imperial Academy for Ma. Additionally, Ding Liguó arranged a marriage for Ma Zhonggui, Ma Congwu's son. Ma Congwu finished the imperial academy, took the examination, and was appointed as a local magistrate.³⁸ Making merit out of caring for the Mas, Ding Liguó exerted his utmost strength to bestow his wealth which he had been accumulating for over ten years to Ma Congwu. Ma Congwu had a choice of two positions and chose to be appointed as the local magistrate in charge of grain in Huai'an prefecture³⁹; he, along with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law, employed two household servants and a few maids. All of the costs for forging silver belts,⁴⁰ making clothes, buying gifts, preparing the traveling expenses were extracted from Ding Liguó who was like a cup of still water being dried up from constant boiling. Ding Liguó said: "We have spent our wealth that has been accumulated over many years, additionally, we are getting too old to make tofu or to carry loads of tofu anymore.

³⁵ 五星 *wuxing*, the five visible planets. 天毛 *tianmao* 刑切 *xingqie*, two planets within the Taoist astrological system. (Could be malevolent planets such as Saturn and Mars)

³⁶ 垣 *yuan*, house. In Daoist astrology, the heaven is divided into twelve houses which happen to correspond to the twelve signs of the Western Zodiac. The five visible planets move through these houses (= the ecliptic). As the planets move through the houses their influence ranges from benevolent to malevolent. However, when a planet is in its own house that means that it is exalted and its malevolent aspects are neutralized. See Ho Peng Yoke, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology* (London: Routledge, 2003), 73, 75.

³⁷ 貢 *gong* = 貢生 *gongsheng*, a student from the provinces selected to attend the 国子监 *Guozijian*, Imperial Academy in Beijing as a "tribute" to the Emperor.

³⁸ 通判 *tongpan*, local magistrate.

³⁹ 淮安府 *Huai'anfu*, Huai'an Prefecture, nowadays Huai'an city in Jiangsu province.

⁴⁰ A silver belt is an appropriate accessory for a government official.

Fortunately, we have an adopted son who would support us so that we won't need our savings." After Ma Congwu relocated to the Huai'an with his family, Mr. and Mrs. Ding sold their residence and other belongings and made their way there. Ma Congwu arrived at his post. Expecting the arrival of the Dings, he instructed the door keeper that should any couple surnamed Ding arrive, they should not be announced. Within a few days, Ding arrived with his wife. For an elderly gentleman and an elderly lady like them, how could they travel without any attendants? Therefore, they employed a person to pretend to be their attendant. Once they arrived at their son's work place, how could they not have any formal clothing? So, they purchased some decent garments. All the silver money that they obtained from selling their property was almost spent except for a small portion kept for traveling expenses. The Dings settled down at a hotel that was located twenty *li* away from Huai'an prefecture, and instructed the attendant to report their arrival at the *yamen*⁴¹ so that Ma Congwu might welcome them with sedan chairs.

The attendant arrived at the gate of the *yamen*. Because first of all he was an unsophisticated fellow from the hills who did not know the protocol, and second of all, he considered himself to be the genuine attendant of the elderly gentleman, he yelled at the *yamen* gate. The door keeper verified his identity and was aware of the arrival of the Dings. Therefore, he seized this "attendant" by the neck and pushed him back at least twenty steps away from the *yamen* gate. The "attendant" said: "You turncoat! I was sent by the elderly gentleman and the elderly lady of your master! How dare you!" Not only was the lictor⁴² not scared, he fetched a "mourning staff"⁴³ to beat him and drive him away. The "attendant" ran desperately for his life, regardless of whether it was a "metal life" or "water life."⁴⁴

⁴¹ 衙門, *yamen*, the official residence of a government official, here the 通判 *tongpan*, Ma Congwu.

⁴² 皂隸 *zaoli*, lictor or bodyguard. The lowest rank of those petty officials classified as 差役 *chaiyi*, *yamen* runners.

⁴³ 哭喪棒 *kusangbang*. A staff draped in white held by the son of the deceased and indicating filial piety.

⁴⁴ 金命 *jinming* = *haizhongjinming*, a life of gold in the sea, An unfortunate life attributed to those born, for example during the first year of a sixty year cycle. 水命 *huiming*, water life. A fortunate and successful life. Both these are terms used in traditional Chinese fortune-telling.

Ding Liguó was waiting foolishly in the hotel for the sedan chair and bearers to come. The owner of the hotel thought the elderly couple were truly the parents of the local magistrate, so he butchered a chicken and bought meat, bowing and scraping to them. The attendant returned and described the entire scene which astonished many people. The hotel owner said: “The *yamen* runners⁴⁵ are rather rude; they saw this stranger and roughed him up without asking for any details. Your manservant was offended and ran back without explaining the situation properly. Please allow me to inform them instead.” Being well acquainted with the people at the *yamen*, the hotel owner walked over to the *yamen* saying: “Which brother is in charge of the gate today? The parents of your master are living at my place and they sent a manservant to inform you of this. Why did you beat him and drive him away? Now the old lady and gentleman are furious and that’s why I have come to rescue you; why don’t you hurry to report this to your master!” The licitor keeping guard said: “Our master instructed us already few days ago, saying that if there were to arrive an elderly couple surnamed Ding, we were not allowed to announce them. So, when I asked the man and learned that the couple’s surname was Ding — what sort of elderly lady and gentleman are they! You should not receive them either. If you offended our master, the consequences are not likely to be pleasant!” The hotel owner returned downcast and asked Ding Liguó: “Mr. Local Magistrate’s surname is Ma, why is your honorable surname Ding?” Ding Liguó related the entire story and said: “In fact, since we have done this and that, he recognized us as his adoptive parents.” The hotel owner said: “It’s pardonable since you are not his real parents. Mr. Local Magistrate gave out these instructions in advance that you should be treated this way and the guard at the gate was not allowed to announce you precipitously, otherwise he would be chastised and dismissed.” Upon hearing this, Ding Liguó was stunned speechless with anger and said to himself: “Tomorrow is the fifth day of the month and he must go to the *yamen* gate to supplicate the Head of the Water Transportation; I will go there to confront him in the middle of the street and see whether or not he recognizes me.”

⁴⁵ 衙役 *yayi*, *yamen* runners, those employed in the *yamen* with various functions.

The evening passed, and first thing in the morning after getting up early in the morning, Ding Liguó brushed and washed himself, and hired a boat to take him to the outside of the city; upon entering the city, by coincidence the Residence of the Governor appeared before him. All the senior officials of the region were at the gate making their supplications. In the front was the sedan chair of the Chief of the Prefecture,⁴⁶ which was followed by the sedan chair of the Sub-Prefectural,⁴⁷; next there were the sedan chairs of Ma Congwu and of the Prefectural Judge⁴⁸ which were marching parallel to each other. Ma Congwu was wearing a cyan-colored satin embroidered garment decorated with the “six clouds” pattern, as well as a snow-white silver belt; since he accepting the seal of Shanyang county,⁴⁹ he was wearing the silk seal ribbon.⁵⁰ With an unfurled umbrella decorated with a kingfisher feather above and sitting in a sedan chair inlaid with bone flowers, Ma Congwu looked an imposing figure. Ding Liguó was about to run over, grab his sleeve and confront him, but was immediately noticed by Ma Congwu who smiled at him and pouted his lips, hinting that Ding should stop proceeding; Ding Liguó immediately stopped. Ma Congwu instructed a servant and said: “The man who is wearing a purple floral garment⁵¹ and an undyed velvet head covering is a neighbor of my former residence. Go and ask him first to return back to his hotel; I will deal with him when I return to the *yamen*.” The man persuaded Ding Liguó to return to his hotel.

Returning from his salutations, Ma Congwu entered the *yamen* and discussed matters with his wife; he decided to pack ten *liang* of silver and send Ding off. His wife said: “Now that you have been an official for a few days, you start to squander the silver as if it is dirt or dung? What do you think silver is? Something for you to waste in batches every day?” Ma Congwu said: “In your opinion, how much shall I give him?” His wife said: “A minimum of one *liang* and no more than two *liang*!” Ma Congwu

⁴⁶ 太守 *taishou*.

⁴⁷ 同知 *tongzhi*.

⁴⁸ 推官 *tuiguan*.

⁴⁹ 山陽縣, Shanyangxian, Shanyang County in Jiangsu province.

⁵⁰ 印綬 *yinshou*, a silk ribbon to which the seal could be attached..

⁵¹ 道袍 *daopao*, a Daoist robe, a traditional men’s garment.

said: "It would be better if it were sufficient for his traveling expenses." His wife said: "Did we invite him here? Who cares if he has enough traveling expenses?" While the couple were discussing this matter, their son, Ma Zhonggui, happened to come in and he asked: "What are father and mother discussing?" The woman said: "The Dings have come and your father wants to give them ten *liang* of silver; I said that your father was squandering silver like dirt or dung. My opinion is that two *liang* are enough." Ma Zhonggui asked: "Which Dings are you talking about?" The woman said: "Pah! Is there a second Ding in the family?" Ma Zhonggui said: "Could it be Master Ding and Madame Ding?" The woman said: "Tell me about it! Who else could it be?" Ma Zhonggui said: "Where are they at the moment? Why not send the attendants to welcome them in the *yamen*? It won't be too late if we pay their meal expenses gradually; why give them silver first?" The woman said: "Pah! You are speaking out of ignorance! I say, give them two *liang* of silver and send them off! If we meet them here, how can we ever get rid of them?" Ma Zhonggui said: "Where would you want them to go? He provided for our family for so many years, now it's our turn to repay and support them. Now you have the heart to give them two *liang* of silver and to send them away without inviting them to live here for a few days!! How come? Will we be officials here for a thousand years and not even see them for one day?" The woman said: "Look at you, you little boy! Do you want me to provide proof? What did they provide for us? Your father was teaching and was so overworked that the corners of his mouth collected such yellow dung dust — did they care a little bit about this? They really did provide for us!"

Ma Congwu said: "In your opinion, what should we do?" Ma Zhonggui said: "In my opinion, we should welcome the elderly couple in to live with us, and repay their favor with nice food and beverages; if they pass away, we should bury them." The woman said: "His surname is Ding and ours is Ma; neither fish nor fowl — what is their relationship to us? 'We provide for them' — nonsense!" Ma Zhonggui said: "He is surnamed Ding and we Ma; what is their relationship to us is that they provided for us for so many years! They even paid for my marriage!" The woman said: "I am determined! Don't be so double-minded and don't talk all talk so confusedly! I am not

going to waver! Hurry up! Ask the servants to wrap two *liang* of silver and get rid of them quickly!” Ma Congwu said: “They might not accept two *liang* and leave; they might complain loudly outside. Now I am an official and no longer a shameless local ruffian!” The woman spat onto Ma Congwu’s face a mouthful of foul-smelling saliva and cursed him: “You, you old headless and beaten creature! When you were a *xiucai* you were fearless, but now you are a coward after becoming an official! Now that he is reproaching and extorting you, aren’t your cane⁵² and leg vise⁵³ at the ready waiting for your seal?” Ma Congwu said: “How can I punish him for nothing?” Ma Zhonggui was startled for a while; he stamped his feet and returned to his room crying out to the Emperor of Heaven. Ma Congwu packed two *liang* of silver, summoned a servant and instructed him: “The old man whom you encountered is surnamed Ding, you can address him as ‘Old Ding’; go and tell him: ‘Our master just assumed office not long ago and has no income; he serves at the same place with the admiral, and it’s not convenient if you come over.’ Give him the silver for his traveling expenses and ask him to return home instantly. You, together with the hotel owner, send him away quickly and then report to me.”

The servant found out Ding’s lodging, talked to Ding as Ma Congwu instructed; he, along with the hotel owner, urged Ding Ligu to leave. Ding Ligu could not help but felt anxious, saying: “I spent my thousand-pieces-of-gold wealth entirely on him, and my remaining property was my houses, which was sold for my traveling expenses to come here. Now these two *liang* of silver, once our food expenses for the days we have been here are deducted, are not sufficient to pay my return expenses!” How could both the servant and the hotel owner be not afraid of the master but rather flatter the two poor strangers instead? Previously, they had thought the Dings were the real parents of Ma Congwu and served them with fine meals and extreme flattery; now they calculated up all the expenses for the food, which came to one *liang* four *qian* and five *fen*, and asked for the exact price. Now Ding Ligu had only five *qian* and five *fen* of

⁵² 夾棍 *banzi*, bamboo rod used for corporal punishment.

⁵³ 夾棍 *jiagun*, leg-vice, an instrument for torture

silver; the couple packed their beddings and left the hotel weeping. Upon seeing that they were walking into the distance, the servant returned and reported to Ma Congwu. Because Ma Congwu had visited such unkind treatment upon the Dings, there was not a single person inside or outside Huai'an, old or young, who did not spit on and curse Ma Congwu.

Previously, when Mr. and Mrs. Ding came to Huai'an, they had extra money in addition to their traveling expenses; they had hired a donkey as well as a companion. Now the hired worker, observing the scenario, began to complain out loudly. Ding Liguó had no choice but gave him the remaining money as well as his purple-colored floral robe and asked him to go on ahead. By the time Ding Liguó arrived at Suqian,⁵⁴ he used up the money he had received for his wife's silver hairpin and silver earrings, and his feet had become too tired to proceed any further. Since they were in deeply upset, the couple fell ill one after the another. The innkeeper was about to throw them out, but his wife said: "One relies on one's parents when being at home and on the innkeeper when being on a journey. They are extremely ill; where are you going to send them to? If by some chance they die unexpectedly and their family come here to look for them, how shall we respond to them? Moreover, the old man said he was coming from the Government Grain Department in Huai'an. It's not a good idea to drive them away." Taking the good advice of his wife, the innkeeper had no choice but allow them to stay at the inn during their illness. A few days later, the couple both died. The innkeeper reported this to the county government, which sent the constables to examine the situation; he also sold the couple's tattered comforters, bought two large pieces of bamboo mat to wrap them in, and buried them at a paupers' cemetery. There was still a little silver left, so the innkeeper bought some joss paper to burn in their memory. The innkeeper ended up suffering a financial loss for the amount of two-day's worth of soup and porridge, in addition to the expenses incurred in purifying his place because of the deceased.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ 宿遷, Suqian, a prefecture-level city in northern Jiangsu Province, China.

⁵⁵ When someone dies at a place, it is expected that the place be ritually cleansed in order to drive away inauspiciousness.

What's more, ever since Ma Congwu drove the Dings away, his son, Ma Zhonggui wept so bitterly that he seemed to have lost his mind; he talked madly and became insane, stripping all his clothes. Moreover, from the day the Dings died, the utensils of the *yamen* started to move automatically, and the doors and windows started to open and close by themselves; the dogs began to wear Ma Congwu's black gauze cap⁵⁶ and imitate human gait and the crows flew inside the bedroom croaking.⁵⁷ A few days later, dog dung was found in the cooked rice; or, when the rice was just being cooked, bricks and stones fell into it from above so that the rice pot was smashed into pieces. When the Mas were sleeping in their bed, the foot of the bed would suddenly be sawn off so that the bed collapsed. A few days later, the Mas were possessed by the Dings' ghosts and talked about their past; the ghosts scolded cursed and cried, but no one else in the household, including for Ma Zhonggui and his wife, were possessed; this state of ghostly possession became more and more severe day by day. When the exorcists were brought in to expel the ghosts, the ghost would possess the stranger or the Mas were forced to tell the exorcist the entire story. After several attempts at exorcism had failed, the Ma family invited another exorcist from the Taoist Monastery of Jade Blossoms in Yangzhou.⁵⁸ Initially, the ghost of the Dings would possess a stranger in order to weep their grief. The exorcist said: "Human beings and ghosts belong to different worlds; if you have been wronged, you can only sue them in the Underworld."⁵⁹ How come you stay in the human world to cause havoc? Causing chaos among the living and the dead — this sin will not be easily spared!" The exorcist shouted: "Fetch me two portable altars!"⁶⁰ The priest chanted the spells holding on to a sword⁶¹, and as he struck the top of the altar he shouted: "Enter the altars quickly!" In obedience, the two ghosts entered the altars crying out loudly. The priest sealed the altars with a pig bladder, attached to which was yellow paper with the spells in cinnabar

⁵⁶ 紗帽 *shamao*, a formal cap worn by government officials.

⁵⁷ Abnormal behavior of the animals was considered as inauspicious.

⁵⁸ 揚州, Yangzhou, a city in Jiangsu province.

⁵⁹ 陰司 *yinsi*, the nether world.

⁶⁰ 壇 *tan*, altar.

⁶¹ 劍 *jian*, a double-edged sword used in exorcisms.

powder written on it; the exorcist sealed the altars and asked his four assistants to carry the two altars to the crossroads on the northwest outside the city and to bury them in the ground. Although the altars were empty, since they contained two ghosts, they became extremely heavy. On their way other pedestrians saw them and all wondered what was inside the altars. After this, the *yamen* became quiet again.

Half a month had passed. One day, it rained for a day, and the two ghosts again started to cause chaos, but this time even more severely than before. They said: “You treacherously ordered us to be trapped so that we should never meet in eternity, how come that we are able to appear again?” The Mas asked them: “You were in the altars and remained quiet for half a month, how come that you are freed?” The ghosts said: “The day when you carried the altars to bury them, this was seen by many people who thought there was treasury hidden inside the altars. Everyday there were people plotting to dig up the altars, but because of the patrolmen, no one dared to do so. Last night, it was raining and there were no patrolmen outside, so the altars were excavated and we were freed. Aren’t you going to send for the exorcist to control us – we will hide inside your abdomen and manipulate you two as we want – even the exorcist will be helpless!” Now Ma Congwu and his wife began to suffer from such acute abdomen pain as if someone was tugging on their intestines and pulling on their hearts and livers that they rolled back and forth on the ground crying; they had no alternative but to beg for mercy, and they were crying as if they were saving the moon⁶²; there was nothing that they did not promise the ghosts. The ghosts spoke from their abdomen: “This place is too hot to live in! Open your mouth and let us out. You still have a few days predestined for you; for the moment we will leave here and wait for you at the cat’s lair!”⁶³ After that then the *yamen* became tranquil again.

In the first month of the following lunar year, Ma Congwu was impeached by the grain transport governor and ordered to return to his birthplace; considering that the

⁶² When lunar eclipses happened, the ancient Chinese thought the moon was being eaten by a heavenly dog so that they would hit their kitchen utensils and otherwise make a racket to scare away the dog and save the moon.

⁶³ 貓兒窩, *mao 'erwo*, a place name.

ghosts said they would be waiting for him at a “cat’s lair.” He determined to avoid the place. He asked the people at the *yamen* who told him: “If you travel by land, there is a place called “Cat’s Lair” twenty miles away from Peach Blossom Spring; if you travel by water, there is a place called “Mao’s son’s place”⁶⁴ thirty miles away from Pizhou.”⁶⁵ Ma Congwu decided to travel by water to avoid going to Cat’s Lair. After traveling on the official boat to thirty miles north of Pizhou, he saw the Dings standing on the shore. Immediately after Ma Congwu cried out: “Too bad!” the two ghosts were blown on board the boat in a gust of wind. Ma Congwu, together with his wife, could not help it, but they started plucking their own hair and scooping out their own eyeballs; they also jammed fire tongs into their own ears so that all their seven apertures⁶⁶ bled profusely. Ma Zhonggui knelt down to implore the ghosts; they replied: “My son, you are a good person, and we will not trouble you. Your parents’ deeds were so foul that the heavens gave me the order so that they may be punished in this life.” Ma Congwu, together with his wife, died instantly. Needless to say, Ma Zhonggui bought coffins in which to bury them. They transported the coffins back to Mingshui town. Fortunately, they had bought a residence two months previously with three hundred and seventy *liang* of silver, and they could place the wooden coffins at the hall for the Daoist ceremonies for departed souls. On the day of Qingming festival⁶⁷, both coffins were buried. After Ma Zhonggui completed his filial duty, he was admitted into the government school.

Ma Congwu had been a Local Magistrate for eight months; he had controlled the official seal Shanyang⁶⁸ county for six months during which period he had extorted eight thousand *liang* of silver by scraping the earth bare as if scraping the marrow from the bone. Ma Zhonggui purchased some land and became a man of wealth; later when

⁶⁴ 毛兒窩 *Maoerwo*, “Mao’s sons place,” a homonym of 貓兒窩, *mao’erwo* which sounds like “cat’s lair.”

⁶⁵ 邳州, Pizhou, a city in Jiangsu province.

⁶⁶ I.e., eyes (2), ears (2), nostrils (2), and mouth.

⁶⁷ 清明節, Qingmingjie, the Qingming festival, a traditional Chinese festival for venerating ancestors and sweeping their tombs.

⁶⁸ 山陽縣, Shanyang county, in Jiangsu province.

the great flood befell Mingshui, Ma Zhonggui's family, just as the families of other righteous men, were not affected — maybe because of his good intentions of not wanting to betray Ding Ligu. Based on the behavior of Ma Congwu and his wife, they did not deserve offspring, not to mention establishing a family lineage. It is thus evident that although the karmic retribution could befall on one's offspring, if those offspring could cultivate their moral character, Heaven and Earth would have another plan for them. If because of the evil deeds of one's parents that they are to be punished regardless of their moral characters, karmic retribution would be nullified.

Now the karmic retribution for Yan Liexing is even more curious. I will first narrate two trivial matters concerning him and leave his strangest stories, which are unprecedented since the beginning of time, for future elaboration. When his first son was born, the child could not defecate for seven or eight days so that his belly swelled up as a little drum. The baby was crying day and night. Upon further examination, it was discovered that the child was born without an anus. How could this be cured? One could do nothing but watch him die. The second year, his second son was born; when that son was seven or eight days old, again he was found to be without an anus. An itinerant Daoist priest advised him to poke him open with the end of a balance, which Yan Liexing did, and the child died immediately. The third year, Yan Liexing had the third son, who was born with anus, but it also bled all over his body, just like the statue of the local God of Land who had been shot full arrows by Yan Liexing. Despite these obvious signs of retribution, Yan Liexing was still evil as ever, unconscious of what repentance was, until a more severe punishment befell him. In conclusion:

Good and evil will be rewarded in the end; it is only a question of time.

Chapter 28: Lord Guan¹ Manifests Himself through Clay Idols; Immortal Xu² Scoops up Earth to Rescue People.

Good and the evil are divided, so are the wicked and the righteous.

Those who follow the righteous way even in the darkness,

Will be corrected and protected by gods and ghosts alike.

Is Jingyang³ just a wooden idol? Is Zhuangmu⁴ not a clay statue.

Rewards to the good and the evil are discernible,

But the confused ones are lost.

To the Tune “Song of Divination.”⁵

Yan Liexing had a younger brother whose name was Yan Liexiu; he resided with Yan Liexing and did not get married even though he was twenty-one years old. Yan Liexiu was a small merchant who would do temporary work during the times of the busy farming season and had accumulated a few *liang*. He got engaged to a Miss Zhou, a daughter from the family of a farmer named Zhou Ji, and chose the fifteenth day of 三月; *sānyuè* as the wedding day.⁶ According to the local custom of Mingshui, the groom should visit the bride’s house to escort her back to wedding; in the face of obstacles, Yan Liexiu managed to acquire a cotton cyan-colored robe and a cap and

¹ 關羽 Guan Yu (†220CE), a general whose activities played a role in the collapse of the Eastern Han Dynasty. Subsequently deified. He is one of the major characters in the fourteenth-century novel 三國演義, *Sanguo yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

² 許遜 Xu Xun, (265 AD - 374AD). Considered the founder of the 淨明道 *Jingmingdao* (Pure and Radiant Way) and 閩山派 Lushunpai schools of Daoism. Subsequently deified.

³ 旌陽 Jingyang the style name of Xu Xun.

⁴ 壯繆 Zhuangmu = 壯繆侯 Zhuangmuhou, Marquis Zhuangmou, the posthumous title of Guan Yu.

⁵ 卜算子 *bu suanzi*. A popular tune associated with *Ci* poetry. See, Xu Yuanzhong, ed. and trans., *Three Hundred Song Lyrics: Bilingual Edition* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 158-59, 184-85, 204-05, 220-21, 298-99, 330-31, 370-73, 380-81, 438-39, 444-45, 480-81, 502-03 530-31, 536-37, 570-71, 638-39.

⁶ 三月 *sanyue*, the third lunar month, roughly equivalent to March.

bought a pair of single-layered socks and pair of velvet shoes, which he wore to visit the bride. When he arrived at his father-in-law's house, he offered a cup of wine to the bride, covered her with a roll of red fabric, and stuck a pair of velvet flowers into her hair. He also borrowed a lean horse to escort the bride's palanquin.

Heaven knows how but Yan Liexing persuaded his neighbours to take care of his few acres of lands, such as managing forage of cattle and the planting of seeds, the plowing of the land, and the harvesting of the crops; however, there was no reason that the neighbors should pay the land taxes in the form of silver and grains for him. But if the neighbors wouldn't pay for him, why should he pay the taxes himself? Therefore, over a period of ten years, he evaded his duty of paying tax to the imperial government: if the borough chief⁷ could be easily deceived, he would find an excuse for an exemption; if the borough chief was difficult to deal with, he would be forced to make up the tax. One year, there was a newly appointed borough chief, who had never experienced Yan Liexing's formidable nature, listed Yan Liexing's record of tax evasion in a report to the government, who instructed the borough chief and the functionaries to arrest and investigate him. One functionary named Zhao San said: "This Yan Liexing is a notoriously evil man who relies on his position of *xiucai* so that he cannot be beaten by the government. In the past, because of his tax evasion, the borough chief sent functionaries to summon him — the functionary's leg was broken by him instead. I truly dare not provoke him." The borough chief said: "Since my superior authorized the petition, I cannot disobey it; let's wait until we summon him." Zhao San said: "It is seventy or eighty *li* from here to there if I make a round trip. If anyone would pay for my meals, I would head straight there." The borough chief said: "This is not a problem; I will provide for your meals."

Having gone about half way there, the two of them encountered someone escorting the bride; this person was Yan Liexing's younger brother, Yan Liexiu. Zhao San said: "Why should Must we arrest his elder brother? Sir, you know you cannot get the better of him beat him anyway. Would you dare to nibble at him devour him? That

⁷ 里長 *lizhang*. A *li* was an administrative district of twenty-five families,

just creates enmity with him to no purpose. It is better to arrest his brother instead.” The borough chief said: “What you say sounds sensible.” Both stepped forward, one halting the horse and the other dragging Yan Liexiu off from it. Yan Liexiu recognized the borough chief and said: “It is my brother who the one who evades paying the land tax; how come that you are arresting me?” The borough chief said: “Since you reside with your brother, how do I know who it is who is evading paying the tax” Allowing him no opportunity for explanation, they forcibly arrested Yan Liexiu.

The bride had no alternative but to arrive home by herself, and she prostrated herself before for the Heaven and the Earth.⁸ Her sister-in-law removed her head covering and escorted her to the bedroom. After the sound of drums, Yan Liexing disguised himself as Yan Liexiu and entered the bedroom. The bride said: “I saw from inside of the palanquin that they arrested you, how come that you have return home?” Yan Liexing lied saying: “Look! It’s our elder brother that cultivated the land but evaded paying the taxes, but they arrested me! When I arrived in the county, I replied that it was not me who owes the land tax and I have been arrested on the road on my wedding day the half way home. The head man ordered the functionaries to receive ten strokes and then released me. I pawned my robe and cap to pay the head man. While he was speaking, he took off the bride’s headwear and clothes. The bride pretended to resist, he said: “The room is so narrow that our elder brother and sister-in-law may hear us; let’s sleep quietly!” The bride dared not to make a sound but obeyed his instructions without a murmur.

Meanwhile, Yan Liexiu was arrested and sent to the county and brought to face to the government official. He explained that it was his brother who owed the land tax since he himself did not manage any of the household affairs. The official asked: “Has he been living apart from his brother?” The borough chief replied: “No, he hasn’t.” The official said: “If you haven’t been living apart from your brother, how can you say it’s none of your business?” He ordered Yan Liexiu to be flogged; while Yan Liexiu’s trousers were being stripped off, a roll of red cloth and two velvet flowers fell off from

⁸ A ceremony signifying the completion of the wedding ceremonies.

his waist. The official asked: "What are these?" He replied: "They are betrothal gifts. Since today is my wedding day, I was arrested on my way from the bride's family." The official asked: "Were you about to get married, or you have already finished the wedding ceremony?" He replied: "I was escorting the bride and was on my way home." The official said: "Release him!" The official rebuked the borough chief, saying: "Why didn't you urge him to pay his taxes on an ordinary day, instead of choosing such an inauspicious occasion as his wedding day? What a repulsive person you are!" Then he ordered the borough chief to be flogged ten times and released Yan Liexiu, ordering him to pay off the land tax in three days.

Since it was late at night, Yan Liexiu found a lodging to stay for the night. The next morning, he returned home and entered the bedroom, wearing his new cyan-colored robe, new shoes, and new cap — not the same groom who was there on the wedding night. It was crystal clear to the bride that she had been taken advantage of, but she did not utter a single word; she only asked: "How much money in tax do you still owe?" The groom said: "I still need two *liang* and six *qian* of silver." The bride brought her hairpins and jewelries to her husband and asked him to return and pay off the debt instantly, without further delay. Her husband took the jewelry to the county and exchanged them for silver to pay off the debt. The bride waited until it was early night when everyone had fallen asleep, dressed herself neatly and well, and then hung herself with a belt in her room. This was not discovered until the next day.

Yan Liexing understood the whole story, but how could Yan Liexiu know it? Even if he were a deity, he couldn't have guessed what happened. Yan Liexiu invited the bride's parents over, who also could not guess the reason behind this. For a bride who been married for two days, whose groom was absent on both these days to consummate the wedding, why should she hang herself? It must have been the bad karma from a previous incarnation. This would be an extremely messy lawsuit, and there would be no reason to sue the groom. Rather than wasting money and energy, it would be convenient to remain silent about it. Therefore, they made a coffin, chanted some religious scriptures, and on the third day, they carried the coffin to the grave of the Yan family and buried it in the early morning.

That night, Yan Liexing had a discussion with his wife, Sai Dongchuan,⁹ saying: “What a pity! The bride was wearing a great deal of jewelry and valuable garments, which are wasted in being buried. Why don’t we, while there is still moonlight, open up her tomb, and strip off her jewelries and garments, which are worth some silver.” His wife agreed with him completely. They waited until it was around seven till nine o’clock; then carrying hoes and axes, they arrived at the grave site which was a little more than stone’s throw away from their home. Yan Liexing dug with a hoe and his wife with a shovel, and they soon excavated the coffin. Sticking it violently, they opened the lid and dragged out the body, stripping off everything on the body and plucking all the hair wear from the head; Yan Liexing asked his wife to first return home with these valuables first while he stayed to place the body back in the coffin and bury it before returning home.

It just so happened that on the way to the graveyard, there was a small temple of Lord Guan. In the past, this temple had been the site of some miracle-working; therefore, the villagers of Mingshui had often planned to renovate and expand it, but the deity sent messages through dreams that he would rather that the temple remained as it was. This very night, the clay statue of Lord Guan took his clay knife from Zhou Cang,¹⁰ walked out from the temple, and chopped Sai Dongchuan into half on the road; he also chopped Yan Liexing into two halves in the graveyard. Lord Guan gradually revived the dead body from out of the grave, gave her a cyan-colored robe to wear, and pointed her in the direction for her to return home. When the bride was half way home, she saw the body of a woman cut in two and lying on the ground. She was so terrified that she nearly flew back to her own home. When she arrived at the groom’s home, she found that the front door was unlocked, so she walked straight ahead to the bedroom and knocked on the door. The groom was so petrified that he could not utter a word but was able to say: “I never had any enmity against you in the past, we got married in vain

⁹ 賽東窗 This name alludes to the story of 秦檜 Qin Hui (1090 - 1155), who was regarded as a traitor for persecuting 岳飛 Yue Fei, a renowned general. 東窗事發 *dong chuang shi fa* means that the conspiracy that was discussed by Qin Hui and his wife under the eastern window which was overheard.

¹⁰ 周倉 Zhou Cang, the loyal servant and companion of Guan Yu.

and even our wedding ceremony was not completed. How much did we suffer! I have already buried you, why does your ghost return to haunt me?" The bride said: "I am not a ghost; I am a living human being. It was a man with a red face, who resembled Lord Guan who revived me. But my garments were all gone, so he passed me a cyan-colored robe to wear. He killed one person at the graveyard and another on the road, both of them being chopped in half. When I was coming here, the man with red face was still standing on the grave with a big knife." The groom said: "That is such an odd thing?" He called out loudly to his brother and sister-in-law, but no one answered. All he could do now was open the door to let her in. He examined her closely; indeed, she a living human-being! The robe that she was wearing belonged to him. He lit a lamp, went out and called out his brother and sister-in-law under the window of their bedroom. Who was there to answer him? He pushed the door their room to enter, and couldn't find even the shadow of human being. He was suspicious and said to himself: "Could it be that the two dead people are these two? But why did they go to the graveyard? Could it be that they went there to rob the tomb?" He called the neighbors over, and implored two women to keep his wife company; he asked the village clerks to examine the graveyard in a group. Initially no one believed his story; but when they had gone half way to the grave yard, they saw a dead person cut in two whose intestines and liver were lying in pieces on the ground, near which were big rolls of garments. Upon further examination, people discovered that it was indeed Yan Liexiu's sister-in-law, Sai Dongchuan, without any mistake.

Yan Liexiu picked up the roll of garments and went over to the graveyard, seeing a man standing there with a ferocious look. Everyone halted, being afraid of proceeding, and asked: "Who is the man standing there?" No matter how loudly they shouted, the man never replied; as they proceeded further and checked more closely, they found it was not a human being. What was that thing? They picked up a stone and said: "If you don't answer us, do not blame us for hitting you with this stone!" There was still no reply. When the figure was hit with the stone, it made a rat-a-tat sound, but the figure did not move at all. These people said: "We have over ten people here and

we are equipped with weapons; even if he is a real person, can't we subdue him? And we should send someone back for more helpers!"

As the news spread, gradually there came quite a few people to help, who all carried weapons; with one unanimous shout, they attacked the figure. And upon closer examination, they discovered that this was the statue of Lord Guan from the temple in their village; the statue was carrying in his hand a big knife, which was covered in blood. There was a body chopped in half lying on the ground. When people bent down to take a closer look, they found that it was indeed the body of Yan Liexing. It was absolutely certain without any mistakes. The axe, shovel and hoe were lying around him, and the coffin lid, as well as the coffin itself, were thrown to one side. All of these people prostrated in front of Lord Guan. Yan Liexiu was about to take care of the dead body, but the crowd said: "Since this is such a peculiar event, we should report to the *yamen* for them to come and examine the dead body; for the moment don't move the body, and we will guard it in turns tonight." Some people returned to their village; when they entered the temple, they found that the statue of Lord Guan was missing from its shrine, and the knife in Zhou Cang's hands had also vanished; the statue of Zhou Cang had also walked to the gate of the temple with his one hand clasping the door frame and half of his body stretching out, as if he was looking into the distance.

The village officials hurried to enter the city wall that very night and reported it to the county magistrate,¹¹ who instantly summoned the mounted constables to go over for a further personal investigation. The county magistrate offered sacrifices of pig and sheep to Lord Guan and carefully "invited"¹² the two statues back to the temple and placed them at their original shrines. This incident caused such a sensation that people from far and near got together and established a grand temple dedicated to Lord Guan.

Only then then did the new bride, Miss Zhou, narrate carefully the details of the entire story of how she was deceived; the county magistrate rewarded her with a plaque for upright women. Yan Liexiu also purchased coffins to bury the four foul pieces of

¹¹ 縣官 *xianguan*, district or county magistrate.

¹² Which means to move.

the bodies. A strange story like this one has never been heard of since the beginning of creation. It was only recently that the clay statue of the ghost judge from the temple of Sheng Huang¹³ in Qizhou¹⁴ walked on the street in daytime and the government made a public notification, so that everyone began to learn about this news; here Lord Guan had already manifested himself, but if you tell the unlearned about it, they will never believe it.

But then for the residents of Mingshui town, since there was a living Lord Guan who manifested himself in the village, and he was not limited to being “as if over their heads,”¹⁵ He really was sitting on the shrine above people’s heads, and he was also not limited to just being “on the right and left of the worshippers,” he was really standing on the right or left of the people. Therefore, those who were not faithless or did not fulfil their filial piety, those who were not righteous or who did not have a sense of propriety, and those who were conscienceless — those stubborn villagers, after witnessing the retribution for Yan Liexing and his wife’s evil deeds, hastily repented and learned to do good. Lord Guan is an upright and powerful deity; not only does he forgive previous wrong doings, but he also blesses those who repent. However, those senseless creatures, who even when they had seen the retribution for the Yan’s, did not fear gods a little bit; those evil ones continued their evil doing and these treacherous ones continued their adulteries, frauds, and robberies. Their morals deteriorated year by year, day by day. Whenever people mentioned “Heaven and Earth” to them, they would turn a deaf ear; whenever people mentioned gods such like Lord Guan, Cheng Huang, or the Goddess of Mt. Tai,¹⁶ it was like casting pearls before swine.

¹³ 城隍 *Cheng Huang* = 城隍神 *Chenghuangshen*, the God of City Walls and Moats, the tutelary deity of a given city or town.

¹⁴ 蘄州, Qizhou, nowadays Qingzhou county in Hubei province.

¹⁵ 如在其上 *tu zai qi shang*. This is and the following: 如在其上 如在其左右 *tu zai qi shang ru zai qi zuoyuo*, “as if over the heads, and on the right and left of their worshippers” are a quote from chapter 16 of 中庸 *Zhong Yong* (The Doctrine of the Mean, otherwise known as: The State of Equilibrium and Harmony), one of the canonical books of Confucianism.

¹⁶ 泰山聖母 *Taishan Shengmu*. 泰山 *Taishan*, Mount Tai is the easternmost of the 五嶽 *wuyue*, Five Great Mountains. It is situated to the north of the city of 泰安 *Tai'an* in Shandong Province. The

Originally, there was the crooked Ma Congwu and after that Yan Liexing who was as wicked as possible. People believed that the evil ones were few, and their punishments came quickly. However, in recent years, the sins that committed by ordinary people, and the tyrannies inflicted by officials, were too numerous to narrate; I could just mention those of this school, such as Yu Jitang, Ni Jikong, Qi Bochang, Zhang Baoguo, Wu Shuoliu, and Chen Huazhe,¹⁷ and every single one of these brutes ruined ethics and morality. If I was about to narrate their stories one by one, I would either pollute my mouth or stain your ears. I am also concerned that my paragraphs would become inappropriate; additionally, I am afraid that my readers are not necessarily from my hometown, so I do not have the heart to expose them. But since those barbaric ones all received their karmic retribution in the end, that worth mentioning. These were demons and ghosts, whose offenses were so rank that they smelled to heaven; the Jade Emperor was almost suffocated by the smell so that He could hardly remain on the throne. Therefore, the Jade Emperor gave a heavenly decree that arrived at the Council for Collation for the Great Sage of Universal Light to examine and determine their punishment.

Who knows what one's time alive might be? Not only is every single sip or every single bite predestined, but the firewood you burn or the bowl of water you use is also predetermined. Even this Mingshui town is in the hands of the gods: if you are a blessed person, they will calculate your blessings and measure your daily measures of water; if the water you used outweighs your prescribed portion, they will deduct the difference from your predestined amount of fortune, since wasting water is not a small sin.

Therefore, if people are born into a place with sufficient amount of water, they would take water for granted; even Mencius also said: "one never meets with a refusal when knocking on another's door in the evening to beg for water or fire. This is because

Goddess is probably [碧霞元君](#) Bixia, Yuanjun, Goddess of the Blue Dawn, or [泰山娘娘](#) Taishan Niangniang. Lady of Mount Tai.

¹⁷ These are the names of some characters in the *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, although not in the sections translated here.

these are in such abundance.”¹⁸ People don’t understand that water is an extremely precious substance that deserves to be treated with as much reverence as the five grains¹⁹; also, not every region under the sky has water flowing endlessly.

The ancient nickname for Shandong province was “twelve mountains and twelve rivers.” There are twelve springs in Jinan, including Baotu Spring²⁰ and Hibiscus Spring.²¹ For a region of rivers and waters like Jinan, the rivers should irrigate ten *li* inland; however, within fifty *li* southwest of Jinan, there is a place called Fried Rice Store, and within fifty *li* of its vicinity, even if you dig thousands of fathoms deep, you would not find a single drop of water. The supply of water for hundreds of *li* around relies on transportation by donkeys and mules. This area is a vital communication line to Tai’an,²² and in spring and autumn, there are tens of thousands of pilgrims traveling to Mt. Tai; when they arrive here, they would not have the water to quench their thirst, not to mention that they would not be able to wash their faces.

Even in surrounding regions of Jinan,²³ such as Haifeng,²⁴ Leling,²⁵ Lijin,²⁶ Putai,²⁷ and Wuding,²⁸ the spring water there tastes like brine, salty and bitter. People got together and built a pond for collecting rainfall during the summer and autumn and snowfall during the winter. When the accumulated ice melted when spring came, the water became green and muddy. The cattle would drink from the pond, and people also

¹⁸ 孟夫子 *Mengfuzi*, Master Meng = 孟子 *Mengzi*, Mencius (372–289 BCE or 385–303 BCE), Chinese philosopher, second only to Confucius. Translation from: *Mencius* trans. D. C. Lau, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), Book VII, Part A, 23 (in part), 150. “昏暮叩人之門戶求水火，無弗與者，至足矣” from 孟子 *Mengzi*, 尽心上 *Jinxin*, part 1, 23 (part).

¹⁹ 五穀 *wugu*, “five grains.” 麦 *mai*, wheat/barley/oats; 豆 *dou*, soybean; 黍 *shu* broomcorn millet; 稷 *ji*, foxtail millet; 稻 *dao*, rice.

²⁰ 趵突泉 Baotuquan, Spurting Spring, a famous spring in Jinan city, Shandong province.

²¹ 芙蓉泉 Furongquan. Furong Spring, or Hibiscus Spring, located in Jinan city, Shandong province.

²² 泰安 Tai’an, a city in Shandong where Mt. Tai is located.

²³ 濟南 Jinan, the capital of Shandong province, also known as 泉城 Quan cheng (City of Springs).

²⁴ 海豐 Haifeng. A 街道 jiedao, subdistrict, in 無棣縣 Wudixian, Wudi County, Shandong Province.

²⁵ 樂陵 Leling, a county-level city administered by Dezhou city, Shandong Province.

²⁶ 利津 Lijin, a county administered by Dongying city, Shandong Province.

²⁷ 蒲臺 Putai, modern 濱州 Binzhou, a county level city in northern in Shandong Province.

²⁸ 武定 Wuding, nowadays in 惠民縣 Huiminxian, Huimin county, Shandong province, and under the administration of 濱州 Binzhou City.

would draw water from it. There were wealthy official's families who would place hundreds of large urns in their garden to collect rainfall in spring and summer which also became green due to algae, and in the water, there were blood-red wigglers, large as a grain of rice that could be taken by hand. After first frost, the water would gradually turn clear, and people would transfer the water into other containers to filter it two or three times, until there was no sediment left; then they would then throw into the water a fist-size hot coal, which was burning red. They threw one piece of burning coal into each urn and sealed it, and the water inside would not deteriorate, but became suitable for boiling tea. The water could also be used to make first-class clear liquor to be drunk for the entire year.

As for the inns at the towns like Wuji,²⁹ Shipo,³⁰ Paihuai,³¹ Yetao,³² and Menghu,³³ that were located on the road to Henan province, they all collect water from ponds. Two barrels of water that were transported from distant places would be worth two *qian* of silver; if one were watering cattle, it would cost five or six *fens* of silver. There was an innkeeper's wife in Yetao town who was in her twenties; her face was as dirty as if little demons had doodled on it, and the soil accumulated on the back of her hand so that it was fully one inch thick. The accumulated dirt became encrusted and sometimes a few pieces of this dirt would fall off, revealing her white and tender skin in those areas. If you looked closely, you would see that her facial features were very good indeed; therefore, some people called for her husband and asked: "That woman is so dirty but she mixes the flour and water, and washes the rice for cooking in front of us; having seen this, how can we feel comfortable in eating the food?" The man responded: "In this area, where is there a family which can afford to wash their faces? Even we waited until it rains and we could collect the rain water, we would have to store it until we have no more space to do so — that's when everyone in our family

²⁹ 五吉 Wuji, a town in Nanyang city, Henan province.

³⁰ 石泊 Shipo, probably a village in Handan city, Hebei province.

³¹ 徘徊 Paihuai, a town in Handan city, Hebei province.

³² 冶陶 Yetao, a village in Handan city, Hebei province.

³³ 猛虎 Menghu, probably a village in Huaxian county of northern Henan province.

would be able to wash their face and hands!” These people had to give two *fen* of silver to the innkeeper’s wife hostess and they forced her to wash face and hands before she could continue to make dough and cook rice. Unexpectedly, when the innkeeper’s wife came out after washing her face, her skin was very fair and her cheeks very rosy, just like a lotus flower; her arms were as tender and white as the lotus root — she was such a natural beauty as if she were wearing light make-up.

Shanxi province is another region where water shortage was a persistent problem. Take Pingshun³⁴ county, which is ten miles away from the Lu’an³⁵ region, for example: there is only one shallow water well five *li* away from the city, that was only able to yield five barrels of water every day; these five barrels of water had already been divided up that one was for the county magistrate, one for the county jailor³⁶ secretary and one for the military instructor³⁷ and they were also muddy— this happened only during summer and autumn when there was precipitation; during the dry seasons, even this amount of water was impossible to obtain. There was a lid above the well, and fence surrounding it; the well was sealed and a guard was assigned to guard it day and night. The other officials, common people, and specialized workers, were not permitted to taste the well water; they could only drink the rain and melted snow from their ponds. If the drought lasted for a long time, so that all the ponds dried up, people had to go to Licheng County for water, which was almost one hundred and sixty *li* for a round trip. The wealthy families could transport the water with pack animals; but for those ordinary families that did not have any pack animals, they had no alternative but transport water by themselves on their shoulders. As strange as their customs may seem, those who carried the water on their shoulders were all females. Although those women looked just like Ox-Head and Horse-Face³⁸ and deserved jobs like carrying water, it was still pathetic.

³⁴ 平順 Pingshun, a county located in Shanxi province administered by Zhangzhi city.

³⁵ 潞安, an administrative division which nowadays includes Changzhi city, Xiangyuan county, Licheng county, Zhangzi county and Pingshun county in Shanxi province.

³⁶ 典史 *dianshi*, county jailor.

³⁷ 教官 *jiaoguan*, military instructor or drillmaster..

³⁸ 牛頭 Niu Tou, Ox-Head and 馬面 Ma Mian, Horse-Face were the two guardians of the underworld.

Having seen these dry areas, how could one still consider water as something to squander? As for Mingshui, since there are dozens of waterfalls in the Mount Huixian³⁹ two or three water curtains, which have their source at the base of the Temple of Dragon King,⁴⁰ and the expansive White Cloud Lake⁴¹; who is to say that this water does not deserve to be despoiled and that whoever despoils it is committing a grievous sin? Additionally, regardless of whether it's a wealthy family or an ordinary household, they all have diverted the water for their own household use, without any fear of offending the Dragon King or polluting the River God; neither did they care if other people may have needed the water to cook, to boil tea, or to use as an offering to Heaven and Buddha. Since they were used to abusing the water, they even used it to wash the things that distinguish male and female, something which was most severely forbidden to wash in the river, so that the Dragon King and the River God⁴² were crying out for justice to Heaven day after day. The God of Water was a most forgiving deity, but even He could not cover up the sins committed by these men and women that he had to use the heavenly talisman⁴³ to investigate the situation and report back to the heavenly court. The residents of the area of Mingshui were just as sinful as any other creatures under the sky; however, they committed an additional sin which is despoiling water. Therefore, the Great Sage of Universal Light of the Bureau of Investigation⁴⁴ gathered the twenty Heavenly Officials to determine the punishment for their sins.

Most of these twenty Heavenly Officials stated that the reason why the Mingshui residents dared to lead a luxurious and dissipated life was because they relied on their power and wealth, which was a result of the benefits brought by the water. Other places, for example arrange to, would have droughts in summer, but Mingshui

³⁹ 會仙山 Huixianshan, Mount Huixian, to the southwest of 鄒平 Zouping, a county level city under the administration of 濱州 Binzhou City, in Shandong Province.

⁴⁰ 龍王廟 Longwangmiao, is situated in 單縣 Shanxian, Shan county, southwest Shandong Province.

⁴¹ 白雲湖 Baiyun hu, White Cloud Lake, about 35 miles east of Jinan in Shandong Province

⁴² 河伯 Hebo, a river god associated with the 黃河 Huanghe, Yellow River.

⁴³ 天符 *Tianfu*, the heavenly talisman. A Daoist term meaning a tool used by the God of wind, the God of rainfall and the God of cloud to control weather.

⁴⁴ 勘輅院普光大聖 kan jiao xiao yuan pu guangda sheng.

had water for irrigation; other places were worried about floods, but Mingshui had lakes to retain the water. Although they were so much blessed by water, they knew nothing about paying gratitude for it; on the contrary, they turned into being enemies of the water. Such was an unprecedented story since ancient times that the recipient of blessings would turn against them. It was the perfect time for punishment.

The Jade Emperor⁴⁵ ordered the Immortal Xu of the Temple of the Iron Tree⁴⁶ in Nanchang city,⁴⁷ Jiangxi province, to release the water dragon⁴⁸ to discharge the waters of Nanwang,⁴⁹ Louze,⁵⁰ Fanyang⁵¹ rivers and springs such as Baotu,⁵² in cooperation with the water deity of the White Cloud Lake, to flood these evil people on *qiyue* the tenth at midnight in the year of Xinhai,⁵³ which the Immortal Xu reported back to the Jade Emperor as being ready. The Jade Emperor gave him permission and ordered Immortal Xu to implement the plan; however, Immortal Xu was not allowed to hurt any innocent people. Having received the imperial decree, Immortal Xu released his divine light which lit up the evil people in Mingshui, the number of whom were exactly the same as recorded on the heavenly seal: out of each hundred, there were one or two righteous people and out of each ten people, there were eight or nine evil ones.

On *wuyue* the first,⁵⁴ Immortal Xu disguised himself as a Daoist priest who was wandering in Xiujiang county.⁵⁵ He gradually came to the area of Mingshui and stopped

⁴⁵ 玉帝 *Yudi*, the Jade Emperor, the chief God in Daoism and Chinese popular religion.

⁴⁶ 鍊樹宮 *tieshugong*, The Temple of the Iron Tree. The Sago palm, *Cycas revoluta*, is commonly known as the iron tree in northern China.

⁴⁷ 南昌 *Nanchang*, a prefecture level city and capital of 江西省 *Jiangxisheng*, Jiangxi province.

⁴⁸ 蛟 *jiao* = 蛟龍 *jiaolong*, an aquatic dragon which was believed to cause floods.

⁴⁹ 南旺 *Nanwang* River, a tributary of the 揚子江 *Yangzijiang*, Yangtze River.

⁵⁰ 雷澤 *Louze*, a lake located in Jining city, Shandong province.

⁵¹ 范陽 *Fanyang* River, a tributary of the 揚子江 *Yangzijiang*, Yangtze River in Shandong Province.

⁵² 趵突 *Baotu* Spring, a spring located in Jinan city, Shandong province.

⁵³ 七月 *qiyue*, the seventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to July; 辛亥 *xinhai*. The forty-eighth year of the sixty-year cycle which is the basis of classical Chinese calendrical reckoning. The Western equivalent would be 1396 if this chapter is also set in the period 1368-1464 as was chapter 27. Otherwise, 1492.

⁵⁴ 五月 *wuyue*, the fifth lunar month, roughly equivalent to May.

⁵⁵ 繡江縣, Xiujiangxian, the fictitious county in which Mingshui is supposed to be situated. The town is actually on the Xuijiang River.

at the Pavilion of Master Lü,⁵⁶ in the day time, he would wander around to beg alms and at night, he would return to the pavilion for a rest with the abbot whose name was Zhang Shuiyun. This Daoist Zhang was a venal and lustful ruffian who was both an alcoholic and a hustler, and also like a bedbug in the district; every day, he would prepare a large plateful of torn-up dog meat, pick out some fine spirits, pick up some sesame cakes,⁵⁷ and become both really drunk and stuffed with food. On the days when it was cloudy or rainy, occasions that the Immortal Xu did not go outside for alms, Daoist Zhang would not even bother to pretend to invite him for a bowl of thin porridge. Many times, when Zhang got drunk, he would talk gibberish and try to drive away Immortal Xu, saying: “My place is a pure and serene fairyland; how can I tolerate a dirty wandering mortal being disturbing my palace of mysteries?” Immortal Xu ignored his nonsense and did not respond. Daoist Zhang often sat in an easy chair with crossed legs, and when he saw Immortal Xu walking inside or outside, he never would move his body. One day, Daoist Zhang placed the easy chair at the gate of the pavilion, its back facing the statue of Master Lü, and himself sleeping in the chair snoring. Immortal Xu was about to go outside for alms, but Daoist Zhang blocked the gateway so tightly that there wasn’t even a small gap to get by. Immortal Xu sighed: “The old saying goes: ‘one relies on Buddha for clothes and food; one depends on Buddha for getting one’s food.’⁵⁸ Now that you have relied on Master Lü and obtained such a clean and pleasant residence, enjoying alms from every direction, how can you bear to have his buttocks in front of me? Such blasphemy! I was about to give him a lesson, but his destined death is not far away, also, he is the disciple of Immortal Lü, therefore it’s not my responsibility to teach him.” He hesitated for a moment, and then went out by the side door.

⁵⁶ 呂洞賓 Lü Dongbin (796 CE-1016 CE), a Tang Dynasty scholar who was subsequently deified to become a member of the Daoist Pantheon. See chapter 24, footnote 41.

⁵⁷ Small baked fermented bread.

⁵⁸ 指佛穿衣，賴佛吃飯 *zhi Fo chuanyi, lai Fo chifan*. Buddhist monks are expected to live an ascetic life; therefore, their lives are dependent on the donations of the laity and patrons.

Every day, after the Immortal Xu finished eating the alms he received, he either went to people's residences to chant the scripture, or to the market to sell medicine. The medicinal pills that he sold were made from soil, which was picked up randomly by the Immortal Xu and mixed up with his saliva; then the paste was twisted until it formed a pill to cure various diseases. When he was making the pills, Immortal Xu never avoided people but mixed the soil with his saliva in front of the people; How could anyone believe that these pills were the elixir of life? Not only would people not buy these pills, but when they saw him begging for alms, they also did not want to give any to him.

There was a man who was walking past Immortal Xu in dismay. Immortal Xu said to the man: "Hey, you, stop! Your wife is having a difficult labor, you won't find any medicine anywhere else. You take my pill and hurry back home. Ask your wife to take the pill with lukewarm water. This pill will remain in the palm of your son, when he is delivered. Return the pill to me then." This man was greatly astonished, saying to himself: "My wife is having a difficult labor and is on the verge of dying. How could he know this? But how could a soil pill be effective? Since he can predict or know things that he shouldn't, maybe this pill might cure." He took the pill and ran back home. His wife was twisting about in pain, he poured out some lukewarm water, and gave his wife the medicine. Immediately some sounds echoed from abdomen and the woman's birth canal was opened and she easily gave birth to a little white and chubby baby boy who was holding the pill in his hand. This man was so overjoyed that he jumped out of happiness, and took this medicine back looking for the Immortal Xu, who was still sitting at the same place. This man thanked him thousands of times and this story began to spread by word of mouth. Such is human nature, that if one man praises something, then others will praise it as well; if one man complains about something, others will also criticize it. Indeed, it was a miracle that a soil pill could expedite the delivery of a child, but the man also exaggerated this story so that countless people began to cluster around Immortal Xu to buy his pills. Immortal Xu said: "For now don't leave me your money; just take the medicine and use it following my instructions. My medicine cures based on predestination: if destiny allows it, your illness would disappear as if it was snatched away by a hand; if the destiny does not allow it, my medicine will be useless.

So, after you have taken the medicine, if it cures you, don't be late then in paying me the money for it." It was just as Immortal Xu said, some were cured by the pills and some were not; just like the old saying says goes: "Medicine only cures curable disease, and the Buddha enlightens only those who are destined to be enlightened."⁵⁹ From then on, the Immortal Xu's pills sold very quickly so that he often had to mix and twist the soil in front of people. The money he received from selling the medicine was often given to charity, or was used to buy live animals to liberate them. Later, Immortal Xu stopped selling medicine in pill form and started selling powdered medicine, which was not made from foxglove,⁶⁰ large-headed atractylodes rhizome,⁶¹ licorice root,⁶² or poria cocos⁶³ but the soil from the ground, and was sold as it was picked up. This soil pill cured just like the powdered medicinal pills did.

So, things continued until the seventh of *qiyue*.⁶⁴ Then the Immortal Xu said: "Now it's predestined that I shall leave you. On the tenth, I am returning to my mountain. However, since I am here, those who want medicine, please ask for it quickly! Not only does the medicine cure, but also, when any disaster comes, sprinkle the medicine outside your door to form a dividing line between your household and the outside, your family would be as immovable as Mt. Tai." For the half-educated dilettantes who were senseless about anything else, they suddenly began to debate with the people about this matter, saying: "How come such a thing occurs in this world? Many purchased

⁵⁹ 藥醫不死病，佛度有緣人 *yao ye bu si bing, Fo du youyuan ren* (Proverbial saying).

⁶⁰ 地黃 *dihuang*, Chinese foxglove, *Rehmannia glutinosa*. The root is used in traditional medicine, for example, to nourish the liver. See Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 172.

⁶¹ 白朮 *baizhu*, the rhizome of the large-headed atractylodes, *Atractylodes macrocephala*. A common ingredient in many medicines, for example, as a cure for diarrhea. See Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 12.

⁶² 甘草 *gancao*, licorice root, *Glycyrrhiza uralensis*. A common ingredient in many medicines, for example, as a boost for the lungs. See Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 47.

⁶³ 茯苓 *fuling*, Poria cocos, *Wolfiporia extensa*, a wood decay fungus that grows underground A common ingredient in many medicines, for example, as a cure for bedsores. See Wiseman and Ye, *Practical Dictionary*, 17.

⁶⁴ 七月 *qiyue*, the seventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to July.

medicine with their silver such as ginseng,⁶⁵ yarrow,⁶⁶ gold and stone,⁶⁷ made them into pills or powders based on the nature of the ingredient, and used these remedies which were not always effective; now he fools you with soil which costs thousands of cash! Now he says that when disaster comes, you shall be saved by sprinkling this medicine in front of your house. In this way he is deluding the people with abominable lies! Even worse is that the local constables have allowed such magician to mislead the public!” And they continued to slander Immortal Xu. the simple people were had firm belief so that everyone of them bought two or three packets of medicine and each packet contained only two or three teaspoons of powder. Immortal Xu continued selling medicine from the seventh day until the night of the ninth, and never returned to the Pavilion of Master Lü. Suddenly he disappeared without trace. For those who had bought medicine, some treasured it with great respect, but some played with it; even though they had bought the medicine, and threw it aside once they got home.

Now that the abbot of the Pavilion of Master Lü, Daoist Zhang, seeing that Immortal Xu did not return for a number of days, became overjoyed and said to himself: “That barbaric Daoist bothered me for fully two months and four days; now he’s gone. He must have traveled to another place. Let me check if there is anything left at the bedroom.” He asked his disciple named Chen Hexiang⁶⁸ to light a candle and examined the room. There was nothing left at the bedroom, but a poem written on the wall, which seemed to have been only recently penned since the ink was still wet. The poem stated:

Wearing a bamboo cap and straw sandals, I travelled lightly,

Going back and forth from Poyang Lake⁶⁹ for eight thousand *li*.

⁶⁵ 參 *shen*, ginseng *Panax ginseng*.

⁶⁶ 藜 *shi*, yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*

⁶⁷ 金石 *jinshi*, Taoist elixirs that are usually made from precious metal, such as gold, and minerals (“stone”).

⁶⁸ 陳鶴翔 Chen Hexiang, whose name sounds like “flying on a crane”. In Chinese mythology, the crane is associated with immortality.

⁶⁹ 鄱陽湖 Poyang Lake, a big lake located in Jiangxi province, which is the birth place of Immortal Xu.

I do not mention my tale of the Palace of Iron,⁷⁰

So that I may not be recognized by the mass of the people.

After reading the poem, Zhang Shuiyun and Chen Hexiang were astonished. Although they did not understand the message conveyed in it, but they recognized that their visitor had not been a barbaric Daoist, but that he must have been an immortal. They had neglected him for more than two months, and this was something very regretful. They regretted for a while and went to sleep. Ever since, Zhang Shuiyun became the one who:

Intending to be an immortal in fairyland, playing with his crane,

Ended up being a dragon guardian⁷¹ in the Palace of Water.

I will narrate this further in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ According the legend, Immortal Xu once subdued an evil spirit and confined it inside a well with an iron tree.

⁷¹ Euphemism for being drowned.

Chapter 29: Lord Fengyi¹ releases the waters; The heavenly army follow the routine to patrol the levee

The flood waters extend into the distance like the nine rivers beyond the Great Wall,² the high waves surge in the Three Gorges.³

It is an unstoppable flood that pours down from the high mountains, and it vaguely resembles the shape of a great waterfall.

The only visible things are the green tops of the willows and poplars, and the white roof of the Buddhist temples.

The mansions are transformed into the residences of fish and turtles, and men and women migrate to the Palace of the Dragon⁴;

High halls become a native land of water crystals,⁵ and infants and the elderly float on the sea.

The Divine Yu will again chop the woods along the mountain and leave his family for eight years.⁶

¹ 馮夷 *Fengyi*, god of the 黃河 *Hwanghe*, Yellow River, in Chinese mythology.

² 九河 *jiuhe*, The Nine Rivers refers to the nine rivers said to have been created in the lower reaches of the Hwanghe by the legendary emperor 禹 *Yu*, or 大禹, *Da Yu*, Yu the Great, (c. 2123 BC – c. 2025 BCE), as part of his massive program of flood control. See, Mark Edward Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 28-43. 塞 *sai*, “the frontier,” stands for the 萬里長城 *Wanli Changcheng*, the ten thousand *li* great wall, i.e. The Great Wall of China. — a 里 *li*, a traditional unit of distance, approximately 1/3 of a mile (1760 feet).

³ 三峽 *Sanxia*, The Three Gorges. These are the three gorges which stretch for 193 miles in the middle reaches of the 長江 *Chang Jiang*, “long river” — the lower part of this river in the vicinity of 揚州 *Yangzhou*, Yang Province (modern capital 揚州市 *Yangzhou shi*, Yangzhou City) was called 揚子江 *Yangzi Jiang*, from which comes the English name of the river, the Yangtze. The gorges are: 瞿塘峽 *Qutan xia*, Qutang Gorge, 巫峽 *Wu xia*, Wu Gorge, and 西陵峽 *Xiling xia*, Xiling Gorge.

⁴ 蛟宮 *jiao gong*, the palace of the 蛟龍 *jiaolong*, the water dragon. Even though the character 蛟 *jiao*, usually means “shark,” here it must be a substitute for 蛟 *jiao*, water dragon. The Palace of the Water Dragon is deep under the sea, so to make a visit there must be a metaphor for “to drown.”

⁵ 水晶鄉 *shuijing xiang*, country or native land of water crystals. The buildings are flooded out and the water freezes in them at night.

⁶ 大禹, *Da Yu*, Yu the Great, was famous for his attempts at flood control. According to the legend, in order to tame the floods, the legendary Yu chopped the trees along the mountains to create a channel; he stayed away from his family for eight years.

Even if Bai Gui rebuilt the irrigation system, he would have the four seas as his neighbours.⁷

The harvest of that year was extremely early; between the twentieth of *liuyue*⁸ and the Beginning of Autumn⁹, it gradually became cooler and windier. In the first ten days of *qiyue*,¹⁰ it became hotter and more unbearable than the hottest days.¹¹ Who would have expected that on the second, of *qiyue* the sky would be cloudless, and the scorching sun in the afternoon would be like a blazing mirror; in the afternoon, however, the dark clouds, arising from the northwest, covered the sun. Gradually, the dark clouds began to well up, and all of a sudden, there was howling wind and torrential rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The torrential rains poured down and did not stop even after four hours¹²; and torrents of water surged violently on the streets as if they were the Yangtze and Yellow rivers.¹³ The water was gushing into the households of the villagers who couldn't find any way to get rid of it. Some remembered the pills

⁷ 白圭 *Bai Gui* was a minister of Wei State during the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE) who is known for his attempts at flood control. However, he was criticized by Mencius: “Po Kuei said, “In dealing with water I am better than Yu.” “You are mistaken, said Mencius, “In dealing with water, Yu followed the natural tendency [道 *dao*] of water. Hence, he emptied the water into the Four Seas. Now you empty the water into the neighbouring states. When the water goes contrary to its course it is described as a ‘deluge’, in other words a ‘flood’, and floods are detested by the benevolent man. You are mistaken, my good sir.” Translation from: *Mencius* trans. D. C. Lau, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), Book VI, Part B, 11, 141. “白圭曰：‘丹之治水也愈於禹’。孟子曰：‘子過矣。禹之治水，水之道也。是故禹以四海為壑，今吾子以鄰國為壑。水逆行，謂之洚水。洚水者，洪水也，仁人之所惡也。吾子過矣’。” 孟子 *Mengzi*, 告子 *Gaozi* 32 = 告子下 *Gaozi II* 11). This seems to be the point of the second half of the line.

⁸ 六月 *liuyue*, the sixth lunar month, roughly equivalent to June.

⁹ 立秋 *liqiu*, the beginning of autumn which occurs on the 7th 8th or 9th of 八月 *bayue*, the eighth lunar month, roughly equivalent to August.

¹⁰ 七月 *qiyue*, the seventh lunar month, roughly equivalent to July.

¹¹ 中伏 *zhongfu*, the second of the 三伏 *sanaifu*, the three “hot periods”: the first is 頭伏 *toufu* or 初伏; *chūfú*, the second 中伏 *zhongfu*, and the third 末伏 *mofu*. These are calculated according to the Chinese solar calendar: *toufu* begins on the first 庚天 *gengtian*, *geng* day, after the summer solstice and lasts for 10 days; *zhōngfú* is either 10 or 20 days; *mofu* begins on the first *geng* day after *liqiu* and lasts for 10 days. Also known as the “Chinese dog days”

¹² Lit. “Two 時辰 *shichen*.” Traditionally, the day was divided into twelve two-hour periods or *shichen*, each named after one of the Twelve Earthly Branches (地支 *dì zhī*).

¹³ 江河 *Jianghe*, the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers.

given by Immortal Xu who instructed that during times of calamity, one should place the pills on the doorsill so one could avoid the worst.; they hurried and searched for the pills. Some followed the instructions; some unfolded the wrappers but found nothing. There were those who were too nervous and lost the paper wrappers and those who took a glib attitude towards it all and forgot the warnings. The storms became more and more severe until midnight of the tenth day of the month; the rain became increasingly tempestuous for a while; the thunder was so loud that it virtually shook the heavens and the lightning was as bright as if it was daytime; after a few claps of thunder, the deluge of water gushed over the flat earth as if it were a landslide, speeding across the land the crest of the water was two *zhang*¹⁴ high. Only those who blocked the flood with Immortal Xu's magical pills on their doorsills were protected as if they were guarded by an iron bastion and sturdy dikes and dams, although the flood in front of their households was several feet¹⁵ higher than elsewhere; as for the other households, they were drowned in the floods just like dumplings¹⁶ floating in a large pot. The hundred thousand household in this village could not withstand this spell of rain, and seven out of ten of them were washed away.

There was a Taoist priest named Su Buxu who resided in the White Crane¹⁷ Tower in Mount Huixian¹⁸; while he was in the tower of the library of Taoist scriptures, he saw innumerable heavenly soldiers in the lightening, who were riding on peculiarly shaped birds and beasts; from the gigantic waves emerged a man gesticulating and shouting out: "According to the heavenly orders and scrolls, flood these people household by household; you must not miss a single one or you will commit a crime!" Soon afterwards, there emerged many heavenly generals in their military attire, who were also riding on dragons and horses, shouting out in unison: "Heavenly army!

¹⁴ 丈 *zhang*, a unit of length equal to approximately 11 feet (3.3 meters).

¹⁵ 尺 *chi*, a unit of measurement. Depending on the part of the country and the usage it varied from 12-14" (31-36 cm).

¹⁶ 扁食 *bianshi*, filled dumplings also known as 餃子 *jiaozzi*. Here 水餃; *shuijiao*, boiled dumplings.;

¹⁷ 白鶴 *baihe*, Siberian crane (*Grus leucogeranus*).

¹⁸ 會仙山 *Huixianshan*, Mount Huixian, Mountain of the Immortals, is to the southwest of 鄒平 Zouping, a county level city under the administration of 濱州 Binzhou City in Shandon Province

Observe carefully! Anywhere there is one of Immortal Xu's dams or a household visited by Immortal Xu, you should protect the place attentively! Do not damage it and violate the order of His Holiness!" The next morning at dawn, there was only a landscape bare and desolate, where were the households and cottages of the old days? There were left only innumerable dead bodies bobbing up and down in motion with the waters.

It was not until the next day that the flood began to gradually recede. Those who hidden in the trees or in the towers during the night all saw the deities in the lightening, and their account of the deities was no different from what the priest Su had reported. For the few survivors, not only their houses remained undamaged, but also their stored grains remained dry, their kitchen utensils were not washed away, and their families remained intact. In retrospect, each survivor possessed certain merits.

On the other hand, as for those who were drowned in the floods, although all were dead, their way of dying varied from one another.

Zhang Shuiyun, the abbot of the Pavilion of Master Lü, was not expecting that Immortal Xu would not return to the monastery, and he was greatly overjoyed. However, after he discovered the poem on the wall, he felt ashamed and repented for a moment. Because that night was abnormally hot, Zhang asked his little apprentice, Chen Hexiang, to carry his rocking chair¹⁹ to area below the eaves of the center of the hall which was at the foot of the pavilion; he stripped off and sprawled spread-eagled in the chair to sleep. In an instant, the thunderstorm broke out; not noticing any movement or sound from his master, the young apprentice went up to him with an umbrella to wake him up. Unexpectedly, the master was immobile, for his limbs, along with his torso, were stuck to the chair as if they were grown from it. Additionally, the Taoist was heavy, and his apprentice was small; how could the boy manage to separate the master from a heavy and rough elm-wood chair? Zhang Shuiyun could do nothing but groan. The rain became heavier and heavier, Chen Hexiang had no idea what to do but to pass the umbrella to Zhang to shelter him from the rain; Chen himself run back to the pavilion

¹⁹ 醉翁椅 *zuiwengyi*, a chair for a drunken gentleman. A Ming-dynasty style of wooden furniture similar to the modern rocking chair.

in the rain. It was raining exceptionally heavily, and the master was undergoing such a peculiar thing; how could Chen Hexiang fall asleep? Afterwards, when it began to flood, Chen Hexiang saw a heavenly soldier in a yellow turban saying: “This Taoist priest is not listed in this book of those who are to die; why was he left here waiting for death?” Another heavenly soldier said: “By the holy decree of Master Lü Chunyang²⁰, he will be added to the victims of this cataclysm, and this divine tally²¹ is the evidence.” The former heavenly soldier in the yellow turban continued: “Since there is the divine tally, we should announce it on the Other List.”²² Chen Hexiang saw that the soldier took the chair together with Zhang and left along with the surging waves and spindrift. Afterwards, when the waters subsided, the dead body of Zhang Shuiyun, still lying intact in his chair, was found hanging from the top of a large poplar tree.²³ The dead body was impossible to get down, and on it were numerous crows and vultures that kept pecking away at it for three or four days until it was blown down by wind while still being glued to the chair. Chen Hexiang had no alternative but dig a large pit and bury the body along with the chair.

Both Yu Jitang and Ni Jikong had their arms around their sisters-in-law; Zhang Baoguo and his aunt, and Wu Suli and his younger sister also clasped each other face-to-face.²⁴ Fortunately, the flood did not emerge suddenly but came with thunderstorms and lightening, and the mountains fell, the earth split, and every one dared not to sleep—therefore all had their clothes on.

Three years ago, Qi Bochang had a dream that he was conversing with his paternal aunt who passed away a long time ago. He saw an ugly and ferocious looking judge of the underworld rush in from outside, saying: “Where did this species of strange and uncivilized man come from?” Qi Bochang’s aunt greeted him and replied: “This is

²⁰ 純陽 *chunyang*, “pure yang,” the Taoist name of 呂洞賓 Lü Dongbin (796 CE-1016 CE), a Tang Dynasty scholar subsequently deified. See chapter 24, footnote 41

²¹ 符 *fu*, a tally. in pre-modern China used as proof of authorization.

²² 另冊 *lingce*. During the Qing dynasty an official register of outlaws.

²³ 白楊 *baiyang*, poplar.

²⁴ These are all characters in the *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*.

my nephew.” The judge said: “You should have informed me beforehand — now that my original shape is revealed, how could this happen?” He then hid himself at a room, and after about the time it would take to eat a meal, he came out as an extremely handsome young man, wearing a black-gauze cap, a bright indigo-colored muslin robe, and vermilion-colored shoes and damask socks. Qi’s aunt said: “This is my husband; you may pay your respects to him.” The handsome young man said: “I did not expect that my virtuous nephew would condescend himself to visit me, and I have offended you with my hideous image, which means my virtuous nephew will have one hundred days of calamity as a consequence. I shall protect my virtuous nephew so that he will not be harmed.” He ordered his servants to prepare some beverage to entertain Qi. While the judging was offering tea to the guest, an official looking man reported: “The judge of the west department invites you for a meeting.” The handsome youngster excused himself and said: “My virtuous nephew, please remain here with your aunt for a moment; I will be back immediately.”

Qi Bochang therefore took the opportunity to stroll around and entered a library. The library had numerous bright and clean windows, and there were *qin*,²⁵ books, and antiques; on one side was a shelf with large number of registers on it. Qi Bochang drew one to read, and discovered that it was a register of the names of people and when they would die. Turning to the second page, he found three clear-written characters which read “Qi Bochang”, and the annotations below stated: “By the systems officer, third grade, Lu: He will die at seventy-eight. He will have one wife and three sons.” When Qi Bochang read this, he couldn’t restrain his joy; he then read two life events referring to him with the annotations stating: “On a certain day of a certain year, he used papers with characters on it to make firecrackers which were blown by the wind into the toilet, therefore his rank was reduced by two levels.”²⁶ On a certain day of a certain year, he made false accusation of someone having an affair, and his rank was reduced by another three levels. On a certain day of a certain year, he mis-taught his students as a teacher,

²⁵ 琴 *qin*, or 古琴 *guqin*, a seven-stringed plucked musical instrument.

²⁶ Chinese characters were considered sacred and were to be venerated. Throwing papers with characters on it into a toilet was therefore blasphemous.

and his rank was reduced by three levels. On a certain day of a certain year, he became the adopted son of his uncle, and after the death of his uncle, he usurped his adoptive father's property and returned to his own parents, therefore his entire career as a government official was eradicated. On a day of a certain year, he committed adultery with his older sister, causing his older sister's family to be dispersed and die, therefore sixty years²⁷ were deducted from his life-span; at midnight on the tenth of *qiyue*, in the year of *xinhai*,²⁸ he will die in the water along with his sister." It was the *qiyue* of the year *jiyou*,²⁹ and he counted that there were three years³⁰ until the *qiyue* of the year of *xinhai*. Concealing his adultery with his sister, Qi Bochang pleaded to his aunt, saying: "I just went to the library of my uncle's and found a book with your nephew's name registered on it saying that I am destined to die in the water at midnight of *qiyue* the tenth of the year of *xinhai*. My respected aunt, how it is reasonable that my uncle is in charge of the book of life and death, yet he cannot do anything to save his nephew?" And he begged her piteously. His aunt said: "Wait until when your uncle has had something to drink, and I shall intercede for you."

After a while, the handsome young man returned; he invited Qi Bochang to be seated and offered him drinks. After several toasts, Qi Bochang's morale was very low knowing that his death was quickly approaching, and he looked depressed. The youth then said: "Just a short while ago my nephew was joyful and full of laughter, how come that you have now become this depressed? I am afraid that you entered my library and discovered something?" His aunt said: "Indeed, your nephew just entered your library and found his name on that register, which states that he will die in water at midnight on *qiyue* the tenth in the year of *xinhai*. Therefore, he feels very depressed. He would

²⁷ 紀 *ji* refers to twelve years. It refers to the period when the planet of Jupiter returns to its original position after circling around the earth. The period takes approximately 12 years. Hence, 五紀 means five years.

²⁸ 辛亥 *xinhai*. The forty-eighth year of the sixty-year cycle which is the basis of classical Chinese calendrical reckoning. Here the Western equivalent would be 1396.

²⁹ 己酉 *jiyou*, the 46th year of a traditional Chinese sexagenary cycle.

³⁰ The author must be counting the *qiyue* of *jiyou* as the first year. That leaves the *qiyue* of the 庚戌 *geng xu* (47th year) and the *qiyue* of *xinhai* = three years.

like to beg you to save him.” The young man said: “That library is my secret room, by accident my virtuous nephew visited me and I forgot to lock the door; how could he pry into it by himself? Gong Cao³¹ registered his name in the divine decree, and then informed Ksitigarbha³² before passing it on to the Lord of the Big Dipper and Lord of the Little Dipper.³³ It was only then that the decree was put into effect. How could this be changed?” Qi Bochang prostrated himself and begged even more piteously. His aunt then said: “You are in charge of all the registers of life and death in the entire world. How come that you cannot care for your own relative? What kind of relatives do you want? You don’t care to take the time to see your family members, but how can I have the audacity to meet with my family again?” The young man said: “Do not be anxious — let me check to see how much of his provisions is still remaining, and then I shall arrange it.” Then the youth returned and said: “Luckily there is a solution. Your official career has already been terminated so we shall not discuss it. You have seven hundred frogs³⁴ still to be eaten, and if you could quit eating frogs, you might be able to preserve your provisions and prolong your life-span.”

As a matter of fact, Qi Bochang ardently loved eating frogs: he couldn’t care less if he was banned from eating meat for many days, but when the frogs were available, he would go to great lengths to borrow money and go and buy a Satyagraha *catty* or half a *catty*³⁵ and he would either fry or stir-fry the frogs and eat them along with half a bottle of *shaojiu*³⁶ — such was his dietary habit.

³¹ 功曹 *gong cao*, one of twenty-four officials who record the good and bad deeds of each individual.

³² 地藏菩薩 *Dizangpusa*, the Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, a Buddhist Bodhisattva who, in folk religion, is in charge of Hades.

³³ 南北斗星君 *nanbei douxing jou*, Lords of the north and south dippers. According to Daoism, both Lords are in charge of determining the life-span of human beings. 斗 *dou*, the southern dipper (= Sagittarius), is the 8th astrological house in 玄武 *Xuanwu*, Black tortoise, the winter sky, one of the 四象 *si xiang* four symbols; 星 *xing*, is the 25th astrological house in 朱雀 *Zhuque*, Vermillion bird, the summer sky, another of the four symbols.

³⁴ 田雞 *tianji*, the east Asian bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus rugulosus*) considered a delicacy in the region.

³⁵ 斤 *jin*, catty, a unit of weight approximately 1½ pounds or 500 gr.

³⁶ 燒酒 *shaojiu*. A clear distilled liquor usually made from sorghum. It is 100-120 proof (50-60% alcohol); hence is called “fiery liquor.”

Then Qi woke up from the dream remembering every single detail. Therefore, he quit eating frogs; even when frogs were served at local banquets or sold on the street and he was starving, he would swallow his saliva and dared not to taste them — the only thing on his mind was his written time of death, midnight of the tenth of *qiyue* in the year of *xinhai*. After one year, he was invited to a friend's banquet on a certain day, there where scrumptiously fried frogs were served; although the aroma of the fried frogs assailed his nostrils, he was determined not to take a single bite, however, the detestable “gluttonous worms” inside his stomach were persuading him to break his rule. He could no longer resist the persuasion of those “gluttonous worms” and followed their command. From that day on, there was not a single day that he did not consume frogs, since he wanted to compensate himself for not having eaten any for a whole year. He comforted himself and thought: “Dreams are not trustworthy. Additionally, my aunt died very young and my uncle is still alive, how is Satyagraha possible if she remarried in Hades?” Although he tried to comfort himself, he did not dare to forget that the time of his death was set for the year of *xinhai*.

Time flew by quickly, and *liuyue* of the year of *xinhai* arrived. Qi Bochang's days were becoming more and more painful — a quarter of an hour seemed like a long summer for him. When the eighth of *qiyue* arrived, he felt more apprehensive than ever, and he murmured to himself: “Since I am destined to die in water, it is most important I should not cross a bridge; I should also avoid walking near lakesides, creek-sides, riverbanks, and the edges of wells during these days. Alternatively, I could move to the library of Qin Boyou's at the Purple Sun Temple on Mount Huixian and have him keep me company for a few days to let this date go by. Even if the flood were to submerge the mountain, the mountain top would still be dry. Surely a flood, no matter how big it is, will never submerge a mountain top.” On the eighth of *qiyue*, after finishing his breakfast, he took a small palanquin and arrived at Qin Boyou's library on the mountain. Qin Boyou laughed and said: “You must have come here to escape from the flood. Please stay and we shall see if there would be a flood great enough to submerge the mountain top.” Therefore, Qi Bochang stayed the night at Qin Boyou's residence.

The next morning, a page from Qin Boyou's family reported: "The tutor of the school has been ordered by the county government to compose general records of the county and he is waiting for you to discuss this; currently his servant is waiting for you at home." Qin Boyou told Qi Bochang: "You have arrived here just in time; please take care of the library for me. The Taoist priest of this temple has left to visit his younger sister; all the basic necessities are here; there is sufficient rice, noodles, and firewood for you for several days." Qin Boyou bid him farewell and walked slowly down the mountain; he prepared a conveyance to travel to the city where the school was, together with the servant. Qi Bochang was living at the temple quite enjoying himself. On the ninth day, around the time of lighting the oil lamps,³⁷ the downpour was no different than it was at the foot of the mountain. Who would have expected that the flood would precisely originate from the mountain top? When midnight of the tenth day came, the rainfall above the Purple Sun Temple poured down as if it was the Milky Way was coming down from heaven; it carried away people along with their houses who floating on the stream like tree leaves. When would this end? When the others were carried away, they floated on the water over the flat earth; however, Qi Bochang was carried away from the top of the mountain along with rocks. Not only was he drowned, but his flesh and bones were crushed in pieces by the rocks; he then came to rest on the branch of a date tree. On the same day, Qin Boyou lodged in the city and was not affected at all.

Let's talk about Chen Hua. On the ninth, he traveled to the city to celebrate his father-in-law's birthday, and his wife went off with him. On that day, because the guests at the father-in-law's family were not punctual, they were seated at the meal quite late. As soon as Chen Hua had emptied fewer than three cups of liquor, he asked to be excused from the banquet; his father-in-law and brother-in-law requested him to stay over and over again but without any success—Chen was determined to leave. He went inside to bid goodbye to his mother-in-law who tried repeatedly to persuade him to stay and his wife also said: "Since there are no other matters at home, and it's getting late

³⁷ The time after sunset.

and the afternoon sun is particularly hot; moreover, you have hardly had any food to eat. Why don't you stay here overnight and return home with me tomorrow—isn't that the more convenient?" Who knew that Chen Hua had in mind to take advantage of his wife's being away from home to return home in order to coerce his father's concubine to engage in a skirmish in the battle of love? This was the reason that it was important for him to return home. Chen Hua was more than ten *li* away from his home and it was getting late, therefore, he whipped his mount to make it gallop back home at lightning speed. Despite the heavy downpour he encountered when he was five or six *li* away from home, he hurried back. Thanks to his great valor, he did not declare the armistice until the two of them had finished "beating the drums and gongs in the battlefield" and "valiantly engaging in combat on the battlefield valiantly," despite the torrential rain and heavy thunder. The Dragon King of the Sea³⁸ was very concerned that the two of them would start another battle, therefore, he invited both of them to the Crystal Palace³⁹ to participate in a banquet full of strange stew and liquor so that he could make peace between the two. Because life in the Crystal Palace was merry and carefree, the two decided to reside there forever and never return home.⁴⁰

Now let's talk about Di Yuanwai. When Immortal Xu arrived at Mingshui town on the fifth of *wuyue*,⁴¹ he first begged for alms at Di's house. It happened that Di Yuanwai walked out from inside and he asked: "Master, where are you from? I have never seen you here." Immortal Xu replied: "This poor Taoist monk practices austerities at the Temple of the Iron Tree⁴² which is under the patronage of the Immortal Xu in Nanchang city, of Jiangxi Province.⁴³ I have heard about the superiority of the natural

³⁸ 海龍王 *hai longwang*, the Dragon King of the Sea, a mythical being that controls the seas, rivers and the weather. He is known to have an irascible temperament.

³⁹ 水晶宮 *Shuijingong*, the Crystal Palace, the mythical residence of the Longwang which is located at the bottom of the sea.

⁴⁰ This means that Chen Hua and his lover were drowned in the water and died.

⁴¹ 五月 *wuyue*, the fifth lunar month, roughly equivalent to May.

⁴² 鑊樹宮 *tieshugong*, The Temple of the Iron Tree.

⁴³ 南昌 南昌 *Nanchang*, a prefecture level city and capital of 江西省 *Jiangxisheng*, Jiangxi province. Jiangxi is one of the cradles of the Daoism religion in China.

beauty of the White Cloud Lake⁴⁴ Mount at Huixian Mountain⁴⁵ in your honorable place, therefore, I wandered over here. Now I ask respectfully for a vegetarian meal from you.” Di Yuanwai hurriedly ordered the servants to prepare a vegetarian meal to welcome him and asked: “Master, are you in a hurry to leave, or do you plan to stay here for a long time?” Immortal Xu replied: “The weather is very hot; therefore, I plan to spend the summer here.” Di Yuanwai asked again: “Where is your residence?” Immortal Xu replied: “Now I temporarily lodged at the Temple of the Immortal Lü.” Di Yuanwai said: “The abbot of the Temple of Immortal Lü, Priest Zhang, is an unbearable man; I am afraid that he will not treat you with great consideration and you will not be able to live there for very long. Since you are a master who is well-traveled, you must be acquainted with some spells and magic, right?” Immortal Xu said: “I have never learned any magic but merely begged for vegetarian food to appease my hunger; or I sell some fake medicines without consulting the prescriptions to sustain my poor existence.” Di Yuanwai laughed and said: “Master, if you say your medicine is fake, it is bound to be marvellous; on the contrary, those who boast about their elixir pills, their pills turn out to be fake.”

While they were conversing, Di Zhou walked outside and asked: “The vegetarian meal is already; where would you like to eat?” Di Yuanwai said: “Let us arrange a place for our guest inside.” Immortal Xu said: “It is more convenient for me to remain here outside. Uncivilized people should not go inside to be greeted.” Di Yuanwai said: “The street is not a place for treating guests. This wandering monk is our honorable guest and he cannot be shabbily treated. Although we cannot provide a decent vegetarian meal at short notice for you, master, please enter and be seated at the guests’ seat.” Immortal Xu entered along with Di Yuanwai and was seated. The vegetarian meal was served. It consisted of: four plates of appetizers, one bowl of pan-fried tofu, one bowl of cucumber and gluten salad, one bowl of cooked cabbage,⁴⁶ one bowl of shredded cucumber with seasonings, one plate of thin pancakes, millet and

⁴⁴ 白雲湖 *Baiyun hu*, White Cloud Lake, about 35 miles east of Jinan in Shandong province.

⁴⁵ 會仙山 *Huixianshan*, Mount Huixian in Shandon Province

⁴⁶ 白菜 *baicai*, bok choy, Chinese cabbage,

mung bean cooked in water, *congee*, and a pair of chopsticks. Di Yuanwai said: "Fetch me another pair of chopsticks; I am accompanying the master to eat."

Di Zhou mumbled behind their back: "I have never seen such a person like my master who would invite anyone for meal and accompany them to eat! Nowadays this year's harvest is not like it was in the past: countless bandits, disguise themselves as Buddhist or Taoist monks; they first deceive the master of the house and then seize and rob him!" Immortal Xu said: "It was gracious of Yuanwai to grant alms to a monk; this poor Taoist monk would like to move outside to consume the meal. Yuanwai, please take care; there is no need for us to keep each other company. Your chamberlain is afraid that some bandit would disguise himself as a monk and rob the owner of the house—which is quite reasonable." Di Yuanwai replied: "Don't pay any attention to him! Master, please be seated." He murmured to himself: "I did not leave him for a single moment, where was Di Zhou and what did he say?"

Di Zhou came over to add more rice. Di Yuanwai said: "Where were you? What did you say about the master? The master was not unhappy about you." Di Zhou said: "I never said anything about the master." Immortal Xu smiled and said: "If you say anything more, I will send another wasp to sting the left corner of your mouth." Di Zhou smiled and said: "So it was master's magic trick! My master said that he would accompany you for meal, and I mumbled to myself: 'my master carelessly invites anyone to our household and accompanies them for meals! Nowadays this year's harvest is not like it was in the past: countless bandits, disguise themselves as Buddhist or Taoist monks; they first deceive the master of the house and then seize and rob him!' — and while I was mumbling, a small wasp stung the right corner of my mouth and flew away." Di Yuanwai said: "Where did you say these things?" Di Zhou said: "I said those at the kitchen door." Di Yuanwai said: "The kitchen is almost an arrow shot away from here; I did not notice anything, but the master knew everything. Isn't this extraordinary? If the wasp indeed did sting the corner of his mouth, why his mouth is not red or swollen?" Immortal Xu said: "It was just to teach him a mild lesson symbolically; how could there be redness or swellings? Di Zhou, come over here, I will remove the mild numbness and itchiness from you as well." He wiped right hand corner

of Di Zhou's mouth corner with his hand, and indeed the numbness and itchiness disappeared. Di Zhou then walked to the backyard and praised Immortal Xu to Madame Di endlessly, saying: "He must be an immortal!"⁴⁷

Di Yuanwai's wife had been sitting on cold ground ever since she had given birth to her daughter, Qiao Jie, so that her abdomen had caught a chill and she suffered from an obstinate case of leucorrhoea. In the past years she had not been able to bring a foetus to term, nor could she wear a pair of trousers for more than two or three days—the lining of her trousers became so daubed with vaginal discharges that it became stiff as if it was smeared with paste; moreover, during the summer months it stank with a terrible fishy smell. She said to herself in her mind: "Such an extraordinary person must have some magical medicine from the fairyland in the sea." However, it was appropriate for Madame Di to tell this to Di Zhou.

After Immortal Xu had finished his meal, he grabbed some dirt from the ground, spat into it and formed it into three little pills the size of a mung bean, and wrapped them with a piece of paper that was taken out from his sleeve. Before leaving, he thanked Di Yuanwan for the vegetarian meal, and passed the pills to him, saying: "Your principal helpmate is planning to ask you for some medicine, but she has not told you yet; she should take these pills along with yellow rice wine⁴⁸ and she will be healed." Di Yuanwai accepted them and thanked him, saying: "Whenever master wants to have a vegetarian meal, please just condescend to come over. That Taoist monk Zhang Shuiyun is not dependable, and few of the residents in this neighbourhood are willing to provide vegetarian meals." He sent Immortal Xu out through the gate of the house.

Di Yuanwai went to the backyard of the house and told his wife: "You were planning to ask for some medicine but had not say so. The Daoist monk left some medicine for you and asked you to take it with yellow rice wine—but for what illness are you asking for medicine?" His wife said: "Do I have a second illness? This is the intention I just had in my mind, but how come he knew about it?" She opened the wrap

⁴⁷ 神仙 *shenxian*, a Daoist immortal or supernatural being.

⁴⁸ 黄酒 *huangjie*, "yellow wine," mulled rice wine.

and found the pills as big as mung beans that were covered with gold foil and the aroma was sharp and extraordinary. Di Yuanwai said: “This is weird! I saw with my own eyes that he grabbed some dirt from the earth, spat into it, and formed it into three little balls; how come they have turned into gold-foiled covered pills like these?” Madame Di warmed some liquor and swallowed the medicine; she then felt heat within her abdomen and urinated a great deal of white sticky liquid, and since then, the root cause of the disease was removed. From then on, Immortal Xu visited the Di household very frequently, and Di Yuanwai also invited him very often for a vegetarian meal; everyone in the household never again called him a Daoist monk behind his back but a Daoist immortal.

One day, the green soya beans⁴⁹ that were inter-cropped with the cotton plants⁵⁰ were about to ripen and Di Yuanwai ordered Di Zhou to cut the ripened beans with shears. Di Zhou took some servants and cut off all the beans regardless of whether they were ripened or not. Di Yuanwai said: “Half of the beans you have cut off are unripe and empty; they are useless.” Di Zhou argued: “You only ordered me to cut off the beans but you never said: ‘cut off the ripened beans and leave the unripe ones intact’; it was because your instructions were unclear, but now you are complaining as if it was my fault!” Di Yuanwai said: “How come that this is necessary? Don’t you have eyes yourself?” Although Di Zhou kept quiet, he was rebuking Di Yuanwai in his mind: “What’s the big deal for which he keeps annoying me ceaselessly!” While he was cursing and mumbling in his mind, he walked outside; without being aware of anything, he felt himself stung on his chest stung by something. Although it was not very painful, the bite still hurt; so, he took off his cotton shirt to discover a scorpion the size of a little fingertip. He shook it off on to the ground and when he was about to stamp on it, it entered into a crack in the wall. Di Zhou mumbled: “What bad luck! first I get lectured for a few beans, and if that does not seem that I am being unlucky enough, then I get bitten by a scorpion! Too bad that I did not kill it and let it creep inside the wall!”

⁴⁹ 青豆 *qingdou*, green soya bean.

⁵⁰ 棉花 *mianhua*, cotton.

The next day, Di Yuanwai ordered Di Zhou to invite Immortal Xu for a vegetarian meal. Upon seeing Di Zhou, Immortal Xu smiled and said: “Does the bite from the scorpion yesterday still hurt?” Di Zhou then realized that the scorpion yesterday had been sent by the immortal and replied without a second’s hesitation: “The bite was unbearable!” Immortal Xu smiled and said: “When you have a master who is as considerate to his servants as Master Di — do not have any bad intentions towards him in your mind nor curse him in the future.” He then took out two scorpions from out of his sleeve: one was around three inches long and the other was as small as the tip of the little finger. Immortal Xu smiled and said: “Little scorpions like this does not hurt much; however, when this big one bites, it can cause fatalities.” While he was talking, he put the two scorpions back inside his sleeve; he and Di Zhou chattered away and laughed, and arrived at Di’s house.

While Di Yuanwai in the company of Immortal Xu eating a vegetarian meal, Instructor Xue walked to the guest room and greeted both Immortal Xu and Di Yuanwai, who invited him to be seated and eat the meal together with them. While he was eating his meal, Instructor Xue said to himself in his mind: “This Daoist monk is always visiting the Di family; why he never visits mine? Tomorrow I shall also prepare a vegetarian meal and invite him home.” As he was about to open his mouth, he spoke to himself: “Don’t be so reckless; let me think of what I have at home.” Suddenly, he thought: “There isn’t any husked rice,⁵¹ and millet is not appropriate with which to entertain guests; I should return home early to ask the servants to buy several *shengs*⁵² of husked rice.” After finishing his vegetarian meal, he was ready to stand up to bid farewell and he asked: “Master, if you are available tomorrow morning, please come over to my humble home for a vegetarian meal.” The Immortal said: “This poor priest shall receive your almsgiving tomorrow morning, however, my benefactor, please do not buy any rice⁵³ whatsoever—this poor priest won’t eat it, and my benefactor would ruin a pair of shoes—how unfortunate.” Instructor Xue laughed and said: “Master, you

⁵¹ 大米 *dami*, husked or white rice as opposed to 糙米 *caomi*, “brown” or unpolished rice.

⁵² 升 *sheng*, a unit of measure equal to 1 liter or 1.82 US dry pints.

⁵³ 稻米 *daomi*, rice (as a generic term for the crop).

must be a Daoist immortal! Indeed, there isn't any rice left at my home; I was just about to return home and buy rice as an offering to you." Xue walked back home and was about to ask Xue Sanhuai to buy some rice while Xue himself supervised the store, for unexpectedly, there were crowds of people purchasing fabric at his place. It was gradually getting dark and he had no alternative but to bring a ten cashes himself and have Dongge carry a market basket; they went to the rice store and purchased five *sheng* of rice. As they were walking towards the door of certain residence, a woman, carrying an iron shovel filled with her child's feces to throw them out, accidentally scattered the feces over Instructor Xue's shoes. The next morning, the immortal, together with Di Yuanwai, visited Instructor Xue's house; when they saw Xue, the Immortal smiled and said: "My benefactor did not believe in my words and ruined one shoe for certain. If you will wash it with the water which was used to rinse the rice, the stain should become virtually unnoticeable." Later, Xue had his shoe washed with rice-rinsing water, and sure enough, not a single trace was left. Afterwards, the immortal also visited Xue's household frequently.

One day, the Immortal visited Instructor Xue and asked for donations of two bolts of indigo fabric to make some Daoist robes. Instructor Xue said: "In such summer heat, how can you wear such cotton fabric? Please wait for two days until the new stock arrives, and I will give master two bolts of indigo linen fabric for making his Daoist robes which is cooler and more breathable. The Immortal said: "Although linen fabric is cooler, it becomes useless when the weather turns cold; although the cotton fabric feels hot at the moment, it will still be useful when it gets cold." Instructor Xue said: "When the weather gets cold, I will give master cotton fabric; this is not difficult."

After a few days, the summer linen fabric arrived as expected. Instructor Xue selected two bolts of top-quality handmade fabric, send them to the dye house to be dyed an indigo color, and had the tailor make up two Taoist robes with the fabric; he then sent them to the Immortal. Next day, the Immortal came over to give thanks, and Xue invited him for a meal. A few days later, the Immortal again asked Instructor Xue

for donations of one cotton shirt and one pair of one-layered trousers⁵⁴ which Instructor Xue gave to him as he requested. On the ninth *qiyue*, the Immortal again visited Xue, saying that he was about to return to his monastery and had come over to bid farewell; he also wanted to asked a donation of three *liangs* of silver for his traveling expense. Without any hesitation, Instructor Xue invited him for a vegetarian meal, wrapped three *liang* of silver to give him, and gave him one pair of cattail shoes and five hundred of copper coins in addition. Xue said: “I still haven’t yet given master the two bolts of indigo cotton fabric I promised.” After finishing his vegetarian meal, Immortal Xue did not move but looked at Instructor Xue for a good while and sighed instead. Immortal Xue said: “This poor priest has received a great deal of alms from his benefactor, and now it’s time for me to bid farewell. This poor priest has a little knowledge of physiognomy, please ask all your family members over and the poor priest will give a superficial evaluation of their fortunes.” Xue asked his two spouses and four children to come over as instructed. The Immortal observed everyone and nodded his head; he asked for a piece of yellow paper,⁵⁵ he cut it into little squares, wrote on them a few stokes with the brush, and asked everyone except Sujie to wear one on their heads. Instructor Xue said: “My little daughter would like to have a talisman⁵⁶ too.” The Immortal said: “Only your daughter does not need to wear one.” He packed the silver and gifts and bid farewell. He went to Di Yuanwai’s house and also bid farewell; additionally, he said: “My benefactor, Mr. Xue, is an extremely kind-hearted person, unfortunately, his entire family, except for his daughter, will suffer in the immediate future.”

Di Yuanwai invited the Immortal for a vegetarian meal and also gave him five *liang* of silver, shoes and socks, cloth by the yard, and so on. The Immortal said: “I am a lone person who lives with in mountains and clouds; those things are unless for me because they cause my luggage to be a burden.” After bidding farewell to the Immortal, Di Yuanwai walked to Instructor Xue’s house and conversed to him; Instructor Xue

⁵⁴ 單褲 *danku*, unlined trousers worn in summer.

⁵⁵ Yellow-colored paper is commonly used to make a 符 *fu*. talisman in Taoist craft.

⁵⁶ 符 *fu*, talisman.

also told him about the *fu* talismans and the fortune telling. Di Yuanwai then returned home and Instructor Xue started tidying up his chests—he saw the summer linen fabric, one bolt of the white cotton fabric that he gave the Immortal for his Taoist robes, one bolt of indigo-colored cotton fabric for the single-layered trousers, one pair of cattail shoes, the three *liang* of silver, and five hundred copper coins—all of which remain intact inside the chest. Additionally, there was a letter saying:

Fear not, fear not,
The Heavenly soldiers are your guardians;
When calamity arrives,
The whole family climb up the trees!

After experiencing those miracles, Instructor Xue was convinced that the Taoist priest was indeed an immortal. Although the immortal had predicted a calamity, which would occur in the immediate future, he could not guess what kind of catastrophe it might be. After Instructor Xue had finished tidying up his chests, he went to the Di's house and told Di Yuanwai about the fabric and the letter. Di Yuanwai said: "The mysteries of Heaven cannot be revealed. Since the letter says that the heavenly guardians will protect us and it also instructs the whole family to climb up the trees, I think we will be saved from this calamity." Then he bid farewell to Instructor Xue and returned home.

Afterwards, when it started to rain, Di Yuanwei's house was pelted with rain, but it was protected from the flood which originated from the mountain top—not a single drop seeped into his house. Seeing that the rain was torrential, Instructor Xue knew that there would be flooding, therefore, he had everyone tightened their clothes and found a ladder so that as soon as the flood arrived, the entire family would climb

up the large locust tree⁵⁷ at their yard. Sure enough, at midnight,⁵⁸ there was a large crowd outside crying: “It’s flooding!” Instructor Xue climbed up the tree; dimly, he was aware as if someone from down below was carrying him up to the tree. In the tree, he saw many heavenly generals, all of whom were saying: “This is the household of Xue Zhen, and his entire family are destined to die except his daughter Sujie. Have they been chased down?” Under the tree, many other heavenly generals said: “Following the holy decree of the Immortal Xu Jingyang, the entire family has been amnestied, and we are ordered to protect them.” The heavenly generals up in the tree said: “Where’s your proof?” The heavenly generals under the tree said: “Here is the holy ordinance written by the Immortal himself; do not disobey it!” Then the heavenly generals above the trees dispersed elsewhere.

Di Xichen often visited the household of his maternal aunt and would stay for days instead of returning home because he was very mischievous; on the day of the flood, he happened to be there. When it began to flood, he along with his maternal aunt’s family ended up in the water. Di Xichen grabbed the ring of a trunk and was swept away by the water. He saw a general wearing a yellow turban and riding on a fish shouting: “Do not drown the government archivist of Chengdu city!”⁵⁹ Go and find him immediately!” Another heavenly general wearing golden hat and riding on a dragon replied: “I have no idea where he is; where can we find him? It seems that he is not a man of glorious fortune, and if he dies, his name will not be investigated.” The one with the yellow turban said: “This is not allowed! The other year, in Shashi city⁶⁰ in Huguang

⁵⁷ 槐樹 *huaishui*. locust tree (*Sophora japonica*).

⁵⁸ 子時 *zishi*. The *shi* were the twelve two-hour time periods which made up the traditional Chinese day. They were classified according to the twelve earthly branches, During the 宋朝 *Songchao*, the Song Dynasty, 960–1279, *Zishi*, the first branch *shi* was determined to be 00:00-2:00.

⁵⁹ 成都市 *Chengdushi*, Chengdu City, a sub-provincial city, the capital of 四川省 *Sichuansheng*, Sichuan Province in south western province.

⁶⁰ 沙市 *Shashi*, Shashi, a district of 荊州市 *Jingzhoushi*, Jingzhou city in central southern Hubei 湖北省 *Hubaisheng*, Hubei Province.

Province.⁶¹ the head of the post station on the Ba River⁶² was burnt to death. As a result, the Lord of the Fire-Star⁶³ was fined and two of us guardian deities are still in heavenly prison and not yet been released.” It happened that Di Xichen, holding onto the ring on the trunk, was drifting towards them, and another heavenly spirit said: “Here he is! Here he is! Isn’t that him? Send him to his home!”

Di Xichen still held on to the ring of the chest and drifted into a tree where he and the trunk became entangled in the branches and stuck there. At sunrise, Di Zhou was looking out from the top of the house and he saw that the water outside was several *chi* higher than the eaves of eaves; then he saw that a box was stuck in the top branches of the tree in front of the door and that a child was holding on tightly to a ring of the box. Taking a closer look at him, he realized that the child was Di Xichen. Di Zhou shouted out: “Here is Chenguan!⁶⁴ He is hanging on the tree in front of the door!” Di Yuanwai also went upstairs to have a look, and the boy was indeed Di Xichen. However, Di Yuanwai couldn’t think of a way to rescue him. Di Yuanwai shouted out to Di Xichen and told him to hold tight onto the box and to never let go his hand. In the afternoon, the water subsided, and Di Xichen was rescued; he then told them how he was protected by gods and spirits.

It is thus obvious that the life and death of human beings are predetermined. Even a government archivist in Chengdu city is guided by gods and spirits. As for Instructor Xue, his residence and household utensils, and the fabric in his stores, were all washed away by the flood. He then realized that the divine general had said: “The entire family of Xue Zhen are destined die by drowning; have they been chased into the water?” The other divine soldiers replied: “Following the holy decree of the Immortal Xu Jingyang, the entire family has been amnestied.” They also said that the holy decree

⁶¹湖廣 *Huguang*, a historical prefecture which includes nowadays Hubei and Hunan Provinces.

⁶²巴水 *Bashui*, the Ba River in Hubei province which enters the Yangtze at 岡市 *Huanggangshi*, Huanggang city, a prefectural city in easternmost Hubei Province.

⁶³火德星君 *Huode xingjun*, Lit. “the Lord of the fire star [Mars],” the god of Mars and fire venerated in Taoism. Sometimes translated as “Mars,” but not really equivalent to the Graeco-Roman deity.

⁶⁴陳官 *Chenguan*. 官 *guan*, a government official was commonly used as an endearment for little boys in premodern China. Chenguan is the nickname of Di Xichen.

was handwritten by the Immortal himself. He realized that the Daoist priest was actually the Immortal Xue in disguise. If Instructor Xue had treated him as any other ordinary wandering Taoist monk, and humiliated him with shouting and negligence, then for certain the Immortal would never have made every effort to rescue him. Therefore, the perfect man should “has to do with many people or few, or with things great or small, he does not dare to indicate any disrespect.”⁶⁵ In conclusion:

An ordinary person cannot be judged from their appearance,

And even in the dusty realm of mortals, there are great ones.

⁶⁵ *The Analects*, chapter 20. Translated by James Legge. “君子無眾寡，無小大，無敢慢。” 論語 *Lunyu*, *The Analects*, 堯曰 *Yao yue*, 3 (part).

Chapter 30: Ji begs her mother-in-law for salvation; Baoguang encounters a ghoulish ghoul that seeks revenge

It is not difficult for a man to commit a suicide, why should he achieve it through typhoid fever? He could kill himself by pursuing carnal pleasures day and night,

Indulging himself in buckets of wine, and missing regular meals, in addition to his rage, his excessive calculations, his ceasing to sleep peacefully at night.

His diseased bones are hard to heal, and which one of the dead has ever been revived? He will forever be on his sickbed, dreaming of the Yellow Springs.¹

A man's life span is limited, and so are his means of prolonging it. Not to mention, he still rides an inferior horse, consumes poison, and swings from a beam.

To the Tune: "You Move in Fragrances."²

Twelve years have now slipped by unnoticed since Ji, the wife of Zhao Yuan, had committed suicide by hanging herself.³ It turns out that those who died peacefully will be reincarnated immediately; however, for those who have committed suicide by drowning in a river, leaping into a well, taking poison, or hanging themselves, there are different destinies for them depending on the circumstances.

If he was a loyal and faithful subject who was trapped inside the ramparts by bandits or traitors without the expectation of any rescue, and the city was about to be stormed; or one who was already captured and being forced to surrender by the bandits but refusing to do so, seizes the opportunity to jump in the river or into a well, or hang himself or to cut his own throat with a sword — such men would not only be reincarnated, but they would be reincarnated as gods or deities.

¹ 黄泉 *Huang Quan*, The Yellow Springs, the realm of the dead, the Chinese equivalent of Hades.

² 行香子 *xingxiangzi*, A popular tune associated with Ci poetry.

³ In the first twenty chapters, 計氏 *Jishi*, Ji, the wife of 晁源 *Chao Yuan* who is the former incarnation of Di Xichen, had committed suicide because she was being framed by the concubine of Chao Yuan.

For example, wasn't Wu Zixu wrapped in cow hide and drowned in a river?⁴ Qu Yuan also drowned himself in the river⁵ — one was incarnated as a River God⁶ and the other a River Spirit.⁷ Weren't Yu Zhongsu⁸ and Yue Pengju⁹ both beheaded? One has been appointed as a tutelary god of cities¹⁰ and the other has been reincarnated as a Bodhisattva¹¹ in the Buddhist monasteries.¹² And what about Wen Wenshan¹³, who was offered the position of Prime Minister during the Yuan Dynasty,¹⁴ but remained loyal to the Song and refused to surrender? He confined himself in an attic and never walked downstairs for meals or to use the toilet; his only desire was to be killed. The Yuan officials had had no alternative but to carry out his wishes and they finally were able to

⁴ 伍子胥 Wu Zixu (6th century BC-484BC), was a general and politician of the Wu state which was located in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, well-known for his resourcefulness and heroic acts. He was forced to commit suicide by the King of the Wu state, and his dead body was wrapped with cow hide and thrown into the 錢塘 Qiantang river. According to Chinese mythology, he was venerated as the god of the river tides in the 浙江 Zhejiang area.

⁵ 屈原 Qu Yuan (c. 340-278 BC) was a patriotic poet and politician of the Chu state which was located in modern 湖北 Hubei and 湖南 Hunan provinces. He drowned himself in 汨羅江 Miluo jiang, Miluo River after Qin's conquest of the Chu State. He was also venerated as the god of the river by the local people.

⁶ 江神 *jiangshen* River God or River Spirit.

⁷ 河伯 *hebo*, a River God or River Spirit associated with the Hwanghe.

⁸ 于忠肅 Yu Zhongsu, the posthumous title of 于謙 Yu Qian (1398-1457), a general and politician famous for his battles against the Mongolian armies. He was wrongfully accused of treason and was sentenced to death in 1457. He was venerated by the people after his death.

⁹ 岳鵬舉 Yue Pengju, the courtesy name for 岳飛 Yue Fei (1103-1142), a military general lived during Song dynasty. He was well-known for his military opposition to the Jin dynasty, which was established by 金 Jurchen, a northern nomadic tribe. He was wrongfully sentenced to death in 1142. He is still venerated in Sinophone areas such as China and Taiwan.

¹⁰ 城隍 *chenghuang*, a tutelary City God, venerated in many places in China such as Beijing, Zhejiang, Shanxi, and Henan.

¹¹ 菩薩 *pusa*, a bodhisattva, an enlightened being who has delayed entrance into nirvana in order to help others attain salvation.

¹² 伽藍 *qielan*, a Buddhist Monastery (Sanskrit *saṃghārāma*, temple or monastery where monks live).

¹³ 文文山 Wen Wenshan, the courtesy name for 文天祥 Wen Tianxiang (1236-1283), a politician, poet, and military general of Song dynasty. He is best known for leading forces against the Mongol Empire and refusing to surrender to Kublai Khan after being captured.

¹⁴ 元朝 Yuanshan, the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), established by the Mongol leader, Kublai Khan (†1294).

kill him at the market.¹⁵ After his death, he was deified and honored as the tutelary god¹⁶ of the Chief Secretary of Shandong province. In a certain year, there was a Mr. Fang whose long-awaited promotion was not realized because his beloved son happened to have a tumor growing in his eye, and therefore, he was planning to retire. He invited a shaman for a planchette writing session¹⁷; after he had chanted the mantras and burnt the *fu* talisman, he invited an immortal to descend to the platform. A *tudi*, by the name of Prime Minister Wen Tianxiang of the Song Dynasty, took charge of the writing. The spirit wrote out the resume of Mr. Fang in detail, which was quite consistent with his actual record. The spirit advised Mr. Fang not to retire, because in the month of *liyue*¹⁸ he would be promoted to the position of provincial Inspector General.¹⁹ The spirit also wrote out a prescription for the eye tumor. Sure enough, within a few days, the Inspector-General of Shandong province accepted a promotion to the position of Minister of War²⁰ in Nanjing city.²¹ Consequently, Mr. Fang was promoted to fill the vacancy for the inspector-generalship of Shandong Province; he also made a tisane²² based on the instructions of the prescription to wash the eye tumor, which was healed within a few days. As for the loyal generals who committed suicide by cutting their own throat, such as Zhang Xun²³ and Xu Yuan²⁴, they all became

¹⁵ In Ming and Qing dynasties, death penalties were often executed publicly at densely populated areas, such as markets and busy streets, for the purpose of deterring potential criminals. For example, 菜市口 Caishi Kou, a commercial centre in Beijing was best known for being an execution ground during the Qing dynasty.

¹⁶ 土地 *tudi*, local deity.

¹⁷ 扶鸞 *fuluan*, Planchette or spirit writing using a sieve Gradually superseded during the Ming Dynasty by 扶乩 *fuji*, Planchette or spirit writing using a wooden stylus.

¹⁸ 一月 *liyue*, the first lunar month, roughly equivalent to January.

¹⁹ 巡撫 *xunfu*, a provincial Inspector-General during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

²⁰ 兵部尚書 *Bingbu Shangshu*, Minister in the Ministry of War.

²¹ 南京 Nanjing, former capital city (1368-1421) during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), nowadays the capital city of Jiangsu Province.

²² 湯藥 *tangyao*, a tisane, a herbal tea or concoction used in Chinese medicine.

²³ 張巡 Zhang Xun (709-757), a Tang general who killed himself during the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763).

²⁴ 許遠 Xu Yuan (709-757), another Tang general who died in the An Lushan Rebellion.

deities²⁵ afterwards. As for the most honorable Lord Guan Yu²⁶ who is known by everyone—I need not to be so wordy to introduce him to you.

As for women, the most precious asset of theirs is chastity, and a less important one is their lives; they should all by means protect their chastity and resist falling into the hands of the filthy—such as cutting their throats, hanging themselves, jumping off a cliffs, or leaping into a well—they should be steadfast in protecting their chastity just like Miss Yinping, the daughter of Yue Fei,²⁷ who leaped into a well after the her father and elder brothers were framed to death by Qin Hui²⁸ in order to protect the honor of her family. She was only thirteen at the time. God pitied her for her chastity and her filial piety, therefore he crowned her as the Lady of Mount Qingcheng.²⁹ Another example is Miss Xiahou³⁰, the wife of Cao Wenshu³¹, who was widowed within two years after her marriage after her husband died from illness. Her uncle insisted that she be remarried after finishing her obligatory period of mourning for her husband, because

²⁵ 神靈 *Shenling*, deities or supernatural entities.

²⁶ 關羽 Guan Yu (162-219) was a general during the Late [東漢 Donghan](#), Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE). He was captured and executed by one of his Lord's rivals and he became known as a paradigm of loyalty and righteousness. He was subsequently deified and is still widely worshiped as 關帝 *Guandi*, Emperor Guan, or 關公 *Guangong*, Lord Guan. He is also one of the major characters in the classic novel, 三國演義 *Sanguo Yanyi*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

²⁷ 岳飛 Yue Fei (1103-1142), a revered general from during the Song Dynasty. The episode of his only daughter, 岳銀瓶 Yue Yingping, committing suicide after his death and subsequently being deified is, apart from here, only found in the novel 說岳全傳 *Shuo Yue Quanzhuan*, *The Biography of General Yue* by 錢彩 Qian Cai. The preface to the novel indicates that it must have been written either in 1684 or 1744. This may mean that Qian Cai is following the author of the [醒世姻緣傳 Xingshi yinyuan chuan](#) or they are both drawing on the same otherwise lost tradition.

²⁸ 秦檜 Qin Hui (1091-1155), a Song dynasty politician. He is best known for framing 岳飛 Yue Fei and his sons and authorizing their execution.

²⁹ 青城山 *Qingchengshan*, Qingcheng Mountain in 都江堰 Dujiangyan, a [county-level city](#) in [Sichuan Province](#). It is one of the birthplaces of Daoism and one of the most important Daoist centres in China. To be the Lady of Qingcheng mountain is to be one of the many thousands of deities associated with this region.

³⁰ 夏侯氏 *Xiahou shi*, Miss Xia Hou, . also known as 夏侯令女 *Xiahou Lingnü*, was the daughter of an aristocrat named 夏侯令 *Xiahou Ling* who lived in the Wei state during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280).

³¹ 曹文叔 Cao Wenshu, was a general in the of the Wei state during the Three Kingdoms period. He died at a very young age

she was very young and without any sons. Miss Xiahou cried for an entire day, covering her body with quilt and slept. Nobody ever noticed her waking up until someone found her inside the quilt, cutting her own throat with a dagger. God crowned her as the Lady of Propriety and Chastity and appointed her to co-manage Mount Tai with the Immortal Goddess.³² and other immortals. There was also a chaste woman named Wang from Linhai county³³ who was captured by bandits, and when they travelled across the Qingfeng Mountain Range.³⁴ she seized the opportunity and leaped off a cliff. God crowned her afterwards as the Lady of Qingfeng Mountain.

For men and women like those, although they died an untimely death, their heroic acts and extraordinary righteousness was different from those who died a natural death. The Heavens respect their moral conduct, therefore they do not have to return to Lord Yama³⁵ to be reincarnated, rather they become an Arhat³⁶ and serve both Buddha as a divine being. This is similar to how the Imperial Court makes an exception to promote a talented man: they do not need to go through the process of taking the municipal level imperial examination to be selected as a *jinshi*,³⁷ but are directly promoted to the position of the royal secretary; they also doesn't need to be appointed as lower rank officials either in the prefectures or in the central government—as long

³² 禮宗夫人 *Lizong furen*, the Lady of Propriety and Chastity to the 天仙聖母 *Tianxian Shengmu*, the Immortal Goddess, that is, 碧霞元君 *Bixia Yuanjun*, the Goddess of the Blue Dawn, also known as 泰山娘娘 *Tiashan Niangniang*, the Lady of Mount Tai in Shandong Province. 元 *yuan* is a Taoist term meaning “origin”. According to local mythology, *Bixia Yuanjun* is also believed to be the Goddess of fox spirits.

³³ 臨海縣 *Linhaixian*, Linhai County, now a [county-level city](#) on the coast in [Taizhou](#), a [prefecture-level city](#) in Zhejiang province,, eastern China.

³⁴ 青風嶺 *Qingfeng ling*, Green Wind Mountain Range, unidentified. Later called 青風山 *Qingfeng shan*, Green Wind Mountain.

³⁵ 閻王 *Yan Wang*, Lord Yama the god of the underworld in Hindu and Buddhist traditions(< Sanskrit *Yama Raja*).He is venerated in both Buddhist and Taoist traditions.

³⁶ 入聖 *rusheng*, an Arhat, someone who has achieved spiritual perfection (nirvana).

³⁷ 進士 *Jinshi*, advanced scholar, a title given to a candidate who excelled in the 會試 *huishi*, the metropolitan level imperial examination in premodern China (Elman, *Cultural History* 659).

as they have composed an excellent essay, they are considered qualified to fill any vacancy for any official position in one of the four imperial *yamen*.³⁸

As for the scoundrels and rogues, the rascal extortionists who fake incidents for money with their worthless lives: their original plan was to fake death to extort money; however, unexpectedly, because they were mocked by both gods and spectres, their pretenses ended up as reality. Those who pretended to cut their throats accidentally died from the dagger, those who pretended to hang themselves accidentally died from hanging, and those who pretended to drown themselves by jumping into a river or throwing themselves down a well with the expectation of being rescued died from drowning—when they were rescued their lives could no longer be revived.

There are also violent wives and brutish concubines, and shrewish and violent paternal aunts who are perhaps even in cahoots with the husband's mother—who pick quarrels or fight against their husbands. There are also sisters-in-laws who gossip against each other or sisters in-law or paternal aunts who vie against each other for power in the family; those women either curse or scold on the street, or pick up a quarrel with their neighbors for trivial matters such as their own children's fighting or their overhearing gossip about themselves: they would also pretend to commit suicide to scare others, so that they would not dare to provoke them in the future and so that their evil deeds would be endured by others—they want to do evil just like bees without a queen, or mice without the threat of a cat. Some of them genuinely intend to commit suicide, yet they relied on their ferocious fathers and elder brothers, their vicious younger brothers and sons to utilize their death to destroy others' households and usurp their possessions, or to stab them with an iron awl at the funeral, or initiate a lawsuit to expand their wealth. Because of their evil intentions, they provoked the rage of gods

³⁸ 四衙門 *siyamen*, the four *yamen*, which refers to the four government offices: 翰林院 *Hanlinyuan*, “Brush Forest Court,” the Hanlin Academy, and 科道兩衙門 *kedaoliangyamen*, the two *yamen* of departments of legal supervision and imperial supervision, that is the six ministries that were at the core of Ming / Qing government organization: “Departments” = 吏部 *Libu*, Ministry of Personnel, 戶部 *Hubu*, Ministry of Finance, and 禮部 *Libu*, Ministry of Rites; “Ways” = 兵部 *Bingbu*, Ministry of War, 刑部 *Xingbu*, Ministry of Justice, and 工部 *Gongbu*, Ministry of Works.

and spirits. For those who die in such way, they will always remain ghouls³⁹ and will never be given a chance to reincarnate into human beings—if the ghouls died from hanging, it would always remain a ghouls with a rope around its neck; if it died from cutting its throat, it would remain a ghouls with a dangling mangled head; if it died from leaping off the cliff, it would remain a ghouls dragging its mutilated bones; if it died from drowning in a river or in a well, it would remain a ghouls with a swollen abdomen full of water—those ghouls will remain in the underworld and never be exposed to any sunshine ever again. Unless they can find a substitute to take their place and relieve them, they will never be reincarnated; even if they do, there is no guarantee that their reincarnation will be a propitious one. If they can't find a substitute, these ghouls will be confined to the underworld for eternity!

It is understandable that Ji committed suicide because of being abandoned by her husband Chao Yuan⁴⁰ for a young concubine; however, by the same token, should all widows kill themselves because of losing their husbands? She should have regarded her situation as that as if Chao Yuan had died and lived as if she were a widow—the household of a widow has no-one to rely on, no firewood or rice, all have to depend upon themselves. How come Ji could not continue to live with abundant help from her family? Ji's family had a lot of cooked rice to eat and clothes to wear. Soon after her mother-in-law returned home,⁴¹ she could have received support from her and be able to rely on her. Advising her to return home, her mother-in-law ordered to send to Ji silver, gold, pearls, jewelry, and fabric for making clothes, because she loved her daughter-in-law dearly. The newly wedded concubine, Xiao Zhengge, together with Chao Yuan literally slandered Ji of committing adultery with Buddhist or Taoist monks to try and coerce her into signing divorce papers. Then she proved her innocence by narrating the entire story and scolding Chao Yuan on the streets, which account was

³⁹ 鬼魂 *guihun*, “soul-ghost,” ghouls.

⁴⁰ 晁源, Chao Yuan, the major character of the first twenty chapters, is the former incarnation of Di Xichen. Chao Yuan's wife, Ji, is the former incarnation of the wife of Di Xichen, named Jijie.

⁴¹ In the first part of the novel, Madam Chao, Ji's mother-in-law, was moved to live in the capital city at when Ji committed suicide.

heard by the neighbors; it was crystal clear to everyone that Ji had been framed by the concubine Zhenge's cunning scheme and everyone scolded Chao Yuan for being fickle in love. Even Chao Yuan began to feeling guilty about abandoning his wife so that he remained hidden behind his door, motionless as a dead soft-shelled turtle; Zhenge was also scared to death that she barred the door so tightly as if it were an iron bucket: therefore, it was unnecessary for Ji to commit suicide. She was only driven by her passion for revenge that she killed herself in order to punish Zhenge. Had it not been for the just judgement of the good officials, Li Qianxian and Chu Sifu, under the jurisdiction of Mr. Hu, the official of Wucheng county⁴² who had skin ulcers all over his back, Ji would have died in vain and her father and brothers would have received a flogging on their buttocks. Although Zhenge was sentenced to prison, she could still enjoy a good life within the prison, and no one ever gave her a hard time.

However, the ghoul of Ji was still fluttering aimlessly in the underworld, for a long time without any hope of reincarnation. When Chao Yuan was the head of the household, the spectre of Ji could still harass it in order to reproach them for the sin and do evil deeds: as the old saying goes, as the master, so the servants; since there was master like Chao Yuan and his servants in the household, the patron god of the household also transformed itself into an evil entity who haunted the house, causing supernatural disturbances. Under such circumstance, it would be convenient for a ghoul to live in the trees or in grass, in order to possess a human being to act as a substitute, so that the ghoul may be reincarnated. However, now that the head of the household who was Madam Chao, who was a serious, reasonable, righteous, and merciful lady, and although the male head was still a baby, he was the reincarnation of an eminent monk; as for the pack of rogues who took advantage of the Chao family, seeing that the power and influence of the family was gone, they either resigned or fled with the rent money. Some of them, such as Gao Sheng, Qu Jingcai, and Dong Zhong, were expelled from the household for beating a *xiucai* while drunk; some were dismissed normally by

⁴² 武城縣 *Wuchengxian*, Wucheng county in 德州 *Dezhou*, a prefecture-level city in northwestern Shandong province,

Lady Chao. The rest of the servants were honest and law-abiding people. The maids and nurses were the close servants of Lady Chao, and Chun Ying⁴³ was treated by Lady Chao like her own daughter, so which one of them could be a substitute for the ghou? Moreover, since the patron god of the Chao household had been replaced with auspicious and benevolent entities, the house was well protected so that it was as firm as an iron bucket; how could the poor ghou that was Ji find an opportunity to find a substitute for herself? Therefore, the ghou had to manifest herself in her mother-in-law's dreams and ask for offerings of Buddhist rites, so that it would receive salvation through the mercy of Buddha.

One night, when Lady Chao was sleeping, she dreamed of Ji: she was wearing a wide-sleeved shirt made from sky-blue colored silk, a white embroidered satin dress, with a shaven head no make-up; she had a red scarf around her neck and she prostrated herself with four double salutations in Lady Chao's direction, saying that she was feeling homesick and asking Lady Chao to help her return home. Waking up from the dream, Lady Chao considered it that was a normal dream and did not pay any attention to it. After a few days, she dreamed of Ji again, who was wearing the same outfit and requesting for salvation rites, for she had not returned home for twelve years and could not find a substitute either. Lady Chao said to herself: "When she died twelve years ago, I was in Tongzhou⁴⁴; I had asked the elder of the Aromatic Rocks Monastery⁴⁵ to select eminent monks to recite one thousand times *The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva*⁴⁶ for her. Did she not benefit from these prayers to receive reincarnation

⁴³ 春鶯 Chun Ying, Chao Yuan's concubine, the mother of 晁梁 Chao Liang..

⁴⁴ 通州 Tongzhou was a county which belonged to Beijing and is now a district of Beijing..

⁴⁵ 香巖寺 Xiang Yan Si, Aromatic Rocks Monastery. There is no such-named Buddhist monastery in the Beijing area. therefore, it must be fictitious

⁴⁶ 觀世音 Guanshiyin, = 觀世音菩薩普門品 *Guanshiyin Pusa Pumen Pin*, *The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva*. This is one chapter from 妙法蓮華經 *Miao Fa Lianhua Jing*, *The Lotus Sutra*, which is an essential scripture of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. *The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* narrates salvation through the mercy of a Buddhist goddess entitled 觀世音菩薩, *Guanshiyin Pusa* (Sanskrit: Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva) who is often portrayed as a motherly and compassionate goddess, comparable to Virgin Mary in Christianity.

but rather remained in my home? Since the eighth of *liuyue*⁴⁷ is the anniversary of her death, I will visit her tomb to pray, and see what would happen.”

On the day of the anniversary of Ji’s death, Lady Chao asked servants to prepare some sacrificial offerings; being followed by servants and maids, she arrived at Ji’s tomb in a palanquin and burnt some joss paper.⁴⁸ She cried for quite a while and prayed: “You have twice manifested yourself in my dreams, but I am a simple person and do not know how to interpret dreams; I don’t know what is your desire. If you haven’t reincarnated yet and are still at home, please send me a dream tonight and articulate your intentions clearly, so that I may fulfil your desire; do not be vague in your sayings. That’s the reason why that on this anniversary of yours, I specially came over here to burn joss paper for you.” Lady Chou burned all the joss paper and made an offering of some rice wine.⁴⁹ A whirlwind appeared⁵⁰ that kept following Lady Chao unceasingly.

When Lady Chao returned home, she dreamed of Ji at night again; Ji, in her former outfit, thanked Lady Chao for the visit to her tomb and the burning of joss paper, saying that for twelve years, she was constantly waiting at the door downstairs and looking for a substitute. She said: “I have been looking for a substitute for myself, but everyone in this household has exuberant life force, therefore I dare not to approach them such was my bad luck; there were a few whose life force was ill, but whenever I tried to approach them, the tutelary god of this household would stop me from acting. I had no alternative but to plead with the tutelary god and pour out my woes, begging him to allow me to find a substitute, so that I may be reincarnated into a human being again. He said: ‘It is unnecessary for you yourself to find a substitute, you only need to implore your mother-in-law. Your mother-in-law once had chanted *The Universal Door*

⁴⁷ 六月 *liuyue*, the sixth lunar month, roughly equivalent to June.

⁴⁸ In Chinese tradition, 冥币 *ming bi*, “underworld money,” joss paper, refers to the paper replica of money burnt for the spirits of deceased family members, ancestors, and friends. Sometimes it is burnt as a ritual of exorcism against demons or spirits.

⁴⁹ Rice is considered to have spiritual significance in connecting the deceased and the living, therefore, liquor made from rice is often offered to the deceased as a sacrificial offering that is indispensable when visiting a tomb.

⁵⁰ Whirlwinds are often considered the manifestation of the ghost of a deceased individual in Chinese superstitions.

Of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva one thousand times at the Aromatic Rocks Monastery in Tongzhou; although her intention was to pray for your salvation and for the fox spirit⁵¹, she did not state her intentions clearly and her *shu* letter⁵² was not addressed to Buddha either so that the one thousand chanted recitations *The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* was directed to nobody.⁵³ Now if she were to have y the *Diamond Sutra*⁵⁴ or the *Lotus Sutra* recited for two thousand, five hundred times, this in addition to the five hundred times *The Universal Door Of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* that have been already recited on your behalf, makes a grand total of three thousand recitations which should be sufficient to help the soul of her daughter-in-law Ji who hanged herself find peace.’” After saying this, she prostrated over and over again as thanksgiving. Madam Chou woke up from her dream weeping and remembered what had happened. Having woken up, she narrated to her maids this dream which she had memorized clearly; when she got up at daybreak, she selected an auspicious day, which was the thirteenth of *liuyue*, and asked Elder Zhixu of the True Emptiness Monastery⁵⁵ to select twenty-four eminent monks of great virtue to perform Buddhist rites for consecutive three days and nights; these monks did not recite other sutra but *The Diamond Sutra* and *The Lotus Sutra* for two thousand times, and *The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* for five hundred times. Together with the previous one thousand times of recitation of *The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* which was done in Tongzhou, there were three thousand times of recitation of the three true scriptures; the merits collected from the recitation of sutras were directed to the

⁵¹ In the first twenty chapters, the male character Chao Yuan killed a 狐仙, *huxian*, fox spirit, who later reincarnated into the concubine of Di Xichen, Chao Yuan’s reincarnation.

⁵² 疏 *Shu* is a form of written prayer intentions addressed to certain deities in Buddhist or Taoist traditions.

⁵³ Of these 1,000 recitations, 500 were supposed to be credited to Ji and 500 to the fox spirit.

⁵⁴ 金剛經 *Jingangjing*, the Diamond Sutra, full title, 金剛般若波羅蜜多經 *Jingang bore poluomi duo jing* (Sanskrit: *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, “The Vajra Cutter Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra), an essential scripture in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

⁵⁵ 真空寺 *Zhen Kong Si*, the True Emptiness Monastery.

elevation of Lady Chao's deceased daughter-in-law, Ji.⁵⁶ She sent Chao Shu⁵⁷ over to pay two *liangs* of silver as the compensation for the writing of the *shu* letter.

Chao Shu returned from visiting Elder Zhi Xu and reported to Lady Chao, saying: "The compensation has been paid. Elder Zhi Xu said that he would establish an altar for the rites over there; he needs the birth and death times for Mrs. Chao⁵⁸ and the names of the recipients of the alms to write the announcement and the *shu* letter." Lady Chao said: "Look how unreasonable I was! I have never considered those things. I can only remember the day of her birth is the eleventh of *eryue*,⁵⁹ but I have no idea about the exact time—I couldn't remember. You will need to invite Mr. Ji and ask him. The presider of the almsgiving is your second uncle and the rites will be celebrated at the temple—let's send three chefs to make the almsgiving meals over there." Chao Shu said: "Madam, perhaps you may need to pay an inspection visit yourself over there?" Lady Chao said: "What do you think I need you for? Are you asking me to visit a monastery?⁶⁰ You need to go there together with your second uncle and Mr. Ji."

Chao Shu invited Ji Bala⁶¹ over for a visit. When he arrived, Lady Chao said: "Your younger sister has not been reincarnated yet and has manifested herself in my dreams on several times, asking me for rites for her salvation. I have chosen the thirteenth day of the month for the salvation rites lasting three consecutive days and nights. I have forgotten the time of her birth." Ji Bala said: "She was born on the eleventh of *eryue*, between six and eight a.m."⁶² Lady Chao said: "On that day, I will

⁵⁶ These are not exactly the instructions given in the dream—there the 3,000 recitations were to be 2,500 recitations of either the Diamond or Lotus Sutra plus the 500 recitations of the "Universal Door" which had been credited to Ji twelve years before. Rather than make a choice or rely on things in the past, it is decided on 1000 recitation of both the Diamond and Lotus sutras and 500 of the "Universal Door."

⁵⁷ 晁書 Chao Shu, a servant of the Chao family.

⁵⁸ 大奶奶 *danainai*, Mrs Chao, refers to Ji.

⁵⁹ 二月 *eryue*, the second lunar month, roughly equivalent to February.

⁶⁰ It was considered as inappropriate for a widowed woman to visit a monastery where the monks resided.

⁶¹ 計巴拉 Ji Bala, Ji's elder brother.

⁶² 卯時 *maoshi*, the fourth of the twelve two-hour periods into which the day is divided, named after 卯 *mao*, the fourth earthly branch.

depend on you to take Little Monk⁶³ with you to receive an almsgiving meal at the temple. There you may tell the Elder the birth time of your sister, so that you can save me the time needed to send a letter.” Ji Bala asked: “Where will the scriptures be recited? Will it not be here in the house?” Lady Chao said: “It would not be convenient in this house for it will last a several days, therefore it will be at the monastery.” After being invited to stay for lunch by Lady Chao, Ji Bala said good-bye to her and left. Lady Chao ordered the servants to buy foodstuffs and to mill wheat to make steamed buns for the rites on the thirteenth of the month.

On the daybreak of the thirteenth, holding the hand of his son, Xiao Runge, Ji Bala came over to accompany Little Monk to the temple. Lady Chao had a servant to go to the study room⁶⁴ to request from the tutor leave for Little Monk for three days; she dressed Little Monk up with linen daoist robe, sandals, and summer socks, and asked Chao Feng⁶⁵ and Li Chengming to accompany him to the True Emptiness Monastery along with Li Bala and Xiao Runge. The monks had already arrived; they were all in their *kasaya*⁶⁶ and ready to approach the altar. Then the three alms givers arrived and after burning incense and praying to Buddha, they greeted the monks. The monks then ascended to the altar and chanted the mantras while striking their percussion instruments; afterwards, the monks were invited to six tables fully laden with tea, pastries, and pancakes to partake of the food. Then the monks wrote the *shu* letter which stated:

By the dharma-and-rule-abiding monastics from the True Emptiness Monastery in Wucheng county,⁶⁷ Dongchang prefecture⁶⁸ of the

⁶³ 小和尚 *xiao heshang*, “little monk,” is the nickname of *Chao Liang*, *Chun Ying*’s son and the male head of the Chou family.

⁶⁴ 書房 *shufang*, study room, studio.

⁶⁵ 晁鳳 *Chao Feng* and 李成名 *Li Chengming* are two servants of the Chao family.

⁶⁶ 袈裟 *jiasha*, the *kasaya*, the vestment worn by Buddhist monks.

⁶⁷ 武城縣 *Wuchengxian*, Wucheng county now administered by 德州 *Dezhou*, a [prefecture-level city](#) in northwest Shandong Province..

⁶⁸ 東昌府 *Dongchangfu*, a Ming dynasty prefecture now administered by 聊城 *Liaocheng*, a [prefecture-level city](#) in western Shandong province.

Shandong Provincial Administrative Commission,⁶⁹ in the Kingdom of the Great Ming located in the jambudvipa⁷⁰: considering that life is as illusory as a dream and as transient as the fire lit with a flint; time is vain like bubbles, and a flower's reflection in the mirror. For the one whose lifespan was not long, who is said to have died a young and unnatural death. Now here is the petitioner: the Lady Ji of the Chao family which is of the first rank in the fifth district, Carefree Lane,⁷¹ Prosperity Village⁷² of this county, who was born on the eleventh of eryue, the twenty-first year of the Yongle era,⁷³ between six and eight a.m., lived to be twenty-nine years of age. Because of being framed by a concubine, she was infuriated at the injustice; she was angry because her husband planned to divorce her. Therefore, she sought to commit suicide. On the eighth of liuyue in the third year of Jingtai era,⁷⁴ at an unknown time, she died by hanging herself. It is feared that she has sunk into the dark sea, and is not able to return to the light as a person; for a long time, she has been separated from the light and still remains on the path of a ghou. Therefore, her mournful older brother Ji Qice, mournful brother-in-law Chao Liang, and mournful nephew Ji Shuxiang have invited twenty-four of the Zen monks of our monastery to celebrate the salvation rites for three days and three nights, and to recite The Lotus Sutra and The Diamond Sutra for one thousand times respectively, and a total of a thousand times of recitation of The Universal Door of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva which includes the five hundred times of recitation completed on the twenty-eighth of Jiuyue,⁷⁵ in the third year of the Jingtai era, at the Aromatic Rock Monastery in Tongzhou, this was completed with combined sincerity and effort and under the immense mercy of Buddha. We pray that may the tin staff of Bodhisattva King Kṣitigarbha⁷⁶ force open the gate of the underworld, and that the merciful boat of the Avalokiteśvara

⁶⁹ 布政使司 *Buzhengshisi*, Provincial Administrative Commission. There were thirteen of these offices during the Ming Dynasty

⁷⁰ 南瞻部洲 *Nanshanbuzhou*, *Jambudvipa*, a Sanskrit word meaning the 'island' or "continent" of the terrestrial world where human beings live.

⁷¹ 無憂裡 *Wuyouli*, "Carefree Lane"

⁷² 富有村 *Fuyoucun*, "Prosperity Village"

⁷³ 永樂 *Yongle*, the regnal name of the third Ming emperor 朱棣 *Zhu Di* (1360-1424) who ruled 1403-1424 The twenty-first year of Yongle era therefore refers to year 1423 AD.

⁷⁴ 景泰 *Jingtai*, the regnal name of the seventh Ming Emperor, 朱祁鈺 *Zhu Qiyu* (1428-1457) who ruled 1450-1457. The third year of the Jingtai era is therefore 1452.

⁷⁵ 九月 *jiuyue*, the ninth lunar month, roughly equivalent to September.

⁷⁶ 地藏王菩薩 *Dizangwangpusa* = 大願地藏菩薩 *Dayuan Dizang Pusa*, Bodhisattva King Kṣitigarbha of the Great Vow, is a Buddhist deity who has vowed to delay enlightenment until all many buddhist hells are emptied. He carries a staff with which to force open the gates of hell.

Bodhisattva⁷⁷ come to the rescue; we pray that she be received into the realm of the Buddha with flags, and seek conversion through the scriptures of Buddha. May she be liberated from the realm of ghouls eternally and approach the blessings of the human world quickly. Such is the policy this document recommends be followed.

Ji Bala, Little Monk, Chao Shu, Chao Feng, and Li Chengming attended the rites in turns and the monks recited the scriptures with extreme sincerity. They treated the monks with vegetarian meals three times a day and tea and pancakes twice a day, and their relatives also helped to treat the monks to tea and pastries; the monks were so beyond happy that they almost wet their pants. After the noon of the third day when the recitation of the three sacred scriptures was completed in proper order, the monks gathered up the new handkerchiefs, new combs, new dustpan, and new brooms for the rites of breaking through from hell⁷⁸; they were also about to establish the gold and silver bridges,⁷⁹ so they asked for a bolt of yellow silken cloth and another of white one, in addition to six *chi* of new fabric for the performance of cymbals. Within three days, the monks asked for three lamps for the rituals; they also asked for a supply of many large *hu*⁸⁰ of steamed rice for the alms-giving ritual of “feeding the hungry ghosts.”⁸¹ On those days, the temple with filled with huge crowds of spectators who had come to watch the rites. Unexpectedly, in a fabulous temple like this one, and when the rites were 99 percent completed, a certain incident occurred.

The monk who ascended to the altar to celebrate the rituals of almsgiving was named Baoguang⁸²; he used to be the abbot of the Dragon Blessing Temple⁸³ in Beijing

⁷⁷ 慈 *Ci*, “the compassionate one” = 觀世音菩薩, *Guanshiyin Pusa*, the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

⁷⁸ It is a Taoist rite to elevate the dead out of hell.

⁷⁹ The bridges which are said to receive the dead from hell to fairy land in Taoist mythology.

⁸⁰ 斛 *hu*, is a container for holding grains and flour. At this time, roughly equivalent to 50 liters or 13.2 US gallons.

⁸¹ 施食 *shishi*, “feeding the hungry ghosts.” A “hungry ghost” (餓鬼 *egui*) is the spirit of someone who has died a violent death.

⁸² 寶光, *Baoguang*, the sacred light, a Buddhist name for a monk.

⁸³ 隆福寺, *Longfu Si*, Dragon Lungful Blessing Temple, is a famous Buddhist temple in Beijing.

and prior to that, the novice monk under the leadership of Yao Guangxiao⁸⁴; when he was young, he was quite obedient and prudent, therefore, Master Yao was very pleased with him and he became a novice monk. The Master then employed a famous tutor to educate Baoguang in scriptures of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In his past life, Baoguang must have been a well-learned Confucian scholar who was reincarnated as a Buddhist monk, for there were no one of the Three Ancient Canons⁸⁵ and the five classics⁸⁶ that he was not well-versed in as soon as he skimmed through it. However, the talent of human beings must be accompanied with corresponding virtue; if one doesn't possess the relevant virtues, one's talent will cause harm to an individual, the same way as one's wealth will cause harm.

Counting on his genius, as well as his connection to the powerful Master Yao, Baoguang was very defiant and had no respect for members of the imperial academy⁸⁷ nor the kinsman of the emperor, or any statesman. He forgot about his own identity, which was a monk, and started consuming luxurious delicacies and wearing silk; gradually, he began to keep concubines and indulged himself in lust and carnal pleasures, having no fear for any Buddhist rules nor the laws of the country. Master Yao was very clear that it would be impossible for Baoguang to come to a virtuous end, however, he loved Baoguang too much to criticize him. The powerful statesmen, who were offended by Baoguang, all gnashed their teeth in anger and were grieved in their hearts, but they couldn't retaliate for fear of hurting Master Yao's reputation. Later, Master Yao died; how could the stubborn heart of Baoguang be suddenly changed? Therefore, Baoguang was impeached by those officials of *Yamen* of Departments and

⁸⁴姚廣孝 Yao Guangxiao (1335-1418) was a famous military strategist, politician, and Zen monk who assisted the Youngle, Emperor (third Ming Emperor) to usurp the throne from his nephew.

⁸⁵ 三墳 *San fen*, the three ancient canons. Possibly 論語 *Lunyu*, The Analects; 孝經 *Xiaojing*, The Classic of Filial Piety; 孟子 *Mengzi*, Mencius.

⁸⁶ 五典 *Wu dian*, the five classics: 詩經 *Shijing*, the Classic of Poetry or The Book of Odes; 書經 *Shujing*, The Classic of History; 禮記 *Liji*, The Book of Rites; 易經 *Yijing*, The Book of Changes; 春秋 *Chunqiu*, The Spring and Autumn Annals.

⁸⁷ 翰林 *Hanlin*, Academics employed as imperial secretaries in the 翰林院 *Hanlinyuan*, The Hanlin Imperial academy.

Ways⁸⁸ for his evildoing that had been accumulated for years, in addition to his marrying a wife and having concubines and profaning the sacred space of Buddha; all said that an announcement must be posted on a bulletin board requesting the immediate execution of Baoguang. After they had submitted the memorial to the throne, the Emperor Renzhong⁸⁹ said: “It is said that he was no more than a monk, but he was permitted to commit such loathsome crimes and both *yamens*⁹⁰ kept their lips sealed and did not say anything waiting until the Master died before beginning to ‘shoot at a dead tiger’; shouldn’t the heads of Departments and Ways be responsible for their malpractice? For now, Baoguang’s matter will not be under further scrutiny; his rank will be reduced and his certificate as a monk will be withdrawn. He will be sent back to his birthplace to resume a secular life; his wife and concubines are permitted to reunite with him.” At first, all the officials had been waiting for the emperor’s decree to execute Baoguang; after they saw the forgiveness and mercy of his Majesty, and the proper punishment by his Majesty, they could not deal with this matter any further.

After receiving a pardon by Imperial order, Baoguang took his wife and concubines, gathered up his gold and pearls, put on a turban, loaded up his possessions on mules and carts, and boarded on a boat at Zhangjia Wan⁹¹; he was returning to his birthplace, Changzhou⁹² city, to resume the rest of his life as a man of wealth. On the entire journey home, he said that there had not existed any Daoist immortal⁹³ who was ever as happy as he was. This was something the natural order of things⁹⁴ could not tolerate. When his boat passed Suqian⁹⁵ and entered the Huang Her, there was a fierce wind blowing over; the boatman lost control of the boat which was overturned by the wind, so that in an instant, the sides of the boat became the bottom of it. Baoguang was

⁸⁸ 科道衙門 *kedaoyamen*, the *yamen* of departments and ways, that is, the six ministries

⁸⁹ 仁宗 *Renzhong*, the temple name of 朱高熾 Zhu Gaochi (1378-1425) who ruled from 1424-1425 as [洪熙帝](#) *Hongxidi*, the fourth Ming Emperor.

⁹⁰ 兩衙門 *liang yamen*, both *yamen*, that is: 科道兩衙門 *kedaoliangyamens*

⁹¹ 張家灣 Zhangjia Wan, a city in 通州 Tongzhou district near Beijing.

⁹² 常州 Changzhou, a Zhangjiajie prefecture-level city in southern Jiangsu province, in southern China.

⁹³ 神仙 *shenxian*, Daoist immortal.

⁹⁴ 天理 *tianli*, the natural order of things, the Law of Heaven.

⁹⁵ 宿遷 Suqian, a tyanzi prefecture-level city in northern Jiangsu province.

luckily rescued by a sailor while drifting in the water and brought ashore, but he lost his wife, his concubines, and all his belongs so that not even a little bit remained. Baoguang vomited up the remaining water out of his stomach; he was in the wilderness where there were no villages or any inns, and all the wealth that he had accumulated during the first half of his life was vain as a spring dream. Wearing his drenched clothes, he bowed down his head spiritlessly and walked along a road for four or five *li*, until he came across a Dragon King Temple,⁹⁶ where he asked some fire from the abbot monk to dry the wet clothes and as well as for something to eat. Having just survived a disaster, everything still seemed unreal and dreamy. He fell asleep in the temple at night; in his dream, he encountered Master Yao, who told him: “I helped to remove your possessions and your beautiful wife and concubines so that they would not do you any harm; however, your talent remains and it can still become the dagger that will take your life. Give me your colorful brush, so that you can still become a monk and prolong your life for a few years.” From his mouth Baoguang spat out a colorful brush which was radiating rays of light, and Master Yao took it and put it inside his sleeve.⁹⁷

Baoguang woke up from the dream and thought: “The master asked me to be a monk; now that I am all alone, deprived of all my belongings, I cannot be anything else other than a monk.” He was tossing around and could not fall asleep again; he became anxious and said to himself: “Now I am sad and senseless like the dead. I’d rather fall into a deep sleep than stay awake and suffer from anxiety; my heart feels like it is being shot at by ten thousand arrows, how can I relieve my anxiety? Let me compose a poem, so that my mind could be diverted from my misfortunes, and I may fall asleep easily.” Then he was determined to compose a *pailü* poem⁹⁸ in which to expound his narrative; however, as he mulled it over again and again, he was not able to compose a single line,

⁹⁶龍王廟 *longwangmiao*, a temple dedicated to a Dragon King. This type of temples was very popular and commonly found in most provinces in premodern China.

⁹⁷ The colorful brush is a literary allusion from the story of the famous author, 江淹 Jiang Yan (444-505). Once had a dream in which he had to return a colorful brush. When he woke up from the dream, his talent as an author was gone in that he could no longer compose any good prose.

⁹⁸排律 *pailü*, a form of classical Chinese poetry that allows the poet to elaborate a very long story in unlimited rhymed couplets.

and when he thought of one, it sounds like a vulgar saying from a rank person. Then he thought: “In the past, I could compose tens of thousands of lines of verse in a moment, how come that I cannot write a single line now? Since I cannot compose a *pailü* poem, I will compose a *lüshi* poem⁹⁹ instead.” After much deliberation, he still could not compose a single line: he changed the *lüshi* format from five characters a line to seven characters a line, and then changed it back again; when he had the first line, he could not think of a second to form the couplet. Then he thought: “Since I cannot write a *lüshi* poem, I shall compose a *jueju* poem¹⁰⁰ to divert my boredom.” Who would believe it but he was not productive in writing a *jueju* poem either? Unexpectedly, his genius had been removed since his colorful brush was taken away from Master Yao; therefore, the anecdote of Jiang Yan exhausting his talent was not a fabrication. Then he thought: “Social customs in the south are fickle; if I return a broken-down individual as I am now, since I used to have a false reputation for being arrogant and lazy, how could I be accepted by any temple?” Furthermore, I don’t have the face to meet my relatives and old neighbors in my birthplace again. I’d rather return to the north and see if there is any secluded temple that will accept me, where I can make a living for the time being.” Therefore, he travelled along the river and whenever he came across a temple or a monastery, he would ask for a meal or a lodging in it either? After several months of travelling, he arrived the True Emptiness Monastery at Wucheng county.

The True Emptiness Monastery was in fact a very famous place for Buddhist rituals; it was situated on the bank surrounding area of a canal, and the alms that it received from the supplicants was sufficient to support hundreds of monks. When Baoguang arrived at the monastery, he met with Elder Zhixu, who assigned him a room as his residence. Although Baoguang had lost his colorful brush, he was a very experienced and knowledgeable man; additionally, he was a southern monk, he was a

⁹⁹律詩 *lüshi*, a form of classical Chinese poetry which emphasizes parallelism, rhyming, and the use of literary allusions. A *lüshi* poem usually consists of eight lines of 5, 6 or 7 syllables each with the even lines rhyming and therefore is significantly shorter than a *pailü* poem which contains more than four couplets.

¹⁰⁰絕句 *jueju*, a Chinese quatrain, matched pairs of couplets each line either 5 or 7 syllables.

hundred thousand times eight thousand times more capable and versatile than his fellow monks in the True Emptiness Monastery. Therefore, whenever there were requests for writing *shu* letters or announcements at the monastery, Baoguang would be the person to compose and to transcribe them; his writings were quite logical and reasonable unlike the usual gibberish. He oversaw the rituals for absolving the sufferings of the dead, breaking them out of hell, and the almsgiving for the hungry ghosts. One day, after he finished the ritual of almsgiving for the hungry ghosts, suddenly, his appearance was transformed because he was possessed by a ghoul, saying that his name was Huida. He had been a monk from Huqiu Temple¹⁰¹ who had wandered into Beijing and had lodged at a temple named the Dragon Blessing Temple.¹⁰² Huida had had a Buddhist rosary which was made by one hundred and eight cornelian prayer beads¹⁰³ which Baoguang pressured Huida to give to him. Considering that the rosary was gifted to him by his master, Huida rejected Baoguang's request; he could no longer live at the same temple, but moved to the White Stupa Temple¹⁰⁴ to live. Baoguang then told the imperial guards that Huida was a demon monk and falsely accused him of performing witchcraft; the guards then beat Huida to death without any formal inquiry, and Baoguang acquired the cornelian rosary. The ghoul said that he had been searching for Baoguang for over ten years, and when he was passing by the temple during the ritual of "feeding the hungry ghosts," he had been able to find him. Baoguang then clenched his own fist to punch himself in the eyes and nose, and all of a sudden bled from all the seven openings in his head. All the monks knelt down to pray for him and vowed that they would celebrate a rite for the salvation of the ghoul. The ghoul replied: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; the murderer must die, and I have nothing else to ask for!" Immediately afterwards, Master Baoguang's soul left his body and ascended to heaven; the ritual which should have been done excellently was ruined by a crooked monk.

¹⁰¹ 虎丘寺 *Huiqiu Temple*, a temple in the Huiqiu district of 苏州市 *Suzhoushi*, Suzhou city, a prefecture-level city in Jiangsu province, eastern China.

¹⁰² 隆福寺 *Longfu Si*, Dragon Blessing Temple. Baoguang was the abbot of the monastery at the time.

¹⁰³ 紅瑪瑙 *hongmanao*, cornelian, a brownish- red variety of chalcedony.

¹⁰⁴ 白塔寺 *Baita Si*, White Stupa Temple, also known as 妙應寺 *Miaoying Si*, the Temple of Marvellous Repose, a famous Buddhist temple in Beijing.

When Chao Shu returned home with Little Monk, he told the entire story of Baoguang to Lady Chao. Chao Feng and Li Chengming stayed behind to supervise the stayed servants in gathering up useful items and carrying them home, Ji Bala came over to thank Lady Chao for the salvation rituals for his sister. Lady Chao tried to retain him for dinner, but he did not want to stay; therefore, Lady Chao asked the servants to gather up a big box of fried dough twists and deep-fried noodle cakes, in addition to another big box of pastries, to carry to his home and told him to enjoy the dainties. All the guests had left.

Lady Chao told Chunying and the maids: “I have taken a lot of trouble for the rite, and still don’t know whether it has elevated Ji? If she could hear my prayer, I would wish she manifest herself in my dreams and let me know.” The wife of Chao Shu said: “Based on how powerful her spirit is, she should surely appear to you a dream.” This dialogue took place at afternoon on the fifteenth of *liuyue*. Then Lady Chao said: “Let’s get ready for bed. Everyone has been working very hard all these days and nights, and they must be tired.” She further told Little Monk: “Tomorrow you may sleep in for a little more. When you wake up, you can rest at home for one day, and then go back to the study room the day after tomorrow.” Now everyone got things ready for going to bed.

At night, Lady Chao dreamed of Ji, who was still wearing the same set of outfit and looking very stylish and very well put together; the red rope which was around her neck previously disappeared, and she prostrated herself in front of Lady Chao, saying that in her past life, she was a maid who was the reincarnation of a fox spirit, and because she did not waste any of the leftover food but picked up all the grains of rice and pancake chips which fell to the ground from the table and ate them, she was rewarded and reincarnated in her recent life as a housewife, whose social status was higher than that of a maid. Because of her bad disposition and being abusive to her husband and should have been punished by being reincarnated as a fox. Because of the merits collected from the three thousand times of the recitation of the sacred scriptures, she was elevated and would be reincarnated as the daughter of Tong Qi, the niello

silversmith who lived at Pingzimen gate neighborhood¹⁰⁵; it was then destined that when she on the summer solstice¹⁰⁶ of her eighteenth year, she would marry Chao Yuan as his concubine. Lady Chao said: “I have been performing the rituals for three days and nights to elevate you to reincarnate you as a man; now that you are to be reincarnated as a woman and become a concubine — why don’t you wait for a while and I will have more scriptures recited for you, so that you can be reincarnated as a wealthy man.” Ji said: “Being reincarnating as a woman will be the best result. If anyone could be reincarnated into good existence merely through the recitation of scripture, then the wealthy could afford to have thousands of monks to recite scripture for millions of times, and be reincarnated into anyone they wanted. Then there would no such thing as like good and evil.”

Lady Chao further asked: “Why will you become the concubine of Chao Yuan?” Ji said: “If I don’t marry him as his concubine, how could I avenge myself for the enmity between us in this life?” Lady Chao asked: “Why don’t you marry him as his wife? Can you only avenge yourself on him by being his concubine?” Ji replied: “He already has the fox spirit who was shot dead by him become his wife.” Lady Chao asked: “Since the fox spirit was shot dead by him, how come that she was willing to become his wife?” Ji said: “Only when she became his wife could she avenge herself: he will have no place to escape to nor place to hide in; he can’t tell it to others nor can he report it to the local government—He will have to suffer from his wife day and night, which is a thorough revenge! He will ‘have a tooth knocked out and swallow it!’”¹⁰⁷ Lady Chao said to herself in her dream: “My beloved, miserable son! I thought all was finished after your death, who knew that you would suffer immensely from two women in your next life!” So, she wept and woke up from the dream. Chunying and the maids also woke up.

Lady Chao told her dream to them and was feeling grievous. The next morning after she finished her hairdo, Ji Bala arrived and greeted her, asking: “Didn’t aunt have

¹⁰⁵ 平子門 *pingzimen* refers to the neighborhood near the Pingzimen gate of the city wall of Beijing. It is now called 阜成門 *Fechengmen*,

¹⁰⁶ 長至 *changzhi*, the summer solstice.

¹⁰⁷ It means that a person would have to endure an unspeakable suffering silently.

any dreams last night?” Lady Chao said: “I dreamed of your younger sister who told me some odd things.” Ji Bali said: “Didn’t my sister tell you that she would reincarnate into the daughter of Tong Qi, the niello silversmith who lived at Pingzimen gate neighborhood?” Lady Chao said: “This is strange. Did you also have a dream?” Ji Bala then told Lady Chao his dream in great details, which was exactly the same as her dream; everyone was extremely astonished. Ji Bali further extended regards to Lady Chao on behalf of his father, thanking her for the salvation rites performed for his daughter, because it was inconvenient for him to visit Lady Chao. Lady Chao asked: “Is the father of my daughter-in-law feeling any better?” Ji Bala replied: “Not at all! Previously he would move with a stool, but now he cannot get up from his bed! Last night he also dreamed of my sister and cried for a while when he woke up, and he is even more paralyzed. Now it is just a matter of time.” Lady Chao said: “The weather is too hot; you need to get ready for a funeral, just to counteract the possible misfortune¹⁰⁸ for the father of my daughter-in-law.” Ji Bala said: “I have found the wood for a coffin, but I happen to have to run out of money at this critical moment.” Lady Chao said: “I still have some coffin planks left over from your brother-in-law’s funeral; if you don’t dislike their inferior quality, please pick a set in preparation for your father’s matter.” Ji Bala said: “That would be great! After I obtain the silver, I will come over to you.” Again, Lady Chao said: “Look! I wouldn’t have said this to you if you had the money. We were talking about not having money just now—it is feared that the weather will be hot and there won’t be enough time to get ready.”

Ji Bala thanked her profusely, saying: “How could I not be embarrassed?” Lady Chao said: “You at the moment don’t have any money and I happen to have some coffin planks, what is there to be embarrassed about? If you had the silver, you could purchase some good ones for hundreds of *liang* of silver elsewhere, and it would not be suitable for me to give you low-quality coffin planks to humiliate the father of my daughter-in-law. This is a compromise for us both.” Ji Bala said: “I have seen several coffin planks

¹⁰⁸ According to Chinese superstition, when a misfortune is about to happen, one can prepare a celebration, such as wedding, to counteract the potential misfortune. Preparing for a funeral is also believed to be efficacious to counteract misfortune.

that were no different from one another. Even if I had the money, I would spend only ten *liangs* of silver on them. I wouldn't afford such quality ones for our family! Since aunt has such good intentions, I will send the servants over to carry them." Lady Chao said: "Since the coffin was for the father of my daughter-in-law, it would be best that you come over yourself to select them." She then had a servant to bring the almanac to refer to and said: "Today is an extremely auspicious day. Since you are here, it is convenient that you select the coffin planks and then have someone bring them home."

Lady Chao then asked Chao Feng to accompany Ji Bali to open up the storeroom. Previously, when Ji had died, Ji Bala had already seen all the timber and remembered all of it; therefore, upon entering, he quickly picked out one which was equivalent to the side boards and another suitable for the bottom board which both could then be made from whole pieces of wood. Ji Bala hired over ten people to carry them home. Ji Bala went in to talk to Lady Chao, kowtowed to her, thanked her, and returned home.

Chao Feng said: "These boards were bought from the pawnshop by the late master for twenty-one *liang* of silver; he said that their real worth was forty to fifty *liangs* of silver. Recently Chao Zhu came over from the village and asked about using them, and Madam, you have just given them away so carelessly." Lady Chao said: "I don't give away things carelessly. When your master was an official in the capital, Mr. Ji sold a pearl cap that belonged to the old Lady Ji for eighteen *liang* of silver; he gave all the money to your master and did not keep a cent for himself. I am indebted to him and was thinking of returning the favor." Chao Feng said: "Our master was an official all these years and he might have already returned the favor." Lady Chao said: "How would I not know about it? He never returned a damned thing! In these years, did he ever mention a single word about it? He made us look like people of low social status." Chao Feng said: "If that's so, then we are somewhat at fault." Lady Chao said: "A fault is not 'somewhat'! Now you are a fine one."

Now that old Mr. Ji received the wood for his coffin which was extremely useful;
on his bed, old Mr. Ji chanted countless times “Namo Amitabha¹⁰⁹” for Lady Chao.
Therefore:

To turn one’s back on a righteous man is indeed to be a dog or a pig,

To know of a grateful woman surpasses knowing a hero.

¹⁰⁹ 阿彌陀佛 *Amituo fo*, Amitabha Buddha or the Buddha of the Western Paradise = merciful Buddha!

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