FROM THE CENTER TO THE MARGINS:
THE SHUIHU ZHUAN AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF
VERNACULAR FICTION IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH
CENTURIES

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Abstract

The *Shuihu zhuan*, or *The Water Margin* as it is usually rendered in English, is one of the major vernacular *xiaoshuo* novels of the Ming dynasty, and continues to be widely read today. Though little is known about its author or the circumstances of the production of its text, it is known that printed editions of it began to appear on the cusp of a major expansion in publishing activity in sixteenth-century China, and that the vernacular fiction genre flourished along with publishing. The *Shuihu zhuan* is a major example of both this genre and this publishing trend. Yet behind the very familiarity of its received text are a number of editions that served varying functions in their milieus. The aim of this dissertation is to follow the transformations that the *Shuihu zhuan* underwent as it appeared in these various incarnations as a means of highlighting some of the major shifts in publishing and modes of consumption of vernacular fiction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To do so, I employ both historical analysis of the circumstances around the editions’ publication and close readings of paratextual materials included in the editions themselves.

Though the novel would later be widely published at the hands of the commercial publishers and has come to be strongly associated with popular and commercial traditions, the earliest editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* were the products of official and private entities of the Jiajing-era elite. In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I contextualize the *Shuihu zhuan* in this setting and attempt to uncover the social functions a work of the nascent genre of vernacular fiction served within these elite social circles and within the book culture of the era. I examine
the overall publishing projects of these entities in order to determine the social space occupied by their output.

The following two chapters are concerned with later, commercial editions of the *Shuihu zhuan*. At the hands of editors and commentators, these editions were transformed in order to meet the tastes of wider audiences. Prefaces and commentaries aimed to shape the way the *Shuihu zhuan* was read. Secondary scholarship on the traditional fiction commentaries has typically treated them as an early form of exegetical literary criticism and an agent in the elevation of the vernacular fiction genre; in these chapters, I argue that the commentators appropriate elements of the novel in order to express their own ideas. Moreover, I show that by using vernacular fiction as a channel of expression, commentators reached large audiences outside the traditional literati class without governmental interference.
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Prologue

The story of the *Shuihu zhuan*, or *The Water Margin* as it is usually rendered in English, is the story of a gathering of heroes.\(^1\) It begins with descriptions of the individual plights of its heroes, telling of how each is forced from society at the hands of corrupt and unjust officials and driven to lead the life of an outlaw. They come to take refuge in a stronghold on Mount Liang, beyond the titular marshes. When the band of outlaws is complete, they hold a celebratory banquet in the hall that their new leader has dubbed the Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness.

As the plot gathers its heroes together, so does the book itself gather together their stories. The adventures of characters such as the band’s leader Song Jiang, the tiger-killer Wu Song, and Li Kui the “Black Whirlwind” predated the novel, having been found in historical materials, dramas, and oral storytellers’ tales. Yet as within the plot the gathering place of the heroes was given a new name, the book in which their stories were arrayed and intertwined took on a new name as well: The *Shuihu zhuan*.

This gathering of interwoven stories, the *Shuihu zhuan*, was among the earliest examples of the nascent genre of the vernacular novel, or *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說, with printed

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\(^1\) In order to retain the distinction between the various editions of the *Shuihu zhuan*, I retain the romanization for the title(s) throughout. For the titles of other books, however, I have used translations whenever possible. In addition to the translation of the title as *The Water Margin*, there is also Pearl Buck’s *All Men are Brothers* and Sidney Shapiro’s *The Outlaws of the Marsh*. John and Alex Dent-Young render the title of their five-volume translation of the novel as *The Marshes of Mount Liang*.
editions of it appearing by the mid-sixteenth century. This places their appearance on the cusp of a large expansion of publishing activity in late Ming China, a phenomenon that would fuel the growth of the vernacular novel genre further. As the culture of the printed book as a medium changed in the late Ming, the *Shuihu zhuan* was transformed as well. It was adapted for new audiences and new usages. The purpose of this dissertation is to trace these changes and illustrate the transformation of vernacular fiction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To do so, I employ both historical analysis of the circumstances around the editions’ publication and close readings of paratextual materials included in the editions themselves.

In following the transformation of the *Shuihu zhuan*, I aim to show both the range of functions to which this particular title was put and the range of possibilities that printing itself presented. The *Shuihu zhuan* is an apt entry point into the study of this process due to the variety of forms it took and to the influence it had over other, subsequent works of vernacular fiction. Though vernacular fiction is strongly associated with commercial printing for popular audiences, the earliest editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* were the products of private and official entities, created for consumption by the elite during the Jiajing (嘉靖) reign (1522-1567). By the mid-Wanli (萬曆) era (1573-1620) however, it had been taken up by commercial printers catering to growing audiences of literate non-literate. In order to meet the tastes of these audiences, commercial printers adapted the work, adding prefaces and commentaries that recontextualized it. Eventually, these “added” materials would demand of the reader nearly the same amount of attention that did the novel’s text. The *Shuihu zhuan* was a pioneer in this regard, and its influence spread to other works of the vernacular fiction genre.
“The Shuihu zhuan”

As I take into consideration a range of editions of “the” *Shuihu zhuan*, each with varying textual and extra-textual features, it is necessary for me to define what is meant by this title. For the purpose of this dissertation, the *Shuihu zhuan* refers to all of these various incarnations. It is this family of imprint books, rather than a hypothetical “original” version or “urtext.” Common to all of these editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* is the outline of the story or, perhaps more precisely, story sequence. It is that sequence that narrates the tale of this group of men who gather together in the mountainous lair. Many of them were petty officials who were forced out of society at the hands of corrupt superiors, and these cases are the ones that have lent the novel its reputation as a book of righteousness. However, it should not be overlooked that in many other cases, the men of the water margin band were professional thieves or outlaws to begin with, or were even forced into membership by others in the band, and the moral of the tale is rather ambiguous. The novel begins with the ominous release of the thirty-six Heavenly Spirits (*Tiangang*) and seventy-two Earthly Demons (*Disha*) who will incarnate as the protagonists. An official of the Song dynasty releases them from a sealed chamber in a cave despite warnings not to do so. From here, the action moves to individuals who will eventually become members of the band, following them, in Andrew Plaks’s words, “billiard-ball” style as they run into one another. Among these individuals, there are several standout characters that emerge, such as Song Jiang, the future leader of the band; Lu Zhishen, the “Flowery Monk” who is actually a wronged killer on the run; the hotheaded “Black Whirlwind” Li Kui; Wu Song, the tiger killer; and Lin Chong, a military official who has been framed by his superior. This action then coalesces in the formation of the band with Song Jiang as their leader at their mountain stronghold, in a hall which in the midst of
a grand, celebratory banquet they christen “The Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness (Zhongyi tang 忠義堂).” What happens after this climactic event depends upon the edition being read: the edition that was most widely read before 1921, that of Jin Shengtan, the novel ambiguously ends here. A character by the name of Lu Junyi has a premonitory dream after the banquet in which he sees the members of the band executed by government troops. He awakes to see before him the words “Great Peace under Heaven (Tianxia taiping 天下太平).” In other editions, the banquet scene is followed by the band’s acceptance of an offer of amnesty on the part of the imperial authorities. From there, they impart on a number of other campaigns on behalf of the Song dynasty. These objects of these campaigns are the Liao kingdom and the rebels Tian Hu, Wang Qing, and Fang La. Many editions do not feature the Tian Hu and Wang Qing campaigns, while some, including the modern variorum edition, feature all of them.

The editions that feature the Tian Hu and Wang Qing campaigns are what are called the “simple recension (jianben 簡本)” editions, which employ a simpler style of narration but narrate more events. Those that feature only the Liao and Fang La campaigns and not the Tian Hu and Wang Qing ones are typically so-called “full recension (fanben 繁本)” editions, which narrate fewer events but employ a more elaborate prose style. Whether the simple recensions represent a simplified version of the original, full recension text, or whether the full recension is instead an elaboration of the simple recension text with portions edited out has been the subject of some controversy. However, the view that the full recensions came first has become scholarly consensus. Regardless, what the “urtext” of the novel might have looked like remains largely a mystery, due in part to the lack of physical exemplars of early editions.
For the purposes of this dissertation, the entirety of this family of editions and their texts falls under the title of the *Shuihu zhuan*. I do not attempt to trace their filiation to uncover an urtext or an original edition. The *Shuihu zhuan*, whether the full recension or the simple recension, whether ending ambiguously with the portentous dream or following the post-surrender campaigns of the bandits, is the gathering of the heroes and the intertwining of their stories. In different points of the history of the printed book in the late Ming, this gathering was taken as a reflection of different aesthetics and meanings, and it is those shifts—rather than those of textual filiation—that I aim to explore. The gathering of materials that is the *Shuihu zhuan*, I will show in this dissertation, was taken as a reflection of several points in the development of the culture of the printed book in the late Ming.

Thus, the *Shuihu zhuan* is distinct from dramas, oral storytellers’ tales, and other narratives that depict an incident or a character from the novel; those might be termed *Shuihu* stories or described as part of a greater *Shuihu* story cycle, but they are not the direct topic of my discussion here. Stories of the *Shuihu* characters’ exploits were also popular subject matter for drama before the novel was in circulation. By one scholar’s count, there were thirty-nine plays based on these characters, with stories about Li Kui and Wu Song making up the majority of those.² These dramas are based on single incidents rather than the “billiard ball” style interplay of characters seen in the novel. Such incidents were also depicted by oral storytellers, though due to the nature of that medium the details of their versions are lost to time. However, it is known that stories of the *Shuihu* bandits were performed as early as the Southern Song, when Luo Ye 羅燁 wrote in his *Records of Conversations with the Drunken Old Man* (*Zuiweng tanlu* 醉翁談錄)

² See Chen Jianping, *Shuihu xi yu Zhongguo xiayi wenhua*, pp. 29-61 for a discussion and catalogue of pre-novel *Shuihu* plays. See also Xie Bixia, ed., *Shuihu xiqu ershi zhong yanjiu*, passim.
that these subjects were being performed.

This categorization of the *Shuihu zhuan* is also distinct from historiographical materials that relate the events that inspired the novel and the related narratives. Song Jiang, the leader of the *Shuihu* band, was a historical figure and is mentioned three times in the dynastic history of the Song dynasty: once in the record of Huizong’s reign, once in the biography of the official Hou Meng 侯蒙, and once in the biography of Zhang Shuye 张叔夜, the governor who was assigned to subdue him. Hou Meng’s biography contains a memorial by Hou in which he writes of Song Jiang’s leadership skills in leading a band of thirty-six men, and suggests that an amnesty be granted to him so his talents could be used in pursuit of Fang La. The official historiographical sources serve as only the briefest outline of the *Shuihu* story. They do not, for example, reveal whether this amnesty was actually offered or accepted, nor whether the historical Song Jiang took part in the campaign against Fang La. There has been speculation that he in fact did, and that this was not recorded in the official history due either to the reluctance of the official historiographers to admit to the role of a bandit like Song Jiang in subduing Fang La or to the low official rank to which Song Jiang was assigned.³ The legend of Song Jiang’s campaign against Fang La was sparked by other, non-official historical sources. The best-known early “unofficial history” (*waishi* 外史) concerning Song Jiang and his band is a short account in the Song-era text *Fragments from the Xuanhe Era* (*Xuanhe yishi* 宣和遺事).⁴

**The “Field” of Publishing**

³ See Irwin, p. 13, for a discussion of the various conjectures that have been made regarding the absence of post-amnesty Song Jiang in the official historiography.

⁴ For a translation of the *Xuanhe yishi*, see Hennessey, *Proclaiming Harmony.*
To borrow the concept of Pierre Bourdieu, I aim to uncover the “fields of cultural production” in which editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* were produced and consumed. Bourdieu criticized both internal and external analysis of cultural products: Internal analysis removes, he argued, the cultural work from the social structures that enabled its creation. External analysis, on the other hand, reduces the work to its social positioning and causing it to lose its place in the literary or artistic arena of which it is part and the relation of that arena to other arenas such as those of power or economics. Bourdieu’s field does not abandon of the study of aesthetics or form; rather, it places these subjective positions in their places among the objective social structures that made them possible. In this way, these positions can be seen among the other possible positions. It thereby reconciles the internal and external approaches.\(^5\)

This notion of the field of cultural production must be modified in order for use in examining printed editions of vernacular fiction in the late Ming. Rather than artistic creations that represent the position-taking of an individual artist, the printed editions of the novel were products of the institutions and individuals who created and published them for a range of motivations, including the social, the commercial, and the expressive. The editions exist in a “field” of publishing that is composed of, but not wholly reducible to, the separate fields of power, economics, and ideological expression. The positions taken within the field of publishing by the publishers subsequently shape the consumption of the novel.

By viewing the editions as existing within a field of publishing, their unique positions become apparent in ways that are not clear when those editions are treated as derivations of an original urtext or when the text of the novel is treated as the artistic creation of a single author. In

\(^5\) Bourdieu’s essays on this subject are collected in Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature.*
any case, the latter views of the work have been rendered highly problematic both by the poor conceptual fit of the single-author paradigm to such a work and by the sheer lack of evidence. Traditionally, authorship of the Shuihu zhuan has been attributed to Shi Naian 施耐庵, or to Shi in collaboration with Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 as either a co-author or an editor. However, there is almost no reliable evidence concerning either of these men. According to sources from the late Ming, Shi lived in Qiantang 錢塘 during the Yuan era. In the 1950s, local officials in Xinghua 興化, in Yangzhou, claimed to have identified Shi’s grave and descendants, though the authenticity of these findings are not widely accepted. As for Luo Guanzhong, there is at least one early Ming source, the Supplemented Registry of Ghosts (Lugui bu xubian 錄鬼簿續編), that mentions him. Thus we can at least be assured that someone by this name did exist. He is said in the Supplemented Registry of Ghosts to be a playwright who went by the style name Huhai sanren 湖海散人, and who was a native of Taiyuan 太原. Luo met the author of the Supplemented Registry in 1364 and was said to have been twenty years his senior. Luo is listed as the author of several dramas. Luo is also traditionally credited with the authorship of several works of fiction, including The Record of the Sui and the Tang (Sui Tang yanyi 隋唐演義), Quelling the Demons (Pingyao zhuan 平妖傳), The Romance of the Remnant Tang and the Five Dynasties (Can Tang wudai shi yanyi 殘唐五代史演義), and, most notably, The Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

These authorial attributions have traditionally been used in attempts to date the creation of the novel to the late Yuan or early Ming. However, the lack of information about either of these purported authors and the circumstances of the novel’s inception has meant that other theories as to its dating have emerged. There have also been attempts to use internal evidence such as place names to argue for authorship in the early Ming, but the instability of the text of
the novel from edition to edition renders this approach unreliable. After all, without an early exemplar, it is impossible to know what the early text looked like. Yet were there such an early exemplar, the textual evidential approach would already have been rendered moot by the very physical evidence of the text. Thus, efforts to use internal approaches to dating the text remain highly problematic.

It is apparent, however, that the body of oral and written antecedents that the novel brings together bears the markings of significant reworking, as Andrew Plaks has shown thematically in his study on the Four Masterworks and Chen Dakang has assumed through historical background in his account of the development of Ming fiction.\textsuperscript{6} In another study, \textit{Out of the Margins}, Liangyan Ge has demonstrated how the written \textit{Shuihu zhuan} represents the result of a “long-term orality-writing interplay,” and that it “should be considered \textit{both} a work of oral provenance \textit{and} a great literary innovation by men of letters.”\textsuperscript{7} He writes, “My own belief is that the synthesis of the \textit{Shuihu} materials from various popular genres may have culminated in a long narrative predominantly in oral prose, which did not merely become the source for the subject matter in \textit{Shuihu zhuan} but bestowed on the novel much of the narrative discourse itself.”\textsuperscript{8} Yet the hand(s) behind this process of revision and the time period in which it occurred remains unknown.

**Printed editions**

The \textit{Shuihu zhuan} as it is known, the novel in all of its editions, is a phenomenon of print.

\textsuperscript{6} See Plaks, \textit{Four Masterworks}, Chen, \textit{Mingdai xiaoshuo shi, passim}.
\textsuperscript{7} Ge, \textit{Out of the Margins}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{8} Ge, p. 37.
Moving from authorship, textual filiation, and genre to printed editions puts us on firmer ground insofar as evidence is concerned. Though thorny problems remain, the picture of when, where, and how printed editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* appeared is much clearer than that of the process of the creation of the text. Beginning in approximately the first half of the Jiajing era, a smattering of bibliographical entries and mentions in literati writings appear. Though the circumstances of the text’s origins remain unknown, it is clear that it was in this period that the *Shuihu* stories first manifested themselves as the printed novel *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Shuihu zhuan* phenomenon began. In the mid- to late- Wanli era, the phenomenon developed further as a number of commercial editions appeared in the burgeoning commercial book market. In order to compete with one another and attract audiences, publishers differentiated their editions by adding commentaries and other materials that catered to customers’ desires. This commercialization process transformed books like the *Shuihu zhuan*, and the commentaries became a rich site for discourse on issues far removed from the texts to which they were attached.

This treatment of the novel provides a unique window onto printing culture in late imperial China, a field which in recent years has made great strides. But whereas histories of the book in China have tended to focus on a particular era, geographical location, or social segment, following the *Shuihu zhuan* in its multiple incarnations brings us across such boundaries. Moreover, this approach demonstrates how these changing circumstances of print were reflected in the work itself, thus destabilizing the notion of its text. It also removes the *Shuihu zhuan* from the expectations of the genres of the *xiaoshuo*, the “literati novel,” or the “amazing books (*qishu* 奇書),” which like all genres were created only in retrospect, and re-contextualizes it among the other printed works alongside with which it was printed. In this manner, the function of the
material artifact of the *Shuihu zhuan* editions comes to light within its field.

**The Late-Ming World of Print**

The earliest editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* appeared on the cusp of a critical period in the history of the book in China, a time often called the “printing boom” of the late sixteenth century. As printing flourished in that period, so did vernacular fiction, and new editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* continued to appear. Recent scholarship has drawn a sharper picture of the history and culture of print in China, and such studies provide a backdrop against which this one takes place. Notable overviews of the history of the book and the culture around it include those by Zhang Xiumin and Inoue Susumu. As for print in the late imperial era, studies by Joseph McDermott and Ōki Yasushi have shown, respectively, how the imprint came to dominate over the manuscript in the era and the effects of urbanization on publishing in the Jiangnan region. Lucille Chia’s work on multiple generations of printing clans in Jiannan has demonstrated the growth in the numbers of titles publishing houses made available in the late Ming. Cynthia Brokaw has also provided a geographically focused study, on Sibao, Fujian, in the Qing. Others, such as Kai-wing Chow, have discussed the impact of late imperial printing culture on particular classes, such as the literati class.

The interface between literature and print culture has also been examined. Robert Hegel has written on the book medium’s effects on printed vernacular fiction, and how books were

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9 Zhang, *Zhongguo yinshua shi*; Inoue, *Chūgoku shuppan bunkashi*.
targeted at niche markets. Shang Wei has shown how encyclopedias such as those popular in the late Ming influenced the composition of the *Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅). Anne McLaren has shown the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was adapted for different audiences. Patricia Sieber has written on Ming book culture and the shaping of “Yuan” drama and arias.¹²

It is worth noting that many of the aforementioned studies of the book in China take some inspiration from the already well-established field of the history of the book in the West, and they often note that the Chinese case is driven by social and economic factors to a larger extent than technological ones. The Western narrative has largely been one of the introduction of technology and the resulting social consequences, to the extent that the influential print historian Elizabeth Eisenstein called the advent of printing “the printing revolution” and the printing press an “agent of change.”¹³ More recent studies have taken a more nuanced stance toward the social effects of the introduction of print, but the narrative remains largely technologically oriented. This is perhaps rightly so, considering that in the West, the mechanical patent was a forerunner of the copyright system, and the copyright system played a role in the development of the figure of the author.

**The Study of Vernacular Literature**

By treating editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* as products of printing culture, I aim to cast it in

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a different light, exposing the boundaries of the vernacular novel genre with which it is associated and to place it among other genres of printed works. The vernacular novel began to attract serious scholarly attention at the turn of the twentieth century, an era when “plain speech” writing was championed by reformers. The genre was seen as a predecessor to a modernized style of writing, and the *Shuihu zhuan* was seen as one of the masterworks of the genre. At the same time, vernacular fiction continued to be criticized for its often crude or “feudal” content. It had been incorporated into a new historiography of Chinese literature, becoming the archetypical genre of the Ming and Qing dynasties just as the Tang dynasty had the *shi* poem and the Song dynasty had the *ci* lyric. With the influence of Japanese historians of Chinese literature such as Sasagawa Rinpu 笹川種郎 and early Chinese literary historians such as Lin Chuanjia 林傳甲 and Huang Ren 黃人, “*wen,*” which originally had specific meanings related to patterning and cosmology, came to mean something more akin to “belles-lettres.” Beginning with Sasagawa in particular, the vernacular novel was treated as “literature” alongside those other genres.14

The dynastic orientation of the literary historiography presented an image of a progression toward modes of written expression patterned after spoken language and thus accessible to the common people. The vernacular novel, with its storyteller-style rhetoric, was the penultimate step in an evolutionary process leading to a modernized “plain speech” style (*baihua* 白話) as advocated by post-May Fourth reformers such as Hu Shih (1891-1962). Hu Shih’s unfinished *History of Vernacular Literature* (*Baihua wenxue shi* 白話文學史) portrayed the vernacular as a long-developing progressive trend in Chinese literature, a trend that proved that the “literary revolution” he advocated had historical precedent. He also noted that his book

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should have been called a history of “Chinese” literature, as this historical trend was representative of the national spirit itself: without “vernacular” literature, the history of the literature of China would have merely been the history of “classical prose (guwen 古文).”

Yet while the vernacular novel was considered a progressive step in terms of literary style, it remained problematic to the post-May Fourth generation for the feudalistic mindsets they found in works of the genre and for what they saw as their critical shortcomings, especially when compared with the Western novel. C.T. Hsia reflected this skeptical stance toward the vernacular novel, writing, “A student of the traditional Chinese novel who has been at all exposed to Western fiction is sooner or later struck by the sharp contrast between the majority of unrewarding works composing that genre and a number of titles which, while sharing the literary conventions of those works, possess enough compensating excellences to appeal to the adult intelligence.” The works he took as the gems among the dross, the “classic Chinese novels” for which his 1968 study is named, are *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義), *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳), *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記), and *An Unofficial History of the Scholars* (*Rulin waishi* 儒林外史). Hsia’s influential study treats the “Chinese novelist” as “a failure to utilize fully the arts of fiction” in a manner comparable to the Western novelist, but who nonetheless had “something interesting or important to say about the human condition.”

In scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, more positive critical stances toward traditional vernacular fiction prevailed. Andrew Plaks argued that the “Four Masterworks” (*si da qishu* 四大奇書) of the Ming novel (eg. Hsia’s “classic Chinese novels” save the Qing-era *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin*, and *Journey to the West*).

15 Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxue shi*.
17 Hsia, p. 17.
Red Chamber and An Unofficial History of the Scholars) represented more than compilations of popular materials. Rather, each “represents the culmination of a long prior and subsequent history of source materials, antecedent narratives, and alternate recensions” and is the “most significant” phase of a “process of evolution,” “the one that puts the final stamp on the process and raises the respective narrative materials to the level of self-conscious artistic constructs.”

The result of the process is a form that could be dubbed the “literati novel (wenren xiaoshuo 文人小說),” and reflects themes of sixteenth-century literati concerns.

Since that time, the progressive, dynastic view of early literary historiography has fallen away. This is not to say that there has been absolute silence concerning the “classic novel,” however. Important monographs include Anthony Yu’s work on the Dream of the Red Chamber and Shang Wei’s on The Scholars. Shang has also written on the relations between the Jin Ping Mei and encyclopedias for everyday use. There have been several articles on Journey to the West as religious allegory. Furthermore, there have been reassessments of the literary value of “lesser” novels such as Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World (Xingshi yinyuan zhuan 醒世因緣傳). However, scholarship on late imperial literature has largely turned away from the “classic” novels or “masterworks,” which had been over-represented, and toward works and genres that had previously been critically under-represented or ignored. Examples of such genres include the martial arts fiction of the late Qing and the Ming novella. Genres outside of their

18 Plaks, Four Masterworks, pp. 3-4.
19 Yu, Rereading the Stone; Shang, Rulin Waishi and Cultural Transformation in Late Imperial China.
20 Shang, “Jin Ping Mei Cihua and Late Ming Print Culture,” in Zeitlin and Liu, eds. Writing and Materiality in China.
21 See for example Lam, “Cannibalizing the Heart: The Politics of Allegory in The Journey to the West” in Ziolkowski, ed. Literature, Religion, and East/West Comparison; and Shao, “Huineng, Subhūti, and Monkey’s Religion in ‘Xiyou ji’.”
22 See, for example, Berg, Carnival in China: A Reading of the Xingshi yinyuan zhuan; and Wu, “Repetition in Xingshi yinyuan zhuan.”
“representative” dynasties, such as the poetry and drama of the Ming, have also attracted growing interest.\(^\text{23}\) Other studies have cut across genres, including the novel alongside other genres such as drama. The work of Tina Lu is an example of such an approach, and Martin Huang has also explored the concept of desire across narrative genres, including the vernacular novel.\(^\text{24}\) As a result of these studies, we now have a richer, fuller picture of late-imperial literary life that is not teleologically driven toward a “plain speech” writing style.

While the “classic novels” are no longer the primary, monolithic subject of the Ming literary picture, they do continue to cast a long shadow, and many questions about them remain to be answered. I aim to reincorporate one such “classic novel,” a “masterwork of the Ming,” back into this larger picture. But rather than demonstrating literary influence or borrowing, I intend to show the relation of printed editions of vernacular fiction to printed matter in other genres through an investigation of the circumstances around their publication. I also intend to destabilize the notion of this text by showing the manner in which changing circumstances of print influenced and transformed it.

**Chapter Outline**

This dissertation is divided into two halves, “The Center” and “The Margins.” The first part of the dissertation, “The Center,” focuses on the earliest known editions of the *Shuihu zhuan*, which date to the first half of the sixteenth century. Though vernacular fiction is a genre

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\(^{23}\) Bryant, *The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming and His World* is an example of a corrective study addressing the lack of studies of Ming poetry: Bryant laments, “No one reads Ming poetry any more, and small wonder it is, too, thanks to Cheng Chen-to and his generation.” (p. 558).

\(^{24}\) Lu, *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*; Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China.*
with strong associations with the marketplace, these editions were on the contrary published by elite private and official entities. Moreover, in each of the two cases I examine, they were published alongside a wide variety of other books, further calling into question assumptions about the “low” or “high” status of vernacular fiction.

Chapter One, “The Illogic of Writing: The Censorate Edition,” examines the circumstances around the edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* printed by the Censorate (*Ducha yuan* 都察院). The Censorate was the Ming dynasty’s oversight agency, charged with conducting surveillance on other administrative bodies. That such an agency would print a supposedly seditious work such as the *Shuihu zhuan* has been seen as evidence of the Ming dynasty’s lack of seriousness in governance. In this chapter, I argue that it is only in the context of the Censorate’s printing project as a whole that the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* can be understood. I analyze the totality of the Censorate’s publishing, and compare it with the output of other agencies as well as commercial printers. In particular, I point out previously unrecognized similarities between its output and that of a particular Beijing commercial publisher, Jintai Wang Liang 金台汪謙. I also discuss ways the Censorate might have put its publications to use.

Chapter Two, “Manufacturing Glory: The Wuding Edition,” examines the edition of the novel published by Guo Xun, the Marquis of Wuding 武定侯郭勛 (1475-1542). Guo Xun moved at the highest levels of the Ming court, and was a personal friend of the Jiajing emperor. In this chapter, I examine his publishing activities and demonstrate his use of printed books—including, but not limited to, vernacular fiction—as a means to create and maintain networks of power. I make use of his publications’ prefaces, which were frequently penned on his behalf by renowned acquaintances and praised his virtues.
The second part of the dissertation, “The Margins,” focuses on the transformations the *Shuihu zhuan* underwent due to the commercialization of the book. In the late sixteenth century, commercial publishers in Fujian, Jiangnan, and other locales flourished by catering to a burgeoning class of literate, monied consumers, and vernacular fiction became a particular favorite. As commercial publishers produced editions of the *Shuihu zhuan*, they also transformed it through editing and interlinear and marginal commentaries.

In Chapter Three, “Bandits for Sale: The Commercial Transformation of the *Shuihu zhuan*,” I draw comparisons with the West, where the competition between booksellers led to the advent of copyright laws and the figure of the author. I demonstrate how, in the Ming, it was rather the editor who became the figure of authority over the text. I then show the range of interpretations that the commercialization process produced through the examples of two critically important editions: the Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 and the Rongyu tang 容與堂 editions. The former is the earliest known commentary edition, which appeared just as commercial printing began to boom. The second came in the early seventeenth century, by which time commercial vernacular fiction was a well-established phenomenon, and features commentary dubiously credited to the renowned literary iconoclast Li Zhi 李贄. This comparison highlights the manner in which the *Shuihu zhuan* came to be read as an “outlaw,” and therefore “marginal,” text. I then place this sort of reading of the *Shuihu zhuan* in the context of other works, including the *Jiandeng xinhua/yuhua* 剪燈新話/餘話 collections, and the surprising lack of censorship in the late Ming. I argue that commentary transformed the novel into a channel for dissent that reached a wide audience and was free of official interference.

Though a number of commentary editions appeared during the printing boom, they were
all eclipsed in the mid-seventeenth century with the appearance the edition edited and commented upon by Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1608-1664). Chapter Four, “Characters in the Margins: Style and Meaning in Jin Shengtan’s Shuihu zhuan Commentary,” deals with the way Jin’s edition once again transformed the Shuihu zhuan. Literary historiography has cast Jin in the role of a brilliant yet idiosyncratic “champion” of vernacular fiction who “elevated” the genre to the level of the classics through his formalistic criticism. I show the ahistorical and problematic nature of this image, and that Jin was not strictly speaking a “literary critic.” I demonstrate that his comments on literary style are intimately linked to his own philosophical ideas which he seeks to present. To Jin, the Shuihu zhuan was a channel through which he could convey his own expressive writing.

The story of the transformation of the Shuihu zhuan begins with the Censorate edition in the following chapter.
Chapter One

The Illogic of Writing: The Censorate Edition

Introduction

In imperial China, texts played such a central role that it has been called “a realm built of
texts.”¹ Its earliest forms of administration were based on written models and derived their
authority from them. As the written word transcends the moment of its inception, these written
models transcended the dynasties formed upon them and served as the basis for successive ones.
Schools of thought kept records of their masters’ teachings, and these served as the basis of
ideologies that perpetuated for millennia. The civil examination system, through which dynasties
selected officials to serve in their bureaucracies, depended on a body of canonical texts that
candidates spent years mastering.

The Ming dynasty was no exception to this long-standing tradition. Its founder, the
Hongwu emperor, set forth his rules for succession and the management of the imperial
household in a written proclamation. The administrative blueprint was also detailed in written
form, and the Ming established its civil examination system around its approved body of

¹ Lewis, Writing and Authority in Early China, p. 362.
canonical texts. In order to ensure the availability and the authenticity of the texts central to its establishment and administration, the Ming authorities created and disseminated woodblock print editions of them. Individual agencies in the bureaucracy printed works relevant to their own functions: The Imperial Household (Neifu 内府), for example, published Hongwu’s *Ancestral Instructions of the August Ming* (*Huang Ming zuxun 皇明祖訓*) and the *Great Ming Code* (*Da Ming lü 大明律*), and the National Academies in Beijing and Nanjing printed canonical commentary editions of the Four Books and the Five Classics. The Imperial Medical Academy (*Taiyi yuan 太医院*) and the Directorate of Astronomy (*Qintian jian 欽天監*) printed medical and astronomical guides, respectively.

Among these weighty publications, it would seem that a work of vernacular fiction such as the *Shuihu zhuan* would have no place. It is neither a prescriptive legal document nor an obvious vehicle for disseminating state-sponsored ideology. Rather, it is the tale of men who are forced out of society at the hands of corrupt officials and eventually band together in rebellion. It features wanton violence, frequently targeted at authority figures, and is often for that reason read as a seditious book that promotes or even glorifies rebellion. Yet the *Shuihu zhuan* did join the ranks of those works mentioned above as an official imprint. Moreover, the agency that printed it was the Censorate, the Ming’s highest surveillance and oversight agency tasked with maintaining order. This Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* is one of the earliest recorded editions of the novel.

Much has been made of the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* despite the fact that no extant exemplar has been identified, and thus a textual analysis of it is impossible. It has fueled assumptions about the status of both vernacular fiction and official publishing in the Ming, and
indeed about the dynasty itself. Scholars of Chinese printing have interpreted the very existence of the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* as a comment on Ming official publishing, or even the dynasty itself: an official agency such as the Censorate was publishing a “seditious” book like the *Shuihu zhuan*, the argument has it, the dynasty itself must have been corrupt and engaged in frivolous pursuits to the extent that it was in existential danger. On the other hand, scholars of literature have seen the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* as a sign that vernacular fiction was once a more esteemed genre and only later lost respectability. However, the lack of an exemplar typically stops the discussion there, and the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* remains relegated to the status of an intriguing footnote in both literary and publishing histories.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a fuller account of the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan*. To do so, I first discuss the implications of the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* as seen by late Qing literati and modern scholars. I then place the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* in the context of the entirety of the Ming Censorate’s printing output, and compare that output with those of other publishing institutions, both official and commercial. I follow by providing a brief history of the Censorate and a description of its operations. Finally, taking into account both the institution and its publishing activities, I suggest purposes for which books such as the *Shuihu zhuan* might have been used that reconcile the seemingly incongruous nature of a powerful and esteemed oversight agency printing a work of vernacular fiction.

**The “Censorate Edition” of the *Shuihu zhuan***
The Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* is recorded in a catalogue of official imprints entitled *Imprints Old and New* (*Gujin shuke 古今書刻*), compiled by Zhou Hongzu 周弘祖 (fl. 1559).  

*Imprints Old and New* serves as an important source of information on government publishing in the late Ming, listing the publications of central and local government bodies, and is widely cited by both literati of the Ming and Qing and modern scholars. It is undated, but information about its compiler places its compilation in the late Jiajing or Longqing eras. Zhou Hongzu was himself a censor, and a biographical entry is to be found in a Wanli-era index of officials of the Censorate entitled *The Almanac of the Orchid Platform* (*Lantai fajian lu*).  

According to the entry on Zhou, he was from Macheng County, Huguang. No year is given for his birth, but it is recorded that he passed the palace examination in the thirty-eighth year of the Jiajing reign (1559) and that he was promoted to the position of censor for the Guangdong circuit three years later. He went on to hold several censorial positions. He was sent to the southern capital in 1565 and then demoted and sent to Anshun, in modern-day Guizhou, in 1570, the fourth year of the Longqing reign. He was promoted back to Nanjing in two years’ time as a Chief Minister of the Court of Imperial Entertainments, only to be wrongfully accused and removed from office altogether. No date is given for his death. *Imprints Old and New* was most likely compiled by Zhou during his tenure as a censor in Beijing, between 1559 and 1565, when he would have had access to information on official publications. It is possible that he worked on its compilation while stationed in Nanjing, in which case it must have been completed by 1570, when he was demoted and sent to Anshun, at the latest.

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2 There are multiple versions of *Imprints Old and New* in existence, yet their lists of Censorate publications differ only by one or two titles. The *Shuihu zhuan* appears on all of them. For a discussion of the different versions of the catalogue, see *Wenxian 文獻* 2007, issue #4.

3 *Lantai fajian lu*, in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan*, v. 16, p. 452.
The Implications of the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan*

This dating of *Imprints Old and New* means that the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* must have been printed by 1570. The *Shuihu zhuan* was widely printed by commercial publishers beginning in the Wanli era (1572-1620), with the earliest known commercial editions being those printed by the Fujian publisher Yu Xiangdou in the 1590s. Thus, the official Censorate printing of the *Shuihu zhuan* likely predates commercial printings by at least twenty years, if not more. The catalogue entry itself, however, gives no further details about the edition such as the number of chapters or volumes it comprised. This lack of information and the lack of an extant exemplar makes it impossible to determine the textual features of the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan*. It is not even apparent whether it was a member of the so-called “simple recension” family or the so-called “complex recension” family of *Shuihu zhuan* editions. The former employ more rudimentary, less descriptive language but narrate additional episodes while the latter are written in more ornate language and feature fewer episodes, and there has been debate...
as to which family is most closely related to the “ur-text” of the *Shuihu zhuan* and spawned the other. Such an early edition as this would be crucial evidence in this debate, but the lack of a description of its detains hinders it from entering into the discussion.

The apparent contradiction of a high-level regulatory agency such as the Censorate printing a work of vernacular fiction such as the *Shuihu zhuan* has typically been resolved in one of two ways. The first is to assume that the appearance of such a publication is an indication that vernacular fiction was not held in such low esteem in the Ming as it later came to be, and that even elite and official circles were involved in its production. The second turns that on its head: the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* has been seen as symbolic of the decadence of the Ming, and as proof that such frivolousness reached even the highest levels of the official administration. Twentieth-century literary scholars, embroiled in arguments over the relative literary value of vernacular fiction, gravitated toward the first view. Many historians of the Chinese book, on the other hand, have followed the opinions of Qing-era bibliophiles and adopted the second explanation.

An early example of the first phenomenon, a literary scholar taking the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* as a sign of the elevated status of vernacular fiction in the Ming, is to be found in Lu Xun’s *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (published in 1925). It comes in a section devoted to exploring the reasons why “xiaoshuo” (broadly intended by Lu Xun as, and translated by Gladys and Hsien-yi Yang as “fiction”) was traditionally looked down upon by Chinese bibliographers. *Xiaoshuo* was, Lu explains, a marginal category historiographical category since the Han that saw only a brief window of appreciation. He writes, “In the mid-Jiajing, there were editions of the *Sanguo* and the *Shuihu* published by the Censorate, and people of the era regarded them as
officials’ books. As such, they were included [in bibliographies], though they are not to be found in later bibliographies.” He explains away this later denigration of xiaoshuo “fiction” as a simple convention of the bibliographical and historiographical traditions that has no bearing on what is, in his estimation, their true literary value. He is, of course, writing at a historical moment when Chinese reformers were advocating a “plain speech” style of writing and seeking historical precedents of worthy literature outside the “Classical” canon.

Richard Irwin’s book-length study of the Shuihu zhuan, The Evolution of a Chinese Novel, makes a brief mention of the Censorate Shuihu zhuan, but only in passing as one of three of the earliest known editions. Irwin brings up the possibility that the Censorate edition and other early editions differed significantly from extant 100-chapter editions but deems further speculation “futile” due to the limited evidence. While he does not make a direct argument for the Censorate Shuihu zhuan as evidence of the relative prestige of vernacular fiction in the Ming, he does blame literati prejudices for keeping critical attention to fiction at an unjustly low level despite its widespread popularity and influence. He writes that vernacular fiction “... was first written by, and has always been written for, the common people,” and as such it does not offer literati the “moral tutelage” required in imperial examinations, nor does it feature the “classical Chinese” writing style preferred by literati. Like Lu Xun, he also associates “vernacular fiction” with the historical bibliographical category of xiaoshuo, which he traces to Ban Gu: “[A]fter listing the works of nine schools of philosophers, Pan Ku (32-92) includes as an afterthought those of the hsiao-shuo-chia 小說家, whom we may consider the ancestors, in a sense, of the authors of the great novels which appeared many centuries later.”

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4 Lu Xun, Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe, p. 21, translation mine.
5 Irwin, Evolution, p. 1.
6 Ibid., p. 1.
scorn of literati kept works such as the *Shuihu zhuan* out of even the “afterthought” category of *xiaoshuo* in official bibliographies. He sees the damage to the *Shuihu zhuan*’s legacy as being compounded by a drastically abridged edition (namely, the 1644 abridgment of Jin Shengtan, which became the standard received edition): Irwin’s stated purpose is “to present a logical picture of the various stages in the evolution of the story both before and after its formulation as a full-length novel and, at the same time, to do justice to the artistic skill of the original authors, the true magnitude of whose work long went unrecognized because of the popularity of an abridgment.” Much like Lu Xun, his project is to restore the *Shuihu zhuan* (and, by extension, vernacular fiction) to its proper place in the literary canon.

Andrew Plaks’ *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* also makes a brief mention of the Censorate edition of the *Shuihu zhuan*. As Plaks’ study is a critical interpretation of the “four amazing books” of the Ming, ie. *Sanguo yanyi, Shuihu zhuan, Xiyou ji, and Jin Ping Mei*, matters of textual history are only of secondary importance. However, textual historical evidence does enter into his analysis. First, he uses such evidence to date the works to the sixteenth century. According to Plaks, it is the sixteenth century version of each text that “represents the most significant phase of this process of evolution, the one that raises the respective narrative materials to the level of self-conscious artistic constructs.” He argues that these sixteenth-century creations are more than the written version of accumulated folk material; they share certain generic features such as narrative irony and formal pacing that are the products of a thorough and conscious revision of previously existing material. Furthermore, these shared features reflect the world-view of the sixteenth-century elite. In the case of the *Shuihu zhuan*,

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7 Ibid., p 6.
8 Plaks, pp. 4-5.
Plaks cites the existence of several Jiajing editions, including the Censorate edition, as well as favorable comments on the work by contemporary literary figures as evidence “indicating the circulation of one or more fine editions of the novel within Chia-ching literary circles.” He speculates that a Jiajing edition and possibly the Guo Xun edition were early examples of the family of complex recension texts as opposed to the simple recension family. He also infers that the Censorate edition’s status as a publication of the central government indicates that it “would have been something more serious than a cheap commercial printing.” This is all evidence for Plaks’ larger argument that the Ming “masterworks” such as the Shuihu zhuan were part of not “popular” but rather literati culture and reflect literati interests and concerns. From this position, he then provides a literary interpretation of the novel.

Historians of the Chinese book, on the other hand, have resolved the apparent contradiction of a bureau of the central government printing works of vernacular fiction in the opposite way: Rather that seeing it to elevate the status of vernacular fiction, as literary historians have done, they have denigrated the institution and, by extension, its dynasty. The appearance of the Shuihu zhuan and other such works on a list of official publications is taken by some as being typical of the frivolousness and decadence of the court. Others, noting the roughly simultaneous rise of a booming commercial print industry based mainly in the south but with signs of activity in Beijing and elsewhere, have drawn the conclusion that bookselling was such good business that by this point even government agencies were engaging in printing for profit.

An early and important example of such a view of the publishing activities of the Ming is

\[9\] The Guo Xun edition of the Shuihu zhuan is the subject of the subsequent chapter of this dissertation.

\[10\] Plaks, Four Masterworks, p. 281.
to be seen in the pioneering work of Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864-1927). Ye, the son of a Hunanese official stationed in Zhili, received a classical education in anticipation of a career in government. He passed the local examinations in 1885, and the palace examinations in 1892. He was assigned a position in the Bureau of Civil Appointments but resigned after only a few months, choosing to return to his family home in Changsha, Hunan. There he devoted himself to collecting and printing books. A staunch cultural conservative, he vehemently opposed reformers such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei and printed tracts denouncing them. His conservatism became his downfall when the Communists, having agreed to cooperate with the Nationalist authorities, entered Changsha. Ye greeted them with a rude poem calling them “beasts” and “bastards,” leading to his execution after a mass trial.

Ye’s pioneering work on Chinese books is *Casual Talks on the World of Books* (*Shulin qinghua* 書林清話). While it is not the first such book written by a bibliophile, it is considered foundational to the modern study of the Chinese book and remains widely cited today. It is the first to systematically codify the terminology used in the field and to provide a chronologically arranged discussion of the development of the book in China, from the Tang to the Qing. Ye also categorizes print activity into three major types: the official (*guanke* 官刻), the private (*sike* 私刻 or *jiake* 家刻), and the commercial (*fangke* 坊刻). (For the Ming, he also adds printing by principalities, or *fanke* 藩刻.) Echoing the views of traditional bibliophiles, he regards Song and Yuan editions as being of the highest aesthetic value. He also places high value on more recent Qing editions due to the careful editing and collation that were the fruits of “textual evidence” scholarship; a value that has been attributed to both his conservatism and his physical distance from repositories of older fine editions.
Ming books then lie between the aesthetic peak of the Song and Yuan editions and the
textual peak of his contemporary editions. The Ming was a time of a deluge of poor-quality
commercial prints, and of pervasive shoddy editing and frivolous subject matter that extended
even to official prints. For Ye, Zhou Hongzu’s *Imprints Old and New* is prime evidence against
Ming official prints, with the Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* a salient case in point. He writes:

Concerning official imprints of Ming times, it can be deduced that Beijing Academy editions
(*jianben*) were the zenith. The Nanjing National Academy held many of the blocks from the Song-
era Academy and the circuit schools of the Yuan. Of those that were not refurbished after the
Zhengde reign, the quality is not second to those of the Song and Yuan. Looking over the
woodblocks recorded in the Four Classifications in the *Record of Classics of the Southern Academy*,
they are truly interconnected with the documents of the three dynasties. The Beijing Academy’s
books were for the most part re-carvings based on Nanjing Academy editions, and it is rare to see

According to records of the era in Zhou Hongzu’s *Imprints Old and New*, the Beijing National
Academy only had forty-one book titles, and there is no record of Classics or Histories. Did
Imprints leave them out? Could it be that by Hongzu’s time the blocks had already been lost? There
are few copies of Hongzu’s book in circulation. I have traced and recut them. Through the example
of the prints made by the court and the local governments of directly-governed provinces, we know
that printing had become a standard affair. For example, the Censorate in Beijing printed things like
*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Legend of the Water Margin* (sic), the *Dark
Machinations of Myriad Transformations*, and *On Realizing Truth*. There were also things like *Lost
Sounds of Great Antiquity*, which is modeled on *A Set of Art Songs* written by the Prince Ning; and
*The Amazing Secret Sourcebook*, which is modeled on *The Classic of Chess* written by the Prince
Ning. With upstanding supervisory agencies printing such ridiculous things, it is no wonder that
books like the Five Classics, the Four Books, and the *Great Compendium on Nature and Coherence*
[by Cheng Yi] were the exclusive affair of the Directorate of the Ceremonial (*silijian*, a eunuch-run
agency)! Books printed by the Directorate of the Ceremonial are seen in the Bibliography of the
Storehouse of Classics (*Jingchang shumu*). Extant large-character copies of Directorate of the
Ceremonial printings such as the Four Book and the Five Classics are widely scorned by collectors,
whose complaints extend beyond their inaccurate editing. It can be seen through them that the Ming
administration was undisciplined, allowing the education of the age to be run by eunuchs. Only the
various principalities occasionally had good imprints. This is because of the books bestowed upon
them, many were fine editions of the Song and Yuan which they could re-cut, and also because
many descendants of the princely households loved learning. The following extant books record
this...
The Ming-era books most valued by Ye are, in essence, Song or Yuan editions, printed in the Ming either directly from old blocks or from new blocks cut in imitation of old ones based on earlier imprints. Other than perhaps the materials used or indistinct printing due to wear on the blocks, which tend to flatten with use, such imprints would be largely indistinguishable from Song and Yuan imprints. Such books were printed in the early Ming by the National Academy and the principalities. Ye derides imprints of the classics from the Directorate of the Ceremonial, a eunuch-run agency, for their poor textual quality and sees them as emblematic of the pervasive decadence of the Ming.11 However, for Ye, it is the titles on the Censorate list, including the *Shuihu zhuan*, the *Sanguo yanyi*, and two Daoist texts, that are the height of frivolity and an indication of how deeply troubled the Ming was.

Ye’s attitudes toward the trajectory of the history of print in China and the imprints of the Ming within that trajectory are reflected in subsequent studies. Zhang Xiumin’s widely-cited magnum opus *History of Chinese Printing* (*Zhongguo yinshua shi*, pub. 1987), for example, refers to the Song as the “Golden Age” of print, the Yuan as a “decline,” and the Ming as a time when print “flourished again.” He is more charitable toward the Ming than Ye is, yet like Ye he emphasizes imprints from the early Ming with connections to Song and Yuan blocks or designs. As for the later Ming, he notes complaints from the mid-sixteenth century about the rising tide of low-quality books printed from poorly-carved blocks onto poor-quality materials. In a section on official printing in Ming Beijing, he also mentions the problematic Censorate editions and, while

he does not condemn them himself, mentions the scorn they have received:

The Beijing Censorate printed more than a few books. In the Ming, there was a Bibliography of Censorate Books, but it is no longer extant. Mr. Zhou’s Imprints Old and New lists thirty-three title, including The Great Compendium of Calculations, The Seven Governances, The Precious Essentials of a Thousand in Gold, The Direct Commentaries on the Military Classics, The Records of the Grand Historian, Selections of Literature, Collected Commentaries to the Poetry of Du Fu, The Fully Annotated Poetry of Su Shi, A New Voice for a Flourishing Age, Art Songs of Great Peace, Illustrated Measuring the Ocean, Sounds of the Tang, and A Record Suiting the Emotions. It is worth noting that there were also the Sanguo zhi yanyi and the Shuihu zhuan, which are popular with wide audiences. In the past, there have been those who believed that for an oversight bureau, printing xiaoshuo was not a sufficiently serious matter.

This image of the Censorate publications as being a wild dereliction of duty was recently repeated in Zhang Lian 2006 Study of Ming Dynasty Central Government Policies of Publishing and Culture (Mingdai zhongyang zhengfu chuban yu wenhua zhengce zhi yanjiu):

In addition to its surveillance duties, the Censorate also took part in printing. Moreover, its publishing output was more than other bureaus and agencies. However, the books it printed were narrow-minded and preposterous, and were the source of ridicule by people of later times. As of now, there are no extant copies in circulation. The only ones that can be attested to are those listed in Zhou Hongzu’s Imprints Old and New.

Chang then goes on to list an example of such ridicule in the form of a quotation from Chen Binhe and Zha Mengji’s 1931 work History of Chinese Books (Zhongguo shushi). Chen and Zha follow Ye Dehui’s complaint quoted above almost to the letter and cite precisely the same Censorate titles, including the Shuihu zhuan and the Sanguo yanyi.

Zhou Xinhui provides more nuanced view of Ming publishing that nevertheless touches

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12 Zhang Xiumin, Zhongguo yinshua shi, p. 252. This passage also appears almost verbatim in a 1981 article by Zhang on printing in Ming Beijing, reprinted in Zhang Xiumin yinshua shi lunwen ji, pp. 155-6.
13 Zhang Lian, Mingdai zhongyang zhengfu chuban yu wenhua zhengce zhi yanjiu, p. 51. This same passage is also found in her dissertation, Mingdai zhongyangzhengfu keshu yanjiu, p. 78.
upon several of the points seen above. For example, she acknowledges the poor editing of many
Directorate of Ceremonial publications that Ye Dehui mocked, but takes pains to note that not all
such publications are of such low quality; that some eunuchs were, in fact, educated men; and
that the historical bias against eunuchs has clouded judgment of the publications. As for the
Censorate publications, Zhou again takes a more sympathetic stance:

The Censorate was the highest surveillance organization in the nation. It published many books, and
moreover their contents were quite broad in scope: There were everything from military books,
medical books, and technology books to general anthologies, and separate anthologies. Imprints
Old and New records thirty-three of its publications, but in actuality it most likely did not stop at
this number. Certainly the thing that most makes one ponder is that the Censorate actually
published vernacular novels such as the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi*. After the middle
period of the Ming, there were many benighted emperors, governance was shadowy, and banditry
was rife. In publishing these two books, perhaps it was hoped that they could serve as a mirror and
that in them good methods for able ministers to eradicate bandits could be found. As for Zhang
Xianzhong, the leader of the peasant army who “had people read him the *Shuihu zhuan* and the
*Sanguo yanyi* by day and put into effect all of the ambushes and attacks therein,” this the officials
of the Censorate had not foreseen. This also certainly illustrates that there were few restrictions on
publishing at the time.

Aware of the criticisms of both the Censorate and the dynasty, Zhou attempts to find a plausible
reason for the Censorate publications that resolves them of their seemingly problematic nature.

In addition to being noted as evidence of a lack of institutional discipline or even
dynastic decline or as a source of amusement and scorn for later scholars, mentions of the
Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* or other publications have also appeared in the more specific context of
the history of the commercial print boom of the sixteenth century. Ōki Yasushi, Joseph
McDermott, and others have depicted the late Ming as a time when, hastened by inexpensive
materials and changes in social conditions, commercial printers thrived and the imprint finally

came to dominate over the manuscript.\textsuperscript{15} Literate and monied audiences created a market for all manners of printed material, including calendars, encyclopedias, and works of fiction. Juxtaposed against this framework, oddities of official Ming printing such as the Censorate Shuihu zhuan appear to be the products of a pervasive commercialism permeating even the administrative bodies of the government. This commercial influence would explain the apparent lack of “seriousness” of the titles in question. Robert Hegel, for example, brings up the Censorate Shuihu zhuan and Sanguo zhi yanyi in the course of describing the technology and economy of late Ming publishing, noting that government bodies were involved in the publishing “business” as well:

Many branches of the Ming imperial government were involved in the publishing business. Among them, the Duchayuan (Censorate) even produced books seemingly for their entertainment value. Their titles included editions of the Sanguo zhi yanyi and Shuihu zhuan, books on chess and music, and a collection of songs.\textsuperscript{16}

Cynthia Brokaw makes the more explicit assumption that the publishing of such books were “clearly commercial decisions,” and that the government “also participated in the commerce of books”:

But the government was a more active player in late imperial publishing than this neat—indeed, overneat—tripartite division [of commercial, private, and official publishing] suggests. For, in the absence of a coherent central policy defining what types of books could be published and what types could not, government offices at all administrative levels often made what were clearly commercial decisions to publish certain popular texts for public sale and profit. Thus the government... also participated in the commerce in books. The Imperial University (Guozi xue) in Nanjing and the Directorate of Ceremonial (Silijian) and the Censorate (Ducha yuan) in Beijing, for example, all produced editions of the novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo yanyi) in the Ming—though doubtless the emphasis in that text on the virtues of loyalty and legitimacy made it a work the state was interested in disseminating for ideological as well as commercial purposes.\textsuperscript{17}

In the above analyses, the Censorate Shuihu zhuan comes to carry considerable weight

\[\textsuperscript{15}\text{See McDermott, Social History, Ōki, Minmatsu, passim.}\]
\[\textsuperscript{16}\text{Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, p. 133.}\]
\[\textsuperscript{17}\text{Brokaw & Chow, eds. Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China, p. 17.}\]
despite the paucity of information concerning it. It becomes a piece of evidence indicating either the high literary status of the genre of vernacular fiction, the frivolity of the Ming dynasty’s administrative bodies, or the creeping commercialism of the late sixteenth century that permeated even the highest echelons of the dynastic administration. Further analysis of the edition is hindered by the lack of an identified, extant exemplar. However, as I am not concerned here with its formal features or its role in the textual evolution of the received versions of the *Shuihu zhuan*, this lack of an exemplar is not problematic. Rather, what I wish to consider is what sort of medium a Censorate publication represented for a work of a nascent literary genre, the vernacular novel. To do so, I will turn to the wider context of the publishing output of the Censorate and the Censorate as an institution. I will also draw comparisons with other elements of sixteenth-century print culture, specifically commercial publishing houses in Beijing that put out titles comparable to those on the list of Censorate publications.

**The Censorate *Shuihu zhuan* in Context**

To understand the printing output of the Censorate, it is first necessary to examine the catalogue in which the publications are listed, *Imprints Old and New. Imprints* contains sections listing the publications of nine central government bodies, 162 local-level bodies, and two others. Of the central government bodies, three are Ministries (namely, those or Rites, War, and Works). These are joined by the Imperial court, the National Academies in both Beijing and Nanjing, the Imperial medicinal college (*Taiyi yuan* 太醫院), and the Astronomy Bureau (*Qintian jian* 欽天監). The remaining two, listed among the central agencies and before the local...
administrative agencies, are the Temple of Abundant Blessings (*Longfu si* 隆福寺), which was constructed with government funding, and a “Nanjing Education Investigation Bureau” (*Nanjing tixue chayuan* 南京提學院), which likely refers to the Nanjing Education Intendant Circuit (*tidu xuedao* 提督學道). The Temple of Abundant Blessings and other temples occasionally functioned as publishers, under both their own sponsorship and under that of private patrons “including eunuchs and imperial relatives.”

Of these central agencies, the Nanjing National Academy has the largest list by far with 275 titles. Its listed titles are so numerous that they are subdivided into classics, masters, histories, collections, miscellaneous, books from the current dynasty (*benchao ben* 本朝本), and calligraphic example books (*fatie* 法帖). The Nanjing National Academy was the repository for woodblocks seized from the Yuan capital of Dadu 大都 by the forces of the Ming’s dynastic founder Zhu Yuanzhang. As many of these woodblocks dated from the Song and were refurbished in the Yuan and Ming, their prints are known as “three-dynasty books (*sanchao ben* 三朝本).” Additionally, the Nanjing National Academy held Song and Yuan woodblocks originally owned by Hangzhou commercial publishers. The fact that the Nanjing National Academy held these woodblocks explains the large number of titles listed for it. The Beijing National Academy has forty-two titles listed, and the Imperial court has eighty-three. Other than the Censorate, the remaining agencies of the central administration only have listings for a handful of titles each.

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18. Naquin, *Peking*, pp. 6-7. Later, under the Qing, the area around the Temple of Abundant Blessings became a renowned book market. Many of the merchants there had official connections and dealt in Manchu-Chinese bilingual works. See Widmer, “Honglou Meng Ying and its Publisher, Juzhen Tang of Beijing,” *Late Imperial China* 23.2 (2002) 33-52. Also Crossley and Rawski, “A Profile of the Manchu Language in Ch’ing History,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (June, 1993), 93: “A large number of the translations and bilingual editions either originated at or were reprinted at one of the printing establishments clustered in the general vicinity of the Lung-fu Temple, slightly to the west of the intensely commercial Tung Ssu Pai-lou district in Peking. Many of these printing houses had links with the imperial printing enterprises, and it is impossible to disprove imperial encouragement in the genesis of this literature.”


The list of Censorate publications is comprised of thirty-three titles, more than any other central body save the two National Academy branches and the Imperial court. They are listed in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Romanization</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>史記</td>
<td>Shi ji</td>
<td>Records of the Grand Historian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>文選</td>
<td>Wen xuan</td>
<td>Selections of Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>潛夫論</td>
<td>Qianfu lun</td>
<td>Discourses of a Recluse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>杜詩集註</td>
<td>Du shi jijie</td>
<td>Collected Commentaries on the Poetry of Du Fu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>詩林廣記</td>
<td>Shilin guangji</td>
<td>Expanded Record of a Forest of Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>千家註蘇詩</td>
<td>Qianjia zhu Su shi</td>
<td>The Poetry of Su Shi, with Notes of Numerous Commentators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>盛世新聲</td>
<td>Shengshi xinsheng</td>
<td>A New Voice for a Flourishing Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>太古遺音</td>
<td>Taigu yiyin</td>
<td>Remnant Sounds of Great Antiquity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>唐音</td>
<td>Tang yin</td>
<td>Sounds of the Tang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>曜仙神奇密譜</td>
<td>Quxian shenqi mipu</td>
<td>The Wondrous Secret Sourcebook of the Emaciated Immortal</td>
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<tr>
<td>玉機微義</td>
<td>Yuji weiyi</td>
<td>Subtle Meanings of the Jade Machinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>詩對押韻</td>
<td>Shidui yayun</td>
<td>Poetic Couplets, Arranged by Rhyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>武經直解</td>
<td>Wujing zhijie</td>
<td>The Direct Commentaries on the Military Classics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>孝經註疏</td>
<td>Xiaojing zhushu</td>
<td>The Classic of Filial Piety, with Arranged Commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>適情錄</td>
<td>Shiqing lu</td>
<td>A Record Sutting the Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>算法大全</td>
<td>Suanfa daquan</td>
<td>The Great Compendium of Calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>琴譜啟蒙</td>
<td>Qinyun qimeng</td>
<td>A Primer of Qin Harmonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>三國志演義</td>
<td>Sanguo zhi yanyi</td>
<td>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>水滸傳</td>
<td>Shuihu zhu an</td>
<td>The Water Margin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rear Chinese Title</td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td>English Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>千金寶要</td>
<td>Qianjin baoyao</td>
<td>The Precious Essentials of a Thousand in Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>太平樂府</td>
<td>Taiping yuefu</td>
<td>Ballads of Great Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>悟真篇</td>
<td>Wuzhen pian</td>
<td>On Realizing Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>玉音海篇</td>
<td>Yuin haipian</td>
<td>Ocean of Jade Voices (?)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>七政曆</td>
<td>Qi zheng lu</td>
<td>The Calendar of the Seven Governances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>毓慶勤懿集</td>
<td>Yuqing xunyi ji</td>
<td>A Collection Nurturing and Celebrating Meritorious Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>雍熙樂府</td>
<td>Yongxi yuefu</td>
<td>Ballads for a Harmonious Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>爛柯經</td>
<td>Lanke jing</td>
<td>The Classic of the Rotten Axe Handle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>萬化玄機</td>
<td>Wanhua xuanji</td>
<td>Dark Machinations of Myriad Transformations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>掳圖測海</td>
<td>Pitu cehai</td>
<td>Illustrated Oceanic [Mirror] for Measuring [Circles] [?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中原音韻</td>
<td>Zhongyuan yinyun</td>
<td>Rhymes of the Central Plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>兀同契</td>
<td>Cantong qi</td>
<td>Token for the Agreement of the Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王氏藏集</td>
<td>Wang shi cangji</td>
<td>Collected Works of Mr. Wang (Tingxiang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>杜研岡集</td>
<td>Du Yangang ji</td>
<td>Collected Works of Du Yangang</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The titles represent a variety of genres, including rhyme and medicine manuals, art-song collections, classical poetry. I will begin, however, with the two vernacular novels included on the list. In addition to the Shuihu zhuan, there is also the Sanguo zhi yanyi. An edition held by the Shanghai Library is frequently identified as an exemplar of the Censorate Sanguo zhi yanyi. It features two prefaces, the first signed Yongyuzi 窮愚子 (“Vulgar and Foolish Master”) and dated 1491, and the second signed Xiuranzi 修髯子 (“Long-bearded Master”) and dated 1522, the first year of the Jiajing reign. As indicated by seal imprints in the edition, these are pen names for Jiang Daqi 蒋大器 and Zhang Shangde 張尚德, respectively. Though the edition features no colophon or other marks that would indicate its provenance, the
quality of its paper and printing are consistent with contemporary official imprints, and the identification as the Censorate edition is made on this basis. In his dissertation, Andrew West has remarked, “As the extant 1522 preface edition has all the appearances of an official edition of the Jiajing period, it has often been equated with the Censorate edition, but as Zhou Hongzu gives no details of this edition it is not possible to confirm this.”

There is evidence in the two prefaces that this edition—frequently called the “Jiajing” or “renwu 任午” edition from its dating—was the first printed edition of the Sanguo yanyi. The first preface, the one dated 1491 and signed Yongyuzi, makes reference to hand-copying. It reads, in part, “Once the writing was completed, the aficionados among the gentlemen scholars contended with one another to copy it so as to facilitate the viewing of it. 書成，士君子之好事者爭相贍錄，以便觀覽。” The 1522 preface by Xiuranzi, by contrast, makes reference to printing. The beginning of the preface is written in a question-and-answer format, and an rhetorical interlocutor asks if the “elaborated” (yanyi) version of the Record of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo zhi) is not just a waste of time as we already have the original version. Xiuranzi answers that it is not, as it makes the message of the original Record more accessible. His interlocutor, thus fully convinced of the Sanguo zhi yanyi’s importance, then asks: “There is a flood of simple books, [yet] fine editions are extremely rare. Might we bestow longevity upon the woodblock carvers and spread these editions out to all four directions? 簡軒浩瀚，善本甚艱，請壽諸梓，公之四方，可乎？”

21 For examples of such an identification, see Zheng Zhenduo, “Shuihu zhuan de yanhua,” and Wang Chung-min, A Descriptive Catalog of Rare Chinese Books, as cited in West, Quest for the Utext, p. 79; See also the preface to the 1975 Renmin wenxue chubanshe facsimile reprint of the 1522 Sanguo edition.
22 West, Quest for the Utext, p. 79.
23 Robert Hegel, for example, interprets the edition this way. See Reading Illustrated Fiction, p. 161.
24 For a discussion of terms such as haoshizhe (here, “aficionados”) and guanlan, see McLaren, “Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China,” in Brokaw and Chow, eds. Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China.
Another form of “vernacular” literature to be found on the list of Censorate publications is collections of *qu*, or northern-style lyrics to be sung in contemporary, northern pronunciations. This is in contrast with more “formal” forms of poetry that used older rhyme schemes. There are three such collections: *A New Voice for a Flourishing Age, Lyrics of Great Peace*, and *Ballads for a Harmonious Peace*. There is also a rhyme dictionary organized by the northern pronunciations used in *qu* lyrics, the *Rhymes of the Central Plain*.

*A New Voice for a Flourishing Age* is an anonymously compiled collection of *sanqu* (also poetically referred to as “*yuefu*”) arias in the Northern style. An extant copy held by the Beijing National Library is dated to the twelfth year of the Zhengde era, or 1517. That places it within five years of the Xiuranzi preface to the “Censorate” *Sanguo* edition discussed above, and like that *Sanguo* edition, this edition too features no publisher’s colophon or other identifying marks. This raises the possibility that this copy is an exemplar of the Censorate edition as well. The 1517 preface to *A New Voice* positions the collection between songs of debauchery on the one side and simply moralizing ones on the other. It also claims to consist of works that are both popular yet written by poets and worthy of technical comparison to those of the *Classic of Poetry*, and that the collection’s organization by rhyme scheme facilitates the writing of matching lyrics:

Ballads have long been in circulation, and are divided into southern and northern songs. Southern songs are passed down from the Han and the Tang, while northern songs arrived in our dynasty from the Liao, Jin, and Yuan. These all came from the mouths of poets, and are not the sounds of decadent quarters. They employ techniques of analogy and association that are of a piece with the “Airs” and “Odes” of the *Classic of Poetry*. As for those songs sung in the villages, none of them go beyond encouraging good and discouraging evil, or expressing nostalgia and writing out grievances. I have paid attention to song lyrics, and found that some of them have base phrasings and vulgar lines that bring grave injury upon classical decorum. Those cause disgust in readers and disdain in listeners. On idle days, I inspected them one by one, excising the verbose and deleting the unnecessary while keeping more than four hundred of popular and widely read pieces and more than five hundred single-song *xiaoling* poems. I titled the collection *A New Voice for a* 25

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25 This copy was reprinted in facsimile form by the Wenxue kanxing chuban she in 1955.
Flourishing Age and ordered workmen to carve blocks of it so as to disseminate it widely. Perhaps it will cause people to sing them and improve their characters, and respond to them without making errors of rhyme or meter. Written on the border in the twelfth year, first cycle, of the Zhengde reign.

In 1525, *A New Voice* served as the basis for *Cilin zhaiyan*, a version greatly expanded by Zhang Lu 張祿. There also exists, however, an edition of *A New Voice* that contains the Zhang Lu preface included in the *Cilin zhaiyan*, bearing the same date. Furthermore, this edition credits “Mr. Zhang of Jintai 金台張氏” with its publication. It is unclear whether “Mr. Zhang” is Zhang Lu, or if a commercial publisher named Mr. Zhang of Jintai obtained and modified the blocks of the *Cilin zhaiyan* preface, adding it to an edition of *A New Voice*.

*Ballads for Great Peace* is a collection of Northern-style *sanqu* songs originally compiled by Yang Chaoying 楊朝英 in 1351. Yang had previously produced another edition of *sanqu* titled *White Snow, Sunny Spring* (*Yangchun baixue*, ca. 1324). Both are arranged by tune rather than author. These were among the first printed collections of *sanqu* songs and contributed to the textualization of the oral phenomenon of the genre. *Ballads for a Great Peace* includes arias from the *Record of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記).

*Ballads for a Harmonious Peace* is another anthology of *sanqu* songs. Its compilation is accredited to Guo Xun, the Marquis of Wuding (1475-1541), who is associated with the publishing of many works including the *Shuihu zhuan*. The earliest edition dates to 1531 and

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27 Princeton microfilm 9101/1165.1 r.1009(4).
28 Other “Jintai” commercial publishers of Beijing are discussed further below.
29 On the textualization of the *sanqu* “art song” and the gradual participation of literati in the genre, see Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, passim.
30 Guo is the subject of the following chapter, which provides more detail on his publishing activities.
contains a preface signed Wang Yan 王言 identifying Guo Xun as its compiler.\textsuperscript{31} It contains all of the arias from the \textit{Record of the Western Chamber}, in textually identical form to the 1498 edition of the latter, the earliest known edition of that text.

The \textit{Rhymes of the Central Plain} is a major phonological work of the Yuan dynasty, compiled by Zhou Deqing 周德清 in 1324, the first year of the Taiding reign. It classifies rhymes according to contemporary northern spoken dialect, and as such can serve as a reference work while composing northern \textit{sanqu} songs.\textsuperscript{32} Zhou writes in his preface, “The rhymes all maintain a natural sound, and the characters can be penetrated by the world’s spoken language 韻共守自然之音，字能通天下之語。” In addition to rhyme tables, it also included Zhou’s “Ten Rules for Composing Song Lyrics (\textit{zuoci shifa} 作詞十法), a guide to writing \textit{sanqu}.

Breaking with tradition, Zhou intended the included rhyme tables to supplant those of older phonological works such as the \textit{Expanded Rhymes} (\textit{Guangyun} 廣韻), which he saw as overly pedantic and archaic. The northern rhyme scheme reflects the post-1280 political reality of Zhou’s era as well, in which the south had been incorporated into what became the Yuan dynasty. For this reason, northern standards for composition came to the south. Along with the \textit{Proper Sounds of Great Harmony} (\textit{Taihe zhengyin pu} 太和正音譜) and the aforementioned \textit{Ballads of Great Peace, Rhymes of the Central Plain} played an important role in the creation of a canonical rhyme scheme for \textit{sanqu} song lyrics.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Yongxi yuefu} is frequently cited as having been compiled in 1566. These citations are incorrect. Moreover, that date is 25 years after the death of Guo Xun, the purported compiler. An exemplar of the 1531 edition is held by the National Central Library, Taipei. For a textual comparison of the \textit{Yongxi yuefu}'s contents and other sources, including the 1498 \textit{Xixiang ji}, see Chen Luojia, \textit{Yongxi yuefu yin Yuan zaju yanjiu} (MA thesis). This work is discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{32} The geographical referent of the titular “Zhongyuan” is the subject of dispute. It has been interpreted by Wang Li and others as referring metaphorically to the Yuan capital, Dadu (Beijing). Wang Jiexin, on the other hand, has interpreted it as referring to Henan. See Wang Jiexin, \textit{Zhongyuan yinyun xinkao}, pp. 37-114.

\textsuperscript{33} On the creation of a canonical song lyric scheme, see Sieber, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 47-51. Details of the phonological system of \textit{Rhymes of the Central Plain} are to be found in Norman, \textit{Chinese}, pp. 48-50, and Hu Qiguang, \textit{Zhongguo xiaoxue shi}, pp. 185-199. See also William Dolby’s entry “Chung-yuan yin-yun” in the \textit{Indiana Companion}, pp.
Taken as a group, these books—important anthologies of sanqu songs arranged by rhyme and a rhyme dictionary—suggest a practicality intended for those who either by choice or social circumstance wrote sanqu song lyrics. The literatus and sanqu author Li Kaixian (1502-1568) cited *Rhymes of the Central Plain* and *Ballads for a Great Peace* as canonical works for the composition and appreciation of sanqu lyrics, a fact that Patricia Sieber has seen as an indication of an emerging “new domain of erudition” among literati with a specific prosody as a defining feature.34

There is also the *Yuyin haipian*, which I have been unable to identify precisely. However, there are several character books (zishu字書) from the Ming with “Haipian” in the title, and this is likely a variation on them.

In addition to the collections of sanqu, there are also five collections of classical poetry, including three anthologies and two single-poet collections. The anthologies are *The Expanded Forest of Poems*, *Sounds of the Tang*, and *Poetic Couplets Indexed by Rhyme*, and the collections are of the works of Du Fu and Su Shi. *The Expanded Forest of Poems* was compiled by the late Song/early Yuan poet Cai Zhengsun蔡正孫 and consists of 671 poems of the Jin, Tang, and Song he deemed “popular and widely read” (膾炙人口). Appended to the poems are “poetry talks” (shihua詩話) and other such materials relevant to them. It was reprinted with a preface that is dated 1497, the tenth year of the Hongzhi reign, and signed by a Censor, Zhang Nai張鼐. While this preface suggests the possibility that this was the Censorate edition, there is no colophon or other evidence to prove it to be so.35 *Sounds of the Tang* was an influential Yuan-

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34 Sieber, ibid., p. 49.
35 The typeset edition of the *Shilin guangji* printed by the Zhonghua shuju in 1982 is based on the Hongzhi edition. The Zhang Nai in question is a Hongzhi-era graduate, not to be confused with the Wanli-era graduate or the Chongzhen-era rebel of the same name.
era collection of Tang poetry compiled by Yang Shihong 楊士弘 between 1335 and 1344. A Jiajing-era edition has been assumed to be that of Jintai Wang Liang. Poetic Couplets Indexed by Rhyme was compiled in 1453 by Geng Chun 歌純 (fl. 1432, not to be confused with the Han dynasty figure of the same name), an instructor at the National Academy and a specialist in the Book of Poetry. It compiles poems in regulated verse by the rhymes they share. As the works discussed previously would facilitate the composition of sanqu lyrics, this work would facilitate the composition of regulated verse.

In addition to these works of vernacular and classical poetry, there are a handful of classical works listed. These are: The Records of the Grand Historian, Selections of Literature, commentary editions of a collection of strategy manuals and the Classic of Filial Piety, and Discourses of a Recluse.

There are also several works that deal with types of performance other than the writing or reciting of poetry: these include three works on music. They are the qin handbooks Remnant Sounds of Great Antiquity, The Wondrous Secret Sourcebook of the Emaciated Immortal, both of which have connections to the Ming prince of Ning 朱 欽 Zhu Quan 朱權, and A Primer of Qin Harmonies. Qin handbooks of the Ming feature “abbreviated notation” (jianzipu 漢字譜), a specialized form of musical notation in which several characters and symbols are printed together in a cluster telling the reader how to play the instrument. This specialized system required precise block carving and printing in order for the book to remain useful to players: mistakes would hinder players’ ability to interpret the score (dapu 打譜). For this reason, many Ming qin handbooks are lavishly produced editions.

37 See Ning, Hanyu yunshu shi, pp. 437-440.
The *Secret Sourcebook*, a particularly important *qin* handbook, was such a lavish edition and was known in the Ming as being among the finest.\(^{38}\) It bears a preface dated 1425, and was reprinted in the Jiajing and Wanli eras. The former reprint was reproduced in the 1963 compendium of *qin* handbooks *Qinqu jicheng* 琴曲集成, the editors of which identified it as a product of the Beijing publisher Jintai Wang Liang (to be discussed below).\(^{39}\) Their assumption is made on the basis of a *Secret Sourcebook* listed among Jintai Wang Liang editions in that establishment’s edition of the *Selections of Literature (Wen xuan)*. However, again as with the *Sanguo* edition discussed above, this edition features no colophon or other distinguishing indications of its origins, and could also possibly be an exemplar of a Censorate edition. The editors of the *Qinqu jicheng* make no mention of the Censorate edition of the *Secret Sourcebook*.

*Remnant Sounds* was also printed by Zhu Quan; in a preface dated 1413, he claims that his edition is based on a work originally from the Song that had been annotated and expanded by Yuan Junzhe 袁均哲 in the early Ming. Jintai Wang Liang published an edition of Zhu Quan’s *Remnant Sounds* as well, titled *Newly Published Complete [Remnant] Sounds of Great Antiquity* (Xinkan Taiyin daquan 新刊太音大全). An extant edition of the Jintai Wang Liang edition bears that publisher’s colophon.\(^{40}\) Though it contains more mistakes than the *Secret Sourcebook*, it features lavish illustrations of fingering positions and various types of *qin*.

Also related to cultured leisure activities are two chess manuals, the first of which is *A Record Suiting the Emotions*. An edition held in the Peking University library features a preface


\(^{39}\) As I will discuss below, the *Shenqi mipu* is featured in an advertisement found in the Jintai Wang Liang edition of the *Wen xuan*. This fact is mentioned by the editors of the compendium. See the 1963 edition of *Qinqu jicheng*, v. 1a, p. 11. The Jiajing *Shenqi mipu* itself is reprinted in pp. 69-144 of the same volume, based on an original held by the Capital Library, Beijing. (A later version of the *Qinqu jicheng* reproduces the Wanli edition of the *Shenqi mipu* rather than the Jiajing edition.)

\(^{40}\) This Wang Liang edition is also reproduced in the 1963 *Qinqu jicheng*, pp. 31-68; a bibliographical description is also available in Tang Jianyuan, *Qin fu*, v. 2a, endnotes pp. 7-9.
dated the third year of the Jiajing era (1525), and again no publisher’s information. The second is *The Classic of the Rotten Axe Handle*, the title of which refers to the legend of Wang Zhi 王質 of the Jin 晉 era. Wang Zhi encountered two immortal boys while cutting firewood and watched them play a round of chess. When they were finished, Wang’s axe handle had rotted away and a century had passed. This manual was also printed by Zhu Quan, mentioned above in connection with the *qin* manuals.

There is a work listed titled the *Great Compendium of Calculations*. This appears to be an abbreviation for the *Jiuzhang bilei suanfa daquan* 九章比類算法大全, a 1450 mathematical work that includes mnemonic formulae for performing calculations on an abacus. Additionally, there are titles related to medicine (*Subtle Meanings of the Jade Machinations* and *The Precious Essentials of a Thousand in Gold*) and Daoism and alchemy (*On Realizing Truth* and *Token for the Agreement of the Three*). There are also a handful of works that I have been unable to identify, including *Dark Machinations of Myriad Transformations*, *The Seven Governances*, *Pitu cehai*, and *Yuyin haipian*. Judging solely from the title and the other works on the list, the first is likely another Daoist work. *The Calendar of the Seven Governances* presumably is a calendrical system based on the *qizheng*, ie. the sun, the moon, and the five planets. The third, *Pitu cehai*, is most likely an illustrated (*pitu*) edition of the *Ceyuan haijing* 測圓海鏡, abbreviated to “cehai.” The *Ceyuan haijing* is another mathematical work by Li Ye 李冶; it is the earliest surviving work describing the “heavenly element (eg. variable) notation” (*tianyuan shu* 天元術) methodology for solving algebraic equations. As for the *Yuyin haipian*, there are several character books (*zishu* 字書) from the Ming with “*Haipian*” in the title, and this is likely a variation on them.

In addition to the works discussed above that were reprinted by the Censorate, there were also three “original” works that were written by people with personal ties to the agency. First, and most importantly, there is *The Collected Works of Mr. Wang*, a collection of the writings of Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1474-1544). Wang Tingxiang has been described as “one of the most active intellectuals and iconoclastic thinkers of the mid-Ming,” whose interests “spanned philosophy, statecraft, literature, and music.” After passing the metropolitan examinations in 1502, Wang had a very successful career that was, however, not without its setbacks. Soon after passing the examinations, he was made a Hanlin Academy bachelor, and then in 1504 he became the supervising secretary in the Office of Scrutiny monitoring the Ministry of War. He served in the capital until 1508, when he first took leave to mourn his father and then was sent down on a minor charge. In the years between then and 1527, he came back into favor, was demoted again, and came back yet again, holding a variety of appointments including a stint as a Censor (1510-1513). In 1527, he was made vice-censor in chief, and finally in 1533 he was made Censor in Chief. The following year, he was made civilian director of the Integrated Divisions, which was under the aforementioned Guo Xun—the figure associated with early editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi*—at the time. This streak of high-ranking appointments came in the aftermath of the Great Rites Controversy, in which he (and, for that matter, Guo Xun) supported the Jiajing emperor in his quest to have his biological father made an emperor posthumously. After Guo was charged with numerous crimes and placed in prison in 1541, the emperor declared that Wang Tingxiang was part of Guo’s faction. Wang was dismissed from office once again and sent home as a commoner. He died three years later.

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43 Guo Xun and the Great Rites Controversy will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.
During his first years in Beijing, from the time he passed the exams in 1502 to the time he took leave to mourn his father in 1508, Wang made friendships with several important literary figures associated with Li Mengyang, including He Jingming and Cui Xian. The core of these men came to be known as the “Former Seven Masters” in literary history. The Former Seven Masters are Wang, Li Mengyang, He Jingming, Bian Gong, Xu Zhenqing, Kang Hai, and Wang Jiusi. As a group, they are considered as comprising an “Archaist” school, advocating prose of the Qin and Han and poetry of the Tang as literary models. However, as Daniel Bryant has shown, the group was neither so well-defined nor so ideologically unified as this appellation and definition would have it. That said, however, Wang remained lifelong friends with several of them.

As the title implies, *The Collected Works of Mr. Wang* is an anthology of Wang Tingxiang’s writings. It features prefaces by Tang Long 唐龍, Du Nan, and Li Yinghong 李應宏. All of the prefaces are dated 1536 (early summer, the fifth month, and the sixth month, respectively). This would place the compilation of the anthology to the period when Wang was Censor in Chief and civilian director of the Integrated Divisions in the capital. An edition with these prefaces held by the Naikaku bunko again has no publisher’s markings. The book itself features poetry and prose in a wide variety of genres.

*The Collected Works of Du Yangang* refers to the literary name of another censor, Du Nan. It features a preface by Wang Tingxiang, signed the previous year (1535), an earlier one by Cui Xian signed 1531, an undated preface by the poet Gao Shusi 高叔嗣 (1501-1537), and one by Li Yinghong signed 1535.

The titles on the list of Censorate publications reflect a leisurely bent, with music, poetry,

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44 *Hishi* reproduction available in Princeton’s East Asian Library
and belles lettres well-represented. Their prefaces also suggest a community, of which men such as Wang Tingxiang and the Former Seven Masters were part.

Censorate Publications and the Beijing Book Trade

In this view of the Censorate publications as associated with the interests and leisurely pursuits of a class of Jiajing-era elites, they are not the random assortment that they might initially seem when compared with imprints of the Ministry of Rites or the imperial court. There are threads, however loose, that run through the collection. The question that follows is whether or not commercial entities targeted similar audiences with similar market offerings. As I have detailed above, it is frequently assumed that the Censorate was engaging in publishing blatantly commercial titles in an attempt to make a monetary profit. If this were the case, it would follow that its publishing operation would closely resemble its commercially-oriented peers. In order to evaluate this, it is necessary to juxtapose the Censorate as a publishing operation with those peers.

Indeed, there is a large overlap of published titles between the Censorate and one particular contemporary Beijing bookseller, Jintai Wang Liang 金台汪謙. However, the shared collection of titles that are found among the publications of these two entities is unique when compared to other commercial booksellers. Jintai Wang Liang published at least fourteen titles, which are listed in an advertisement contained within that establishment’s 1522 edition of Selections of Literature. Of the fourteen Wang Liang titles advertised, all save one (specifically,

45 The overlapping titles of the Censorate and Jintai Wang Liang can be compared against other commercial printings from Beijing by consulting Du and Du, Quan Ming fensheng fenxian keshu kao.
46 This advertisement is reprinted in Qi, Zhongguo gudai shufang yanjiu, p. 250.
the *Han Shi waizhuan*（韓詩外傳）are on the Censorate list.\(^{47}\) Furthermore, those thirteen titles appear together on the Censorate list, interrupted in the first fourteen places only by *A New Voice for a Flourishing Age*, which appears in the seventh place. The advertisement features two lists of seven titles each, printed in horizontal rows. The first list is of prints from “facsimile recut” (*fanke* 翻刻) blocks based on Song and Yuan editions, and the second list, printed directly underneath the first, is of books printed from “newly recarved” (*chongke* 重刻) versions of texts from “ancient woodblocks (*guban* 古板).”\(^{48}\) When read vertically rather than horizontally, over half of the titles are even listed in the same order as on the Censorate list.

\(^{47}\) The advertised title, in full, is “Han Shi waizhuan (“Exoteric Commentary on the Han school text of the Classic of Songs”), one set in ten volumes, the Collection of Han Ying”（韓詩外傳一部十卷韓嬰集. Hightower translates *Han Shi waizhuan* as “Exoteric Commentary on the Han school text of the Classic of Songs”: see Hightower, *Han shih wai chuan: Han Ying’s Illustrations of the didactic application of the Classic of songs: an annotated translation.*

\(^{48}\) *Fanke* are made by tracing the characters of an old edition, typically one from the Song or Yuan, and recreating the edition by pasting the tracing onto blocks for carving. *Chongke* editions are printed from newly carved blocks that follow the text, but not necessarily the design, of an older edition. See entries for *fanke ben* and *chongke ben* in Qu, *Zhongguo guji banke cidian*, p. 432, p. 656.
The Jintai Wang Liang advertisement lists the establishment’s location as “across from the first patrol watch office to the west and inside the Zhengyang Gate.” However, despite the establishment’s name, this area is not the area known as Jintai (“Golden Terrace”). It is near the center of the old city, near what is now Tian’anmen Square, while the area Jintai is in the north of the city, near the Chaoyang Gate. Kathryn A. Lowry writes that Jintai is “auspicious” and “propitious” for the name of a book publisher, for it “referred to the legendary site on which the ancient King Zhao of Yan was said to have heaped gold as an
enticement to any minister who might help him take revenge on the state of Qi” and was one of the eight vistas of Beijing painted by the Yongle emperor’s court artists after moving the capital there. As such, it refers “to the rewards due to men of talent and acumen.” This propitious designation Jintai is used in the names of several other Beijing publishers in the Ming: Mr. Lu of Jintai 金台魯氏, Mr. Yan of Jintai 晏氏, Jintai House of Yue 金台岳家, and Mr. Feng 馮氏 of Jintai. The House of Yue was in the vicinity of Wang Liang’s within the Zhengyang Gate and thus not in Jintai. Additionally, the Yanfa 衍法 and Da Longfu 大隆福 temples and the Zongjing Hermitage 宗鏡庵 used the Jintai designation. This suggests that the name Jintai was used for its cultural as well as geographic connotations.

Nothing is known about the life of Wang Liang, but the imprints themselves and bibliographical records of them provide information about his publishing activities. First, as mentioned above, the advertisement in the Selections of Literature edition mentions a number of titles. Those titles are advertised as being based on earlier editions, many from the Song and Yuan and thus, presumably, of high quality. Also, there are records of Jintai Wang Liang titles in the libraries of collectors. The Qing bibliophile Ding Bing 丁丙 (1832-99), for example, listed Wang Liang titles in the catalogue of his collection, A Guide to the Collection of the Fine Edition Book Room (Shanben shushi cangshu zhi 善本書室藏書志). Ding owned a copy of the Wang Liang Selections of Literature, which he describes at length. After boasting of the many commentaries included in the edition, Ding remarks admiringly of this edition:

Could anything but an edition originally from the Song be like this? This is a new printing by Jintai Wang Liang from the first year of the Jiajing reign. At the front it has a preface by Li Tingxiang of Puyang, who praises its virtue. Mr. Wang Liang happened upon some Song editions and had cuts made from them. The woodblock carvers not only knew nothing of You [Mao 尤 (1127-94)] but

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49 Lowry, The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th and 17th Century China, pp. 49-50. See also ibid., p. 90. (Lowry here is referring not to Jintai Wang Liang but another “Jintai” publisher, Mr. Lu of Jintai 金台魯氏.)
neither did they know of Zhang [Boyan 張伯顏]!\(^{50}\) Liang is the one who set up the Jintai bookshop inside the Zhengyang Gate across from the patrol watch office.

Ding also has an entry for a collection of Du Fu’s poetry entitled *A Collection of a Thousand Commentaries to the Poetry of Du Fu, Separated by Category, in Twenty Volumes* (集千家注分類杜工部詩二十卷), which he notes is a Wang Liang facsimile reprint of a Yuan edition. In the entry, he describes three Yuan editions. First is an edition printed by Mr. Yu’s 余氏 Qinyou tang 勤有堂 in Jian’an 建安, and the second is a “new edition” printed by Guangqin tang 廣勤堂 that also bears the mark of Sanfeng shushe 三峰書舍.\(^{51}\) Then, there is one printed by Pan Pingshan 潘屏山 at Guashan shuyuan 圭山書院. He then describes the edition he owns:

This is a facsimile reprint made by Wang Liang. Its number of lines and its character count do not differ from the Yuan edition. The only difference is its brush strokes are slightly thicker. In printing, many discarded official documents were used, giving the editions an air of antiquity. Wang Liang is the Jintai bookseller. The *Shiji* of Mr. Ke [Weixiong 柯維熊, printed in 1525] and the *Wen xuan* of Mr. Zhang were both his publications.

Ye Dehui’s account in his *Casual Talks* contradicts Ding. According to Ye, the Qinyou tang establishment dissolved around the time of the Yuan-Ming transition, and Ye Rizeng’s 葉日增 Guangqin tang obtained its blocks.\(^{54}\) He claims that Ding Bing’s catalogue is mistaken: Wang Liang did not make a facsimile reprint of a printed edition of the Du Fu collection, but rather

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\(^{50}\) You Mao edited and printed a commentary edition of the *Wen xuan*. After its blocks were destroyed in a fire, the Yuan-era scholar Zhang Boyan created facsimile blocks based on the You edition and reprinted it in the Yuanyou era (1314-20). See Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, p. 55.

\(^{51}\) Ding, *Shanben shushi cangshu zhi*, juan 38, p. 1.

\(^{52}\) In actuality, the Guangqin tang edition has been shown to be printed from the same blocks as the Qinyou tang edition, with Qinyou tang’s name removed and Guangqin tang’s name added. “Mr. Yu” of Qinyou tang has been identified as Yu Anding 安定 (1275-1347), a ninth-generation ancestor of the famed Ming commercial printer Yu Xiangdou. (Yu Xiangdou will be discussed at length in a later chapter.) See Chia, *Printing for Profit*, pp. 88-93.

\(^{53}\) Ding, ibid., juan 24, p. 10.

\(^{54}\) Lucille Chia, who has examined the genealogical records, points out that the son of Qinyou tang’s Yu Zhi’an 余志安 was married to a woman of the surname Ye, who may have been a member of Ye Rizeng’s family.
purchased the blocks themselves from Guangqin tang.\textsuperscript{55} Ding’s remark that the Wang Liang edition’s brush strokes are fatter is explained away as flattening of the blocks due to frequent printing.\textsuperscript{56}

Jintai Wang Liang was one of only a handful of printers in the capital. Despite, or perhaps because of, its status as the national capital, Beijing paled in comparison with areas such as Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Jianyang as a center for commercial publishing in the Ming: As the seat of the government, it naturally was home to many literate people whom one would expect to be large consumers of books. However, as the majority of them came from elsewhere, it might be that they obtained the majority of books in their hometowns. It might also have been the case that, as a trading hub, Beijing had less need for locally printed books. The late Ming bibliophile and scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602) suggested that the high price of paper in the north hindered the book trade there compared to the south. As for quality of editions, Beijing did not even warrant a mention from Hu. He writes:

> Of contemporary woodblocks, those from Suzhou and Changzhou are the best. Following them are those from Jinling, and then those from Hangzhou. Recently, there have frequently been exquisite carvings from Huzhou and She County that accordingly contend with those of Suzhou and Changzhou in price. Extant Sichuan prints are exceedingly rare, and Fujian prints are of the lowest quality. The situation is the same for all areas as it was in Song times.  

The Ming writer Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624) wrote a similar ranking of imprints of various areas, and Beijing is once again absent from the list:

> Of Song-era imprints, Hangzhou’s were the highest quality, followed by Sichuan’s. Fujian’s were of


\textsuperscript{56} Ye does not, however, provide an explanation of why Wang Liang would advertise the Du Fu collection as a “fanke” facsimile reprint if it were actually printed from the Yuan blocks. It is possible that the \textit{fanke} implied editing of the text to the customer; Ke Weixiong’s preface to the “fanke” edition of the \textit{Shiji}, for example, says he was asked to correct the text. Microfilm versions of this \textit{Shiji} edition is held by Princeton University’s East Asian Library.

the lowest quality. The “Hangzhou imprints” of today are not even worthy to be called as such. The quality of craftsmanship in carving in Jinling, Xin’an, and Wuxing is up to par with that of the Song.

With the prestige granted books printed in the south, it is likely that rich and powerful residents of Beijing would prefer them over locally-printed books. Lower-end consumers, on the other hand, would find locally produced books prohibitively expensive, especially in comparison with cheap Fujian products arriving through trade routes.

In terms of numbers, Jintai Wang Liang is one of thirteen book publishers known to have been operating in Ming Beijing. This number pales in comparison to those for major publishing centers such as Nanjing, Suzhou, and Jianyang. Estimates place the number of Nanjing publishers at around one hundred for the Ming. Those for Suzhou vary more widely, with the highest at sixty-seven. Various counts put the number for Jianyang between sixty-seven and 129. Jianyang County also encompasses the town Masha, the home of the notorious “Masha editions,” a term which perhaps unfairly became synonymous with cheap, shoddy imprints.

The other “Jintai” publishers mentioned above were also noteworthy. The Jintai House of Yue is notable among these Beijing publishers of the Ming for its edition of the Record of the Western Chamber (Xixiang ji 西廬記). Published in 1498, it is the earliest extant edition of that work. For a Beijing edition, it is uncharacteristically fine, with lavish illustrations in the top register. A single exemplar is held in the library of Peking University. Mr. Lu of Jintai is

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59 For a discussion of this observation, see Qi Fukang, Zhongguo gudai shufang yanjiu, p. 191.
60 More precisely, Zhang Xiumin counts 93, while Miao Yonghe counts ten more. See Zhang, Yinshua shi, pp. 243-7; Miao, Mingdai chuban shigao, pp. 73-4. See also Qi Fukang, Zhongguo gudai shufang yanjiu, p. 174-97; Zhang, “Mingdai Beijing de keshu,” in Zhang, Lunwen shi, pp. 151-61.
61 Miao, ibid.
62 The low figure is from Qu Mianliang, Zhongguo guji banke cidian, while the high figure is from Du Xinfu, Mingdai banke zonglu.
63 For a description of this edition of the Xixiang ji, see West and Idema, The Moon and the Zither, pp. 12-13.
significant as it published three short anthologies of popular songs to the tune of “Stopping the Flight of the Clouds (zhu yunfei 駐雲飛),” the first of their kind. The earliest is dated to 1472, and the others appeared before the end of the Chenghua reign (1487). They are of a series, with each purporting to best the last. Kathryn Lowry has interpreted this as evidence that they were targeted toward locals who would be repeat customers. The second of the three consists of songs about the Record of the Western Chamber story; the Jintai House of Yue edition of that work appeared only a few years after this song collection, illustrating the contemporary popularity of the narrative. All of the song anthologies are slim editions of a single juan each.\footnote{64} Mr. Yan of Jintai, meanwhile, published an erotic novella called Zhongqing liji 鍾情麗集 (translated by Richard Wang as “Pleasing vignettes of Concentrated Love”). The earliest of the classical novellas, a genre related to the chantefable, Concentrated Love was published in the sixteenth year of the Hongzhi reign, or 1503, though Wang notes, “From an intertextual perspective, Ming novellas and vernacular fiction of the same time frame do not seem to have had mutual influence.”\footnote{65}

Yongshun Hall (Yongshun tang 永順堂) was also apparently a significant publisher in Ming Beijing. However, there are no contemporary records of such an establishment and its output is only known through a cache of printed volumes found in an excavated gravesite in greater Shanghai’s Jiading 嘉定 district in 1967. They consist of sixteen volumes of chantefables (shuochang cihua 說唱詞話), four of which form the continuous story of Hua Guan Suo 花關索; and one legend (chuanqi 傳奇). Six of the unearthed books bear the mark of Yongshun Hall either on the title page or at the end, and one has printed on it “Newly printed in Beijing.”

\footnote{64} For a description of the zhu yunfei song collections, see Lowry, ibid., pp. 90-99. “Stopping the clouds’ flight” was apparently a common image employed in praise of a singer’s ability: see the similar wording used by Shen Defu (“sheng e yun 聲遏雲”), noted and translated in West and Idema, ibid., p. 9.
\footnote{65} Wang, Ming Erotic Novellas, p. 14, and passim.
Several bear Chenghua reign years between Chenghua 7 (1471) and Chenghua 14 (1478). They are all printed in the same rather crude style, and bear illustrations either on their top registers or on some verso sides. From this evidence it has been assumed that there was a Yongshun Hall operating in Beijing during the Chenghua reign, though the imprint that declares it is “newly printed in Beijing” bears neither a publisher’s name nor a date. This leaves open the possibility that the Yongshun hall was actually based in the south, closer to where these imprints were found, and the “Beijing” edition was a reference to a Beijing branch of the establishment, some sort of marketing ruse, or the product of another firm altogether. In any case, the discovery of the Yongshun Hall editions presents the intriguing possibility of an early example of vernacular literature published in book form, and in Beijing no less.66

From this brief sketch of the notable booksellers in Ming Beijing and the writings of literati about the book market there, we get an indication of the sort of backdrop against which Jintai Wang Liang operated. Beijing was not renowned for its book publishing and was surpassed both in quantity and general quality by a number of southern cities. However, that is not to say that Beijing produced no commercial imprints of interest. The most notable are the illustrated Record of the Western Chamber edition published by Jintai House of Yue, the simpler editions of popular song anthologies targeted at repeat customers, and if one accepts the Yongshun Hall as a Beijing establishment, early print editions of chantefables. All of these examples date to the Chenghua (1465-87) or Hongzhi (1488-1505) reigns, slightly earlier than Jintai Wang Liang’s output and, presumably, the Censorate titles that match them as well.

The Censorate and Jintai Wang Liang publications were of considerably finer quality

66 The excavated Yongshun tang works were reprinted as a set of thread-bound volumes by the Shanghai wenwu baoguan weiyuanhui, 1973, under the title Ming Chenghua shuo chang cihua congkan 明成化說唱詞話叢刊. For more on these volumes, their contents, and their discovery, see McLaren, Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables, passim.
than the sort of smaller sized and more simply carved books that typified Beijing publications of the era. The Jintai House of Yue edition of the *Record of the Western Chamber* is perhaps the Beijing commercial imprint that comes closest to the output of these two institutions: *Ballads for a Harmonious Peace*, which the Censorate published, contains arias from *Western Chamber* textually identical to those in the House of Yue edition. This publication might also reflect the regional interest in the *Western Chamber* narrative that the “Stopping the Flight of the Clouds” booklets do, yet in a much more extravagant manner. Yet overall, the Censorate and Jintai Wang Liang publications stand out among Ming Beijing imprints.

Beijing did not share the reputation for publishing that meccas such as Nanjing and Jianyang had. However, Jintai Wang Liang’s print output was not completely isolated from those southern regions more generally associated with the commercial printing industry. Whether through printed books, as Ding Bing’s account has it, or through the woodblocks themselves, as Ye Dehui has it, Jintai Wang Liang obtained Fujian editions and reprinted them in the northern capital. Editions thus flowed from the south to the north. The overlap between the Jintai Wang Liang titles and the Censorate titles, as well as the fact that Wang Liang editions use discarded official documents, suggests that the flow of editions continued on in the same manner from the bookseller to the government agency, across social boundaries as well as geographical ones.

Having provided an outline of Beijing’s place in the Ming commercial publishing world and compared the Censorate’s publishing output to that of contemporary Beijing print industry, I now turn to the institution of the Censorate itself in order to situate its use of books within it.

**The Organization of the Censorate**
The central administration of the Ming was divided into six ministries (liu bu 六部): those of Personnel (Li 吏), Revenue (Hu 戶), Rites (Li 禮), War (Bing 兵), Justice (Xing 刑), and Works (Gong 工). Each was headed by a Minister, or shangshu 尚書. The Censorate was positioned in parallel to these six, outside of their jurisdiction. At the founding of the dynasty, the Six Ministries were situated beneath the Secretariat (zhongshu sheng 中書省). However, a major administrative reorganization came in 1380, after one of the Chief Councilors (chengxiang 丞相) of the Secretariat, Hu Weiyong 胡惟庸, was accused of scheming against the Ming with foreign powers. The Secretariat was abolished, and the Six Ministries were placed directly under the emperor himself. The reorganization reached the Tribunal of Censors (Yushi tai 御史台), the Censorate’s immediate predecessor, as well. The body was abolished along with the Secretariat, though a constituent office, the Investigation Bureau (chayuan 察院), was left in place. In 1382, a new body, the “Chief Censorate Bureau,” or the Censorate (Ducha yuan 都察院), was established to coordinate investigative activities. Laterally, there were the Six Offices of Scrutiny (liu ke 六科) and the Provincial Surveillance Offices (tixing ancha shisi 提刑按察使司). The former were created to monitor the Six Ministries. The latter were the local-level counterparts of the Censorate. While the Censorate issued directives and channeled communications to the Provincial Surveillance Offices, the Provincial Surveillance Offices did not directly report back to the Censorate. In the 1382 reorganizations, investigating censors were placed in circuits for each of the provinces under the new bureau. This coordinating body was headed originally by a panel of eight chief investigating censors (jiancha du yushi 監察都御史), and then later, after further reforms in 1383-4, a pair of censors in chief (du yushi 都御史), a pair
of vice-censors in chief (*fu du yushi* 副都御史), and four assistant censors in chief (*qian du yushi* 廩都御史). Appointments in the Censorate were to be approved personally by the emperor. This institutional structure remained set for the rest of the Ming dynasty and formed the basis for its Qing-era counterpart as well.

The structure of the post-reconstruction Censorate is outlined in the official *Ming History*: The Censorate was administered by Censors in chief of the left and the right (rank 2a), vice-censors in chief of the left and the right (rank 3a), and assistant censors in chief of the left and the right (rank 4a). Under them were a registrar (rank 6a), two to four office managers (from rank 9), a records keeper (rank 8), a proofreader (rank 9a), and five to six prison warders (from rank 9). Then there were 110 investigating censors (rank 7a) on the thirteen circuits: ten each for Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Henan, and Shandong; seven each for Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Sichuan, and Guizhou; eight each for Shaanxi, Huguang, and Shanxi; and eleven for Yunnan. Additionally, the titles of censor in chief and vice assistant censor in chief were also sometimes granted to military officers on assignments that overlapped administrative districts or otherwise required extended authority.

The duties of censors are also outlined in the official history:

Censors in chief were the disciplinary officials charged with conducting investigations on officials of all ranks, looking into grievances, supervising the routes, and acting as the eyes and ears of the emperor. In all cases where grand ministers were engaged in treachery and deceit, and in all cases where petty people formed cliques or disrupted governance through arbitrary actions, they would investigate. In all cases where officials perturbed official discipline in the pursuit of crude profit, they investigated. In all cases where scholarship was not upright, false reports were made and chaos was instilled, or recommendations were sought, they investigated. When important prisoners were sent to an outside court to testify, they accompanied officials of the Ministry of Punishments and the Court of Judicial Review (*Dali si*) in interrogations. They reported on the interior and patrolled the exterior, and executed their orders.
The main task of the Investigating Censors of the thirteen circuits was to observe officialdom for dereliction of duty. At times they made public charges, and at times they submitted sealed memorials. In the two capitals, they copied records; patrolled the administration; oversaw neighboring counties, civil exams, and martial exams; oversaw the Court of Imperial Entertainments; oversaw the capital granaries; oversaw the palace storehouses, capital security, and the five wards [of the capital]; and in rotating shifts took charge of the Public Petitioners Drum Office.

Outside duties included: patrols, troop purification, education intendant, salt controller, horse-trading offices, canal inspector, border inspection, transport control, horse branding, and state farm supervisor. Operating in the capital, duties included overseeing military discipline and achievement, with each dedicated to investigating his assignment. Also, when on patrol, they acted on the behalf of the emperor, investigating the servants of the principalities and the officials of the prefectures and counties of their jurisdiction, and bringing up charges in cases of dereliction of duty. In major cases, they memorialized to the court requesting a ruling; in petty cases, they resolved the situation immediately.

Together, the Censorate and the Provincial Surveillance Offices formed a surveillance and oversight system, the agents of which were known as *fengxian guan* 風憲官, or “officers of moral discipline.” Regulations for the officers of moral discipline are found in a document titled the *Xiangang shilei* 憲綱事例, which was compiled by the Ministry of Rites and Hanlin scholars under the command of the Xuande emperor and was first issued in 1439 by the Zhengtong emperor. The regulations emphasize the weight of the authority invested in the officers, referring to them as “the eyes and ears of the court” who “propagate the virtue of the high” and “transmit the situation of the low” in their duties and stating that they may present results of their investigations directly to the emperor without first reporting to the Censorate office. The regulations also include multiple injunctions against corruption and undue influence, arguing that as censors must judge others, they must be above reproach themselves in order to maintain

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67 A modern typeset edition of the *Xiangang shilei* is to be found in *Zhongguo zhenxi falü dianji jicheng*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 29-61.
the integrity of the legal system. There are also injunctions against misuse of public funds, straying from assignments, and other such infractions. Punishments are enumerated for these crimes and also for interfering with censors or surveillance officers in the course of their duties. In addition to these regulations and principles, which come in a section of thirty-four articles entitled “Statutes (xiangang 憲綱)” and one of fifteen articles entitled “Legal substance (xianti 憲體),” there are three sections on specific circumstances. These are “Propriety in meetings while on inspection” in four articles, “Principles for inspection tours” with thirty-six articles, and “Regulations for copying documents” in six articles. Punishments were increased by three levels of severity for censors who committed crimes.

According to the statutes, Censorate censors and Provincial Surveillance Officers could bring charges against one another. The Six Offices of Scrutiny also had the authority to conduct investigations of the Censorate despite the fact that they were established in parallel to the Six Ministries and the Censorate was outside of those. In fact, they were more likely than the Provincial Surveillance Offices to investigate the Censorate as they did not have the sort of working relationship with the Censorate that the Offices did.\textsuperscript{68} The Censorate had the authority to investigate the Six Offices of Scrutiny as well. The overlapping jurisdictions of the agencies seem redundant, yet this is an intentional feature of the surveillance system. While it defies neat hierarchical systematization, it serves the function of keeping checks and balances even to a redundant degree: supervisors are themselves supervised, and the emperor is at the center of the system. Communications flow down through the system but can, from any point, return directly to the top.

\textsuperscript{68} Liu Shuangzhou, Mingdai jiancha fazhi yanjiu, p. 24. See also several examples of Six Offices inspectors impeaching members of the Censorate.
"Of No Practical Use": The Censorate and The World of Books

What use would the Ming Censorate have for a book like the *Shuihu zhuan*? It was a prestigious, high-level agency, on a par with the Six Ministries and nominally below only the emperor in the administrative hierarchy of the dynasty. The conduct of its employees was highly regulated, and as constituent parts of an administrative oversight system designed with an element of redundancy, the censors themselves were monitored both by one another and by the Provincial Surveillance Offices. It is highly unlikely that such an agency would have printed works of vernacular fiction in order to enter the commercial book market; it would have had neither the need nor the ability. Furthermore, the publishing output of the Censorate bears little resemblance to that of the publishing industry in the capital, with the exception of the Jintai House of Yue’s *Record of the Western Chamber* and the products of the bookseller Jintai Wang Liang. In the latter case, the very similarity of the publishing outputs, not to mention the fact that Wang Liang purportedly used discarded official documents as paper stock, suggests some undiscovered ties between the two institutions. Could Wang Liang have purchased Song- and Yuan-era blocks in Fujian, brought them back to the capital for his high-end printing business, and then rented or sold them to the Censorate? There is no hard evidence but the overlap in titles is striking, especially when it is taken into consideration that the majority of Beijing’s commercial imprints were booklets of song lyrics, chantefables, and the like.

Yet at the same time, it does not follow that the Censorate’s printing of the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi* indicates the high literary status of vernacular fiction during that period, as
early twentieth-century reformers had it. It is true that the *Shuihu zhuan* had admirers such as Li Kaixian and the Eight Talents of the Jiajing era, and that that group and Wang Tingxiang and the Seven Former Masters group were intermeshed through the Censorate publications. However, the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi* are but two entries on the list of more than thirty miscellaneous titles. To make inferences about the literary status of vernacular fiction as a genre from their appearance on this list would be to stretch the significance of those two titles and ignore the others completely.

If the books published by the Censorate were the contents of a shelf in the personal library of an individual, what sort of person would that be? Taken as a whole, the Censorate publications show a certain air of leisure and sophistication. Their owner is familiar with both the poetry of the Tang and the *sanqu* lyrics of the Yuan, and could compose in both genres. He plays the *qin* and chess, and dabbles in medicine. He knows of prominent men of his age such as Wang Tingxiang and Du Nan, and perhaps even has personal ties to them. He knows episodes of the adventures of the bandits of Mount Liang and the sworn brothers of Taoyuan from drama and storytellers’ stories, yet he enjoys lavish print editions that relate these narratives as complex, intricate wholes.

An advertisement in the Jintai Yue edition of the *Record of the Western Chamber* notes that “people lodged in inns or traveling on boats—whether they be roaming for pleasure or sitting in some distant place—can get a copy of this text, look it over, and sing it correctly from beginning to end and thereby refresh their hearts.” The owner of this imaginary Censorate library might use his books in a similar way. If he is a censor himself, he might take some of these books for use in a similar manner when going out on assignment.

He might also have the need while on assignment to present books to officials he comes across in the course of his duties. As Joseph McDermott has noted, "among officials, imprints often served as presents to smooth their way through social occasions and into beneficial social relationships."70 Such personal and official gift-giving played an important secondary channel for the dissemination of books in the Song and Ming, in McDermott’s words, “in particular niches important for certain kinds of books and for certain readers in certain situations.”71 The Censorate books might have been printed and stored for this purpose. Were that the case, it would not have been the first time an agency produced a store of books for such a purpose. A Song-era edition of Among the Flowers (Huajian ji 花間集), a collection of song lyrics, features a preface claiming that previous editions had been presented to departing officials as gifts. The colophon’s author, Chao Qianzhi 晁謙之, justified the presentation of a collection of song lyrics to officials, writing, “Though its language is decadent and it is of no practical use to the age, it can be called finely crafted 雖文之靡，無補於世，亦可謂工矣.”72 This is a modest assertion, for it is precisely the fact that the book is “finely crafted” and “of no practical use” that makes it extravagant and, thus, a valuable gift.

In the Ming, books were a standard gift item among officials, often presented along with a handkerchief as a “shupa ben 書帕本” after returning from business.73 By the mid-Ming, the presentation of books was such a widespread practice among officials that Lu Rong 陸容 (1436-94), lamented the unequal distribution the practice created despite the abundance of imprints:

The books of people of former times were not, in most cases, printed editions but rather self-made manuscript copies. I’ve heard it said that printed editions of the Five Classics began with Feng Dao. Many scholars of today are ignorant of their good fortune. At the start of the dynasty, only the

70 McDermott, Social History, p. 90.
71 McDermott, Social History, p. 85.
72 In Li, Huajian ji zhushi, p. 395.
73 See Chen Li, Zhongguo tushu shi, p. 277.
National Academy had woodblocks for book-printing. Far-flung provinces and counties, I suspect, did not have them. Look at Song Qianxi’s [Lian] “Preface to Sending Off Student Ma” and you’ll know this. During the Xuande and Zhengtong reigns, woodblock printing was still not widespread. Now, books everywhere increase by the month and the day, and there are more ancient texts than ever before. But the literati today are superficial in their studies, and those who can print the orthodox great books of old are few. The books they publish are of no use and are contemptible. High officials present them back and forth as gifts, always printing as many as one hundred copies. Officials have plenty, while most rustic scholars of remote areas try as they might and can’t even get a single look at them.

The Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei*, which first circulated in the last years of the sixteenth century, contains two fictional portrayals of censors presenting books as gifts while on official business. In Chapter 49 of the novel, two censors pay a visit to the main protagonist, Ximen Qing, and exchange gifts with him:

The two officials, politely deferring to each other, entered the reception hall in order to exchange amenities with Ximen Qing. Censor Cai Yun ordered his retainers to offer the customary presentation of gifts: two bolts of Huzhou silk, a literary collection, four bags of tender-leaf tea, and an inkstone from Duanxi.

Though the novel does not mention whose literary collection it was that was presented, one can picture our imaginary censor bringing Censorate editions of the collections of Censors in Chief Wang Tingxiang and Du Nan, or the poetry collections of Du Fu or Su Shi, for such a purpose.

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Illustration 3: Ximen Qing greets a Censor's boat, Jin Ping Mei Ch. 49.
In Chapter 51 of the novel, the regional investigating censor Song Qiaonian (巡按宋老爺) brings several gifts for Ximen Qing, which Ximen Qing’s servants record on a card for him. The card reads: “One freshly slaughtered pig, two flagons of Jinhua wine, four hundred sheets of official-quality stationery, and a small book (小書一部).” It is not clear whether the book is referred to as “small” out of condescension or if it is a miniature novelty such as the “sleeve books” that circulated in the Ming, but the use of the measure word (一部) suggests it is a full set of a title.

Like *Among the Flowers*, the *Shuihu zhuan* was of “no practical use to its age” and was considered well-crafted. It was a book of banditry, yet it was not necessarily read in the same ideologically charged way that it would be at the turn of the seventeenth century. Rather, as a well-crafted text with no practical use, it was ostentatious: owning and reading such a book could give the distinction of being beyond the classics, having mastered them, as much as it could of being beneath them. It is in this way that even a work of vernacular fiction like the *Shuihu zhuan* could function as cultural capital in the reproduction of an institution like the Censorate.

Robert Darnton has proposed the model of “communications circuit” in books, a chain that links author, publisher, printers, shippers, booksellers, readers, and, as authors are readers themselves, back to author. His context is early modern France, however, and the *Shuihu zhuan* and other Censorate publications do not fit neatly into this model. The first problem is the role of the author. The attribution of authorship of the *Shuihu zhuan* is unclear at best, and even if one accepts Shi Nai’an and/or Luo Guanzhong as its author, little is known about those figures or

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76 JPM p. 628, Roy, p. 249.
78 On authorship, see the introduction.
their “original” version of the text. Furthermore, the *Shuihu zhuan* is a reworked version of a wealth of previously existing materials, and thus the “communications circuit” in this case must begin with the editor. The work of the “printer” in the case of woodblock printing is divided into carvers and actual printers who ink the blocks and place paper over them. As seen above in Ye Dehui’s account of Wang Liang’s editions, there are occasions in which the woodblocks predate the publisher. This is another modification that must be made in the communications circuit model for these circumstances. In the case of the Censorate, the “shippers” and “booksellers” are replaced by censors, and the economic transaction is replaced by a social one. The “readers” are unknown, but can be presumed to be either censors or local officials who are the recipients of gifts, upon whom a level of status is conveyed. In this sort of communications circuit, early editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* were produced.

Considering the *Shuihu zhuan* within this sort of communications circuit brings to light its social function in a clearer manner than relying on the expectations of either the literary genre of vernacular fiction or the institutional standing of the Censorate. The Censorate, an institution tasked with maintaining order, publishing the *Shuihu zhuan*, a book of banditry and disorder, need not be a sign of creeping commercialization, official corruption, or even the literary value of the fiction genre. It is, however, a picture of the world in which the earliest editions of that novel circulated, and of the other types of books it appeared alongside.

As for the publication of the *Shuihu zhuan* by an individual rather than an official institution, that is the subject of the next chapter.
Introduction

The previous chapter was concerned with the institution of the Censorate and its involvement with print. Previous scholarship has used the existence of a Censorate edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* as evidence of either the original high literary status of vernacular fiction or, conversely, the frivolity of the dynastic administration of the Ming. I have demonstrated that the *Shuihu zhuan* and its fellow vernacular fiction novel the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* were but two of more than thirty Censorate publications in a wide range of literary genres, and have suggested that despite that generic diversity, the titles published by the Censorate have certain commonalities. They were tools of cultural reproduction and parts of a literati world rather than a mere means of transmitting ideology. Now, in this chapter, I turn from the level of the institution to the level of the individual and the family.

Among the earliest known editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* to circulate is the so-called
“Wuding edition 武定板.” That appellation derives from their printer, Guo Xun, the Marquis of Wuding 武定侯郭勷 (1475-1542). Like the Censorate, Guo also published a range of books beyond the *Shuihu zhuang*. As did the last chapter, this chapter contextualizes the publication of the *Shuihu zhuang* within a larger publishing project and attempts to illustrate the uses of fiction in such a context. In the case of Guo Xun, existing exemplars and prefaces tell the tale of his books in closer detail. Details of his life are seen in both official and unofficial histories. I bring these strands together to show his life in books, and the role of vernacular fiction in it.

The “Wuding” *Shuihu zhuang*

Guo Xun is linked to the *Shuihu zhuang*, and the *Sanguo yanyi* as well, through an entry in the catalogue of the *Baowen tang* collection of Chao Li. Under the category of “Masters; miscellaneous (ziza 子雜),” Wuding editions of both of these works are listed. A preface to a later edition of the *Shuihu zhuang* signed Tiandu waichen 天都外臣 and dated 1589 makes reference to the Guo edition. The relevant passage reads:

> Legend has it that early in the Hongwu era, a sharp-witted and learned man of Yue surnamed Luo wrote this book in one hundred chapters and fashioned an introduction in fantastical language for each in order to give them color. In the Jiajing era, Guo Xun, Marquis of Wuding, had new printing blocks carved. He excised the introductions and left only the main body of the text. I’ve seen several stories like “Granny Candlewick” with their exotic air, but regrettably have lost them all. Since Guo’s, there have been more and more editions of the work. Again and again they have been ruined by village pedants, who destroyed the wonderful humor and description and added the events in Huaxi and Hebei. Just like painting a leopard’s spots red or drawing legs on a snake, travesty upon travesty has visited this book! Recently, there have been some aficionados who, while regretting that the introductions are irretrievably lost, sought out rare editions of the text and collated them. They reproduced the original text and created woodblocks of it.

1 The 1589 date for this edition, however, has been questioned by Andrew Plaks. See Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, pp. 286-7.
In his *Gleanings from the Wanli Era* (*Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編), Shen Defu makes reference to a contemporary fine edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* printed in Xin’an 新安, which he identifies as the version transmitted by Guo Xun’s family (其家所傳): the Tiandu waichen edition is a likely candidate for the one to which he refers.

Despite the Tiandu waichen preface’s statement that Guo merely edited the *Shuihu zhuan* text and had new woodblocks carved to reprint it, some have speculated that his edition was the novel’s urtext. Most influentially, the modern scholar Dai Bufan 戴不凡 wrote of his “suspicion” that either Guo Xun or someone in his employ was the author of the *Shuihu zhuan*. He noted that Guo Xun’s edition appears to be the earliest print edition, and that there was no full-length novel version of the “*Shuihu zhuan*” before it. Furthermore, he noted, there is no mention of Shi Nai’an, the reputed author of the *Shuihu zhuan*, before Guo’s time, despite the fact that Shi was supposedly an earlier figure from the Yuan or early Ming. He dismissed the contradictory statements in the Tiandu waichen preface by pointing out Guo’s ignoble end and reputation: its publishers were merely compelled to distance themselves from Guo with (inaccurate) discussion of reassembling an “original” edition.³ These lines of argument were adopted and expanded upon by Zhang Guoguang. Zhang sees the portrayal of Daoism in the novel as another sign of Guo’s involvement, as that was an interest shared by Guo and the Jiajing emperor. Zhang concludes that Guo had a retainer create the *Shuihu zhuan* no earlier than the early 1530s.⁴

Yuan Shishuo has refuted the argument on several points. First, he notes the contrast between Guo Xun’s elevated social status and the underworld figures depicted in the *Shuihu*
zhuan itself, claiming that a figure such as Guo would not have had the knowledge of such social strata necessary to depict it convincingly. Yuan does, however, concede that it is impossible to ascertain for certain whether one of Guo’s retainers wrote it. Yet he finds this unlikely for several reasons, including inconsistencies in geographical nomenclature and the ideological inconsistency of Guo, a figure of power, having a hand in the creation of a work depicting rebellion.

The pioneering scholar of vernacular fiction Zheng Zhenduo claimed in his 1953 preface to a variorum edition of the Shuihu zhuan that a five-chapter fragment in his possession was a partial exemplar of the Guo Xun edition. This claim sparked some controversy. In a 1997 article, Lan Qing and Li Yongyou proposed a series of tests for this fragment and concluded that it was possibly Guo’s edition or a source upon which Guo’s was based. In the final analysis, however, there is not enough evidence to conclude for certain either Guo’s involvement in the original production of the text of the Shuihu zhuan or the providence of the Zheng fragment.

Yet no matter whether his was the first printed edition, or whether Guo was the force behind the creation of the urtext, the fact remains that Guo is associated with one of the earliest known editions.

The Wuding Marquisate Lineage

Before turning to Guo’s publications, let us first look at his title. Guo Xun’s social position, and his marquisate, derive from his ancestor, Guo Ying 英, who played in the founding of the Ming dynasty. Ying was an early follower of the founder-to-be of the Ming dynasty, Zhu
Yuanzhang, first serving as a bodyguard and then as a military commander. His most distinguishing accomplishment was his defeat of Zhu’s enemy Chen Youliang at the important battle of Poyang Lake. According to the *Ming History*, Zhu credited Ying with personally slaying Chen Youliang and in reward allowed Ying to wear his battle dress. Ying gained further favor with Zhu Yuanzhang when their families intermarried: Zhu Yuanzhang took Ying’s sister as a consort, the Consort Ning; a prince took two of Ying’s daughters as consorts; and a son of Ying’s was married to a princess. Ying was appointed to a succession of high military ranks, and was granted the Wuding marquisate in 1384. He died in 1403 at age 67, and was posthumously promoted to the title of Duke of Ying.

The inheritance of the Wuding marquisate fell into dispute in the generations after Ying’s death, as described in Ying’s biographical entry in the *Ming History*:

[Ying] had twelve sons. [Of them,] Zhen took the Yongjia princess in marriage. Ming was the Manager of Seals for the Principality of Liao, and Yong was the Commissioner of the Right of the Central Military Commission. He [Ying] had nine daughters, two of whom married the Princes of Liao and Ying. His granddaughter became the favored consort of the Emperor Renzong and was Ming’s offspring, and for this reason, Ming’s son Xuan inherited the marquisate. In the Xuande reign, Xuan held an office in the Court of the Imperial Clan. It appropriated riverside farms as well as a thousand mou of land from Tianjin military colonies, blaming low-level officers and bestowing it on Xuan. Early in the Yingzong reign, the Yongjia princess sought to have the marquisate conferred upon her son Zhen. Zhen was Ying’s direct grandson, and he was made an assistant commander of the Brocade Guards. When Xuan died, his son Cong vied with Zhen for the right to inherit the title. As a result, it ceased to be conveyed, and Cong was given an official position equal to Zhen’s. In the first year of the Tianshun era, Zhen’s son Chang was granted the title by favor of imperial decree. Cong contended for it but to no avail. When Chang died, his son Liang was in line to inherit it, but Cong spoke out again, saying that Liang was not Chang’s son. The title once again ceased to be passed on, and Liang was made an assistant commander. He sought the title repeatedly and was jailed, but was granted amnesty and returned to his official position. Soon after, the Guo clan collectively sought the selection of a single descendant of Ying to be granted his rank. The officials of the court all said that Liang was the direct descendant of Ying and should be granted the title. Permission was granted by imperial decree. Early in the Zhengde reign, Liang died and the title was inherited by his son Xun.

子十二人。鎮, 尚永嘉公主。銘, 遼府典寶。鏞, 中軍右營督。女九人，二為遼、鄆王妃。女孫為仁宗貴妃，銘出也，以故銘子玹得嗣侯。宣德中，玹署宗人府事，奪河間民田廬，又奪天津屯田千餘，罪其奴而宥玹。英宗初，永嘉公主乞以其子玹嗣侯。珍、英嫡孫也，授錦衣衛指揮僉事。玹卒，子嶙與珍爭嗣，遂並停襲，亦授嶙如珍官。天順元年，珍子昌以詔恩得襲。嶙爭之不得。昌卒，子良當嗣，聰又言良非昌子，復停嗣，授指揮僉事。以屢乞嗣下獄，尋釋復官。既而郭宗人共乞蔊英孫一人嗣英爵。廷臣皆言良本英嫡孫，宜嗣侯。詔可。
The entry for Guo Ying goes on to relate the life of Xun as well; Xun does not receive an entry of his own. The dynastic history depicts Xun as a villainous character, a taker of bribes and ambitious seeker of power who offends officials of the court at every turn. His successive promotions are catalogued, as are the demotions he received due to official censure. The depiction has him opportunistically forging a relationship with the Jiajing emperor by anticipating the turn of events in what comes to be called the Great Rites Controversy, and the eventual payoff to which that relationship led:

Xun was crafty and deceitful, and was quite involved in books. During the Zhengde reign, he was appointed Grand Defender of Guangdong and Guangxi, taking charge of three thousand camps. Early in the Shizong reign, he controlled the Integrated Divisions. The Great Rites Controversy broke out, and Xun realized the Supreme intent. He first came to the aid of Zhang Cong, and Emperor Shizong greatly favored him. Knowing he was the object of favor, Guo often put on airs. The Grand Secretary Yang Yiqing despised him, and when it was discovered that Guo was accepting bribes, Guo was relieved of his duties with the Integrated Divisions and stripped of his rank as a Grand Guardian (1529). When Yiqing was relieved from duty, Guo was reinstated and charged with the training of the Division of the Five Armies (1530). Guo also supervised construction projects in the four suburbs of the capital. The following year, he was reinstated with the Integrated Divisions (1531). In the eighteenth year of the reign (1539), he was made concurrent controller of the houfu. He sought a favor from the emperor, asking that the name of his fifth-generation ancestor Ying be recorded in the imperial ancestral temple. The court officials insisted it could not be done. Vice Minister Tang Zhou was especially vociferous. The Emperor would not listen, and in the end Ying was instated in the ancestral hall. The year after this, [the emperor’s biological father] Xianhuang was given the title zong [...] and entered into the imperial ancestral hall; and Xun was promoted to the title of Duke of Yi and conveyed the title of Grand Preceptor [...a 1a rank].

正德初卒。子勘嗣。

Division of the Five Armies: “one of the Three Great Training Divisions (san daying) at Peking.” (Hucker, p. 570) By 1531, Guo had returned to the Integrated Divisions (DMB, p. 771). For a fuller account, including Yang Yiqing’s specific charges, see the Ming shi gao version of these events. MSG 65.867b, translation in Liew, The Treatises on Military Affairs of the Ming Dynastic History, v. 1, p. 125-6. Wang Tingxiang, author of the Wangshi jiacang ji, which was printed by the Censorate, was appointed to the Integrated Divisions in 1534. Though he memorialized against corruption and the problems of the Integrated Divisions that Yang Yiqing cited previously, he apparently got along well with Guo Xun, as will be seen below. See Liew, pp. 128-9.
The entry goes on to describe how Guo curried favor with the Jiajing emperor by introducing magicians to him as well. In the end, however, Guo abuses his power too much, and the impeachments come in such a flood that even the emperor turns his back on Guo long enough for him to die in prison:

Before this, the magician Li Fuda said of himself that he could turn a concoction into silver and gold. Xun was close to him. When Fuda was brought down, Guo made efforts to have him released from prison. Many of the court officials were offended by this. At this point, he again brought in a magician, Duan Chaoyong, saying that using his transformed silver and gold as eating utensils would bring immortality. The emperor took Guo as even more loyal. The Supervising Secretary Qi Xian accused Guo of abusing his power, taking rapacious profits from the people, and other such crimes. Li Fenglai and others backed up his words. Lower officials’ investigations uncovered that Xun maintained as many as a thousand shops in the capital [[against the rules of his rank]]. The Vice Censor-in-Chief Hu Shouzhong also accused Xun of having an uncle, Guo Xian of the Ministry of Punishments’ Western Depot, torture innocents on his behalf. The emperor put the accusations to the side and did not deal with them. At this point, the emperor had a remonstrance official speak out to give Xun a reprieve, and had Xun accompany Minister of War Wang Tingxiang and Earl of Suian Chen Hui on Troop Purification duty. The order to service was provided, but Xun refused to accept it [...]. Remonstrance officials accused him of arrogating authority and forming a faction. Xun wrote out a justification, which had this phrasing: “What need is there to further trouble the emperor with issuing an order?” The emperor was greatly angered by this, and accused him of being arrogant and lacking in the proper formalities of an official. At this point, Supervising Secretary Gao Shi completely exposed Xun’s deceit and profiteering, also implicating Zhang Yanling as an accomplice. The emperor grew more angry, and he put Xun in the prison of the Brocade Guard. This was the ninth month of the twentieth year of the reign.

The emperor was initially hesitant to allow Guo to be punished, but those officials whom Guo had offended continued to push their cases and called for his execution. The accusations against Guo continued to accumulate, and Guo died in prison in 1541. The entry in the dynastic history does not say if he was executed or if he died of natural causes while in prison. The entry ends with the following judgment of Guo Xun:
Since the flourishing of the Ming, officials with inherited ranks did not involve themselves in the affairs of governing. Only Xun, by means of holding imperial favor and being skilled at influencing the court, selfishly took part in illicit and evil deeds to the extent of ruin.

自明興以來，大臣不與政事。惟助以挾恩寵、擅朝權，恣為姦慝致敗。

Guo’s Life in Books

As for Guo’s publishing activity, the Ming History has nothing to say other than his “involvement” with books. Moreover, this involvement is put in a negative light: he was “crafty and deceitful, and quite involved with books.” The biographical sketch then goes on to detail his craftiness and his plots, but makes no further mention of books. In truth, Guo Xun published enough books to warrant a catalogue of them: Gao Ru’s Baichuan shuzhi 百川書志 lists a single-juan catalogue of the books published by Guo Xun by the title of A Record of the Village of Books (Shuzhuang ji 書莊記). That catalogue is no longer extant. Most of the books I will discuss below are still extant and are held in library collections; a few, including the Shuihu zhuan, as mentioned above, are known through bibliographical entries and other such records.

The known editions published by Guo Xun appear in waves: First, there are books pertaining to his family lineage and its descent from his ancestor Ying. Then comes a series of classical literary works. Finally, I suggest, came several works of vernacular literature, including the Shuihu zhuan and the Sanguo yanyi as mentioned above as well as a collection of sanqu art songs and, possibly, another vernacular novel. While these books are of disparate genres, I will show that they served similar purposes of creating and maintaining Guo’s networks of power. To do so, I will rely on their prefaces, which not only sing Guo’s praises but also are signed by illustrious contemporaries. I will also in some cases make use of the contents of the books themselves, though they are only of secondary importance.
Guo had inherited the Wuding marquisate on the bingyin 丙寅 day of third month of the third year of the Zhengde reign (April 28, 1508). In the twelfth month of that year, the emperor put him in charge of the imperial guards, and in the following year he was appointed to a series of military ranks. In the fifth year, he was granted the title of Grand Guardian (taibao 太保). In the sixth year (1511), he was appointed by the emperor to be the Grand Defender (zhenshou 鎮守) of the Guangdong-Guangxi region. It was in his time in this region that his earliest known publications appeared.

Both of these earliest books associated with Guo Xun are concerned with his family lineage. The first is a joint family history of Guo Ying and two other servants of Zhu Yuanzhang called Generational Compendium of the Three Families (Sanjia shidian 三家世典). The second is a compilation of documents concerning the Guo family titled A Collection Nurturing and Celebrating Meritorious Service (Yuqing xunyi ji 毓慶勲懿集). Prefaces to Generational Compendium are dated 1515, while those to Meritorious Service are dated the following year. Meritorious Service was likely compiled earlier, however: Guo Xun’s father Liang 良 (1454-1507) is credited in the edition with “respectfully collating and recording (dunshou jilu 頓首輯錄)” its documents, and Xun himself is credited with its publishing (kanxing 刊行). (See Illustration below.) But by the time Xun published it in 1516, its “collator,” Guo Liang, had been dead for nine years. Furthermore, according to the prefaces, Xun supplemented the previously existing collection and had it printed, suggesting that it had existed previously in manuscript form or another yet earlier edition.

Nevertheless, I will begin by describing The Generational Compendium of the Three
Families, the first to be printed. It relates the histories of three founding servants of the Ming: Xu Da 徐達, Mu Ying 沐英, and Guo Ying, as well as their descendants. A copy is listed in Gao Ru’s Baichuan Catalogue of Books (Baichuan shuzhi) along with Guo’s Shuihu zhuan and Sanguo yanyi, and Guo’s catalogue of imprints. A manuscript copy of the Generational Compendium’s text exists in the Ming collection of documents Dynastic References (Guochao diangu 國朝典故). The compilers of the Siku quanshu zongmu include it as well, noting that its text is comprised of unembellished excerpts from dynastic veritable records and histories and expressing doubts as to the appropriateness of Guo Ying, a duke, being placed on the level of Xu Da and Mu Ying, who were enfeoffed as princes (wang 王). Generational Compendium is attributed to Guo Xun himself.

There are three prefaces to the Generational Compendium, all of which praise Guo Xun’s merit and portray him as a worthy successor to his ancestor. They are by three men he knew from his time in the Guangdong-Guangxi region: the famed official and military leader Yang Yiqing, Zhou Nan 周南, and Chen Jin 陳金, the latter two being Censors as well as Guo Xun’s colleagues in the military administration of Guangdong and Guangxi.6

Yang Yiqing’s preface is dated the first month of the tenth year of the Zhengde reign (1515). Writing against possible objections that Xu Da and Mu Ying were made princes of Zhongshan 中山 and Qianning 黔寧, respectively, and Guo Ying was only a duke, an objection later hinted at by the Siku quanshu compilers, Yang notes that of the scores of noble titles granted at the founding of the dynasty, only a very few remained in the current generation. The majority, he writes, ceased transmission after their holders committed offenses of some sort, and

6 The modern typeset edition of the Guochao diangu contains the Sanjia shidian, but does not include its prefaces. A reproduction of the Sanjia shidian from the manuscript version of the Guochao diangu is available, replete with the three prefaces, in Biji xiaoshuo daguan, v. 41, no. 1. The modern edition is collated from two manuscript copies of the Guochao diangu held in the National Library of China, and is annotated.
it is a credit to the virtues of these three particular families that their titles had continued to be passed down. He lists the civil and martial accomplishments of Xu Da, Mu Ying, and Guo Ying, but points out that while they were great military leaders they never reveled in killing. Their descendants inherited their humaneness and wisdom in governing, and that quality makes them sagely officials of the court. He ends the preface by describing his reasons for fulfilling Guo’s request for it:

The Grand Guardian Duke [Guo] wrote requesting a preface. I take it that the flourishing merits of these three gentlemen might be known to all and spoken of by all, but the humaneness abiding in their hearts and the wisdom of their conduct is perhaps not known in detail. For this reason, I specially wrote this in order to exhort their descendants to follow their family codes and preserve them for generations. The Grand Guardian Duke possesses abilities and shrewdness in the manner of his ancestor, and the compiling of this compendium is sufficient to know they are preserved.

Yang signs his preface with a long list of titles connoting merit and prestige: Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (Guanglu dafu 光祿大夫, a prestige title for rank 1b officials), Pillar of State (zhuguo 柱國, a merit title), Junior Mentor (shaofu 少傅, a high prestige title), Grand Mentor of the Heir Apparent (taizi taifu 太子太傅, according to Hucker “normally awarded only as concurrent appointments to officials already having considerable stature at court, solely for the purpose of enhancing their prestige and possibly their income”), Minister of Personnel (Libu shangshu 吳部尚書, rank 2a), Grand Academician Drafter of the Hall of Military Glory (Wuying dian taixueshi zhizhigao 武英殿太學士知制誥, according to Hucker, the title of Drafter “may be encountered in later periods as an unofficial reference to members of the Hanlin Academy,” which may be the case here as Yang was appointed a special member of the Hanlin Academy at the tender age of seven), and Classics Colloquium Participant (jingyan guan 經筵官).

7 Hucker, p. 484.
8 Hucker, p. 156
Zhou Nan’s preface follows a rhetorical line similar to Yang Yiqing’s: Zhou writes of the importance of worthy ministers to the endeavor of a leader, adding a flourish of classical allusions, and continues on to the particular case of the service of Xu Da, Mu Ying, and Guo Ying under Zhu Yuanzhang. Notably, he elides Ying’s ducal title of Yingguo 營國, referring to him as “Lord” or “Duke” Wuding Guo Ying 武定郭公英. Also, though Xu Da was a prince, Zhou refers only to his ducal title, rhetorically placing Xu, Mu, and Guo at the same rank. He also refers to Guo Xun as “Wuding’s sixth-generation descendant,” dropping the rank of the Wuding title altogether. Like Yang Yiqing, Zhou Nan also notes the rarity of the unbroken transmission of inherited titles from the founding of the dynasty to the present day (eliding, of course, the disputes into which the Wuding marquisate’s transmission fell) and the virtues of the three families that are the subject of the text at hand, calling them cause for commemoration.

Unlike Yang Yiqing, however, Zhou mentions his direct personal experience working with Guo Xun in Guangxi:

In the jiaxu year of the Zhengde reign (1514), I humbly accepted the order to fill the position of Supreme Commander and was stationed in Cangwu, and Wuding’s sixth-generation descendant and official of the age (shichen) had already been governing that land with his great power and vision for two years. With his exceptional command, he issued orders to the people of the two areas (ie. Guangdong and Guangxi), who conformed to them as if they were grass bending in the wind. When he was not occupied with military governance, he would often collect the whole of the collective merits of the three dukes’ military service to the emperor, put together their outlines, and classify them as the Generational Compendium of the Three Families. He requested that I introduce it at its start. Who am I to dare to moisten my pen and fail to live up to my duty, especially when the merits of those who assisted the emperor in sweeping the area surpass previous generations such that their praises may be sung by the multitudes? Though the details of my account are no different from those of others, the merit of the three dukes’ rising in the service of the True Lord in their day, and then their descendants inheriting their titles and living up to their glory—this is something to commemorate, and is what makes these favored ones stand out from others. This is what I am unable to exhaust with words. Or could I make my admiration of this official of the age known by submitting this? Accordingly, I pen this in response.

正德甲戌余承乏締督之命駐節蒼梧而武定之六世孫世臣巍然以位望隆重總戎斯土已二載。有奇威行令肅兩地之民夷，風靡草仆。不暇戎政之餘時多以三公同功一体取三公從聖祖戎馬中履歷本末，繼其大要，類為三家世典，屬余記其端，余何人斯而敢泚是筆以辱來命，況聖祖掃清區宇扶植人極之功絕出前代萬萬人人類能讚頌，余雖齟齬言之固當無異於人也，但三公當真主龍興之日建開國輔成之功且後嗣又皆恪守前規光增舊物，斯則可慶而幸者獨異於人而余自不容已於言也。抑世臣是舉又能知所好尚者乎。因書以歸之。
Zhou signs his preface with a series of weighty titles as well: metropolitan graduate with honors (jinshi di 进士第), Grand Master for Assisting toward Good Governance (zizheng dafu 資政大夫, a prestige title for officials of rank 2a), and Supreme Commander of Military Affairs for the Guangdong-Guangxi Region, with concurrent appointment as Grand Coordinator (xunfu 巡撫) Censor-in-Chief of the Right.

Chen Jin also begins with the obligatory salutations to the merits of the three ancestors’ coming together to assist the first emperor of the Ming in the “washing away of the stench of [Yuan Mongol] mutton and the establishment of a great peace of ten thousand generations 濂腥臊以清宇宙而為萬世開太平也.” He also points out the rarity of the transmission of noble titles over more than one hundred years, pointing out that of six dukes and eighteen marquises, the three families are all that remain. Like Zhou Nan, he elides the distinctions between the three ancestors’ ranks as princes and the marquisate to which Guo Xun was the heir, placing the marquisate “Wuding” where the dukedom “Yingguo” should be in reference to Guo Ying despite the fact that he uses Weiguo and Qianguo for Xu and Mu, respectively. Where Chen differs, however, is he writes of knowing all three of the direct ancestors of Xu, Mu, and Guo. He met: Xu Da’s fifth-generation descendant, Fu 輔, while serving as Minister of Revenue in Nanjing; Mu Ying’s sixth-generation ancestor Zhen 鎮 while serving as Grand Coordinator in Yunnan, which the Mu family had controlled since Ying’s time; and Guo Xun while serving as Supreme Commander in Guangdong and Guangxi, where Guo was a military official. Chen writes of his willingness to pen a preface as a testament to the virtue and filial piety of the three descendants and Guo Xun in particular. The titles in his signature are as follows: Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent (taizi taibao); Grand Master for Glorious Happiness (ronglu dafu); Censor-in-Chief of
Imperially Appointed Supreme Commander of Military Affairs in Guangdong and Guangxi with a joint appointment as Grand Coordinator; Former Supreme Commander of Military Affairs in Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Huguang, Zhejiang, and South Zhili; and Minister of Revenue, Nanjing.

The authors of these prefaces lend prestige to Guo Xun, both through the lists of titles by which they sign their names and through their praise of his intelligence and values. The titles indicate the authors are at the highest levels of the governmental bureaucracy, with ranks of first or second grade, and that they are the recipients of merit and prestige. They praise the roles of Xu Da, Mu Ying, and Guo Ying in the founding of the dynasty, extend that praise to the current generation of their descendants for living up to their illustrious forebears’ virtues, and single out Guo Xun especially for his contribution in the form of the compilation of the Generational Compendium of the Three Families. The discrepancy in rank between Xu and Mu on the one hand and Guo Ying on the other goes unmentioned, and even if it were mentioned, the preface writers place the three on the same level in another fashion by making a point of the rarity of a noble title being passed down for over one hundred years. Through this chain, a sort of equivalence between the three men from the founding of the Ming and Guo Xun in the current day is suggested, and the logical step for a reader of the Generational Compendium would be to assume that Guo Xun is deserving of the same title of duke that the founders were bestowed.

Around the same time Guo Xun was assembling the Generational Compendium of the Three Families, during his tenure in the Guangdong-Guangxi area, he was also collating A Collection Nurturing and Celebrating Meritorious Service. The documents included are broader

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9 A microfilm copy of the Yuqing xunyi ji is available at Princeton. It is made from an exemplar held by the Beiping Library, now held in the National Palace Museum, Taipei.
in scope than the biographical outlines given in the *Generational Compendium*, and include correspondence between Zhu Yuanzhang and Guo Ying, and the imperial orders granting Guo Ying and his descendants their titles. It also includes documents concerning the sons, daughters, and granddaughters of Ying who intermarried with the family of the Ming’s founding emperor, as well as subsequent generations of the family who held prestigious official and noble positions, and their wives and extended families.

As I have shown above in Guo Ying’s biography in the dynastic history, the Wuding marquisate fell into dispute and ceased transmission in the generations before Xun and his father Liang successfully lobbied for its reinstatement in 1502. This collection of documents supports Liang and Xun’s claim to the marquisate, tracing it through Ying’s grandson Xuan 璞, to Xuan’s grandson, Chang 昌 in 1457, to Liang in 1502, and finally to Xun in 1508. The dispute had occurred between Guo Cong 聰, who was Xuan’s son, and Guo Zhen 珍, who was a descendant of Ying in the line of the Princess of Yongjia. In the *Meritorious Service* collection, this dispute is simply elided completely. Xun was of adult age at that time of its original compilation, and so I believe it is probable that Liang and Xun originally assembled it in order to make a case for their branch of the family to be awarded the marquisate in 1502. Then, Xun must have added the documents concerning the conveyance of the marquisate to himself, solicited prefaces from powerful acquaintances, and had it printed in 1516.
Guo Xun’s printed edition of the collection bears signs of his campaign for prestige in the form of prefaces by prominent figures Fei Hong 費宏, dated to the tenth day of the first month of the eleventh year of the Zhengde reign (February 12, 1516); Wang Zan 王瓊, dated to the first month of the eleventh year of the Zhengde reign (1516); and Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水, dated to first day of the first month of the eleventh year of the Zhengde reign (February 2, 1516). Fei Hong’s
titles are listed as Palace Graduate with Honors, Grand Master for Glorious Happiness, Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent, Minister of Revenue, and Grand Secretary of the Hall of Military Glory.\textsuperscript{10} Wang Zan is listed as Palace Graduate with honors, Grand Master for Court Discussion, Chancellor of the Directorate of Education, Classics Colloquium lecturer [to emperor], and former Hanlin Academy Expositor in Waiting and National Historiographer.\textsuperscript{11} Zhan Ruoshui is listed as a Palace Graduate, Hanlin Academy Junior Compiler, Gentleman litterateur, National Historiographer, and Classics Colloquium lecturer.\textsuperscript{12}

Gao Ru’s \textit{Baichuan Catalogue of Books} lists an additional title associated with Guo Xun and his family, \textit{The Family Biographies of Messrs. Guo (Guo shi jia zhuan 郭氏家傳)}. It is described as consisting of four \textit{juan} and relating the biographies of the Marquis of Wuding (Guo Xun) and his relative, the Earl of Dingxiang (Guo Deng 郭登).\textsuperscript{13} It is no longer extant.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Guo and the Circulation of Literature}

During and soon after his tenure in Guangdong and Guangxi, Guo Xun also printed several anthologies of Tang prose and poetry. These were \textit{Yuan Cishan wenji (A Literary Anthology of Yuan Jie)} in 1517, \textit{Bai Xiangshan shiji 白香山詩集 (A Poetry Anthology

\textsuperscript{10} Ronglu dafu, Taizi taibao, Hubu shangshu (nominal, in conjunction with Wuying dian daxueshi appointment to raise rank), Wuying dian daxueshi
\textsuperscript{11} Chaoyi dafu (prestige title), Liang jing Guozi jijiu, Jingyan jiangguan, Qian Hanlin shijiang tongxiu Guoshi
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Hanlin yuan bianxiu} (position given to 2nd and 3rd place jinshi with expectation they will advance to higher positions and then neige), \textit{Wenlin lang} (prestige title), Guoshi, Jingyan guan
\textsuperscript{13} See \textit{Baichuan shuzhi} in Mingdai shumu tiba congkan v. 2, pp. 1263-4.
\textsuperscript{14} There is a Qing-era manuscript copy by this title in five \textit{juan} (rather than four) in the National Library of China. Its preface, reprinted in the \textit{Guojia tushuguan cang guji tiba congkan} v. 1, pp. 57-9, is written from the perspective of the Ming.
of Bai Juyi) in 1517, and Bai Letian wenji (A Literary Anthology of Bai Juyi) in 1519. The edition of the prose writings of Yuan Jie’s writings, which is still extant, is another illustration of Guo’s use of publishing as a channel for publicizing his character and social connections. Like the Yuqing xunyi ji, it features a preface written by Zhan Ruoshui, who was in mourning for his mother in Xiqiao, Guangdong at the time. In the preface, Zhan praises Guo’s taste and abilities, and mentions that he’d given his copy of Yuan Jie’s writings to Guo. It reads:

The historian Ruoshui says: Since I obtained the writings of Yuan Jie, my contemplations on literary patterning (wen) began to take consideration of the ancient. In great antiquity, there was only substance unembellished by patterning. Then there came substance embellished by patterning, and then there came “substance” floating atop the surface of patterning. When substance floats atop the surface of patterning, the Way is in ruins. This is the reason why, when Lin Fang asked what is basic in ritual, Confucius treated it as a great question that got at the birth of things. First there is substance, and then comes patterning. Accordingly, substance is that which is born of heaven, and patterning is that which is born of men. Substance is innate and is brought about through creation. Patterning is acquired and is brought about through transmission. This is why, concerning our literary heritage, people have difficulty not with patterning but with substance, not with ornateness but with roughhewn simplicity, not with cleverness but with straightforward unpretentiousness. While traveling in the northern capital, I attained a copy of Master Yuan’s writings and was struck by it. I desired substance rather than wildness, simplicity rather than ugliness, unpretentiousness rather than obstinacy. Stately and self-fashioned was his style. The greats of the Tang were a civilizing force in the world that has persisted since middle antiquity. For these writings to become obscure and not circulate would be to allow our heritage to come to an end in this generation.

The Grand Defender of Guangdong and Guangxi region, Guo Xun, the Marquis Wuding, is a military man who loves literature. I described the writings of Master Yuan to him, and when he read them, it was as if he had some tacit understanding of them. He said, “Ah, Yuan Jie was unyielding and bold, indignant at the strife and deviance of his times. If only we had an army of Yuan Jies to sweep away the customs of this era! Is there merely patterning now?” He then printed an edition based on my copy and employed me to relate his vision of it.

As Zhan Ruoshui remarks in the preface, Yuan Jie (719-792) had the literary reputation
as a moralist who openly critiqued what he saw as the corruption of his times. In his most well-known essay, *Gailun* 丐論 (*On Begging*), which is included in the anthology printed by Guo, Yuan Jie compares a beggar acquaintance favorably with officials who engage in “begging” of another, less honest kind. Also included is Yuan’s preface to his own *Qiezhong ji* 篓中集 (*An Anthology from a Box*), in which Yuan collected works by “friends on the periphery of official life.”

In that preface, Yuan praises the authenticity of the moral engagement of those poets, which he sees as being in contrast with the artificiality of strict adherence to compositional rules and standards.

The collections of the poetry and prose of Bai Juyi feature prefaces by, respectively, Chen Jin, who had contributed one to the *Generational Compendium* as well; and Wang Zan, who had done so for the *Meritorious Service* collection. Chen Jin’s preface to the poetry collection is dated the dingchou 丁丑 day of the twelfth year of the Zhengde reign (January 22, 1517). It describes Guo as having received the poetry edition from a “Principal Gentleman Shi (zhenglang Shi jun 正郎石君).” However, according to the Wang Zan preface, which is dated the jimao 己卯 day of the tenth month of the fourteenth year of the Zhengde reign (November 10, 1519), Guo’s father Liang had owned a rare edition of the prose collection and Xun had it reprinted for distribution to court officials. Wang writes:

> My friend, the Grand Guardian Guo the Marquis of Wuding had already printed and circulated Bai Juyi’s poems. In order to respond to the desires of the officers of the court to review them together with his prose, Guo had a fine edition held by his father Xianzhu [Liang] reprinted and asked me to write this preface.

17. I am unsure as to whom this refers or to the precise meaning of the title zhenglang here. I translate it here as “Principal Gentleman” after Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, p. 124. Hucker’s definition is in reference to a Song-era term; I am assuming its use here is a stylistic archaism.
As Xie Siwei has pointed out, there is a discrepancy between these accounts of the source of the poetry collection. Had Guo’s story changed in order to better characterize himself as a well-bred, cultured participant in the world of letters? As the poetry collection came before his return to the capital and the prose collection came after, it is possible that this was the case.

**Back in the Capital**

Guo Xun’s appointment in the Guangdong-Guangxi region came to an end in the eighth month of the twelfth year of the Zhengde reign (1517), when he was recalled to Beijing in order to take up his former position as commander of training the Division of the Three Thousand. He was also jointly appointed Commissioner-in-Chief of the Left Chief Military Commission, a 1a rank.

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18 Excerpted in Xie Siwei, *Bai Juyi ji zonglun*, p. 126. Xie also includes a description of Chen Jin’s preface.
The first edition known to have been printed by Guo Xun after his return to the capital from his tenure in Guangdong and Guangxi was a break from the previous series of Tang literary works. It was a philological work called the *Rhymes of Poetry, Explicated* (*Shiyun shiyi* 詩韻釋義), and is dated 1520. It is a rhyming dictionary with 10,260 words organized into 106 rhyme categories, each with a definition typically six or less characters in length. Its original
compilation is credited to “The Old Man of the Snowy Cliffs East of the River (Jiangdong xueya laoren 江東雪崖老人),” and the definitions are credited to Guanxi Xiuranzi 關西修髯子.

Xiuranzi, it should be recalled from the previous chapter, is the name signed to the 1522 preface to the “Censorate” Sanguo yanyi edition. Rhymes of Poetry, Explicated also features a preface by Yang Yiyong 楊一濬, a native of Nanhai 南海, Guangdong. A copy of this edition is held by the National Library in Beijing.21

In the following year, a series of events began that would alter the course of Guo Xun’s career for the rest of his life. Born without rank, he had already in his lifetime been awarded the previously defunct Wuding marquisate and been granted the honorary title of Grand Defender. He had also risen through the military ranks and held an important post in the capital region. However, his rise in power was only in its beginning stages. On April 19, 1521, the Zhengde emperor passed away after a prolonged illness, leaving no direct heir. Faced with the prospect of an insurgency due to the power vacuum, the chief grand secretary, Yang Tinghe 楊廷和, engineered the installment of the Hongzhi emperor’s younger brother’s son, the Zhengde emperor’s cousin, as the new emperor. Yang’s intentions were to have the new emperor-to-be adopted into the main imperial line as the Hongzhi emperor’s son and the Zhengde emperor’s younger brother, and have him treat his biological father as his uncle. Yang saw precedents to his plan in the succession of the Han throne from the emperor Chengdi 成帝 to his nephew, the Prince of Dingtao 定陶, and in that of the Song emperor Renzong 仁宗 to a distant relative.

The newly installed Jiajing emperor was not pleased with this plan, and a crisis began to brew. The emperor sought instead to have his biological father posthumously entered into the imperial lineage as an emperor, a plan that many officials saw as a serious breach of ritual

21 Listed in Zhongguo guji shanben shumu, v. 1, p. 185.
protocol. In the fall of the same year, a student sitting the metropolitan examinations, Zhang Cong 張璁 (1475-1539), argued that the precedents were not valid and eventually found himself in direct conflict with Yang Tinghe. This was the beginning of the Great Rites Controversy (Da liyi 大禮議), which rippled through officialdom.

According to the account of the Great Rites Controversy in the unofficial Mingshi jishi benmo 明史紀事本末, Guo Xun opened his home to Zhang Cong and another ally taking the emperor’s side, 桂萼 (?-1531) early in the controversy. There they could meet without fear of Yang Tinghe’s men. Guo, the account says, took delight in their planning and “pledged allegiance as an assistant from the inside (yuewei neizhu 約為內助).”

22 The controversy came to a head in the seventh month (August, 1524). The emperor ordered the Ministry of Rites to carry out his plans. A large crowd of officials protested against his actions, and the emperor ordered the Diectorate of Ceremonial (Silijian 司禮監) to move against them. Over 180 officials were beaten, and seventeen died of their injuries. The rest were banished. In the ninth month, Guo Xun and sixty-three other officials memorialized in support of the emperor’s actions, praising his filial piety. Could Guo have empathized with the new emperor due to his own experiences with the inheritance of the Wuding marquisate?

The Jiajing emperor remembered Guo Xun’s early support, and rewarded him for it. Other officials, however, resented Guo’s activism and favor. Guo’s life from this point on would be marked by a series of promotions and impeachments, eventually culminating in his death in prison.

According to the Ming History, Guo’s first promotion under the Jiajing emperor came

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early in his reign, as the Great Rites Controversy was brewing. Guo Xun was put in command of
the Integrated Divisions (tuanying 團營) protecting the capital region. The first year of the
Jiajing reign also saw the publication of the “Censorate” Sanguo yanyi with the preface by
Xiuranzi discussed in the previous chapter, a topic to which I will return below in order to
discuss it in relation to Guo Xun.

The first scandal to envelop Guo Xun was the case of Li Fuda 李福達, as mentioned in
the biographical sketch from the Ming History cited above. The incident occurred in 1526. An
inspector in Shanxi named Ma Lu 馬錄 arrested a man he asserted to be Li Fuda, a fugitive and
member of the messianic White Lotus Society, living under a different name. One of the sons of
this “Li Fuda” was under the patronage of Guo Xun in the capital, making alchemical elixirs for
him. Guo came to the defense of this alleged Li Fuda on behalf of the son, and in return, Ma Lu
drew up charges of treason against Guo Xun. Other censors and inspectors added to the charges
against Guo, but Guo justified himself to the emperor by saying the accusers simply retained a
grudge against him for his support of the emperor in the Great Rites Controversy and were
colluding against him. Zhang Cong and Gui E, to whom Guo Xun had pledged to serve as an
“assistant from the inside” in the original flare-up of the Great Rites Controversy, were at this
time Left Censor-in-Chief and Minister of Justice, respectively, and were involved in the
investigation. They determined that this “Li Fuda” was not the fugitive the authorities had been
looking for. The man was released, and Guo Xun was cleared of charges. In a turnaround, it was
Ma Lu who ended up being banished, and a purge of the officials who had accused Guo
commenced. In the words of James Geiss, “At [the emperor’s] behest, [his advisors] dismissed
the charges against the accused and initiated an investigation of those officials at court who had
supported the indictment. Ten officials were beaten to death and over forty were banished to frontier posts. When it was over, the Censorate and the ministries had been purged of officials who had associated with Yang T'ing-ho and the Hanlin clique.” Yang Tinghe was deposed in 1528, and instated in his place was another ally of Guo Xun’s: Yang Yiqing, who had contributed a preface to Guo’s *Generational Compendium* in 1515. Zhang Cong and Gui E had moved to bring Yang in to counter the authority of Grand Secretary Fei Hong, whom they had seen as an obstacle to their power. It is notable that in these maneuverings, Guo’s connections run to all sides: Not only was Guo an “assistant from the inside” to Zhang and Gui, he had ties to both Fei and Yang from his days in the Guangdong-Guangxi region. Yang, it should be remembered, had contributed a preface to Guo’s *Generational Compendium*; and Fei had contributed one to Guo’s *Meritorious Service* collection of documents.

However, whatever good will Guo might have had with Yang Yiqing from his days in the Guangdong-Guangxi region did not last long. As the *Ming History* account of Guo’s life relates, Yang Yiqing turned against Guo, and when bribery charges were leveled against Guo in 1529, Guo was stripped of his position in the Integrated Divisions and his Grand Defender rank. Relations between Yang Yiqing and Zhang Cong also soured, and in 1529 Zhang was briefly sent away from the capital. Yet by late 1530, Zhang was back as senior Secretary and Yang was out of his position. By 1531, Guo was reinstated with the Integrated Divisions.

The year of his reinstatement in the Integrated Divisions, 1531, also marked the year of his publication of the *Ballads of Harmonious Peace* collection. *Ballads of Harmonious Peace* is a major collection of *qu* 曲 art songs of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, often named alongside the

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25 For details of the back-and-forth of accusations between Zhang and Yang, see “Chang Fu-ching” entry in *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, pp. 67-70.
Shengshi xinsheng 盛世新聲 (an edition of which was printed by the Censorate, as discussed in the previous chapter) and the Cilin zhaiyan 詞林摘軼 as the three great qu anthologies. It also contains all of the arias from the Record of the Western Chamber; in textually identical form to the 1498 edition of the latter, the earliest known edition of that text.26 An exemplar of this edition of Ballads of Harmonious Peace is held in the National Central Library in Taipei.27

In this time of rapidly shifting allegiances, Guo sought to consolidate his restored position by advertising his close relationship with the emperor in the preface to Ballads of Harmonious Peace. Similar to the prefaces to Guo’s other publications, this one, by Wang Yan 王言, praises Guo Xun’s abilities and claims that he compiled the work in his leisure time. It also intimates that the poems within are works that require a certain taste to understand:

26 For a textual analysis of the Yongxi yuefu’s text vis a vis the Xixiang ji, see Chen Luojia’s unpublished MA thesis, Yongxi yuefu yin Yuan zaju yanjiu, Chiayi University, 2009.

27 The text of the following preface is taken from the rare edition in the National Central Library. It should also be noted that this edition predates the 1566 one included in the Sibu beiyao, an edition that is frequently mistakenly understood as the first. I would like to thank Ma Tai-loi of the Princeton University East Asian Library for assistance deciphering the calligraphy and meaning of this preface.
In peaceful and uneventful times, through days when martial affairs were set aside in favor of literary cultivation, the Grand Mentor, Marquis of Wuding Guo Cangyan [Xun] compiled lyrics and arias written by literary men from the Song and Yuan to our dynasty. He selected and edited them, twenty volumes in all, in order to have them printed so they might circulate more widely. He gave them the title 

Ballads for a Harmonious Peace.

He showed them to me in his free time, and when I read them it was as if I were sitting in the court of the sagely Shun of great antiquity: The five tones played in harmony and the six modes resounded together, flooding the ears. It was as if I had entered the imperial kitchen: All delicacies of land and sea arrayed, with every flavor on offer. The only concern is that such a feast would not suit the tastes of the masses, that such refined sounds would not be melodious to the common ear. Likes and dislikes differ, and these are not things that are understood by the unsophisticated.

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In this case, the preface also links this leisure time to a time of peace and good governance, saying that the art songs of the book are a consequence of the era as well:

As for the meaning of the name of the ballads, it seems that I have obtained some notion of it. I venture to say that “yong” means “peace,” as does “xi,” and, looking to antiquity, that “yongxi” refers to the harmonious peace of Yao and Shun. Above were Yao and Shun as rulers and below were Yu and Houji as ministers. Institutions were full of vitality, and throughout the land the people responded to governing as if moved by the wind—it could be said to be an era of Harmonious Peace. For that reason, of all the airs in the streets and songs of the officials, those that praised tranquility and commended merit were innumerable.

Even so, were it an era of harmonious peace but lacking arias of harmonious peace, it could certainly not be proclaimed the flourishing of harmonious peace. And, suppose it were not an era of harmonious peace but there were arias of harmonious peace—would anyone be able to enjoy the blessings of harmonious peace? Now our lord, in an era of harmonious peace, passes on arias of harmonious peace to Guo’s flourishing heart, it is better to share with others than to take delight alone, and it is better to share with the many than with the few.

Then, the preface links the peace of the era to good governance in the present, and turns to Guo’s status and relationship with the Jiajing emperor:

自是閭閭里巷家傳而人誦者，咸以見雍熙之治不在唐虞而在今日矣!況公為國元勳，受知明主，退食之暇，必有移宮換羽製作，鋪張治功，以鳴國家太平之盛，殆與古之壽歌詠謳韻頌於宇宙間者，當倍於今日，則俟別刻以傳，故序。嘉靖辛卯歲秋七月中秋日，春泉居士王言書於望槐庭。

From these recitations of the people transmitted through the homes in the streets and alleys, all may see the rule of harmonious peace is not a thing of the reigns of Yao and Shun, but of the present! Moreover, when our lord, who is among the senior officials of the country and has the trust of our enlightened ruler, is retiring at leisure, he must have compositions of all modes that extravagantly lay out meritorious governance in order to proclaim the flourishing peace of the land. Those songs and interpretations of old that have survived the ages must be twice the amount of this collection; they will have to wait for a future publication to transmit them. Thus, I have written this preface.

Written on the 15th day of the seventh month of the xingmao year (1531) of the Jiajing reign by
The preface was not mere boasting; Guo was among the Jiajing emperor’s elite inner circles. This can be seen in the fact that, in the eleventh month of the same year, the Jiajing emperor began a series of Daoist jiao ceremonies to ensure an heir, and Guo Xun took part in them. Guo Xun’s old ally Zhan Ruoshui, who had written a preface for Guo’s *Meritorious Service* collection, served as one of the guiding officials of the ceremonies, and Guo Xun himself was one of five civil and military officials who took turns conducting them. In the following years, Guo’s alliance with the Jiajing emperor continued to be strong. Guo rose even further in rank, receiving in 1536 the merit title Left Pillar of the State (*zuo zhuguo* 左柱國), a 1a rank.

*Record of the Heroes*

According to late-Ming rumors, Guo continued to publish vernacular literature after the 1531 printing of *Ballads of a Harmonious Peace*. He is said to have had the vernacular novel *Record of the Heroes* (*Yinglie zhuan* 英烈傳) created and circulated. However, unlike his other publications such as *Ballads* or *Meritorious Service*, there are no exemplars of his edition of *Record of the Heroes*, nor are there extant prefaces showing his relation to the work. However, the gossip reports do match the general pattern of Guo’s uses of print. They claim that Guo used the creation and circulation of the *Record of the Heroes* as part of a calculated plot to bolster the prestige of his family lineage and win himself a promotion in rank from that of marquis to that of duke.

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28 See *Ming Shizong shilu*, juan 132, p. 7. See also Chu Hong-lam, “The Jiajing Emperor’s Interaction with His Lecturers,” in Robinson, ed. *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition in the Ming Court (1368-1644)*, pp. 136-230, for further background on the Jiajing emperor’s relations with Zhan Ruoshui and other lecturers at court.
The Record of the Heroes is a vernacular retelling of the founding of the Ming dynasty. Its narrative opens with a portrayal of corruption and decadence at the Yuan court, and prophetic events indicating the fall of the dynasty and the imminent birth of a “true ruler” (zhenzhu 真主) who will hold the Heavenly mandate to rule. It goes on to depict the miraculous birth of Zhu
Yuanzhang 朱元璋, the future Hongwu 洪武 emperor, who is referred to anachronistically as Taizu 太祖 throughout the text.²⁹ It recounts his career as he gains followers, builds an army, and battles both Yuan forces and other contenders to the throne. The story ends in the sixteenth year of the Hongwu reign, with the pacification of Yunnan and the complete integration of the Ming’s territory.³⁰ It incorporates a broad array of historical material into its text.³¹ Exemplars of three Ming editions are extant. The earliest is a commercial publication printed by Yang Mingfeng 杨明峰 of Nanjing in 1591, titled Huang Ming kaiyun yingwu zhuan 皇明開運英武傳. This edition is divided into sixty sections (ze 則) in eight volumes (juan 卷). This edition purports in credits and interlinear notes to be based on an “old edition (jiuben 舊本)” titled Yinglie zhuan 映列傳 printed by the House of Qi 齊府 principality in Nanjing. It is the only book known to be printed by Yang Mingfeng.³² An exemplar is held by the Naikaku bunko. The second is an edition printed by the Santai guan 三台館 of the famed Yu family of printers of Jiangnan, Fujian. On its cover, it claims to be an “official version” (guanban 官板). Its text is the same as the Yang Mingfeng edition, but it is divided into six volumes rather than eight. Copies are held at the Naikaku bunko and the National Library of China, and a Chongzhen-era reprint is held in the National Central Library, Taipei. The third is retitled Yunhe qizong 雲合奇踪. It is based on the Yingwu zhuan edition, with “new editing” (fu bian 甫編) purportedly undertaken by Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593). This edition is divided into eighty chapters (hui 回), with a four-character couplet title for each. Exemplars are held at the Shanghai Library and the National Library of

²⁹ For my purposes here, I retain this anachronism and use “Taizu” to refer to the fictionalized Zhu Yuanzhang depicted in the Yinglie zhuan.

³⁰ For a complete synopsis, see “Yinglie zhuan” entry in Ouyang Jian and Xiao Xiangyi, eds., Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao, pp. 53-5.

³¹ For a detailed tracing of historical sources employed in the Yinglie zhuan, see Zhao, “Yinglie zhuan benshi kaozheng.”

³² See Han, ed., Xiaoshuo shufang lu, p. 5.
China. Later Qing editions derive from this version, with seven-character couplet chapter titles added.

With the earliest extant edition coming from nearly half a century after Guo Xun’s death, the associations between the novel and Guo come not from prefaces but from casual writings of literati. The earliest allegation that Guo had a hand in the creation of the Record of the Heroes as part of a plot to win a promotion is found in the writing of a younger contemporary of his named Zheng Xiao (1499-1566). In a work called Words on the Present (Jinyan 今言), Zheng wrote:

In the sixteenth year of the Jiajing era (1537), Guo Xun sought to have his ancestor, Ying the Marquis of Wuding, installed in the imperial hall. Accordingly, he made Record of the Heroes of the current dynasty in imitation of the vernacular version of The Record of the Three Kingdoms and The Water Margin. It says that both the live capture of [Zhang] Shicheng and the shooting of [Chen] Youliang were the work of Ying. It was read in the emperor’s quarters and moved those who heard it.

This account was repeated decades later by Shen Defu 沈德符 in his Gleamings from the Wanli Era (Wanli yehuo bian 萬曆野獲編). Shen’s version appears to be based on Zheng’s as it follows the same basic outline, but is in greater detail:

Prior to this, Xun had aligned himself with Zhang [Cong, of] Yongjia in deliberating on the matter of the Great Rites. Because of this, they relied on and assisted one another, and came into favor with the emperor. Guo plotted to have his hereditary rank raised to duke and came up with a marvelous plan: He personally wrote a vernacular record of the founding of the dynasty and titled it Record of the Heroes. In it, he praises his clan founder Ying’s achievements in battle, placing him almost on the level of [Chang Yuchun, Prince of] Kaiping and [Xu Da, Prince of] Zhongshan. Also, at the time no one knew whose was the stray arrow that struck and killed Chen Youliang during the battle of Poyang, so Xun said Guo Ying fired it. Xun had the officials of the inner court charged with storytelling perform it for the emperor daily and to pronounce it an old edition that had been passed down. Thinking it was a pity that Ying’s reward was not commensurate with his achievements, the emperor sought to elevate Yi in rank. At this point, he allowed Guo Xun to act as a consultant to the throne and write “azure-paper prayers.”

Guo enjoyed the protection of the emperor for this, nearly surpassing Lu Wuhui 鄧武惠 [Lu Bing 炳 1510-60] and Qiu Xianning 仇咸寧 [Qiu Luan 鶴, Marquis of Xianning]. Next, he used his merits

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33 Zheng Xiao, Jinyan, juan 1 no. 92, p. 49.
34 ie. qingci, performed by Guo in the Daoist zhai ceremonies mentioned above featuring Zhan Ruoshui.
in construction to be made Grand Preceptor, and then Guo was promoted as Duke of Yi. Next, Guo used his merits in construction to be made Grand Preceptor, and then he was promoted as Duke of Yi. Thus, falsifying a biography brought him power. This vernacular book is currently in circulation.

According to the *Ming History*, Guo was promoted to the title Duke of Yi and concurrently granted the title of Grand Preceptor in the 18th year of the Jiajing reign, or 1539. The chronology of the official historiography thus matches that of the gossip accounts.

Insofar as the narrative of the *Record of the Heroes* goes, it too tends to be in accord with the description from these gossip allegations. It does show an indebtedness to both the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi*, the works that Zheng Xiao claimed Guo had imitated in its creation. The similarities are even stronger when the oldest extant edition of the *Record of the Heroes*, that printed by Yang Mingfeng, is used.

At the formal level, there are at least superficial similarities between the *Record of the Heroes* and the other two, more renowned, works upon which it was purportedly modeled. Like those masterworks, *Record of the Heroes* is also episodic in structure. The early Yang Mingfeng edition is divided into sixty sections (*jie* 齊). It also employs a rhetorical style that simulates an oral storyteller’s, with formulations such as “Let us tell of...” (*que shuo* 邁說) employed throughout. It also begins as the other works begin, with a sweeping historical overview that gradually brings the action of the plot into focus, of

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36 Later editions would be divided into eighty chapters, or *hui* 回.
the sort that would become a convention as the vernacular fiction genre grew.\textsuperscript{37}

In addition to these formal similarities, the \textit{Record of the Heroes} also demonstrates some intertextual borrowing from those other works. There are, for example, two instances of the “righteous release (\textit{yishi 義釋})” of a captive, reminiscent of Guan Yu’s famed release of Cao Cao at Huarong Pass in the \textit{Sanguo yanyi} and the release of Song Jiang in ch. 22 and 32 of the \textit{Shuihu zhuan}. These occur in the fifth section of \textit{juan} 2 (“Taizu’s righteous release of Chen Zhaoxian 陳兆先”) and the fifth section of \textit{juan} 3 (Chang Yuchun’s 常遇春 righteous release of Liangzu 亮祖).\textsuperscript{38}

The section of the \textit{Record of the Heroes} recounting the story of Liu Ji 劉基, a chief advisor to the Hongwu emperor, also contains several similarities to both the \textit{Water Margin} and the \textit{Romance of the Three Kingdoms}.\textsuperscript{39} First is an incident in which Liu Ji enters a cave to find a stone with an inscription saying “This stone is to be smashed by Liu Ji.” Liu Ji smashes the stone to find a chamber containing a divine book. Then a magical white ape, who has been locked in the cave, begs him for release, and he agrees. The ape then disappears in a flash of white light. This is reminiscent of several incidents from the \textit{Water Margin}, the first being Marshal Hong Xin’s opening of a chamber in a cave that bears his name and thereby releasing the protagonists in the form of the Thirty-Six Heavenly Spirits and the Seventy-Two Earthly Demons, and the second being Song Jiang’s receiving of a divine book while hiding in a temple. The similarities continue

\textsuperscript{37} Notably, however, the \textit{Record of the Heroes} does not feature the sort of tragic/ironic ending that the other “masterworks” do. Rather, it of course ends in the founding of the Ming dynasty—the same dynasty in which it was written. The circumstances of its production surely influenced its content.

\textsuperscript{38} As the sections of this edition are not numbered and the facsimile reprint bears no page numbers, citations are section number in juan.

\textsuperscript{39} For a discussion of the fictional characterization of Liu Ji in the \textit{Yinglie zhuan}, see Chan Hok-lam, “The Making of a Myth: Liu Ji’s Fictionalization in the \textit{Yinglie zhuan} and Its Sequel,” in Link, ed. \textit{The scholar’s mind: essays in honor of Frederick W. Mote}, pp. 51-94.
after the white ape is freed: Liu Ji comes across a family in which the daughter has been possessed by a spirit that manifests as a white light. Liu Ji has learned magic from the divine book and offers to help. Liu Ji moves the girl out of her room and awaits the spirit at night. It ends up that the spirit is of course none other than the White Ape. This is reminiscent of the famous episode in chapter 5 of the *Water Margin* in which Lu Zhishen sends off an unwilling bride and awaits the undesired husband-to-be in the bridal chamber. It is also reminiscent of another scene in chapter 73, in which Li Kui intervenes on behalf of a family whose daughter they believe to be possessed.

As for the allegations of Guo Xun had, in the words of Shen Defu, a “marvelous plan” to win a promotion to the rank of duke through the glorification of his ancestor Ying, the most relevant instance of intertextual borrowing comes in the scene of the Battle of Poyang. This is the battle in which Ying purportedly killed Chen Youliang. The version of these events in the *Record of the Heroes* borrows heavily from the famed Red Cliffs episode from *Sanguo yanyi*. Liu Ji has by this point become an advisor to Taizu in a relationship modeled after that between Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei in the *Sanguo yanyi*, and Chen Youliang is cast in the role of Cao Cao. Like Zhuge Liang before him, Liu Ji manipulates the winds against the enemy armada and causes it to be set ablaze.

In this battle scene, the Yang Mingfeng edition makes several explicit references to the *Sanguo yanyi*, comparing the battle at Poyang to the battle at Red Cliff, and Liu Ji to Zhuge Liang:

The ingenious calculations in his breast startle ghosts and spirits,  
With one fire he is able to incinerate a million troops.  
Marquis Han [Xin], vanquisher of Chu, now appears again,  
Through Liu [Ji], Zhuge [Liang] lives once again.

胸前妙算鬼神驚，一火能焚百萬兵
It is at this point in the plot that Guo Ying has his moment of heroism. In the chaos of the battle and flames, Guo Ying is struck in the arm with an arrow. He pulls it out, places it in his own bow, and fires it back. The arrow miraculously flies directly into Chen Youliang’s eye socket and penetrates the back of his skull, killing him instantly. When the battle is over, however, Ying hesitates to take credit for the miraculous shot. A comrade at arms informs Taizu of the deed and points out Ying’s wound. Taizu asks Ying if the account is true, and Ying only responds, “It was brought about by the might of heaven and the calculations of the spirits; what merit is it of your subject?” Taizu then rewards him for his deed and for his humility. Taizu is greatly pleased and states, “Guo Ying’s single arrow surpasses 100,000 generals—how could his merit be matched?”

This effectively writes Guo Xun’s ancestor into the famed Red Cliff episode.

It should be pointed out that this account of Ying’s merit at the battle of Boyang is very similar to that found in Guo Xun’s *Generational Compendium*, the book for which he had Yang Yiqing write a preface. The *Generational Compendium* version reads as follows:

Our ancestor went on an expedition against Chen Youliang of the false Han and fought in the great battle at Poyang Lake. They battled to a standstill for days and nights on end. Ying’s old wound had yet to heal, yet he endured the pain, boarded a sea ship, and fought ferociously. They

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40 *Yingwu zhuan*, juan 5, section 6. In the later, 80-chapter version of the *Yinglie zhuan*, Ying’s reply to Taizu has been excised.
defeated the enemy at the mouth of a tributary river, burning down the ship of Chief Jiang of the impostor bandits. Then, Youliang was struck and killed by a stray arrow. There was word that this was Ying’s accomplishment. His Majesty asked about it, and Ying said, “It was the might of heaven and the calculations of the spirits; how would your subject have such power?” His Majesty rewarded him heavily.”

Guo Ying’s reply to the future emperor here is almost verbatim, albeit more classically phrased, to that in the *Record of the Heroes*. In his gossip writings, Shen Defu noted this similarity between the accounts in the *Record* and the Compendium, suggesting that they were part of a long-standing ambition on the part of Guo Xun to (wrongfully, in Shen’s opinion) attribute the slaying of Chen Youliang to Guo Ying. Shen writes:

> Taizu’s consolidation of his territory came to completion in the battle of Poyang. Nowadays it is said that in the heat of the battle, Guo Ying shot and killed Chen Youliang, the leader of the false Han, and that due to this our forces came to a great victory. However, an investigation of this will reveal that afterward Ying was not even sufficient in rank to be honored in the ancestral hall with Taizu, and that the one who fired the shot at that time was not Ying but Guo Xizheng, Duke of Gongchang. As Xizheng and Ying had the same surname, Guo sought to steal his merit. Nowadays it’s commonly said that Guo had the *Record of the Heroes* made himself in order to confuse the Jiajing emperor, and that he had laid the foundation of this plot long before. In the time of the Zhengde emperor, Xun wrote the *Generational Compendium of the Three Families*, and he secretly worked the story of shooting Youliang into its pages. The “Three Families” are those of the Prince of Zhongshan, the Prince of Qianning, and Ying, whom Taizu had enfeoffed as the Duke of Ying. The preface came from the pen of Yang Yiqing. Guo’s fantasy of having Ying installed in the imperial ancestral hall had long been brewing.

Guo Ying is not the central character in the *Record of the Heroes*, a fact that has led some to doubt the allegations of a “marvelous plan” on the part of Guo. However,

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41. Ying and Zixing were, in fact, brothers. Guo Zixing, the “Prince of Chuyang 惠陽王” and Zhu Yuanzhang’s father-in-law, of the same name. In the case of the *Record of the Heroes*, the latter Zixing is renamed Guo Guangqing 光卿. Ying’s brother’s name is often abbreviated to Xing. Xing was granted a marquisate as well, but it ceased transmission in the post-Hu Weiyong affair purges.


43. See Zhu Hengfu, “Guanyu Yinglie zhuan di zuoche, yanbian yu yishuxing,” in *Ming-Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* v. 1 (1995), pp. 43-52, for this dissenting view concerning Guo Xun’s involvement in the creation of the *Yinglie zhuan*. 

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the critical point is that Ying is credited with the slaying of Chen Youliang in both Xun’s
historiographical and narrative accounts. Whether this “plot” was as nefarious and
cynical as Shen Defu makes it out to be is debatable, however; it could very well have
been the Guo family’s sincere belief that Ying was not given the credit due. By the Wanli
era, when Shen Defu was writing, Guo’s reputation was tarnished after his death in
prison.

Whether a cynical plot or a reflection of a sincere belief, Guo received the
promotions he sought. Ying was installed in the imperial ancestral hall in 1537, and Guo
was granted the prestige title of Grand Preceptor (taishi 太師) in 1538. Then, in 1539, he
was granted the title Duke of Yiguo (Yiguo gong 鈞國公). But his success was not long-
lived. In the following year, he introduced another magician, Duan Chaoyong, to the
emperor. Duan claimed to be able to make eating utensils that would grant the user
immortality. For introducing Duan, the emperor granted Guo yet another raise in salary.
When Duan was exposed as a fraud, the ensuing controversy enveloped Guo as well. A
flurry of charges was leveled at Guo, and this time he could not escape. Further
accusations claimed that Guo had been abusing his power by mistreating officers,
unrightfully claiming land, using government transportation for personal purposes, and
running a network of shops.

The charges were sent to the Censorate for investigation, but the Censorate took
no action against Guo. A persistent Supervising Secretary from the Ministry of Justice’s
Office of Scrutiny memorialized to the court, saying that no action had been taken by the
Censorate for more than forty days, and the emperor demanded Guo explain himself.
Guo’s arrogant and assuming response were phrases such as “What is the point of investigating the charges and troubling the emperor to forgive me once again? 何必更勞賜赦?” The emperor had finally reached his limit, and Guo was imprisoned in the fall of 1541.\textsuperscript{44}

The reluctance of the Censorate to investigate Guo Xun was likely due in part to the Censor-in-Chief, Wang Tingxiang. Wang had been serving as Censor-in-Chief from 1533, and was concurrently made civilian director of the Integrated Divisions, of which Guo Xun was head, early in 1534. When the emperor lost patience with Guo, Wang Tingxiang was implicated as well. Wang was stripped of his position and was sent home.

At the same time as these accusations were coming against Guo, the newly constructed imperial ancestral hall was destroyed in a fire, and the emperor ordered relevant officials to submit reviews of their own conduct. Wang Tingxiang had narrowly escaped punishment, but twelve officials, including Li Kaixian 李開先, were dismissed.

According to Shen Defu, publishing nearly saved Guo:

Duke of Yi Guo Xun also published one Taihe zhuan. After many accusations from the censorial system, Guo was taken in for questioning at the command center of the Embroidered Guards. Following the sagely command of the Jiajing emperor, Xun was rewarded for his praising the Great Rites and for printing the Taihe zhuan by having his shackles opened, and the court was consulted as to appropriate punishment. Thus it seems we can find that it’s not merely legend to speak of printing books and praising the Great Rites together.

Shen adds that he does not know what Guo’s “Taihe zhuan” was, though he mentions the Proper Sounds of Great Harmony (Taihe zhengyin pu 太和正音譜) as a possibility. Yet it was not to be: Guo Xun died in prison in the tenth month of the twenty-first year of the

\textsuperscript{44} See Ming Shizong shilu entry 明世宗實錄, DMB “Kuo Hsun” entry.
\textsuperscript{45} Shen, Wanli, v. 2, p. 643.
Jiajing reign (November 1542), more than a year after he was jailed.

The Field of the *Shuihu zhuan*

Guo used publishing as an instrument of his power throughout his career, in several strategic ways. First, there were the contents of the works he published: The *Generational Compendium of the Three Families*, the *Collection Nurturing and Celebrating Meritorious Service*, and, if the allegations are true and Guo was involved, *Record of the Heroes* all drew attention to his family lineage and its merit. Second, there were the prefaces to those works. Guo had a procession of renowned military and literary figures contribute prefaces to his works. He also showed a talent for calling on officials with promising future careers, including Yang Yiqing and Fei Hong before those men had reached the height of their careers. While Guo’s early association with Yang Yiqing shows that these allegiances were not permanent, they did lend Guo an air of prestige for a time. The prestige came also from the contents of these prefaces, which frequently praised Guo’s alleged virtues and his willingness to print books in order to allow them to be distributed more widely—of course, carrying the praise of his own name with them.

The question remains at what point in his career Guo Xun printed the editions of *Shuihu zhuan* and *Sanguo yanyi* mentioned in the bibliographies of book collectors as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and what function their distribution might have served him. From the fact that these are referred to as “Wuding editions,” it can be inferred that they came into existence during the period in which Xun held that title, which was conferred upon him in 1508
and superseded by the title Duke of Yi in 1539. Furthermore, he presumably would have printed these two novels before printing the third novel associated with him, the *Record of the Heroes*, as it presumably was based on them. *Record of the Heroes*, according to later Ming sources, was printed in 1537, moving back the latest date for his *Shuihu zhuan* and *Sanguo yanyi* by two more years.

Another clue to take into consideration is the considerable overlap between the publishing output of Guo Xun and that of the Censorate, as discussed in the previous chapter. Of the titles printed by the latter institution, at least four are also related to Guo Xun: In addition to the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi*, there are also *Ballads of a Harmonious Peace* and *A Collection Nurturing and Celebrating Meritorious Service*. While the connections between Guo and the former two are loose, with speculation discussed above that Guo might have had a hand in the creation of the “urtext” of the *Shuihu zhuan*, the personal connections between him and the latter two are much stronger and less likely to be mere coincidence. This is especially the case with the *Meritorious Service* collection, which not only notes his connection to the printed edition in the preface but is also a collection of documents about his own family.

Another connection between Guo and the Censorate publications is the preface of the 1522 “Censorate” edition of the *Sanguo yanyi* signed Xiuranzi. As seen above, one by the name of Xiuranzi also played a part in the creation of Guo Xun’s edition of *Rhymes of Poetry, Explicated*. He is credited with providing the explications to the previously-existing book of rhymes. I have been unable to locate any reference to a Xiuranzi in connection with any work other than these two.

It seems to me highly probable that Guo Xun and the Censorate collaborated on book
printing projects in some fashion. This raises the possibility that the Censorate editions and the Guo Xun editions of the novels were one and the same. They were perhaps printed in 1522, shortly after Guo Xun’s return to the capital after his stint in the Guangdong-Guangxi region, and Xiuranzi was at that time in his employ. Another possibility is that the relationship between Guo and Wang Tingxiang led to their publishing these works between 1534, when Wang entered the Integrated Divisions, and 1539, when Guo was promoted to Duke. The latter scenario would explain the presence of both Guo’s *Meritorious Service* and Wang’s collected works on the list of Censorate publications. There is also the possibility that Jintai Wang Liang, whose books also overlap considerably with the Censorate’s, was one of the shops that the inspectors accused Guo of improperly running.

The exact nature of these connections between Guo, the Censorate, and the commercial bookseller Wang Liang is unclear; Wang Tingxiang’s writings about his time in the Censorate, the *Neitai ji*, for example, make no mention of such publishing activity. Nevertheless, what is certain is that these are the circles in which the early *Shuihu zhuan* edition(s) were found.

As for how the *Shuihu zhuan* was read at this early stage in its life as a phenomenon of print, a remark by Li Kaixian—the same figure who was dismissed from office along with Wang Tingxiang in 1542 and who was renowned for his poetry and drama—gives a sense. He wrote:

Cui Houji (Xian, 1478-1541), Xiong Nansha (Guo, js. 1529), Tang Jingchuan (Shunzhi, 1507-1560), Wang Zunyan (Shenzhen, 1509-1559), and Chen Hougang (Shu) say that the *Shuihu zhuan* is filled with minute details, with a single theme running throughout, and that only the *Records of the Grand Historian* precedes this book. Moreover, since ancient times there has never before been a book about a single event in one hundred and twenty volumes (*ce*). One who would fault it for its treacherous banditry and deception knows nothing of methods for narrating events or of the subtleties of the study of history.

崔後渠、熊南沙、唐荊川、王遵嚴、陳後岡謂《水滸傳》委曲詳盡，血脈貫通，《史記》而下，便是此書。且古來更未有一事而二十冊者。倘以奸盜詐偽病之，不知序事之法，學史之妙者也。

From this remark, we can see how elite audiences might have received the printed *Shuihu zhuan* in this period. It was admired not for its content or its valorization of outlaws but for the craft of its writing, its wealth of detail, and its very length. It was a private game of the cognoscenti; to dwell on its depictions of lawlessness would be to reveal oneself as lacking in taste and literary perception.

The remark is also further evidence of the specific circles in which the book moved at this point. Of the readers named, Xiong, Tang, Wang, and Chen are along with Li Kaixian himself among the group known as the Eight Talents of the Jiajing Era (*Jiajing ba caizi* 雅靖八才子), graduates of the 1526 and 1529 imperial examinations. (The remaining members are Zhao Shichun 趙時春, Ren Han 任瀚, and Lü Gao 呂高) The older man, Cui Xian, was part of the circles around Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1529), the core of which retrospectively came to be known as the “Former Seven Masters (*qian qi zi* 前七子).” That group consisted of Li Mengyang, Wang Tingxiang, He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521), Xu Zhenqing 徐禎卿 (1479-1511), Bian Gong 邊貢 (1476-1532), Kang Hai 康海 (1475-1541), and Wang Jiusi 王九思 (1468-1551). In the words of Daniel Bryant, “The grouping of just these seven men is, like many of its analogs in other periods, somewhat misleading, but it reflects a real phenomenon all the same. What it actually amounts to is a partial list of men who were closely associated with Li Meng-yang in Peking during the years 1496 to 1505 and who accepted his leadership of a literary coterie.”

Li Kaixian represents a connection between these two groups. He was in the same circles at court as Wang Tingxiang and mentioned Cui Xian as a fellow admirer of the *Shuihu zhuan*. He

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47 Bryant, “Poetry of the Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries,” in Mair, ed. *Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, p. 404. See also Bryant, “Appendix Three: The Seven Masters of the Ming,” in his *Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483-1521) and His World*, pp. 641-58.
had passed the palace examination in 1529, and in 1531 he was sent to Ningxia 宁夏 in his capacity as secretary in the Ministry of Revenue. On the way, he ended up having a chance encounter with two other members of the “Early Masters” group, Kang Hai and Wang Jiusi. The latter two men had been dismissed from office in 1510 and had since turned to writing sanqu lyrics, an interest Li Kaixian held in common with them. On the first night of their acquaintance, Li penned a lengthy suite of lyrics for Kang. Tian Yuan Tan has pointed out that while literary historiography often portrays this encounter as Li Kaixian’s entrance into the tutelage of the older men, in fact Li had been well-versed in sanqu writing since his youth, and his knowledge of the sanqu form served as his entrée into the world of the older men. The sanqu was a form of cultural capital for Li, and for this reason he wrote in it rather than the more formal shi poetry that would be more customary in such situations. Li would turn again to the sanqu form in earnest after his own dismissal from office.

Publishing brought together the worlds of the Seven Masters and Eight Talents groups, the Censorate, and Guo Xun: Li’s acquaintance Cui Xian had written a preface for the collected works of Du Nan published by the Censorate. That collection also featured a preface by Du Nan’s fellow Censor, Guo Xun’s colleague Wang Tingxiang. Wang Tingxiang’s collection likewise featured a preface by Du Nan.

Beyond the personal connections, we can also see the tastes and interests of the class of people such as Li Kaixian, the Seven Masters, and the Eight Talents reflected in the publications of Guo and the Censorate. Sanqu collections are well-represented, with the Ballads of a Harmonious Peace (Guo and Censorate), A New Voice for a Flourishing Age (Censorate), and

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48 For an in-depth description of the meeting between the two “early masters” and Li Kaixian, and for an analysis of Li’s suite of song lyrics for Kang, see Tan, Songs of Contentment and Transgression, pp. 149-56
Ballads for Great Peace (Censorate). So too are philological works to be used in the composition of sanqu and poetry, with Rhymes of the Central Plain (Censorate) and Rhymes of Poetry, Explicated (Guo). Tang literature also figures into both Guo’s and the Censorate’s publishing, with the former’s collections of the works of Yuan Jie and Bai Juyi and the latter’s anthologies. Though drama was not directly represented among these publications, related works—including qu taken from dramas such as Record of the Western Chamber as printed in Ballads of a Harmonious Peace—were. Li Kaixian also wrote dramas, including Record of the Precious Sword (Baojian ji 宝剑记), which is an adaptation of a Shuihu story.

This is the literary field in which early editions of the Shuihu zhuan and the Sanguo yanyi existed, and a sampling of the community in which they were consumed. As a member of a military family, Guo Xun would not be eligible to sit for the civil examinations. However, he was educated and, in the words of the Ming History, “quite involved in books.” He also interacted regularly with high-ranking literati officials. Areas such as sanqu and vernacular fiction are areas of mutual interest, and by publishing books (which occasionally had the added benefit of advertising his merits and social connections), Guo cemented his place in this field where the martial and the civil intersected.

The Shuihu zhuan in the commercial world is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Bandits for Sale:

The Commercial Transformation of the Shuihu zhuan

Over the course of the sixteenth century, the printed Shuihu zhuan underwent a transformation: As the previous two chapters have shown, it was a product of elite society in the first half of the century, circulating among Jiajing era courtiers and administrative bureaus. The Wuding edition, discussed in Chapter Two, is the only identified edition to have existed in the first four decades of the century, with the Censorate edition, the subject of Chapter One, coming possibly slightly later but before the 1570s at the latest. By the last decade of that century, however, the Shuihu zhuan had become a commercial phenomenon with so many different editions available that one publisher, Yu Xiangdou, felt compelled to include in his 1594 edition a statement about its superiority over the host of others contending with it in the market. The note, included in the upper register of the pages of the preface, read as follows:

There are a variety of editions of the book Water Margin in the shops. There are more than ten partially illustrated ones, and only one fully illustrated one. Previous illustrated editions had mistaken characters in their texts and were printed from indistinct, old blocks. As for the Sanhuai tang edition, the poetry was removed from it, making it inconvenient to read or recite.¹ Now,

¹ According to Han, ed., Xiaoshuo shufang lu, there were two Sanhuai tangs, one of which is associated with Wang Kunyuan 王昆源 (p. 19, p. 50). An account of the late Qing by a Manchu official, Chong Yi, tells of a Sanhuai tang located among the bookshops of the Longfu si area of Beijing. According to another bookseller, Sun Dianqi, that Sanhuai tang later became a flower shop. See Widmer, “Honglou mengying and its publisher, Juzhen tang of Beijing.” Irwin suggests that the Sanhuai tang in question is the one related to Wang Kunyuan;
Master Yu of Shuangfeng tang has corrected the text and added commentary, removing anything inconveniencing its perusal and eliminating anything extraneous. It contains poems with incorrect rhymes that he wished to edit out, but he feared that readers would say it was lacking so they have been included in the upper register. Furthermore, there are no mistakes whatsoever in a single sentence of the book’s twenty-plus volumes (juan). Gentleman customers can trust in the Shuangfeng tang trademark.

The quality of its print, the accuracy and completeness of its text, and its commentary, Yu wrote, made this edition superior to the dozen or more competitors.

The Shuihu zhuan was not the only title to see this kind of growth in the late sixteenth century: this was a time when books in general had become more widely available than ever before. While commercial printers had existed since the Northern Song era, it was in the late Ming they thrived as never before by catering to literate and at least moderately wealthy populations of readers. Yu Xiangdou himself is a perfect example of this expansion of print activity. His clan had been in the business for hundreds of years, and he was an eleventh-generation publisher. Yet whereas his ancestors had only published a handful of titles each, Xiangdou published more than seventy, mostly between the years 1588 and 1609 but as late as 1637, and his contemporary cousin Yu Zhangde 彰德 published fifty-seven. In addition to the

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2 Hegel notes this final line in his Reading Illustrated Fiction, pp. 433-4.
3 There is precious little data concerning the prices of books in the late Ming. For a summary of that data, see Shen Jin, “Mingdai fangke tushu zhi liutong yu jiage.” However, Lucille Chia notes that even this data may be problematic (Printing for Profit, p. 323n18). It can be inferred from the editions themselves that prices varied. Robert Hegel, Anne McLaren, and others have also argued that late Ming publishers could target publications for specific niche audiences. See Hegel, “Niche Marketing,” and McLaren, “Ming Audiences,” on different editions of the Sanguo yanyi aimed at different audiences.
4 Lucille Chia has written extensively on the Yu publishing clan and Jianyang printing in general. See her Printing for Profit, passim., esp. pp. 87-93. Chia includes detailed information concerning their publishing output as well. She has identified 20 Yu clan imprints from the Song, 43 from the Yuan, and 371 from the Ming. Of those 371, she counts 72 as being Yu Xiangdou’s. Others attribute a slightly higher number to Yu Xiangdou. See Chia, p. 155, pp. 298-302, p. 364n24. See also Xiao Dongfa, “Mingdai xiaoshuo jia, keshu jia Yu Xiangdou,” in Ming-Qing xiaoshuo luncang, vol. 4, pp. 195-211.
Shuihu zhuan, titles printed by Xiangdou fall into a range of genres including other works of vernacular fiction, classics, encyclopedias for daily use, and almanacs.\(^5\)

This surge in commercial printing, often called the late Ming “printing boom,” has received much attention from scholars in recent years. Studies have focused on wide-scale topics such as the long-term development of print and print culture, studies of the industry in specific locales, the examination of the imprints themselves, and the eventual domination of the imprint over the manuscript. Others have examined the influence of print culture on the formation and reception of texts, including commercial commentary editions of the classics, the targeting of “niche” audiences by commercial publishers, and the functions of various editions of a text aimed at audiences of varying literacy levels. Closely related to these studies are yet others that have focused on the materiality of the book in the late Ming period, and the function of the book as a symbol of status and taste among merchant classes who were newly affluent yet filled with anxiety over their lack of traditional literati status.

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the particular effect the late Ming printing boom had on the Shuihu zhuan in particular, a title typical of the commercial imprints of the period. I will show the changing significance of the Shuihu zhuan as it was consumed during the printing boom, and how the printing boom influenced its reception. I will also show what the commercialization of the Shuihu zhuan demonstrates about the wider phenomena of late Ming commercial printing and channels for disseminating information. First, I will provide a brief description of the celebrated late Ming printing boom and the socioeconomic factors that fostered it, and draw some comparisons between the print culture of the late Ming and that of

\(^5\) The latter includes his well-known 1599 almanac The Correct Source for a Myriad Practical Uses (Wanyong zhengzong 禹用正宗), discussed in Timothy Brook’s Confusions of Pleasure, pp. 213-14.
seventeenth century Europe. In particular, I will argue that, while in the West the commodification of the text gave rise to the author figure and the concept of copyright ultimately derived from it, in the Ming it was the editor and the closely related commentator who were products of the commercial print industry.

This leads to the second point. I will show the ways that the editor/commentator figure that rose from the commercial print industry shaped commercial editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* through the addition of prefaces and commentaries. The first commentary edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* was created by Yu Xiangdou, the very same edition of 1594 that is quoted above. In the early seventeenth century, a handful of other commentary editions appeared, most notably two purporting to be by the infamous iconoclast Li Zhi. These commentary editions attempted to frame understandings of the work by remarking not only on the quality of its prose but also the moral qualities expressed within it. Here I focus on the problem of expressions of loyalty and righteousness (*zhong yi* 忠義) and their role vis a vis official state ideology.

Finally, with comparison to historical precedents, namely the *Tales While Trimming the Lamp* (*Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話, *Jiandeng yuhua* 剪燈餘話) collections that are frequently cited as the first “banned” works of literature in the Ming, I examine the extent to which non-canonical literature and its spread through commercial channels could be perceived as a danger to the state. I argue that, while it may not be the case that a fully-developed “public sphere” arose out of print and “print culture” in the Ming, there was a large degree of freedom and range of ideology expressed in “printing boom” era books in general and commentary editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* in particular.
Commercial Publishers, Authors, and Editors

By the time commercial editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* such as Yu Xiangdou’s appeared, commercial circulation of texts was already a phenomenon with a long history. The commercial circulation of texts in China was not sparked by the advent of printing: Texts were sold in manuscript form long before the woodblock imprint became the dominant medium for textual transmission. Records of marketplace stalls selling (or possibly, as Joseph McDermott has suggested, renting out) manuscripts exist as early as the Latter Han dynasty (22-220). The biography of Wang Chong 王充 (27-100 CE) in the *Book of the Latter Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), for example, contains the following:

His family was poor and without books. He would frequently roam the market stalls of Luoyang, reading the books sold there.

家貧無書，常游洛陽市肆，閲所賣書。⁶

There are records of permanent shops dedicated to the sale of manuscripts by the sixth century in the north and the south.⁷ As for printing technology, it was in use in East Asia at least 700 years before Gutenberg famously “revolutionized” communications in the West with his invention. It also had a widely used precedent in the form of official seals used to denote the authenticity or ownership of documents or items. It is because printing was so early and widespread that there is not an East Asian figure equivalent to Gutenberg in the West, an inventor who changed the world in one stroke. The “inventor” of printing in East Asia is not known, and such a concept is perhaps not even applicable. In any case, it can be surmised that East Asian printing was driven by religious rather than (purely) commercial concerns. In Mahayana Buddhism, sutras became the equivalent of relics, and the copying and transmission of them were understood to be a

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⁶ *Hou Han shu*, book 49.
means of creating merit. Timothy Barrett has speculated that Wu Zetian used printing to disseminate large numbers of Buddhist texts in order to create merit and legitimacy for her Zhou dynasty (690-695), establishing herself as an equivalent to Ashoka, the Indian ruler who created 84,000 relic stupas throughout his territory. Printing, Barrett claims, allowed Wu Zetian to do this work more quickly and effectively than employing scribes would.\(^8\) A lack of contemporary references to woodblock printing of books complicates this claim, however there is some physical evidence to back it up: a Buddhist *dharani* text discovered in a Korean temple features characters developed during Wu Zetian’s rule. The temple’s construction suggests that the text was placed within it between 704 and 751.

Early printing techniques were used by Daoists as well, including the printing of iconography onto paper. The Daoist heavenly hierarchy mirrored the earthly bureaucracy, and as such Daoists employed stamps and seals as well. Daoists also used stamp-like techniques to create forms to be filled in. These uses predate the Wu Zetian reign, raising the possibility that by they influenced the Buddhist usage. The printing of entire texts by Wu Zetian would simply have been a case of taking a familiar technique to new lengths.\(^9\)

As for entire “books,” the famed Diamond Sutra acquired by Aurel Stein in 1907 and held by the British Library is frequently regarded as the earliest printed book. The British Library qualifies that title, referring to it as “the world's earliest complete survival of a dated printed book.”\(^10\) Dated 868, it features a colophon stating that one Wang Jie 王玠 had it printed

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\(^8\) See Barrett, *The Woman who Discovered Printing*, passim, on the influence of religion on early printing in China.


\(^10\) It is described as such on the British Library’s website: [http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/diamondsutra.html](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/diamondsutra.html), accessed 2/27/12.
for distribution to gain merit on behalf of his late parents.\textsuperscript{11}

There are records of booksellers dedicated to selling printed materials in Chengdu and other major cities as early as the ninth century.\textsuperscript{12} The birth of the shidafu 士大夫 class spurred the development of bookstores in the Song, as candidates sought out printed materials that would assist them in preparing for the civil examinations. Inoue Susumu has argued that commercial printing in the Song was a factor in Su Shi’s fame as a poet, as it was at this time that one could be a commercial author. Susan Cherniack has also argued that Song commercial printing led to a re-evaluation of the Confucian classics in that it exposed textual instability and brought various commentaries into circulation, factors that gave rise to textual criticism.\textsuperscript{13}

While print was a major cultural force by the Song, spurring the growth of textual criticism and making texts increasingly widely available, the manuscript continued to be the dominant form of textual transmission until the late Ming. Several surveys of existing and historical collections of books have come to the same conclusion, that print only began to outpace the manuscript in the sixteenth century. The dominant force behind the rapid growth of the woodblock imprint in the sixteenth century is the growth of the commercial print industry at that point in history. The majority of the imprints from the era were the products of commercial publishers such as Yu Xiangdou.

Several factors spurred this rapid expansion of the commercial print industry. First was economic expansion and urbanization. With the silver trade bringing the precious metal into the Ming from the New World via the Philippines and Japan, domestic economic activity became

\textsuperscript{11} For a lavishly illustrated introduction to this sutra, see Wood, The Diamond Sutra: the Story of the World’s Earliest Dated Printed Book.
\textsuperscript{12} See Inoue, Chūgoku shuppan bunka shi, pp. 95-100.
monetized to a greater extent than ever before. Coupled with the urbanization process, this meant that cities became hubs of economic activity. Trade routes allowed commerce between the nodes, and the widespread use of silver as a means of exchange brought a greater range of products to local markets.¹⁴

The second factor was an increase in population. While the precise numbers remain a subject of much debate, it is agreed upon that the sixteenth century was a period of rapid population growth. This combined with the economic growth allowed for greater investment in the educational preparation for the civil examinations. More families could afford to put their money into the education of one or more of their boys in the hopes that one day he would be able to become an official, traditionally the most prestigious of careers. The educated “sub-elite” who did not take places in the traditionally esteemed hierarchy of officialdom formed the audience for commercial publishers. In addition to the classics, these audiences sought out a range of printed material that ran from encyclopedias for daily use, calendars and almanacs, and trade route guides to dramas, joke books, literary collections, and, of course, vernacular fiction.

The odds of success in the exams, however, became increasingly minuscule with respect to the number of candidates: while the number of examination hopefuls grew wildly, the number of positions to be won remained mainly stable. Yet rather than being deterred, candidates took heart in the increasing number of alternatives that remained open to them should they fail to win a spot in the government bureaucracy. Among these fall-back careers were those of professional publisher, writer, editor, and commentator. Their ranks bolstered the previously existing commercial publishing industry.

¹⁴ On silver and international trade, see Atwell, “Time, Money, and the Weather,” “Another Look”; von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*. 
It was not the printing of “new” texts that allowed publishers to thrive: as I have shown above, the *Shuihu zhuan* was available from at least a dozen publishers in the last decade of the sixteenth century. This is a typical example of vernacular fiction in the late Ming. Encyclopedias for daily use, joke books, and other such genres of printed material also contained previously extant content, repurposed and repackaged into “new” collections. There was no formal legal copyright apparatus as there developed in seventeenth century Europe. However, that is not to say that publishing was seen as a complete free-for-all by all parties involved. Here again, Yu Xiangdou’s editions serve as an example. In a note preceding his edition of the *Baxian zhuan*, he complains about those who have reprinted his work without his permission:

Works such as *Huaguang zhuan* and others I’ve edited all came from my heart at great expense of labor and money. Those many who print in search of profit and those who would even copy this establishment’s works are only walking in the tracks others have made and following in others’ dust. Now, this house has many works of its own and has no shame about attempting to profit from them. But there are bastards and running slaves from elsewhere who would only re-cut printings already made by others. They seize upon others with their musings and obtain something without putting their heads down and working up a sweat—shameless in the extreme!

Yu’s protestations might seem hypocritical in light of the fact that he was himself guilty of reprinting the work of others: his publications *Tang guo zhizhuan* 唐國志傳 and *Da Song zhongxing Yue wang zhuan* 大宋中興岳王傳 were reprinted works by Xiong Damu 熊大木. Yet it is important to note that Yu is not bemoaning unauthorized copying of his “original” work. He speaks here not as an author but as an editor/compiler. The activity in which he claims to have invested his money and labor is editing (*bianji* 編輯) rather than “creating” or “writing,” terms that do not figure into his lamentation at any point. In the division of labor that the commodification of the book has created, the editor is responsible for shaping the text and
becomes the basis of authority over it.

This is in contrast with the history of the book in the West. Unlike in China, where woodblock printing techniques remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years, the West saw sudden adoption of mechanical printing technology. This technologically based origin led to the forerunner of the copyright, the mechanical patent that granted the rights to print books in a certain language or, later, books of a certain kind. The situation soon became untenable, and booksellers sought exclusive legal rights to print specific texts. Those rights derived from the author, whose labor—authorship—brought the text into existence. As the product of labor, the text was the property of its author, and the author held property rights to it accordingly. The booksellers claimed that those property rights were transferred to them exclusively by purchase of texts from their authors.\(^\text{15}\) These claims became the basis of the modern copyright system.

In the commercial publishing of the late Ming, it was editing rather than authoring that was the main labor that went into creating a text for publication as a book. In this light, Yu Xiangdou is justified in his complaint that others have profited from his labor. He sees his labor as honest work by which he should be able to make his fair profit. This sort of labor is on display in the first Yu Xiangdou quotation above as well: though the base texts of the *Shuihu zhuan* in the market editions most likely shared a line of textual filiation, they were transformed through editing. Yu’s claim is to have created the most accurate, readable edition through his labor of editing. He also pioneered another, related strategy for improving upon the text, adding commentaries. The commentator, similar to the editor, labors to create an edition that can be read accurately.

\(^{15}\) For an account of the rise of the figure of the “author” in the West and its relation to copyright law, see Rose, *Authors and Owners: The invention of copyright*; Johns, *Piracy*. 
Bandits for Sale: Commercial editions of the *Shuihu zhuan*

In this section, I will examine two editions of the *Shuihu zhuan* that were transformed at the hands of commercial editors/commentators. The first, by Yu Xiangdou, appeared in 1594 as the printing boom of the late sixteenth century was reaching its height. The second, with commentary allegedly by Li Zhi, came some twenty-five years later, well after the printing boom came into full swing. In particular, I will examine the way the editor/commentators of these two editions deal with the issue of loyalty and righteousness (*zhong yi* 忠義) that is predominant in the novel. I use two parts of the editions as lenses into the treatment of these issues at the hands of the commentators: First, I look to the prefaces to see how the commentators set the stage for the reading of the entire book. It is in these prefaces that the commentators bring up the themes that they see as running through the work as a whole, and establish a discourse by which those themes are to be understood. In the prefaces, they also establish the place of the book in reference to other books, frequently through direct comparisons. Second, I look to their treatments of the two instances of the “righteous release” (*yishi* 義釋) of a captive, Song Jiang, in the novel. As these are instances of conflicting loyalties, the commentators’ treatments of them is revealing of their attitudes.

The righteous release, as I discussed in the previous chapter, is a common trope in vernacular fiction. It appears in the *Yinglie zhuan* as well as the *Shuihu zhuan*, but the most famous righteous release of a captive is from the *Sanguo yanyi*, which precedes both of those works. In that famous scene, which occurs in chapter 50, the forces of Liu Bei have routed those
of Cao Cao at the battle of Red Cliff. Cao Cao and a small band escape via Huarong Trail, upon which Zhuge Liang has had Guan Yu set in ambush. In order to escape the ambush with his life, Cao Cao plays upon Guan Yu’s sentiments. Guan Yu had previously been captured by Cao Cao and had surrendered to him, subsequently serving under him. He then escaped Cao’s service, killing five commanders in the process, and returned to serve Liu Bei. At Huarong Trail, Cao Cao reminds Guan Yu of the kindness he paid him at the time, and of the killings of the five commanders when he escaped.

And Lord Guan, whose sense of honor was as solid as a mountain, could not put Cao Cao’s many obliging kindnesses or the thought of the slain commanders from his mind. Moved, despite himself, at the sight of Cao’s men on the verge of tears, Lord Guan softened. He swung away his mount and said to his soldiers, “Spread out on all sides,” clearly signaling his intent to make way. When Cao Cao saw Lord Guan turn aside, he and his commanders bolted past, and when Lord Guan came back, they were gone.\(^{16}\)

Guan returns to Liu Bei’s camp and reports to Zhuge Liang that he has allowed Cao Cao to get away and that he is ready to suffer capital punishment as a result. Liu Bei, remembering his pledge of brotherhood with Guan Yu, pardons him. Guan Yu is subject to several conflicting loyalties in this situation, and he attempts to mediate them all: with his “sense of honor [that] was as solid as a mountain,” he spares Cao Cao in return for his previous kindness, and he realizes that in doing so he has compromised his loyalty to Liu Bei, so he is prepared to accept the punishment of death for having done so. (Zhuge Liang, of course, had anticipated from the start the manner in which the situation would play out.)

In the *Shuihu zhuan*, the character Song Jiang, who eventually becomes the leader of the Mount Liang band, is righteously released twice. These instances occur in Chapter 22, in which he is allowed to slip away after murdering his wife Yan Poxi, and Chapter 32, in which bandits

who have captured him learn of his identity and set him free. Song Jiang first appears in
Chapter 18 of the *Shuihu zhuan*. The son of a farmer, he is working as a registrar in Yuncheng,
Shandong. He is introduced into the narrative when an inspector arrives in town in search of the
ringleader of a band of thieves who’ve held up a caravan transporting birthday presents intended
for the Grand Preceptor. Song Jiang is described as a talented official but also a lover of the
martial arts and friend to the roving men of the “rivers and lakes”:

Song Jiang himself served as registrar in Yuncheng. He was skilled at indicting charges and highly
experienced in his job, but he also loved to practice martial arts, and had studied many different
modes and styles. What he liked best in the world was to make friends with heroes of the rivers
and lakes. No one was turned away who came to him for help, be they great or small; all were
afforded refuge at his house in the country, where Song Jiang would keep them company all day
long—he never tired. When they left he would be careful to make sure their purses were lined. He
scattered his wealth like water and if anyone asked him for money he never said no. He deemed it
a pleasure to offer people relief and arrange their affairs. He bought coffins for those who could
not afford them, succored the poor and aided the needy. Anyone in trouble could rely on him for
support. This behavior had made him famous throughout Shandong and Hebei and people called
him “The Opportune Rain,” comparing him to the rain which heaven bestows just when it is
needed, to the benefit of all earthly things.

The inspector announces himself to Song Jiang, and Song Jiang brings him to a teahouse to
entertain him and talk business. The inspector reveals the name of the man he is looking for—
Chao Gai—and Song Jiang is shocked. Chao Gai is a friend, and Song Jiang rushes off on a
pretense to alert him that the authorities are coming for him.

It is later in the narrative that Song Jiang receives righteous release at the hands of
captors or authorities. The first instance is in Chapter 22, which is titled “Mother Yan causes an
uproar in Yuncheng County/ Zhu Tong gives Song Gongming a righteous release 闊婆大鬧鄯城
縣 朱仝義釋宋公明.” Yet to understand the circumstances of this righteous release, it is
necessary to provide some further background: Song Jiang, a friend to those of the “rivers and

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17 These chapter numbers refer to “full-recension” (*fanben*) editions. Chapter numbering varies by edition. Notably,
editions based on the Jin Shengtan edition will be off by one: ie. The righteous releases of Song Jiang will be
found in chapters 21 and 31. The chapter divisions in the Yu Xiangdou edition discussed in this chapter will be
discussed below.
lakes” underworld, has become even closer with the bandit ringleader Chao Gai after informing him that the authorities were about to move against him. Chao Gai has given Song Jiang a letter of thanks and a promise of gold. Song Jiang’s wife Yan Poxi, who despises him and has been conducting an affair with one Zhang Wenyuan, discovers the letter and blackmails Song Jiang with her knowledge of his friendship with Chao Gai. She demands that Song Jiang let her go and give her the gold, threatening to expose him otherwise. Song Jiang agrees, but insists that he has not received the gold. When Yan Poxi does not believe him, he flies into a rage and kills her.

Song Jiang comes to his senses and, as he is leaving, encounters Yan’s mother. He tells her what has happened, and falls victim to her ruse: she pretends to agree with Song’s declarations that Poxi got what she deserved, and promises to remain quiet about the killing as long as Song Jiang pays for the funeral expenses. While on the way to the coffin maker, they pass the government offices, and Mother Yan grabs onto Song Jiang, screaming that he has murdered her daughter. A crowd gathers, but Song Jiang is known as a righteous man so no one moves to arrest him.

Finally, a friend of Song Jiang’s called Bullock Tang (Tang Niu’er 唐牛兒) appears and knocks Mother Yan aside, accusing her of slandering Song Jiang’s good name. Song Jiang slips through the crowd and escapes.

That is the background to Chapter 22. In the chapter itself, Zhang Wenyuan pushes for charges to be drawn up against Song Jiang and the magistrate, though reluctant due to his admiration for Song Jiang, sees no choice but to do so. Song Jiang has gone off to hide in his family’s village. Two sergeants, Zhu Tong and Lei Heng, who are themselves friends of Song Jiang and Chao Gai, are sent to the Song village. Zhu knows of Song’s hiding place in the village beneath a Buddhist altar and goes to find him there. He tells Song Jiang that he will stall the
investigation and allow him to escape. Song does so, and takes refuge at the home of Chao Gai. There he meets Wu Song, and the focus of the narrative shifts.

The second righteous release of Song Jiang comes when he is on the run after murdering Yan Poxi. This is in Chapter 32, which is titled, “Pilgrim Wu drunkenly beats Kong Liang/ The Brocade Tiger gives Song Jiang a righteous release 武行者醉打孔亮 錦毛虎義釋宋江.” This time, however, it comes not at the hands of authority figures who have a personal connection to Song Jiang, but rather bandits. He is walking through a forest when he sets off an alarm bell tied to a rope. Men waiting in ambush seize him and drag him off to their mountainous lair. They tie him to a pillar there and plan to slaughter and eat him once their leader has awakened. Eventually, three bandit chiefs show up and the henchmen prepare to kill Song Jiang. Song Jiang laments his fate, sighing, “O wretched Song Jiang, your life must end here!”18 Upon learning the identity of their captive, the bandit chiefs are shocked. Song Jiang’s reputation for righteousness precedes him in the underworld of the “rivers and lakes.” The Brocade Tiger approaches him:

“You don’t mean to say you are Song Jiang of Shandong, the Opportune Rain, the one who killed Yan Poxi and fled to the rivers and lakes?”
“You know all about that then? Yes, I am he.”
Appalled, the Brocade Tiger seized the soldier’s knife and cut the bonds. Then he tore off his own burgundy robe and wrapped it around Song Jiang. He placed him on the middle one of the tiger-skin chairs and ordered [the other chiefs] at once to get down on their knees. All three knocked their heads on the ground. Song Jiang slipped off the chair to return the compliment.

“Why are you honoring me like this, instead of killing me? What does it mean?” he asked, bowing to the ground.

The three chiefs remained kneeling there together. “I would like to take this knife and gouge my own eyes out, for failing to recognize a great man,” the Brocade Tiger said. “If I hadn’t been and looked for myself, and made these inquiries, we could easily have finished off a righteous man. I thank my stars that you were impelled to speak out your own name, for how else would I have learnt the truth? I have frequented the rivers and lakes and roamed the greenwood for many a year now, and I know well your reputation for bravery and generosity, for helping the needy and supporting the oppressed; but it had never been my fortune to meet you face to face. Today heaven has ordained our meeting and my dearest wish is fulfilled.”

Song Jiang replied: “What poor talent can I lay claim to, that you should overestimate my worth?”

“It is well known how you respect men of honor and receive heroes, you are renowned

Both of the righteous releases of Song Jiang are due to his upholding of the values of the lakes and rivers underworld, a set of values embraced by people on both sides of the law: One release is at the hands of a sympathetic yamen runner, and one is at the hands of a bandit chief. The fraternity of men who appreciate heroes and the value of righteousness is not opposed to the law, nor does it uphold the law; to it, the law simply does not hold the relevance that the set of values does. This is a more ambivalent position than the righteous release seen in the *Sanguo yanyi*.\footnote{Guan Yu’s release of Cao Cao was, however, a subject of interest to the greatest commentator of the *Sanguo yanyi*, Mao Zonggang.} There, Guan Yu is conflicted between two men whom he has served, one of whom is a sworn brother. There is not a set of shared values that creates a fraternity and renders authority irrelevant as there is in the *Shuihu zhuan*.

For this reason, the righteous releases of Song Jiang are ideal windows into the ideological leanings of the editor-commentators. They show how the editor-commentators treat loyalty and righteousness and the relations between these values and the law. At the hands of an editor-commentator, the outlaws of the *Shuihu zhuan* can be harnessed to the purpose of social commentary. The heroes of Mount Liang have the potential be presented as being along the lines of Hobsbawm’s “social bandit.” As defined by Hobsbawm, social bandits, as opposed to “simple criminals” on the one hand and “organized insurgents” on the other, are “peasant outlaws whom the lord and the state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported.”\footnote{Hobsbawm 1969, p. 13.}
Hobsbawm’s work on the “social bandit” is comparative, and for the portion concerning China, he even uses the *Shuihu zhuan* as an example. However, the heroes of the *Shuihu zhuan*, and Song Jiang in particular, only partially fit the description. Indeed, most of the heroes of the *Shuihu zhuan* were, like Song Jiang, originally minor officials or military officers despite the fact that the novel was frequently described in the twentieth century as depicting “peasant rebellion (*nongmin qiyi* 農民起義).” However, fitting the social bandit description, Song Jiang and the others are forced out of their posts (and society at large) for righting or refusing an injustice, usually in an instinctive rather than premeditated manner. The heroes of Mount Liang are regarded as criminals by lord and state, though they reside in their lair rather than “remain[ing] within peasant society.” They are held up as heroes, at least among certain individuals who admire loyalty and righteousness. This is evident in the righteous releases of Song Jiang, in which his reputation saves him from both the law and the criminal. However, there are situations when the Mount Liang bandits cause misery among the people the social bandit would presumably protect: Li Kui, for example, frequently kills innocent bystanders while in a rage, and in one situation kills Zhu Tong’s child in order to force him to join the band.\(^2\)

Ultimately, the classic social bandit is a reformer rather than a revolutionary, trying to bring back the traditional order rather than bring about a new society according to an ideological agenda. This again fits Song Jiang and the band in general; once the band is gathered at the height of the novel, Song Jiang expresses his hopes to capitulate to the authorities. He never opposes the emperor, only the corrupt officials below him. There is also a narrative aside in Chapter 22 to a similar effect, explaining why Song Jiang’s family’s compound had a hiding

\(^2\) That the “social bandit” oppresses his people as much as he aids them has been a criticism of Hobsbawm’s concept in general: see Blok, *Honour and Violence*, for an example.
By the way, if the Song family were just farmers, how did they come to have a secret hiding-place? Well, back in the Song dynasty, you see, it was easy to be a high-up official but hard to be a simple clerk. Why was it easy to be a high-up official? Because the court was corrupt and the ministers all flatterers. Positions simply went to relatives and those with money. And why was it hard to be a clerk? Because if a clerk made the slightest slip he was branded and banished to some god-forsaken frontier zone; if his fault was more serious his house and property were confiscated and he might as well pay with his life! That is why Song Jiang had prepared his hiding-place in advance and to prevent his parents being implicated had made them denounce him and strike him off the household register. They lived apart and there was a certificate to prove that there were no further relations between them. But the cellar was set up so that he could live at home secretly. In the Song era there were many who arranged things like this.\textsuperscript{23}

My intention here is not to measure Song Jiang or the Mount Liang band in its entirety against the arbitrary standard of Hobsbawm’s conception of the social bandit. Rather, I simply seek to point out that the raw materials to create such a portrait of the heroes of Mount Liang exist within the \textit{Shuihu zhuan}, but that they still remain problematic. Whether the materials become social commentary in the vein of the social bandit concept is through the editor-commentators’ treatments of them.

\textit{Yu Xiangdou’s Shuihu zhuan}

The first edition of the \textit{Shuihu zhuan} that I will examine here is the first known commentary edition, the one mentioned above printed in 1594 by Yu Xiangdou. Yu, as mentioned, was an exceptionally prolific commercial printer from Jianyang, Fujian. The details of his life are estimated primarily through the books he printed, from both their publication details and the prefaces he wrote for them. The more than seventy publications associated with him appeared between 1588 (the 16\textsuperscript{th} year of the Wanli reign) and 1637, the former date being that of his earliest known publication, \textit{Jingben tongsu yanyi an Jian Quan Han zhizhuan} 企本通

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Broken Seals}, p. 423.
Sun jia zhuan pingxue dongwei baojian 新刊萬天官四世孫家傳平學洞微寶鏡. He abandoned his attempts to pass the civil examinations and turned to the family publishing business in 1591, he writes in a preface to his edition of the Records of the Historian. He sat for the exams three times, and the exams were held once every three years. Therefore, assuming he began his attempts as a young adult, it can be deduced that he was most likely born in the 1550s. Then, assuming the authenticity of the Dongwei baojian edition, Yu apparently lived into his eighties.

In the prefatorial matter to his edition of the Records of the Historian, he provides a long list of titles that he has published that includes several versions of the Four Books and the Five Classics, the History of the Han, and the pre-Qin philosophers. Notably absent are the works for which he is well-known, including the encyclopedias for daily use and vernacular novels that he published. Of these, he writes in this preface:

This establishment has ordered all of these various books to be printed in succession, edited by famed scholars and brought to the public, and thus they are all listed here. Reprints of Jinling editions and the miscellaneous records (zhuan) are not the foundation of this establishment, and I dare not add them to this record.

The editions he “dared not add” to the list were numerous, with at least twenty works of fiction. In addition to the Shuihu zhuan, there were editions of the Sanguo yanyi and the Yinglie zhuan as mentioned in previous chapters; several works of historical fiction such as the Da Song Yue wang zhuan and the Quan Han zhizhuan mentioned above, the Lieguo zhizhuan and the Nanbei Song zhizhuan; Daoist-themed Journey stories to the East, West, and North; and three works of self-penned detective gong’an 公案 fiction. Many of the historical works, such as the Lieguo

24 This line of reasoning is detailed in Xiao, “Mingdai xiaoshuojia.”
zhizhuan, are credited to Yu Xiangdou’s relative Yu Shaoyu, with editing by Xiangdou.

The Shuihu zhizhuan pinglin (hereafter SHZZPL) itself belongs to the simple recension of the Shuihu text, and is possibly the first one of that lineage. These “simple recension” (jianben 簡本) editions, in contrast to the “full recension” (fanben 繁本) editions, feature simpler, more terse prose and additional plot sequences. In this edition, the additional sequences are campaigns undertaken by the Mount Liang band post-surrender on behalf of the emperor against the rebels Wang Qing and Tian Hu.

The SHZZPL is divided into twenty-five juan and 104 chapters, though only chapters one through thirty are numbered. As advertised, it features an illustration on each page, each of which bears an eight-character title. The pages are split into three registers, with the main body of the text in the bottom register, the illustration in the middle register, and comments in the relatively small top register. Most every page features a comment. Some of the comments extend to the next page, though the majority are merely one or two brief sentences. Typically, the comments evaluate (ping 評) a character or an action in the story, but they occasionally evaluate the poems in the main text as well. The latter typically remark on the content of the poetry, though they occasionally occasionally remark on its artistic quality as well.
At the front of the book, there is an unsigned preface dated to the first day of the twelfth month of Wanli jiawu (ie. February 20, 1594). This preface is sometimes
erroneously attributed to “Tian Haicang” 天海藏. The widely available facsimile copy is made from the only extant complete edition, held in Jigen-dō 慈眼堂, Nikkō, Japan, was property of the monk Tenkai 天海. The characters are a stamp signifying the book was part of Tenkai’s collection (藏) and is not an author’s name from the original woodblock print.26 The preface is four pages long, each with seven columns of twelve characters carved in a style imitating brush strokes. Above the first three pages is the note testifying to the authenticity of the edition that is mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. That note is called “Discerning the Water Margins (Shuihu bian 水浒辨).”

The preface is unsigned, though it is safe to assume that Yu wrote it himself as he is a frequent presence in his own publications; he famously went as far as to include a picture of himself in some editions, including his well-known Wanyong zhengzong. Yu also takes credit for editing this edition. Yu begins this preface by stating some conventional definitions of loyalty and righteousness. He then goes on to extend those definitions, giving them social import by making them of national consequence. With these definitions established, he begins to justify their application to Song Jiang and his men, claiming that they put fear into the hearts of corrupt officials of the Song dynasty:

> Our scholarly forefathers said that loyalty (zhong) was bringing the heart to full realization, and that righteousness (yi) was controlling the heart and acting in the correct manner. I humbly submit that loyalty is bringing one’s heart to full realization on behalf of the nation, and righteousness is acting in the correct manner in accordance with the needs of the people. As for Song Jiang and his band, were they loyal? Were they righteous? At that time, the legitimacy of the Song Dynasty was in decline. The sovereign did not hold the reigns, and there was no discipline among the officials. The people below could only sigh, and the mountains and valleys resounded with their cries. Heroes and valiants were outraged by the inequality in the rulership of the land and took pity upon the displacement of the commoners. Thus they rose up in Shandong, bringing together the like-minded. With the difficult terrain of the water margin for cover, they put out their great call. Their power was such that they could make a great contribution27 and strike fear into unrighteous men.28

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26 Such an attribution is made in the Shuihu zhuan ziliao huibian, p. 192.
27 Reading 捕天浴日 for 吞天浴日 here.
28 I read 奔鲸 as “men without honor,” possibly a reference to Tao Qian’s poem “Ming zi 命子,” which contains
It could be said that they dispersed the corrupt officials, and in “dispersion” [ie. the Yiijing hexagram “huan”] there is a base.

In Yu Xiangdou’s estimation, the actions of the band require justification. He concedes to a hypothetical interlocutor that they are “not necessarily humane” but are acceptable in light of the socialized motivations for them. Like the social bandit, the heroes of Mount Liang as presented by Yu are reformers battling against the decay of a social order that itself remains unquestioned.

Though he does mention the inattention of the ruling house of Song, the main thrust of Yu’s preface is that the band is motivated by a desire to assist people in need and battle corrupt officials:

An ignorant person might say that these were the thieves of the people, the pestilence of a nation. Oh, but that is not the case! They uprooted the strong and assisted the weak, pared away at the rich and brought relief to the poor. They straightened out the wronged, broke down the walls and freed the imprisoned. Though at first their hearts were not necessarily dedicated to humaneness, they widely practiced charity to the people. Looking to the consequences of their actions, it could be said that they possessed the sense of righteousness of Huan and Wen, and were on the path to being cultivated men (junzi). Those who savor its meaning should ignore those negatives of [xxx] and accept the positives of their creating equality, thus talented [xxx], the poor can live out their lives unharmed and evil officials dare not commit wrongdoing. [II] say they are loyal in acting on behalf of the nation and righteous in relieving the people.

This socialization of the band’s motivations in turn has consequences for the entire book. Yu positions it as a classic worthy of comparison to the Spring and Autumn Annals that is to be taken seriously:

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the similar line 奔鲸駟流.

29 According to Mencius, tyrants of whom Ru do not speak, but in Hou Han shu, symbols of righteousness.
People of old said that the *Springs and Autumns* was a crucial classic beyond the histories that brings about one’s innate moral disposition. Thus, I say that this record is a crucial compendium for contemplation that is beyond the chronicles. How could one say that this is not a classic of the sages, that this is not a sagely record, and treat it lightly?

The SHZZPL was printed in order to turn a profit for its publisher, and these remarks about the gravity of its text can therefore be taken with a grain of salt. Yu is surely trying to play up the importance of his edition to the potential purchaser. However, it is worth noting that while in his prefatorial material to the *Records of the Historian* he separates classical texts from those he claims are “not the foundation” of his establishment, here he equates them closely. The *Shuihu zhuan*, he says here, is a book of the sagely wisdom.

Meanwhile, the “Discerning the Water Margins” note is printed directly above this preface. While the bottom register of the page argues that this text is an important expression of the moral values of loyalty and righteousness comparable to the Confucian classics, the top register argues for the authenticity of this particular edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* over others on the market. In a sense, then, these are values that are marketed. One needs not buy into the sincerity of Yu Xiangdou’s rhetoric to see that the portrayal of the text as an exemplar of a certain set of values was positioned to add to the value of the book.

The values expressed in the preface to the SHZZPL are loyalty and righteousness of a kind that have social consequences when expressed through action. Having examined the prefaces, I now turn to the incidents of righteous release in the SHZZPL in order to see how the edition presents them as an expression of those values.

Chapter 22, which relates the first righteous release of Song Jiang at the hands of Zhu
Tong, takes up eight pages in the SHZZPL edition. The title of the chapter in this edition is as described above. In addition to the chapter title, each page features an illustration with a caption of its own consisting of seven to eight characters. These are as follows:

- Bullock is pulled by Grandmother Yan to see the magistrate 牛兒婆子扭見知縣
- The magistrate questions Bullock Tang 知縣推問唐牛兒
- Runners arrive at the village to see Song Gongming 差人到莊見宋太公
- Zhu Tong and Lei Heng let Song Jiang go 朱仝雷橫放走宋江
- The magistrate places the blame on Bullock Tang 知縣坐罪與唐牛兒
- Song Jiang and his brother see the great official Chai 宋江兄弟見柴大官
- Song Jiang is grabbed by Wu Song 宋江被武松扯扭住
- Chai Jin comes to see Song Jiang and Wu Song 柴進來見宋江、武松

The pictures and captions taken alone provide a simple version of the text’s narrative. They do not follow the rhetoric of the text’s storytelling strictly: Whereas the text does not reveal the identity of Wu Song until the next chapter, opting to maintain suspense, the captions reveal it two pages in advance. It is also notable that in the captions, the release of Song Jiang is not referred to as a “righteous release” as it is in the title of the chapter, but rather the more neutral phrasing “let go.” Furthermore, the captions place a greater emphasis on Bullock Tang taking the fall for Song Jiang. This is an issue taken up at greater length in the comments to the chapter.

The comments to the chapter appear in the top register of the page, above the illustrations. There are seven comments over eight pages, with one comment continuing onto a second page.

An evaluation of Bullock: Observe that Bullock’s hitting Mother Yan to save Song Jiang was not done just because he’d been chased off by her the previous day. It certainly was not because he’d been insulted. Even had it been someone else who’d taken hold of Song Gongming, Bullock would still have struggled to the best of his ability to save him. Observe that Bullock can be compared to a benefactor. As for how afterwards Bullock is assigned the blame by an official and, wronged, takes the punishment, when one observes this later, one has a sigh of pity for Bullock.

An evaluation of the magistrate: Observe by the magistrate’s yelling at the old woman that he seeks to save Song Jiang, even as Song Jiang clearly killed someone. How could he neglect official business for personal reasons?

An evaluation of Lei and Zhu: The two men see Song Jiang and allow him to flee the situation. If this is not the profound foundation of a friendship, then what is?

An evaluation of Squire Song: The Squire treats the two officers to wine, and because of this feast the two do not capture Gongming. In actuality, they already had strong relations with Song Jiang.

An evaluation of the phrasing of the poem: Where it says “rouge,” it is referring to Poxi; where it says “hero,” it is referring to Gongming.

An evaluation of the reception: Gongming arriving here and receiving a warm reception from Chai Jin is good fortune in the midst of ill fortune.

An evaluation of the words on receiving people: When he [Wu Song] says “[Song Jiang gives people] the proper treatment,” you can see the sincerity with which Song Jiang treats people. (pp. 209-10)

The second instance of righteous release is considerably less prominent in the SHZZPL than in full-recension versions. It takes place in chapter 30, which is chapters 31 and 32 of full-recension editions merged together under the title of chapter 31 of the full-recension editions, “In Ducks and Drakes Tower the general’s blood will spill/ Pilgrim Wu travels Centipede Hill by

31 Song Jiang comes across Wu Song in Chai Jin’s lair. Wu Song is unaware of Song Jiang’s identity at this point, and relates what he’s heard of Song Jiang’s reputation. He says: I only heard from that fellow that his name is Song Jiang, a mighty hero! I have no plans to waste my time on him. (Translated in Dent-Young as “I can’t tell you just now. But he’s a real man. He knows what’s what, he knows the score! As soon as I’m better I’m going to go and find him!” Broken Seals, p. 430. For 候友尚有終 the Dent-Youngs have “He knows what’s what, he knows the score.” I have translated it as “the proper treatment.”) Chai Jin then reveals to Wu Song that the man he is talking to is, in fact, none other than Song Jiang himself.
night 張都監血濺鶯樓 武行者夜走蜈蚣嶺.” This chapter of the SHZZPL is followed by the equivalent of chapter 32 of full-recension editions. The words “righteous release” are not used to refer to this second incident in the SHZZPL’s chapter titles. As the combined chapter 30 of the SHZZPL is considerably longer than than chapter 22 discussed above, I will discuss here only the relevant section, in which Song Jiang is held captive and then released by the Brocade Tiger. The entire incident is covered in just three pages. The captions and comments are as follows:

Song Jiang is captured and taken up to the mountainous lair
An evaluation of Short Tiger: The phrasing in the lines of the poem below\(^3\) presents Short Tiger as a lustful figure who has an imposing presence. He is at once admirable and detestable. The critical term for this is “one-up one-down” phrasing method.
宋江被捉上山寨
評矮虎：詩中句法見矮虎好色人物崢嶸可羨可惡，此批語迺一起一倒句法。(p. 301)

Song Jiang is tied up and presented to Short Tiger Wang
An evaluation of “water splashing the heart”: An explication: as for the splashing of water onto the chest, it is because people’s hearts have hot blood within them. Using cold water to disperse the hot blood makes the organ of the heart easier to remove.
宋江被綁，見王矮虎
評水潑心：釋明潑水潑心寓者，人心都是熱血裹著，把冷水潑散熱血，心肝好取。(p. 302)

Yan Shun assists Song Gongming to a seat
An evaluation of calling “benevolent brother”: Observe how Yan Shun uses the title “benevolent brother” to refer to Song Jiang. This is because he’d long heard of Song’s reputation and on this day had the opportunity to meet him—the utmost in luck.
燕順扶宋公明上坐
評稱仁兄：觀燕順以仁兄稱宋江，是聞名之久，今日相會，幸之至也。(p. 303)

Despite the rhetoric in the preface about the protagonists of the novel being manifestations of the values of loyalty and righteousness, the social significance of those values, and the justification of the protagonists’ actions that follows as a result of that significance despite the protagonists’ apparent lack of humaneness, the body of the commentary does not

\(^3\) The poem commented upon is: 天青衲祅錦繡補，形貌崢嶸性粗鹵，貪財好色最強梁，放火殺人王矮虎
develop along those lines in these incidents. Rather, the primary concerns of the commentary are friendship and human relations, expressed through the words “having a relationship” (jiao 交) and “receiving (people)” (dai 待). While these are conceptually related to loyalty and righteousness, they do not carry the social significance of the latter pair as theorized in the preface. Indeed, the commentary even mildly scolds the magistrate for not pursuing Song Jiang, saying he is putting personal relations ahead of his public duty, despite the fact that it is precisely such duties that the “socialized” loyalty and righteousness of the preface would permit shirking. The commentary also draws attention to a collateral victim of Song Jiang’s escape, Bullock Tang, for whom the commentary says we should sigh. A friendship is depicted as having a “profound foundation,” and two people are described as having “strong relations,” but the commentary does not claim that these relationships are based on values. Nor are values at the root of the displays of respect seen in a “warm reception,” giving “proper treatment,” or calling another “benevolent brother,” all topics of the commentary’s attention.

An additional factor that diminishes the full application of the idealized values of loyalty and righteousness as put forth in the preface is the role of simple luck that the commentary points out in the incidents: Song Jiang’s encountering Chai Jin is “good fortune in the midst of ill fortune” rather than the natural consequence of membership in a fraternity based on shared values. Likewise, it is said to be “the utmost of luck” that Yan Shun has heard of Song Jiang’s reputation in advance of their meeting.

There is also an element of didacticism in the commentary, with a fairly obvious explication of the references to “rouge” and “hero” in the poem in chapter 22, and a more
evaluative comment on the poem about Short Tiger that remarks upon the literary method employed. These comments reflect an assumption of a readership that needs some guidance yet at the same time sees itself as connoisseurs who appreciate the craft of the writing they consume. This is also reflected in the “Discerning the Water Margins” note at the beginning of the edition, which as I have shown above testifies to the quality of this particular edition over the others on the market and makes assurances as to the accuracy of its text (despite the misprints that are actually found within it).

“Li Zhi” and the Shuihu zhuan:

The man Li Zhi (1527-1602) was born Quanzhou, Fujian, and passed the provincial juren examination in 1552. He served a series of minor appointments, each lasting only three to five years, before retiring in 1581. He then left Yaoan, Yunnan, where he’d been serving as prefect, for Macheng, Huguang, where he stayed with friends the Geng brothers. His long-suffering wife and only surviving daughter were escorted back to Fujian by his son-in-law. Li’s wife pleaded for several years for him to return home, but he eventually shaved his head and began living as a monk in an unlicensed temple of his own. He subsided on the largesse of friends. He’d gained a reputation as an unorthodox thinker even before his retirement, and once ensconced in his temple, he was free to commit himself to writing and speaking.

While there, he wrote and published A Book to Burn (Fenshu 焚書) and A Book to Hide Away (Cangshu 藏書). He also produced commentaries to the Shuihu zhuan and the Tale of the Lute (Pipa ji 琵琶記), and produced Collected Early Writings from the Lake (Chu tan ji 初潭集),
in which he rearranged and commented on material from *New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu*) and similar writings by his friend Jiao Hong.

He is best remembered for his essay “On the Childlike Mind (*Tongxin shuo* 童心說),” which was included in *A Book to Burn*. In the essay, he praises the titular “childlike mind” as maintaining a state of guilelessness and spontaneity uncontaminated by artificial learning. Writing, he declares, should embody such a spontaneous quality, and therefore need not strictly emulate classical models. It is at this point in the essay that he mentions the *Shuihu zhuan*:

Why must poetry emulate the ancient Selections and prose the pre-Qin philosophers? With time, the Six Dynasties came and the style transformed into the modern style of poetry. It transformed again into the *chuangqi* tale. It transformed into the *yuanben* and the *zaju* styles of plays, into the *Western Chamber* arias and the *Shuihu zhuan*, into the current form in which worthy examination candidates discuss the Way of the sages (i.e. the eight-legged essay). All of these are perfected writings for the ages and should not be discussed on the merits of which came first or last chronologically. Accordingly, I feel that each of these is the spontaneous writing of the childlike mind. What need is there to talk about the Six Classics, the *Analects*, or the *Mencius*?

Li Zhi was also known to have discussed the *Shuihu zhuan* with his friend and disciple Yuan Hongdao, a fellow admirer of the work.³⁴

Li Zhi gained notoriety during his lifetime, and his name became associated with the works that he admired such as the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Tale of the Lute*. His notoriety led to charges of impropriety, and he offended members of the local gentry with his views and lifestyle. In 1602, he was imprisoned, and he committed suicide while in captivity. Though, as I will discuss below, there was a move to ban his works, his notoriety fueled the market for books associated with him. Some 120 works appeared crediting him as author, editor, compiler, or

³⁴ For Li Zhi’s relationship with Yuan Hongdao and his brothers, see Chou, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School*, pp. 21-6.
commentator. The majority of these are spurious attributions. “Li Zhi” became a publishing phenomenon.

“Li Zhi” editions of the Shuihu zhuan appeared on the market soon after his death in 1602, the first being the edition published by Rongyu tang 容與堂 of Hangzhou. The Rongyu tang edition was first published soon after Li’s death, with a revised and corrected version appearing in 1610. The second “Li Zhi” edition of the Shuihu zhuan was printed by Yuan Wuyai 袁無涯 of Suzhou. It appeared sometime after the Rongyu tang edition but before 1612, when it is mentioned in Casual Records from Useless-Timber Studio (Shuzhai manlu 楮齋漫錄) by Xu Zichang 許自昌. Both the Rongyu tang and the Yuan Wuyai editions contain a preface by Li Zhi that is also included in Li’s A Book to Burn, which was published during his lifetime. The preface is slightly modified in the Yuan Wuyai edition to accommodate that edition’s version of the narrative, which includes the interpolated campaigns against Tian Hu and Wang Qing.

There are arguments for and against the authenticity of both the Rongyu tang and Yuan Wuyai editions. The Rongyu tang edition’s commentary seems to be more in character with Li Zhi’s philosophy as expressed in A Book to Burn and other positively identified works, and is more consistent with the preface. However, Yuan Wuyai had connections to Li Zhi’s circles, and Yuan Zhongdao claimed that the Yuan Wuyai edition’s commentary matched the one he’d personally seen Li Zhi working on. That said, however, we do not know the extent to which

35 See Lin Qixian, Li Zhuowu shiji xinian, “Li Zhuowu zhushu kao.”
36 For Li Zhi as a product—and a victim—of a “mass communication society,” see Ōki, Minmatsu Kōnan no shuppan bunka, pp. 129-34.
37 Xu Zichang is likely an alias of Ye Zhou 葉書, a “shadowy figure” who has been identified as the actual author of some “Li Zhi” commentaries. See “The Li Chih Commentaries” in Rolston, How to Read, pp. 356-63, and Rolston, Traditional Chinese Fiction, pp. 2-3. For a full description of the editions, the descriptive bibliography of Shuihu editions in How to Read, pp. 404-30.
Yuan Zhongdao examined the commentary on either occasion, and the second occasion came more than a decade after Li Zhi’s death, so it is unknown how well he’d remembered the first one.

Here, I am concerned with the Rongyu tang edition, though not out of any conviction over the authenticity of its attribution to Li Zhi. Rather, it is the content of that edition’s commentary that is of interest. It is more illustrative of the extent to which commercially printed material could go. While this is the same argument used in support of the authenticity of the commentary—that it is more in line with the known “iconoclast” Li Zhi—it is the content and not the supposed authenticity itself that brings it to this discussion. As I will show, its preface is in some ways similar to the Yu Xiangdou edition’s preface, yet whereas the Yu Xiangdou commentary fails to develop on the themes its preface lays out, the Rongyu tang edition’s commentary does follow along the lines laid out by its preface to radical—or at least caustically cynical—effect. Thus, it better shows the extent to which books—and the commentaries within them—could be used to express sentiment in the late Ming. For the purpose of the discussion of this commentary edition, “Li Zhi” is the semi-fictional identity of the Rongyu tang edition’s editor-commentator.

Like the Yu Xiangdou preface, the Li Zhi preface justifies the Mount Liang band in political terms, though it does so in a more sophisticated manner: The Yu Xiangdou preface justifies the actions of the characters in the novel by the socially relevant values it claims they hold and their rebellion against the corrupt Song government, whereas the Li Zhi preface justifies the book itself as an expression of retrospective outrage against the bygone humiliations of the Song on the part of the purported Yuan-era authors of the *Shuihu zhuan*, Luo Guanzhong.
and Shi Nai’an. In order to vent their rage, the preface says, Luo and Shi portrayed loyalty and righteousness as being pushed literally to the margins of the Song empire:

The Grand Historian said, “‘The Difficulties of Persuasion’ and ‘The Sorrow of Standing Alone’ are works that the sages authored in order to vent their anger.” [From Letter to Ren An] From this vantage point, it is apparent that the sages of antiquity would only author works out of anger. Writing without anger would be like shivering without being cold or moaning without being ill—though one could do it, what sort of sight would it be? The Water Margin is the result of writing to vent anger. Because as we know the House of Song remained unconcerned with affairs and became turned on its head, the wise were placed below and the foolish were placed above. It eventually reached the point where barbarians were above and the Central Plains were below. The rulers of the time remained blissfully unaware of the situation, nesting away in their pleasure palaces and giving official positions in exchange for bribes, willing to bow down before even dogs and sheep. The two gentlemen, Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, lived in the Yuan, but their hearts were in the Song. Though they were born in the day of the Yuan, they were in actuality angered by the events of the Song. For this reason, they were angered by the capture of the two Song emperors at the hands of the northern Jin and went on to praise the destruction of Liao in order to expunge that anger. They felt anger over the temporary peace of the crossing to the south, so they went on to praise the extermination of Fang La in order to expunge that anger. Dare we ask through whom it was that they expunged their anger? It was the strong men of old who heeded the call and gathered at the water margin. To refrain from deeming them loyal and righteous would be impossible. Accordingly, Luo and Shi passed down the record of the Water Margin and also added “Loyal and Righteous” to the name of this record. As for how the loyal and righteous were pulled to toward the water margin, the reasons can be comprehended. As for how each and every one of the men of the water margin could be loyal and righteous, and how they came to be so, this can be comprehended.

The authors’ shame at the circumstances of their land was reflected in the characters of their work. Those circumstances made their rebellion a moral obligation:

Now, it is a principle that “those of little legitimacy submit to those of great legitimacy, and those of little worth submit to those of great worth.” [Mencius Li Lou shang] If those of little authority do the ordering and those of great authority are the ones who submit, how can they be willing to serve without feeling any shame? It is as if the weak do the binding and the strong are the ones who are bound. How would they be willing to to give up and allow themselves to be bound without putting up a struggle? The powers that be compelled the strong and the worthy of the world to congregate at the water margin. Thus it can be said that the men of the water margin are strong and wise, possessed of loyalty and of righteousness.

Song Jiang, the preface claims, is the epitome of these values of loyalty and righteousness with political implications:

And there has been none who possessed loyalty and righteousness like Song Gongming! Now, observe the 108 men: they have the same merits and faults, they live and die together. Their hearts of loyalty and righteousness are as Song Gongming’s. Yet it is only Song Gongming whose body is in the water margin and while his heart is in the court. With the single intention to surrender, he single-mindedly sought to repay the nation. In death he was fearless and attained great merit, taking a dose of poison on his own accord. As he died without abandoning his task, he was a martyr to loyalty and righteousness, with a heart that was truly sufficient to serve the 108 men. This is why he was able to form a bond at Mount Liang and become the master of 108 men. In the end on the campaign against Fang La, more than half of the 108 men died in battle. Furthermore, Lu Zhishen remained at Liuhe Monastery, Yan Qing tearfully took leave of his master, the two Tong brothers make plans with Li Jun the River Dragon—Song Gongming was not unaware of these things. He had some degree of wisdom. However, these petty men completed their plans on their own accord and were certainly not tolerated as loyal to their lord or righteous in regard to their friends. This is said of Song Gongming. This is why he is called loyal and righteous.

Song Jiang, the embodiment of these values, is then positioned in the preface as the raison d’être for the entire book. Since the book portrays such admirable values, the preface argues that it is itself of value:

Could a record of him not be written? Could a record of him not be read? For this reason, anyone with an allegiance to the nation must read this record, so then the loyal and righteous will not be in the water margin but by the side of the ruler. Wise ministers must read this record, so then the loyal and righteous will not be in the water margin but at court. Military strategists and commanders at the borders also must read this. If one day they read this record, then the loyal and righteous will not be at the water margin but will make the heartfelt choice to serve as protectors. Otherwise, if they are not at court, nor at the ruler’s side, nor serving as protectors, then—alas—where will they be? They will be at the water margin. This is why this record is one of venting anger. If connoisseurs use it to fuel their conversations, if those who employ armies take advantage of its strategies, if each sees in it what he might need, then how could one not see what is called loyalty and righteousness?

力大賢，而盡納水滸矣。則謂水滸之眾，皆力大賢，有忠有義之人，可也。

Song Jiang, the preface claims, is the epitome of these values of loyalty and righteousness with
Though the anger is safely cordoned off to the Song and no mention is made of the present day, the values of loyalty and righteousness remain a threat when on the margins and must be domesticated. The *Shuihu zhuan*, the preface claims, has the power to do so.

Though the values of loyalty and righteousness were central to the preface to the “Li Zhi” edition, they are subordinated in the commentary to chapter 22. The only explicit reference to them are in response to a line in the chapter’s opening poem that reads: “The world’s heroes are generous in their thoughts; talk of loyalty and righteousness moves officials 四海英雄思慷慨, 一腔忠義動衣冠.” The comment, in the upper register over the second part of the couplet, simply reads “A fine line 佳句.” As in the Yu Xiangdou commentary, this commentary is more concerned with the related values of friendship and personal relations. Here, those are taken further, however, associating friendship and personal relations with private feelings (*renqing* 人情), and placing those private feelings on a higher level of importance than law or duty. By contrast, as I have shown above, the Yu Xiangdou commentary rebukes the magistrate for shirking his duties. The Rongyu tang Li Zhi commentary, on the other hand, associates acting on personal feelings with becoming a thief:

What a good officer. He only cares about operating on his own private feelings. Operating on your feelings, what of the Kingly way? 好個都頭，只管做自家人情。都做了人情，如王法何？(p. 675)

The villain Zhang Wenyuan, meanwhile, is said to be merely “upholding the law”:

People only know Zhang Wenyuan to be covetous and lustful. They don’t know he is actually upholding the law.

[^39]: Li Zhuowu piping Zhong yi Shuihu zhuan, p. 665.
The magistrate, whom the Yu Xiangdou commentary criticized, is praised in the Rongyu tang commentary as “understanding fairness”:

What a great magistrate!
好知縣！

What a great magistrate who understands fairness!
好一個明白公道底知縣！ (p. 667)

In the Rongyu tang commentary, society is turned on its head. In the final note in the chapter, the commentary praises thieves and shows contempt for the “good citizen.” The highest legal authority in the passage, the magistrate, is himself a thief. He is praised for the very same quality for which the Yu Xiangdou commentary condemned him:

Old baldy Li says: Zhu Tong, Lei Heng, and Chai Jin pay no regard to the law of kings; they only pay regard to personal emotions. So, they are thieves to the core. One like Zhang Wenyuan on the other hand upholds the law and is still a “good citizen.” Or, you might say: The honorable magistrate also plays to his personal emotions, how is it that he doesn’t become a thief? I say: “Are you telling me the honorable magistrate is not a thief?”
容評：李禿老曰：朱仝、雷橫、柴進不顧王法，只顧人情，所以到底做了強盜。若張文遠倒是執法的，還是個良民。或曰：“知縣相公也做人情，如何不做強盜？”曰：“你道知縣相公不是強盗麼？” (p. 689)

In his *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, David Rolston has referred to the Li Zhi commentaries as “second-stage” commentaries, between the “first-stage” ones such as Yu Xiangdou’s and “third-stage” ones inspired by Jin Shengtan, whom I will discuss in the subsequent chapter. Rolston characterizes second-stage Li Zhi commentaries as “spend[ing] more time attacking their texts than praising them,” and “includ[ing] complaints about everything from implausible plot sequences and poor characterization to improper use of vocabulary and faulty grammar.”\(^{40}\) The Rongyu tang commentary, as I have shown above, is

\(^{40}\) Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, p. 3.
concerned with more than pedantic criticism of its text. Chapter 22 contains only a few such acerbic remarks: one passage toward the beginning is marked for excision.

Chapter 22’s comments present a world turned upside-down, where the thieves are praised and good citizens are the objects of derision. In chapter 32, Song Jiang is kidnapped and subsequently freed by a group of bandits. However, these bandits do not receive the sort of praise that the outlaws of chapter 22 do. The majority of the comments to chapter 32 are on the portion of the narrative devoted to Wu Song. As for the section in which Song Jiang meets the bandits, the majority of its comments are concerned with his actions once he has been freed and remains on to stay with the band. He saves a colleague’s wife, whom the band has captured. First, however, there is a note directly after Song Jiang escapes death by uttering his own name just as his captors prepare to cut out his heart:

The benevolent knowledge of [?] words forbidding killing is seen here. One should certainly close one’s eyes, clasp palms together, and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha three times.

When the captor declares his desire to gouge out his own eyes for failing to recognize Song Jiang, there is a cynical comment about the current day:

Nowadays people all gouge out their eyes like this, making a blind world.

The commentator agrees with Song Jiang when he thinks to himself that he has to save his colleague’s wife, simply writing, “Right” in the upper margin. Then there are more cynical jabs at officials when the Short Tiger complains that, while he has no companion, officials take all the women for themselves. The interlinear commentary says, “Good words 好話” next to this
complaint, and above it in the upper register is the comment “What would the high and mighty officials think if they heard? 大頭巾聽之何知？” When Song Jiang begs Wang to let her free, he swears he will bring another, better wife to him. The commentary says, “Which one would be willing to marry a thief? 那個肯嫁強盜,” using ambiguously the same term “thief” that was used in the chapter 22 commentary.

When the woman meets troops sent from home to save her after she’s been freed, she lies about what has happened. She claims that the thieves let her go out of fear for her authority. The commentary says, “A woman who speaks inaccurately wouldn’t make a good wife 口不准，便不是好婦人了.” The troops then beg her to lie on their behalf and say that they’d saved her, so that they could escape punishment. She does so when they arrive, telling her husband that they’d saved her “by force.”41 The commentary at this point praises her again, saying, “A wife like this would be better off as a thief’s old lady 如此婦人，只好做強盜婆子.”

There is only a single note in the chapter 32 commentary that is critical of the text. When Liu’s wife and company arrive, they laugh and say, “We were running so fast we must have been kicking ourselves on the back of the head!”42 This passage is marked with dots, and a comment in the side margin reads, “Crude and laughable—this can be deleted 鄙俚可笑，可刪可刪.”

The chapter ends with the following comment:

Li the Monk says, People nowadays only notice the later incidents and say that Song Gongming shouldn’t save Liu Gao’s wife. They are completely unaware of the fact that if Song Gongming didn’t do all this, he would have been Short Tiger Wang’s henchman for life. How would he have been able to do so many great things? How would he have been able to be the big brother to those other 107 men?
李和尚曰：今人只看後來事體，便道宋公明不該救劉高妻子，殊不知宋公明若無這些，直是王矮虎一輩人了，如何幹得許多大事，彼一百單七人者，亦何以兄事之哉！

While this note downplays Short Tiger Wang, who is himself a bandit, it at the same time it hints

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41 Tiger Killers, p. 208.
42 Tiger Killers, p. 208.
at what is to come from Song Jiang and his own group of bandits. It also justifies actions undertaken by Song Jiang that might be, in the commentator’s estimation, misinterpreted as upholding of law and order. Song Jiang, the commentary posits, does not save Liu Gao’s wife out of a sense of duty to the law, but to be able to leave Short Tiger Wang and his band. This puts Song Jiang in the position to eventually lead his own band. Furthermore, the woman that he saves is herself declared worthy of a “thief,” which as we saw above is a compliment in this commentary.

**From the Center to the Margins**

In the two previous chapters, I have shown how the earliest printed editions were created by elite social institutions and individuals, namely the Censorate and Guo Xun. I have also suggested in those chapters that the printed *Shuihu zhuan* circulated in those circles as a token of prestige. As for the reception of its text in those early forms, there is little evidence. However, it can be assumed that as such actors were involved in its production, it did not carry connotations at those levels of a seditious nature: Were it so, surely the Censorate and Guo Xun would not circulate it. The evidence there is for the early reception of the *Shuihu zhuan* points to the appeal of its craft to the literati reader. As mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation, the playwright and *sanqu* writer Li Kaixian 李開先 wrote about the *Shuihu zhuan*’s reception among his renowned circle of friends. In Li Kaixian’s opinion, to complain about the banditry of the *Shuihu zhuan*’s protagonists would be to mark oneself as a philistine.\

As I have shown in this chapter, by contrast, the outlaw nature of the *Shuihu zhuan*

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became a major drawing point in its commercially published incarnations through the commentaries appended to it by editor-commentators. By the 1590s, as commercial print editions began to flood the market, *Shuihu zhuan* commentary began to valorize, at least superficially, the values of loyalty and righteousness that the heroes were portrayed as embodying. The Yu Xiangdou edition praises the loyalty and righteousness of Song Jiang even as it criticizes the magistrate who shirks his duties and lets Song Jiang go. Moreover, the Yu Xiangdou edition champions personal feelings (*renqing*) over governmental authority.

Like Li Kaixian before him, Yu Xiangdou also—albeit with transparently commercially-minded motivations—placed a high value on the *Shuihu zhuan*. His edition presents the *Shuihu zhuan* as being a text worthy of meticulous editing, and in the “Discerning the Water Margins” essay he trumpets the supposed accuracy of his edition over others on the market. Yet unlike Li Kaixian, Yu Xiangdou places value on the *Shuihu zhuan* for the values it encapsulates rather than merely its aesthetic properties. It is for that reason that Yu compares it to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, suggesting that it deserves the sort of careful reading that that particular classic receives, and likely implicitly referring to the “zhuan” of *Shuihu zhuan*, as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* also had the “zhuan” or interpretive “traditions” of Zuo, Gongyang, and Guliang.

The Li Zhi edition combines Li Kaixian’s aesthetic appreciation of the *Shuihu zhuan* with Yu Xiangdou’s values-based appreciation of it. The “Li Zhi” of the preface describes the *Shuihu zhuan* as not merely a depiction of moral and political outrage, but as an expression of such
outrage. It is the authors of the *Shuihu zhuan* and not simply its protagonists who are outraged at the humiliations of their era. In the body of the commentary, antiauthoritarian attitudes are expressed: “thief” is a compliment, and “good citizen” is a term of derision. The preface explicitly indicates that the source of the authors’ outrage was the humiliations of the Song and places the authors in the Yuan, yet at the same time it indicates the necessity of reading the *Shuihu zhuan* in the present day so as to bring loyalty and righteousness out from the margins and back to the center. In this way, it subtly indict the Ming of the present day.

Some modern readers of the *Shuihu zhuan* have been struck by the cruelty and darkness of the Mount Liang band: C.T. Hsia writes that it is “to be expected that a modern Chinese critic conditioned by Western values would deplore Li K’uei, Wu Sung, and Lu Ta for their savage delight in killing, their vindictive sadism toward women, their gargantuan appetites for meat and drink (a much less serious offense), and would go on to raise serious questions about Chinese culture for its endorsement of such heroes.”

Both the Yu Xiangdou edition and the Rongyu tang edition, by contrast, justify the actions of the band, establishing in their commentaries and prefaces a portrait of the protagonists that is comparable to Hobsbawm’s conception of “social bandits”: Their actions, though in need of justification, are portrayed as ultimately aimed at the social good and in opposition to unjust authority.

**Censorship and the threat of books**

As I have stated at the outset of this chapter, these editions appeared on the commercial

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market, the Yu Xiangdou edition coming just as the print industry began to flourish and the Rongyu tang edition after it was well-established. As the Shuihu zhuan was transformed from a work of aesthetic value disseminated at the highest levels of society to one made to typify antiauthoritarian values and disseminated to any literate person with the funds to purchase it, did it present a threat? More generally speaking, could commercially printed vernacular fiction pose a threat? To answer this question, I turn to the subject of literary censorship in the Ming.

The first purported case of censorship in the Ming came at the hands of the dynasty’s founder, the Hongwu emperor. Hongwu, outraged by Mencius’ questioning of the absolute bond between ruler and subject, moved to expunge the Mencius text from the civil examination system curriculum and remove Mencius as a beneficiary of sacrificial rites in Confucian temples. As a compromise, officials dedicated to keeping the Mencius in the curriculum prepared censored versions for use in the examinations. A formalized censored version of the Mencius with eighty-eight offending passages removed, *The Abridged Mencius* (*Mengzi jiewen 孟子節文*), was prepared in 1394 and remained in use for examination candidates until 1414-1415. However, a lack of official documentation concerning the censorship of the Mencius led some Qing scholars to doubt the veracity of the incident.45

The *Great Ming Code*, established under the founding emperor, made the possession of “books that should be banned (*ying jin zhi shu 應禁之書*)” an offense to be punished with one hundred lashes. This “ban without a ‘ban,’” as one historian has described it, placed the impetus on the populace to avoid such books, whatever they might imagine them to be, rather than on

45 For a full discussion of the censorship of the Mencius text, see Elman, *Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 80-88.
officialdom to maintain a standardized list of actual banned titles. The absence of literary collections by scholars purged and declared *personae non grata* under the Hongwu and Yongle emperors would seem to testify to the effectiveness of the ban without a ban. However, collections of the works of Lian Zining and Fang Xiaoru, two ministers who remained loyal to the short-lived Jianwen emperor after the Yongle emperor’s usurpation, eventually appeared, assembled together from privately held fragments.

Under the *Great Ming Code*, performances of plays depicting the emperor as a character (*jiatou zaju*) were banned. In 1411, under the Yongle emperor, this ban was extended to printed versions of the plays. However, supposedly banned jiatou zaju appear soon after in the massive collectanea project the *Yongle dadian* and in the mid-Ming in Chao Li’s *Baowen tang* catalogue. Tian Yuan Tan has grouped *jiatou* plays extant in Yuan and Ming editions according to whether the emperor’s role in them was removed, changed, or remained untouched. The fates of the Yuan plays as they were transmitted in the Ming were varied, leaving Tan to conclude that there is “very little evidence that these dramas were actually censored.”

The first apparent banning of a specific literary title came in 1442, when a minister at the Zhengtong emperor’s court named Li Shimian 李時勉 (1374-1450) called for a ban on *New Tales While Trimming the Lampwick* (*Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話). However, as I will show, the situation was more complex than the memorial shows. The memorial reads as follows:

> In recent years, there have been unmannered scholars making up strange events and dressing them up with baseless words in works such as *New Tales While Trimming the Lamp*. Not only do superficial city-dwellers recite them to one another, but even students at the National Academy are

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46 Tan, “Prohibition of Jiatou Zaju in the Ming Dynasty and the Portrayal of the Emperor Onstage,” *Ming Studies*, 49, pp. 82-111.
abandoning their proper studies and committing these works to memory night and day to fuel their conversations. If these works are not strictly banned, it is feared that such misguided talk of the uncanny will run rampant and throw people’s minds into confusion. As this is not a minor matter, I request that the Ministry of Rites issue a decree to internal and external *yamen* as well as to Education-Intendant Censors and Provincial Surveillance Commissioners saying that should they encounter such books on their rounds they should order them destroyed by fire and that those who either print and sell or possess them should be prosecuted according to the legal code so as to have commoners know the orthodox path and not be confused by heresies.

New Tales is a collection of stories written in the early Ming by Qu You 瞿佑 (1341-1433). A preface written by the author is dated 1378. It inspired “sequels” of sorts, the first of which, *Further Tales While Trimming the Lamp* (*Jiandeng yuhua* 剪燈餘話) by Li Zhen 李楨 (1376-1452), appeared around 1420. Nearly two centuries later, in 1592, a second sequel called *Tales While Searching for the Lamp* (*Mideng yinhua* 覓燈因話) by Shao Jingzhan 邵景詹 was completed. These are similarly themed collections of eerie and erotic stories rather than continuations of the stories in *New Tales*.

*New Tales* has earned the dubious distinction of being the first explicitly “banned” literary work in the Ming: Unlike works made dangerous by the “ban without a ban,” it was specifically cited in Li Shimian’s memorial at court. Yet it should be noted that the memorial refers to “works such as” *New Tales*, and not that work alone. Thus, it was most likely targeted at *Further Tales* as well as *New Tales*. *Further Tales* was written just 21 years before Li Shimian’s memorial, whereas it had been 64 years since *New Tales* was written. Furthermore, a commercial edition of *Further Tales* had been published just nine years earlier in 1433.

The temporal proximity of *Further Tales* to Li Shimian’s memorial is especially relevant when it is taken into consideration that Li Shimian and *Further Tales*’ author Li Zhen were at
one point colleagues and friends. Both were graduates of the 1404 palace entrance examination, and the two worked on the Yongle dadian collectanea project together. Furthermore, Li Shimian even contributed a postface to one of Li Zhen’s poems, “Ode to a Sing-song Girl of the Zhizheng Era (Zhizheng jiren xing 至正妓人行),” which Li Zhen wrote in 1418 after a chance meeting with the aging former sing-song girl of the title. “Ode to a Sing-song girl” was included, with postfaces by Li Shimian and others of the 1404 palace entrance exam graduates, in the 1433 edition of Further Tales. This means that Li Shimian was calling for a ban on a work for which he was a contributor. Could Li Shimian have been reacting against what had originally been a literary game among his peers leaking out via commercially available printings to audiences not originally intended to be included? Could he have felt personal embarrassment at his own involvement being made known? While it is impossible to know Li Shimian’s true intentions in submitting his memorial, it can certainly be assumed that the case was more complex than simply one of a conservative Confucian reacting against salacious or pernicious literature.

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is that, though the stories in New Tales and Further Tales contain supernatural elements that to modern readers are unbelievable, they were not written as “fiction.” They were, rather, collected gossipy stories purportedly about real people. In the case of Further Tales, many of the subjects were within the time frame of living memory. Many of them claim to relate events of the early Hongwu reign, which would be around the time Li Shimian and Li Zhen were born, and the generation of their fathers. Li

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47 See the facsimile reprint of the 1433 edition of Further Tales, printed in the Guben xiaoshuo congkan series (vol. 5, no.1) by the Zhonghua shuju. Li Shimian’s preface is on pp. 145-6. The “Ode to a Sing-song Girl” appears to be appended to the 1433 edition and not part of the original Further Tales. See also the editors’ preface to the reprint, pp. 1-3.

48 Cf. Brook’s portrayal of Li Shimian’s memorial in his Chinese State in Ming Society. Brook describes Li Shimian as having a “soberly Confucian” (115) point of view, and finding the “minor piece of erotica” New Tales “morally irritating.” (116-7)
Shimian might have felt the need to contain these stories not out of concern for their “literary” themes but over their non-fictional subjects. Again, what might have been acceptable as a private activity—reading, writing, and exchanging uncanny stories about recent generations of fellow elite—might have been seen completely differently once it spread to students and others beyond the clique.

Whatever his reasoning, Li Shimian submitted his memorial and, according to Gu Yanwu, it was acted upon. There are, however, no records of how this “ban” was actually carried out, nor the extent to which it was taken.\(^49\) The existence of another edition of *More Tales* from 1487 and the publication of *Searching for the Lamp* in 1592 suggest that the ban was neither long-lasting or extensive.

The next major case of supposed literary censorship in the Ming came with the ban on the works of Li Zhi. Li Zhi had taunted the those that would condemn him by naming two of his books *A Book to Burn* and *A Book to Hide Away*. In the preface to the former, he also anticipated their ire:

> I have written four books, the first of which was *A Book to Hide Away*. The controversies of some thousand years are not easy for the average person to see, so I desired to hide the book away. I said that it should be hidden away in the mountains to await a latter-day Yang Xiong. Another book, called *A Book to Burn*, was my answers to questions in friends’ letters. Quite a lot of what I said in it cut directly into the hearts of scholars of recent times. As it struck at their most vulnerable points, they certainly want to kill me.\(^50\)

When officials called for Li Zhi’s arrest, they moved to ban his books as well. Zhang Wenda, his

\(^{49}\) See Brook, *The Chinese State in Ming Society*, pp. 115-7; Chia, *Printing for Profit*, pp. 176-7.

\(^{50}\) Among the contents of *Fenshu* are Li Zhi’s scathing correspondence with and Geng Dingxiang and others—the “scholars” to whom he refers here. Li rather audaciously published these during his and their lifetimes. It should be noted that the titles of his books taunt his contemporaries rather than the authorities: Li Zhi writes that the scholars, not officials, will want to kill him.

\(^{51}\) *Fenshu, Xu Fenshu, Zhonghua shuju*, p. 1.
accuser, wrote:

In his middle years, Li Zhi was an official. In his older years, he shaved his head as a monk. Recently, he has also had printed books such as A Book to Hide Away, A Book to Burn, and The Great Virtue of Li Zhi, which are now disseminated throughout the land and throw people’s minds into confusion. He treats Lü Buwei and Li Yuan as resourceful, Li Si as talented, Feng Dao as an official-ascetic, Zhuo Wenjun as a fine choice for a mate, Qin Shihuang as an emperor for the ages, and the teachings of Confucius as not worth referring to. These books are outrageous and rebellious; they must be burned.

Li Zhi was frequently depicted in mid-twentieth-century historiography as a “heretic” and a “martyr” to the cause of progressive or radical anti-feudalism. However, more recent scholarship has stressed the local factors in the disputes that led to Li Zhi’s arrest and imprisonment and the call to ban his works. These are the sort of accusations made by Zhang Wenda as well: following this description of Li Zhi’s books and the recommendation that they be burned came a list of his supposed transgressions in Macheng, mostly sexual in nature.

Li Zhi was jailed and committed suicide while incarcerated in 1602. As with the case of the Trimming the Lamp collections, it is not known if and how a ban on Li Zhi’s works was carried out, nor what titles would be included in such a ban. Yet it is telling that editions attributed to Li Zhi appeared soon after, unhindered. The Rongyu tang edition of the Shuihu zhuan with “Li Zhi” commentary was printed first sometime after Li’s death and again in 1610, and the Yuan Wuyai “Li Zhi” Shuihu zhuan edition appeared in 1612.

Conclusion

For an analysis of the uses of Li Zhi in twentieth-century historiography, see Chan Hok-lam, Li Chih, 1527-1602, in Contemporary Chinese Historiography: New Light on His Life and Work. W. Theodore de Bary discusses Li Zhi as a martyr in his “Individualism and Humanitarianism in Ming Thought,” in de Bary, ed., Self and Society in Ming Thought. In his 1587: A Year of No Significance, Ray Huang makes the case that Li Zhi was not a martyr as he did not die for a cause that was carried forward by others after his death.

For local and personal factors in Li Zhi’s persecution, see Rowe, Crimson Rain, pp. 95-108; Jin Jiang, “Heresy and Persecution in Late Ming Society: Reinterpreting the Case of Li Zhi.”
In *The City of God*, Augustine relates the story of the pirate captured by Alexander the Great. Alexander asks the pirate, “How dare you molest the seas?” The pirate responds, “How dare you molest the whole world? Because I do it with a small boat, I am called a pirate and a thief. You, with a great navy, molest the world and are called an emperor.” In the late Ming, an editor-commentator could, with impunity, put a similar moral to a work of previously-existing fiction even as books were becoming increasingly widely available. Despite the growing prevalence of printed material, the central authorities never created a systematic method of censorship; other than the “ban without a ban,” there were only the sporadic memorials against certain works as I have outlined above, and as I have shown, those bans were vaguely defined and short-lived.

It could be argued that the most prevalent “censorship” occurring in the Ming did not take the form of forcible erasure of texts but rather of the mandatory inclusion of texts: the demands of the examination system curriculum kept potential literati occupied at the expense of non-canonical works. Yet as commercial prints became more widely available, and as their messages were reshaped by editor-commentators, commercial works of fiction such as the *Shuihu zhuan* editions spoke to those outside this official career track. The Rongyu tang edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* brought the values of social banditry to those audiences.

Commercially printed books in the late Ming have been seen as a status symbol among rising classes of the period such as merchants who, while literate and monied, lacked the traditional elite status of the literati official. Purchased books, the theory has it, fulfilled this anxiety over status, with lavish editions lining one’s shelves lending an air of prestige and
learnedness. Yu Xiangdou famously included a portrait of himself in some of his editions, in which he sits leisurely at a desk in a garden, poring over books as attendants stand at the ready. Commercial books of the late Ming have also been seen as a means of circulating versions of the classics with alternative commentaries other than the ones that were officially sanctioned. In this view, commercial printing created a space for literary professionals who eventually came to challenge the authority of the official examination system’s mandated interpretations of the classics. The commercial editions they produced, it has been argued, created a sort of “public sphere” comparable to that which in the West has been theorized as sparking the Enlightenment.

A commercial edition of a work like the *Shuihu zhuan*, however, would be unlikely to ease the anxiety of, say, a literate merchant who envied the social status of the literati official. It would also have little if anything at all to do with challenging the officially sanctioned interpretations of the classics. This is precisely due to the fact that it does not exist in the same field as the classics. The classics are not the only measure by which fiction can be measured.

It would be a gross exaggeration to claim that fiction commentaries such as those presented in the Yu Xiangdou or Rongyu tang *Shuihu zhuan* editions created a “public sphere” in which stances on issues of political or social importance could be formulated without interference by the authorities. Even arguments that the printing press served as an “agent of change” in the West have come under greater scrutiny in recent years.\(^{54}\) However, it is also not the case that such commentaries had no effect at all, as can be seen in the final case of censorship in the Ming: the ban on the *Shuihu zhuan* itself. On the 17th day of the fourth month of the fifteenth year of the Chongzhen reign (May 15, 1642), the following was memorialized to the

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\(^{54}\) Elizabeth Eisenstein famously declared the printing press as an “agent of change” in her study of the same name. Adrian Johns has convincingly argued against such a portrayal in his *The Nature of the Book*. 
Li Qingshan’s bandits gathered together on Mount Liang, sacking towns and putting the torch to transport ships. Their base is covered by difficult terrain, and two territories to the east are like pots boiling over. Bandits take refuge at Mount Liang, and the Lotus uprising once took place to the east of the mountain, spreading from the area between Yuncheng and Mount Liang. Your subject has frequently passed through the area via boat. It is not comprised of precipitous cliffs or rough terrain that can be used to strategic advantage. However, bandits have turned it into a gathering place due to its fame. This account of the area is rooted in the book *Shuihu zhuang*. In it, Song Jiang and the others answer the call to gather on Mount Liang. Among them, there are those that count sacking towns and breaking men out of jail among their abilities and those for whom murder and arson are calling cards. Every day they sack towns, break men out of jail, commit murder, and commit arson, and every day they discuss surrender, bending the words of generals and officials. Not only is this book committing heresy and causing disorder by treating banditry as a harmless affair, it also openly serves as a record of how to rally people, how to sack towns and break men out of jail, how to commit murder and arson, and how to discuss terms of surrender. These are at the ready as strategies for rebels. Your subject thereby declares this a book for bandits. As for Li Qingshan and the rest who take Mount Liang as a base and discuss surrender, then on the same day sack both Dongping and Zhangqiu, it is as if they were enacting each and every step. Though Qingshan has been taken out, places in the Mount Liang area such as Yuncheng, Ju, Shou, and Fan it is feared still harbor bandits yet to be driven off. The *Shuihu zhuan* is a book that harms people’s minds. How could one not detest it?

In the sixth month, an order was issued banning the work. In a particularly ironic twist, the Censorate—the very agency that was among the earliest printers of the *Shuihu zhuang*—was charged with carrying out the ban.56

A book that had been printed by an official agency and the court elite approximately a century before had been transformed into a widely circulating “book for bandits” through the process of commercialization. While the *Shuihu zhuang* may not have directly inspired uprisings against the Ming court, it is apparent that it did lend a certain air to the uprisings that did occur.

55 Quoted from Wang Liqi, *Yuan Ming Qing san dai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, Section one (“Zhongyang faling”) pp. 16-17.
Though the court called for a ban on it, it was too late. The dynasty collapsed just two years later. Just before the collapse, a radically edited commentary edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* appeared: that of Jin Shengtan. The Jin Shengtan *Shuihu zhuan* would prove to be the most widely read edition until the early twentieth century.

The Jin Shengtan edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* is the subject of the following chapter.
Chapter Four

Characters in the Margins:

Style and Meaning in Jin Shengtan’s Shuihu zhuan

Introduction

The commercialization of vernacular fiction in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had transformed the Shuihu zhuan from a phenomenon of elite circles around the Jiajing court to a forum in which values of personal feelings were celebrated and legal authority was openly mocked. In that transformation, traditional values of loyalty and righteousness were reoriented away from the nation and toward personal relationships, with the Shuihu zhuan band of outlaws employed as prime examples of such potentiality. The spread of commercially available books brought these values to wider audiences.

The Jin Shengtan edition of the Shuihu zhuan, which appeared just before the collapse of the Ming dynasty and just after the Ming authorities had attempted to ban the novel, transformed the novel further. Jin’s commentary treated the action and, more importantly, the characters of the novel as starting points for a series of tangentially related comments and even short essays on a variety of topics. Central to Jin’s interests, however, are character and expressive style, and the link between the two. In literary
historiography, it has been the second part of this pair of interests that has received the most attention, with Jin being cast as a literary critic who used formalistic criticism to champion vernacular literature, a genre that had supposedly been denigrated previously. His brand of “criticism” has often been compared to the New Criticism in the twentieth-century West. In this chapter, I aim to show how this image of Jin as formalist critic was created, and to show how moving past it can provide a fuller understanding of Jin’s work. The resulting rethinking of Jin Shengtan’s work should reveal its relationship to the Shuihu zhuan itself: The novel had become a set of readymade allegorical types, waiting to be appropriated in commentary.

Jin’s remained the most popularly read edition of the Shuihu zhuan throughout the Qing dynasty and into the early twentieth century, when “modernized” editions stripped of all commentary began to appear. Jin’s edition was radically edited: He excised completely the chapters following the gathering of the band on Mount Liang, ending instead with the character Lu Junyi dreaming of the band’s execution by government troops. The first chapter became a “prologue (xiezi 楔子),” leaving a total of seventy chapters whereas previous editions had had one hundred or more. He also rewrote the language of the text in places. Additionally, he added three prefaces, the last of which he signed as Shi Nai’an, the novel’s author. He also included a point-by-point essay on how to read the novel and an outline of Song dynasty history.

His Shuihu zhuan was the fifth of an envisioned six-book program he called “Books of Genius (caizi shu 才子書).” The others were the Zhuangzi, Qu Yuan’s Encountering Sorrow (Li sao 離騷), Sima Qian’s Records of the Grand Historian, the
poetry of Du Fu, and Dong Jieyuan’s Record of the Western Chamber. Of these, he only completed commentaries to the Shuihu zhuan and the Record of the Western Chamber. He also published a collection of Tang poetry with commentaries, and a selection of classical passages with commentary called Must-Read Books for Geniuses (Caizi bidu shu 才子必讀書) was published posthumously.

**Birth of a “Formalist”**

Historical, bibliographical, and literary evidence point to the elite origins of the Ming vernacular novel. Previous chapters have shown the elite military and government circles in which early editions of the Shuihu zhuan (and its frequent sister publication, the Sanguo yanyi) were printed and most likely distributed, and early extant versions tend to be lavish, fine editions. Moreover, literary studies have traced themes of these two works and the other Ming “masterworks” to contemporary sixteenth-century literati concerns such as self-cultivation; Andrew Plaks has classified these works as of a genre he dubbed the “literati novel.” Yet despite these factors, the image of the Shuihu zhuan and the other masterworks as being “popular” literature persists among the general public and more specialist audiences alike.

In terms of more general audiences, it is the very popularity of these works that continues to give such impressions. The novels are to this day very much a part of popular culture throughout Asia and the rest of the world, through literary versions including the original texts, translations, and retellings, as well as countless television,
film, and video game adaptations. Those familiar with the original texts might be led to assume that they were part of popular oral culture due to the storyteller tropes used in them, and specialists might be familiar with pre-existing source materials that inspired or were incorporated into the novel forms. Those with more specialized knowledge might cite the traditional classification of the novels as “xiaoshuo 小説,” which before it took on the modern sense of “novel” or “fiction” was a catch-all bibliographical category for gossip, rumor, and outsider history that, while not “literary,” still held enough archival value to be worth preserving.

It is true that some conservative cultural voices did speak out against the *Shuihu zhuan*, the *Sanguo yanyi*, and other such works as early as the mid-sixteenth century, typically in protest of what they deemed their dubious merits as historiography. Yet at the same time, the majority of the remarks on the works from literati of that early period of their reception are positive. In the case of the *Shuihu zhuan* in particular, the sustained narrative and the descriptive power of the prose are frequent points of admiration, and Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* is a very common point of comparison. It was later, under the Qing, that stronger critical voices emerged. By that time, the novels were widely published and read, though figures such as Qian Daxin spoke out against what they saw as their bad influence.

Yet a canon of vernacular novels has been agreed upon, as is seen in expressions such as the “four great masterworks” (*si da qishu 四大奇書*) and the “four great famed novels” (*si da mingzhu 名著*), and in textbook overviews of Chinese literary history, the “xiaoshuo” is the genre associated with the Ming and Qing dynasties, just as the *shi* poem
and the *ci* lyric are associated with the Tang and Song respectively. This indicates a
measure of respectability that is in contrast to the assumption of the genre’s “lowly” or
popular origins. A common assumption has been that fiction was of low origins, but it
was somehow “elevated” to its status.

A frequently cited candidate for the role of the agent in the “elevation”
phenomenon has been the traditional fiction commentator, and in particular, Jin Shengtan
and his followers. Jin Shengtan’s 1643 commentary edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* was the
first of its kind; whereas previous commentators made simple or even flippant remarks on
the action. Jin’s comments were long, complex, and often digressive, and he employed a
host of literary terms of his own coinage to describe techniques supposedly found in the
novel. He directly inspired imitators who penned similar commentaries for other works:
Mao Zonggang for the *Sanguo yanyi*, Zhang Zhupo for the *Jin Ping Mei*, and Chen
Shibin for the *Xiyou ji*. These editions, with the possible exception of the latter, became
the standard editions in which the works were read until the early twentieth century.¹
Furthermore, Jin-style commentary shaped the writing of later fiction, which incorporated
the techniques he described and also included “commentary” written by the author
himself.²

The influential role played by Jin Shengtan in the reception and writing of literary
fiction is beyond doubt. Yet over the course of the twentieth century, Jin Shengtan’s

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¹ Due to the religious allegorical readings to which the *Xiyou ji*’s subject matter lends itself, a number of
allegorical commentary editions contended with one another. See the introduction to this dissertation for
examples of scholarship on this question.
² See Widmer, *Margins of Utopia* for an instance of an “auto-commentary” in a sequel to the *Shuihu
zhuan* called *Shuihu houzhuan*. Widmer also sees Jin’s writing techniques as being incorporated into the
fiction itself. See also Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, pp. 269-348, for
“auto-commentary” and commentator-narrators.
critical reputation went through a process of death and reincarnation, transforming from influential pingdian commentator to bourgeois intruder on literature to champion of vernacular writing. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Qing dynasty was plagued with internal and external troubles. There was a perception on the part of intellectuals that the dynasty was repeatedly humiliated at the hands of foreign powers, and that part of the nation’s inability to keep up on the international stage was the stagnancy of its elite. Part of the blame for this stagnancy fell on the imperial examination system, which was perceived to emphasize rote learning and encourage stilted, formulaic writing at the expense of innovative and expressive thought. The examination system was abolished in 1905, thus rendering obsolete the eight-legged essay form in which examination answers were written, yet in the following years the drive for more accessible, populist writing styles continued. Figures such as Hu Shi advocated a writing style that reflected common speech and the stock classical references and literary particles of speech found in what came to be known in contrast as “Classical” or “literary” Chinese (wenyan wen 文言文). In the quest for such a “plain speech” style of writing, antecedents outside of the standard “classical” tradition were needed, and the novels of the Ming and Qing were a natural match. The Shuihu zhuan was an especially good match, as it was earlier than the Xiyou ji, the Jin Ping Mei, and the Honglou meng, yet more colloquial and less tied to official historiography than the Sanguo yanyi.

In 1921, the Oriental Book Company of Shanghai began to publish an ambitious series of Ming and Qing fiction, and the first to appear was a new edition of the Shuihu zhuan. The new edition purported to be the first “old” text printed in modern typeset
characters and with punctuation, and featured a glowing preface by Hu Shi himself.
Notably absent from the edition, however, was the Jin Shengtan commentary. Hu praised
the editors of the edition for this exclusion, claiming that their typesetting and
employment of punctuation had rendered the commentary obsolete: now, readers would
not need Jin’s markings to parse sentences, as the punctuation would allow them to do it
for themselves. Nor would readers be distracted by Jin’s digressive remarks; they would
be able to read the *Shuihu zhuan* for themselves, unmediated.

Hu Shi portrayed Jin Shengtan as a creature of his times whose work was
permeated through and through with the “stench” and “leftover poison” of the eight-
legged essay form. Jin’s commentary arose, according to Hu, from an impulse to explain
writing techniques *ad nauseum* that was the mindset of the compiler of eight-legged
essay handbooks. To Hu, the constant interruptions into the text represented Jin’s
infliction of “death by a thousand cuts” (*lingchi suikan* 凌遲碎砍) on the *Shuihu zhuan*.
Hu also saw in Jin’s writing an unfortunately traditionalist tendency to read texts as
“history,” seeking out the sort of “subtle phrasings” (*weiyan* 微言) assumed to have been
encoded into the *Spring and Autumn Annals* by Confucius, leading Jin to make “absurd”
(*yufu* 迂腐) claims. He specifically cited Jin’s constant denigration of the character Song
Jiang. Hu also specifically cited Jin’s treatment of the famous passage relating the story
of Wu Song’s killing of the tiger. In the passage, Wu Song’s only weapon, his club,
breaks in the midst of the battle with the tiger, leaving him to fend for himself empty-
handed. Jin’s commentary provides a running count of the number of times the word
“club” is used. To Hu, this is thoughtless and “mechanical” criticism that does nothing
but interfere.

In order to modernize the *Shuihu zhuan* and, thereby, create retroactively a lineage for a literature of the “plain speech” style, Hu Shi saw the need to expunge Jin Shengtan. This project demanded the removal of the commentary in order for the text of the work itself—the project’s immediate focus—to make itself known. Jin’s commentary did not serve the purpose of furthering “plain speech” literature. Yet while Hu damned Jin from a literary perspective, he praised Jin as a historical figure. Jin, Hu exclaimed, had had the audacity to sing the merits of vernacular fiction in a time when such works were not held in esteem. Jin had placed the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Xixiang ji* alongside the *Zhuangzi*, Qu Yuan’s *Encountering Sorrow*, the *Records of the Grand Historian*, and the poetry of Du Fu in his program of the “Six Books of Genius (*liu caizi shu*),” a group of books he planned but never completed complete commentaries; Hu praised this program for its “elevation” of vernacular works to the level of “the classics,” something that was simply not (according to Hu) done in Jin’s time.

Hu’s portrayal of Jin Shengtan as a “champion” of the genre of vernacular fiction who sought to “elevate” it to the level of the classics is a distortion. Jin did not elevate vernacular fiction as a genre for its own sake; he of course had high praise for the *Shuihu zhuan*, but he specifically criticized the *Sanguo yanyi* and the *Xiyou ji*. His praise for the “vernacular” language of the *Shuihu zhuan* was more for its descriptive power and variety than any sort of fidelity to a standard of a common spoken language as sought by the plain speech advocates. Likewise, the “classics” in Jin’s program are there for their own particular qualities of “genius” rather than a supposed elevated status as classics.
Moreover, these books had been grouped together by earlier figures such as Wang Shizhen and Li Zhi, and were among the bestselling commercial imprints of Jin’s day.\footnote{See Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, pp. 150-1.} Jin was hardly the first to group these works together. Yet this portrayal of Jin served Hu Shi’s goals of advocating for a “modern” plain speech style by mediating between the popular and the elevated: Jin Shengtan as a historical rather than a literary figure helps create a transition between vernacular fiction’s supposedly populist nature and its place as a validated part of the Chinese literary canon. And despite the problematic nature of Hu’s characterization of Jin and his work on the *Shuihu zhuan*, Hu’s critique proved highly influential and shaped the discourse on Jin Shengtan and fiction commentary in general for much of the twentieth century. Jin was a flawed and mechanical critic who, despite his excesses, was a primary force in elevating the genre of vernacular fiction. This became the image to which critics who followed Hu had to answer.

In the first decades after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Jin Shengtan’s work on the *Shuihu zhuan* was discussed in political terms. In Communist circles, even as vernacular fiction fell in and out of favor as either proletarian literature on the one hand or remnants of a feudalist, backward society on the other, the *Shuihu zhuan*’s reception remained positive due to its anti-authoritarian content. Mao Zedong even claimed to journalist Edgar Snow that the *Shuihu zhuan* was one of the few books he carried along with him on the Long March.\footnote{The *Shuihu zhuan* did become the object of some controversy in the “Anti-Shuihu Campaign” during the Cultural Revolution, when Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four used criticism of the novel as an oblique way of attacking Deng Xiaoping and other political enemies as revisionist capitulationists who, like Song Jiang, sought to surrender to the emperor. The flare-up came to an end when Mao proclaimed that the worth of the *Shuihu zhuan* was precisely in the surrender, as it taught revolutionaries to recognize the face of capitulationists. Mao’s words are printed in the front matter of editions and studies of the *Shuihu zhuan* that appeared in the mid-1970s, including the 1975 facsimile reprint of the Jin} The bandits of the novel were seen as
leading a righteous “peasant uprising” (nongmin qiyi 農民起義). Jin Shengtan, however, was highly ambiguous in his treatment of the characters. Not only did he point out “subtle wording” that supposedly criticizes the leader Song Jiang, he also rewrote the ending to portray the dream execution of the band at the hands of government troops. Thus, to Communist admirers of the novel’s characters, Jin was an enemy of the cause of peasant revolution.\(^5\)

When Jin Shengtan came to be reevaluated in the 1970s by scholars trained in the West and Taiwan, Hu Shi’s bifurcated portrayal was reintegrated in a novel manner: Hu’s historical image of Jin as a champion of vernacular fiction remained unchallenged at the same time Hu’s literary image of Jin as a “mechanical” critic steeped in eight-legged-essay examination system culture was regarded as a not-altogether negative point. In fact, the eight-legged essay’s influence on Jin came to be seen as a contributing factor to his critical attention to form and technique, which in turn was for some reminiscent of the “close reading” style of criticism associated with the American and British New Criticism. With this reevaluation, Jin became known as a champion of vernacular fiction who elevated the genre not through praise alone, as Hu had it, but through his formalist criticism.

The most influential such reevaluation of Jin Shengtan and his work on the edition. The controversy had renewed interest in Jin’s edition as, in that version of the story, the bandits never surrender. Somewhat ironically, as the Chinese Communist Party hailed the Shuihu zhuan as a veritable textbook of revolution, the Guomindang regime on Taiwan—which portrayed itself as the true inheritors of Chinese culture—also lionized the Shuihu zhuan as a canonical part of Chinese literary heritage. The excerpts “Wu Song Kills a Tiger” and “Lin Chong Flees at Night” remain part of the ROC curriculum.

\(^5\) For a brief description of Jin’s post-1949 detractors, see Wang, Chin Sheng-t’an, pp. 356-8. Chief among these is He Manzi 何滿子, author of Lun Jin Shengtan pinggai Shuihu zhuan 論金聖嘆評改水滸傳.
Shuihu zhuan in particular came from John Wang, author of both the entry on Jin in the Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature and the monograph Chin Sheng-t’an. The monograph remains the only book-length study of Jin Shengtan’s life and work in English, and remains widely cited despite the fact it was originally published in 1972. In 2004, a bilingual English-Chinese edition was published under the title Chin Sheng-T’an: His Life and Literary Criticism.

Like Hu Shi, Wang defines Jin as “one of the pioneers in China to advocate the importance of the traditionally despised vernacular literature” and as one who dared to place fiction at the same level with the classics. Wang concedes that Jin was not the first to list the Shuihu zhuan as being on a par with “classic” works such as the Records of the Grand Historian and the Zhuangzi, being preceded in that regard by Wang Shizhen, Li Zhi, and Li Kaixian. However, according to Wang, what differentiates Jin from those other “champions” of fiction is that, unlike them, Jin went beyond the level of merely praising the work to attempt to describe the particular qualities that made it great:

What makes him unique in the history of Chinese literature is that, unlike his predecessors who for the most part merely praised the vernacular works in general terms, he was able to demonstrate, through detailed critical commentaries, how these works excelled as works of literary art, and how they should be regarded as being on an equal footing with the standard classics. It was chiefly through his efforts that the vernacular literature began gradually to attain some popularity and prestige within the scholarly community, until shortly after the turn of the present [twentieth] century vernacular works were finally admitted into the world of belles-lettres.

On this point, Wang begins to differ with Hu Shi. While both commend Jin Shengtan as a force in the elevation of fiction to the status of the “classics,” Wang sees Jin as having done so through the very sort of criticism that Hu saw as mechanical. Wang radically reinterprets the influence of the eight-legged essay form on Jin: Whereas Hu

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* Wang, Chin Sheng-t’an, p. 201.
saw the form as a poison whose traces permeated Jin’s writing and permeated it with its stench, Wang sees the eight-legged essay as a not altogether negative influence. While, in Wang’s estimation, it did have a stultifying effect on the intellectual life of the Ming and Qing, it also inculcated a sense of discipline and economy in writing, the influence of which he sees in Jin’s attention to technique:

In spite of its stifling effects on the intellectual life of China (how can any original and far-reaching idea be expounded within the limit of six hundred words or so—the prescribed length of the essay?), when viewed simply as a piece of literary composition, the eight-legged essay has at least the following two merits to recommend it: First, it teaches the writer how to write tightly woven compositions, in which each segment contributes substantially to the whole. Second, it forces the writer to write economically by presenting his main point without bringing in any unnecessary words. [...] The deep influence the eight-legged essay had on Chin can also be seen in the fact that he would often use in his commentaries technical terms associated with the essay to discuss the literary merits of the various works involved.7

As an example of Jin’s attention to technique, Wang employs the very same passage mocked by Hu as mechanical and useless, that in which Wu Song battles a tiger and Jin Shengtan provides a running count of the number of times the word “club” is used. Wang translates the passage and its commentary in full.8

To Wang, the famous original passage is a “classic of Chinese fiction,” and Jin was “equal to his task” in criticizing it. Wang credits Jin’s commentary with making two “perceptive and revealing points” concerning it: First, Jin highlights that Wu Song has a flash of fear when he is confronted by the tiger. In Wang’s view, Jin thereby heightens the realism of the scene and makes Wu Song all the more courageous for confronting the object of his fears. Second, Wang credits Jin’s counting of the word “club” with heightening the tension when the object, Wu’s sole weapon, finally breaks in the moment of need. Wang writes: “The reader feels almost as bereft as Wu Song. This is, of course, a

7 Wang, ibid., pp. 255-6.
8 Wang, ibid., pp. 292-8.
trick played by the author, but it is a clever and highly effective one, and we feel a sense of gratitude to Chin for pointing it out. This stands in strong contrast to Hu Shih’s evaluation of the same passage in the commentary as thoughtless and mechanical distraction.

With the genealogy of Jin’s emphasis on technique traced in this way back to the influence of the eight-legged essay, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that Wang draws parallels between Jin’s work and the contemporary “New Criticism” in the West and the “close reading” methodology associated with it. Wang borrows M. H. Abrams’ classification system of literary theories as detailed in Abrams’ classic work, The Mirror and the Lamp, distinguishing between mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective theories. Mimetic theories are concerned with the relations between a work of art and the universe; pragmatic theories with the relations between a work and its audience; expressive theories with the relations between a work and its artist; and objective theories with the work’s internal workings. Wang sees Jin as espousing a primarily expressive theory of literature with elements of pragmatic theory, or as a “Romanticist with Classicist leanings” who believed writing is an expression of true feeling but must still resonate with its audience. However, to Wang, Jin’s methodology is reminiscent of objective theory:

Chin’s emphasis on language and on the close scrutiny of a given text reminds us incidentally of the trend of the so-called New Criticism in recent Anglo-American literary criticism, which can best be characterized as an effort to make the literary work itself the primary object of literary study (Abrams’ “objective theory”). In such a literary program, language naturally assumes a paramount importance. In the analysis of a poem, for example, what really matters is not how much of the poet’s own personality or of the character of his time has been reflected in it, or how many allegorical meanings we can read into it, but rather how much we can find out about “the meanings, ambiguities, and

Wang sees limitations in what he sees as Jin’s insistence on applying this same critical apparatus on works of widely varying genres, but claims that “[...] in spite of the limitations, [...] Chin, again like the New Critic in the West, has at least helped to provide a methodology through which meaningful discussions of literary works can be conducted.”

Soon after the publication of John Wang’s work on Jin Shengtan, Chen Wanyi drew similar comparisons between Jin and the New Critics in his Jin Shengtan de wenxue piping kaoshu. Drawing on the work of Willard Thorp, Chen describes the New Criticism as a loose association of critics who shared a common opposition to the pedagogical methodologies of their teachers. Their teachers’ emphasis on literary history and social influences drove the New Critics to return to the text and grant it, rather than externalities, ultimate authority. Chen here draws a parallel with Jin Shengtan, claiming that Jin was also motivated by pedagogical concerns. Jin, according to Chen, sought to teach composition to students but was dissatisfied with the muddle-headed approach of the private tutors of his day, so he created his explicit critical language replete with terminology to discuss technique. Chen draws a distinction between the New Criticism’s emphasis on the text and Jin’s methodology, however. Jin, Chen notes, is ultimately interested in recovering the intention of the author of the text, and the text is the only means by which that intention can be accessed. Nonetheless, the result for Jin is a similar technique of “close reading.”

10 Wang, ibid., p. 259, quoting Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, p. 22. (“the meanings, ambiguities, and interactions of the individual words, images, and passages.”)
11 Wang, ibid., p. 260.
Explicit comparisons between Jin Shengtan’s commentarial style and the New Criticism have become less common, yet they continue to be made. A recent example is in Wu Zilin’s 2009 study Jingdian zai shengchan: Jin Shengtan xiaoshuo pingdian de wenhua toushi. Wu dedicates a section of the study to a comparison between Jin and the New Critics on three counts. First is the attitude of the critic toward the text, and here Wu makes a point very similar to those of John Wang and Chen Wanyi, that Jin’s criticism represents a sort of “close reading” and employs a specific critical vocabulary that breaks with a critical tradition of vagueness. Second is the emphasis on the power of language. Wu concludes that despite the often “startling” similarities between the New Criticism and Jin Shengtan’s methodology, they remain different in that the “close reading” of the former is based around semantic meaning while that of the latter seeks to interpret how the reader is affected psychologically. This leads to the third point, the centrality of the reader (literally, the “reader spirit” duzhe jingshen). Like Chen Wanyi, Wu notes that Jin sees the text as a bridge to understanding the intended meaning of the author and expects readers to develop the necessary interpretive skills to access that meaning. Wu sees Jin Shengtan’s criticism as anticipating and even surpassing the New Criticism some three hundred years before the fact, but unfairly neglected in the history of Chinese literary criticism.

Despite Wu’s explicit comparison of Jin’s critical methodology with that of the New Criticism, the more predominant trend in studies of Ming fiction commentary since

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12 Wu, Jingdian, pp. 149-68.
13 Wu, ibid., p. 162.
14 Wu, ibid., p. 168.
the late 1980s has been to treat Jin and the commentators’ work as a “native” or “contemporary” readings of fiction that have been preserved in the margins of the fiction itself. In this view, the traditional commentaries can be used as a means by which a contemporary theory of fiction can be reconstructed. Again, Jin Shengtan is given special prominence in such studies due to the influence of his work on both subsequent commentators and authors of fiction. As these studies seek to recover from implicit and scattered references a “Chinese” or “Ming/Qing” theory of vernacular fiction, outright comparison with the New Criticism or other modern, Western schools would be counterproductive. However, the emphasis remains on Jin’s structural or “formalist” remarks even when not labeled as such outright. Such remarks by Jin have been particularly influential in the quest to describe the generic features of traditional Chinese vernacular fiction.

An influential early example of this trend is seen in Andrew Plaks’ *The Four Masterworks of the Chinese Novel*. Plaks’ central thesis is that the four “masterworks,” i.e., *Jin Ping Mei*, *Xiyou ji*, *Shuihu zhuan*, and *Sanguo yanyi*, represent constituents of a genre and as such share certain generic formal features and thematic elements. The shared formal features include divisions into 100 or 120 chapters; subdivisions of those chapters into thematic groupings of tens; and the “figural recurrence” of elements of setting, events, and full scenes. Thematically, these elements contribute to a sense that the works are self-conscious reworkings of previously existing materials, and within the self-conscious narrative is a sense of irony that often undercuts the original materials. Plaks sees Jin Shengtan’s commentary as pointing out instances of figural recurrence, and he
takes Jin’s list of narrative techniques as a systematic (if largely redundant) explanation of the ways in which figural recurrence can occur. Plaks then uses these as evidence of the ironic “deflation” of the “heroic” characters of the novel:

In evaluating this dimension of the artistry of the Shui-hu chuan, I will again place primary emphasis on the principle of figural recurrence, observing how this goes to set up the patterns of ironic reflection at the heart of my reading of the novel.

In the critical appreciation of the narrative texture of the Shui-hu chuan, we are greatly aided by Chin Sheng-t’an’s relatively thoroughgoing analysis of the narrative devices at work in the novel, as set forth programatically in his well-known tu-fa 談法 essay, and applied throughout in his interlinear and prechapter commentary. [...]

Putting aside the heated political and ideological controversies regarding Chin Sheng-t’an’s interpretation of the book, I believe his primary contribution lies in his close reading and literary analysis of the specific narrative techniques that comprise the dense texture of the work. In the context of my discussions in this book, it is most significant that Chin Sheng-t’an’s wide-ranging critical vocabulary can be reduced to a central focus on the ways in which the principle of figural recurrence operates in this text.15

Though he does refer to Jin’s “close reading” and concern with formalist characteristics, Plaks does not specifically compare Jin to the New Critics. Rather than make such a comparison across time and space, Plaks’ interest is in using the traditional commentaries in “reconstructing, for better or for worse, what these books might have meant to their immediate audiences, the literati readers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”16

Soon after Plaks’ Four Masterworks was published came a volume edited by David Rolston titled How to Read the Chinese Novel (1990), which includes translations of the “How to Read” (dufa 談法) essays from Jin Shengtan’s commentary on the Shuihu zhuan, Zhang Zhupo’s on the Jin Ping Mei, the Maos’ on the Sanguo yanyi, and others, and features contributions from Plaks and John Wang. Rolston’s stated purpose for the

15 Plaks, Four Masterworks, pp. 313-5.
16 Plaks, ibid., p. xi.
volume is similar to that of Plaks’ work. He writes:

The purpose behind the endeavor... was not to say that these traditional critics were infallible and hit their mark every time. The point to be made is rather different. Aside from the important fact that early critics had a direct influence on the writing of later novels and that the mere practice of publishing novels together with commentary eventually changed the mix of narrative voices in the traditional novel, we can turn to these traditional critics for help in avoiding, in our interpretations of these novels, the imposition of foreign frameworks and literary theory onto a tradition alien to them.17

Elsewhere, Rolston has dismissed the labeling of Jin Shengtan as a “formalist,” claiming that much of Jin’s apparent concern with the surface of the text is in reality Jin’s way of camouflaging morally or politically problematic material. By drawing attention away from the literal meaning of the text and toward its artifice, Jin protects it against charges of seditiousness and immorality or cruelty.

This was the process by which Jin Shengtan, pingdian commentator, was erased and rewritten as a literary critic. While interpretations of his critical methodology and his motivations differ, the consensus is that he was a literary critic concerned with formal features of texts and close reading in a manner that anticipated or at least invites comparison with the New Criticism. It is also consensus that his criticism is more than mechanical application of pedantic exegesis in the style of the eight-legged essay compilers, as Hu Shi had it; it is rather a source of useful and authentic insights into a Ming/Qing era theory of fiction and fiction reading.

Jin Shengtan never devised a systematic statement about the aesthetics or

17 Rolston, ed., How to Read, p. xvi.
formal properties of the long-form vernacular fiction genre, so studies such as those discussed above can only extrapolate such a literary theory from certain moments in Jin’s *Shuihu zhuan* commentary (and to a lesser extent, his *Xixiang ji* commentary) in which he is concerned with formal features. However, this selective process of extrapolation leaves much of the commentary by the wayside, and the sections that do not fit the agenda become a distraction or a liability to the project of reconstructing a literary theory. If Jin is made into a literary critic advancing a formalist theory of vernacular fiction, then these pieces that fall outside the realm of what might be deemed theory render him an “eccentric” or “self-indulgent” critic for whom apologies must be made. John Wang, for example, begins his discussion of Jin’s literary thought with the caveat that Jin is a “practical critic, a literary commentator, and not a literary theorist.” Andrew Plaks writes, “It must be admitted at the outset that a large portion of the sort of materials under consideration here never quite cross the shadowy boundary from the prosaic world of textual commentary to the lofty heights of literary criticism proper.” Plaks does, however, see the implicit theory of the novel found in the best of the commentarial tradition as the basis for the critical assumptions in the “rather random, fragmentary quips and stabs that comprise the bulk of the tradition.”

The most fertile site in Jin’s work for finding formalistic statements is the “How to Read” essay included in the front matter of his edition of the *Shuihu*

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19 Rolston, *How to Read*, p. 75.
In that essay, Jin defines several techniques he claims the author of the *Shuihu zhuan* used throughout the text. He then points out instances of their usage in the commentary on the main body of the text itself. The “How to Read” essay is comprised of sixty-nine points, of which fifteen are definitions of structural techniques. They are:

- Advance insertion (*daocha fa* 倒插法)
- Simultaneous narration (*jiaxu fa* 夾敘法)
- Snake in the grass or [discontinuous] chalk line (*caoshe huixian fa* 草蛇灰線法)
- Detailed and extended narration (*da luomo fa* 大落墨法)
- Needles wrapped in cotton and thorns hidden in mud (*mianzhen nici fa* 棉針泥刺法)
- Whitening the background to bring out the foreground (*beimian pufen fa* 背面鋪粉法)
- Displaying the bait (*nongyin fa* 弄引法)
- The otter’s tail (*tawei fa* 獭尾法)
- Direct repetition of topic (*zhengfan fa* 正犯法)
- Incomplete repetition of topic (*lüefan fa* 略犯法)
- Extreme avoidance of narrative frugality (*ji busheng fa* 極不省法)
- Extreme narrative frugality (*ji sheng fa* 極省法)
- Introducing new twists into the narrative just as you are about to bring it to a close (*yuhe guzong fa* 欲合故縝法)
- Clouds cutting the mountain in half (*hengyun duan shan fa* 橫雲斷山法)
- Joining a broken zither string with glue (*luanjiao xuxian fa* 鳴膠續絃法)

The list itself presents a tangle of overlapping variations on repetition and recurrence of themes and elements, such as “snake in the grass or chalk line” and “clouds cutting the mountain in half.”

20 Following the translations in *How to Read*, pp. 140-5. The numbering of the points here is my own.
cutting the mountain in half.” It also presents opposing items, such as “extreme narrative frugality” and “extreme avoidance of frugality.” These items represent yet a small portion of Jin’s commentary, in both their listing in the “How to Read” essay and their application throughout the bulk of the work, so to develop or extrapolate a theory of fiction from these items requires a great deal of effort. Ellen Widmer, for example, writes that there is “at least a nucleus of a system among them” despite their shortcomings, and that they generally point toward a distinction between what in Russian Formalist criticism is called “discourse” and “story.” Yet, as developing such a theory was not Jin’s concern, it is not surprising that Jin’s list does not fit this standard well.

Characters in the Margins

Jin Shengtan’s rehabilitation as a literary critic in the vein of the Western New Critics has been a project that emphasizes the “formalistic” aspects of his commentary at the expense of those aspects of the commentary concerned with appraising the characters of the novel. For example, Hu Shih, whose work turned Jin into vernacular fiction’s premier champion at the same time it denigrated his actual writing, explicitly cited Jin’s obsessive contempt for the character Song Jiang as one of his critical failures. The scholars who followed Hu in portraying Jin as a champion of fiction, but who at the same time drew positive parallels between his work and that of the New Critics, also underplayed the significance of Jin’s appraisal of characters: Jin’s attention to style and technique became the main focus, and his approach was likened to “close reading” that

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granted ultimate authority to the surface level of the text. Such readings of Jin necessitate the discrimination between the “literary critical” and the rest, and scholars inevitably provide caveats or apologies for the parts left behind. In light of comparisons to New Criticism, comments such as those negative ones about Song Jiang appear overly subjective in addition to being digressive or distracting. These readings of work by Jin and other traditional commentators have been successful in bringing more serious scholarly attention to the study of traditional Chinese vernacular fiction, however, countering dismissive attitudes of early twentieth-century reformers and later Western-trained critics alike. Yet now that vernacular fiction occupies a firm place in the Chinese literary canon, a more complete reading of the work of Jin Shengtan is made possible, a reading less reliant on maintaining a distinction between the legitimate “theory” and the “subjective” dross. Such a reading needs to account for Jin’s appraisal of characters of the novel. In actuality, character appraisal comments are more than idiosyncratic asides in Jin’s work; they are a central element of it. Furthermore, rather than being separate from a body of literary theoretical comments concerned with form and authorial technique, they are inextricably connected to them: through the technical comments, Jin points out the skillful depiction of the qualities he sees the characters portrayed as embodying. Furthermore, it is often the case that the “formalist,” surface-level comments such as those used in literary theory reconstructions are employed as evidence that the author’s portrayal of characters is intentional and skillful. Rather than serving as the main point,
the technical discussions drive the main point about the characters and their qualities.

The character appraisal aspect of *Shuihu* commentary did not begin with Jin Shengtan: the Rongyu tang edition of the *Shuihu zhuan*, for example, contains a prefatory essay on the subject called “The Merits and Demerits of the 108 Men of the Marshes of Mount Liang (*Liangshan po yibai dan ba ren youlie* 梁山泊一百單八人優劣).” Yet Jin’s commentary responds to the “Li Zhi” edition, and surpasses it in influence, complexity, and sheer length. The appraisal of the *Shuihu* characters remains a popular style of “commentary” outside of theoretical literary criticism, as attested to by recent publications such as Y.W. Ma’s 2003 *Shuihu renwu zhi zui* 水滸人物之最.\(^{22}\)

When read with importance granted to the character appraisal aspects and not only the "formalist" aspects, the How to Read essay holds together in a more consistent manner. In the essay, Jin creates a system that he then employs in the body of the commentary itself. Discussion of form and technique are indeed a part of that system, but these are largely driven by the appraisal of characters: the writing is designed, in Jin's mind, to give the reader stronger impressions of the characters' personalities and moral qualities. A comment pointing out the fine techniques employed by the author in the description of Li Kui, for example, is as much about loyalty as it is about literary style.

Jin begins the How to Read essay by stating that it is of the utmost importance that a reader first understand the intention of a text’s author (“先要曉得作書之人是何心胸”). This is a point conceded in some of the New Criticism comparisons, in which Jin is understood to be using “close reading” style techniques not to grant ultimate authority to

\(^{22}\) Examples of twentieth-century appraisals of *Shuihu* characters include Zhang Heshui, *Shuihu renwu lunzan*; Yue Qian, *Shuihu renwu sanlun*; and Wu Shi, *Shuihu renwu lun*.  

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the text but to better interpret the author’s thoughts. Jin compares the purported author of
the *Shuihu zhuan*, Shi Nai’an, with the fabled author of the *Records of the Grand
Historian*, Sima Qian.23 By the Ming dynasty, a substantial body of mythology had
developed around the figure of Sima Qian, and his work—which had frequently been
criticized as slanderous, ahistorical, and biased by the likes of Zhu Xi—was alternatively
praised for its fine prose style and for embodying the author’s personal resentment.24 To
Jin, Shi Nai’an possessed a genius of a level comparable to that of Sima Qian, whose
work also numbers among Jin’s Six Books of Genius. Yet unlike the famously resentful
Sima Qian, Jin claims (at this point, at least) that Shi was happy and content, picking up
the brush and writing his polished phrases as a way to pass idle hours. Here Jin is
rebuking a preface to an earlier edition by Li Zhi, in which Li identifies resentment as the
primary impetus behind all writing. Writing without resentment is like moaning without
illness, the renowned iconoclast Li had written, and the bandits of Mount Liang
represented the author’s positive embodiments of loyalty and righteousness. Jin criticizes
this simplistic and directly anti-establishment pronouncement of the bandits as
embodiments of loyalty and righteousness, saying that this is precisely counter to the
proper understanding of the work (1).25 Jin depicts Shi, being without resentment but in

23 Sima Qian’s *Records* was a frequent object of comparison among Ming readers of the *Shuihu zhuan*. See for example Li Kaixian’s comments discussed in chapters one and two, in which Li remarks that he and his literati acquaintances place the *Shuihu zhuan* as second only to the *Records*.

24 For an encyclopedic treatment of the development of Sima Qian mythology that served as a Foucauldian “author function” and transformed readings of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, see Esther Klein, “History of a Historian” (unpublished dissertation, Princeton University). Klein’s study does not include developments under the Ming, however.

25 Numbers in brackets refer to the item numbers in the How to Read essay. The original is divided into unnumbered points; for the sake of simplicity and ease of reference, I employ the item numbering as added by translator John Wang in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, pp. 131-45, rather than citation by page numbers. For the Chinese text, I use the Zhonghua shuju facsimile reprint of the Jin commentary edition of the *Shuihu zhuan*. 

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need of a topic (timu 題目) for his writing pastime, turning to the semi-historical
Remnant Events from the Xuanhe Era (Xuanhe yishi 宣和遺事) and its records of the
real-life bandit Song Jiang and his thirty-five followers, the group known as the Thirty-
six Heavenly Spirits (Tiangang 天罡) in the Shuihu zhuan (21). According to Jin, Shi
chose this topic precisely because of the ample opportunities for characterization the
number of characters presented, and the fact that all of the men have distinct personalities
(xingge 性格) (4, 17). It is this abundance of personalities that makes the Shuihu zhuan a
work to which one can return again and again without growing weary of it (16).

Furthermore, Jin depicts Shi as an author in complete control of every nuance of
his creation. Shi was a man of “surpassing intelligence” (11) who conquered the
challenges presented by the material (19, 20) to write a book “with substantial sections of
serious writing” (2) that was “not written carelessly” (9).

This choice of topic and intentional, ingenious execution, Jin states, directly
affects the form of the Shuihu zhuan. Again, form is inseparable from the content in Jin’s
estimation: each character’s appearance is the subject of a clearly delineated “arrayed
biography” (liezhuan 畫傳) in the style of those contained in the Records of the Grand
Historian, whether it be several chapters or just a few sentences in length (15). The
methods (fangfa 方法)²⁶ employed in the Shuihu zhuan, Jin says, all come from Sima’s
Records and in many instances surpass their employment in that earlier work (7). Indeed,
Jin states that he has long maintained that the Shuihu zhuan is superior to Records in the
face of the incredulity of his peers, the reason being that while Records “uses writing to
convey events (yi wen yun shi 以文運事),” the Shuihu zhuan “produces events because of

²⁶ Wang, emphasizing technique, translates fangfa as “literary devices.”
the writing (*yin wen sheng shi* 因文生事) (8). That is to say, while the latter is historiographical in nature, the latter, while based on actual historical figures, is created out of the mind of its author—a much more difficult task, and one that, as an act of creation rather than conveyance, demands great responsibility.

With these points about the controlling intelligence of the author and the demands of the material established, Jin continues on to rate the characters of the novel. He rates thirty-three of them with pairs of “high,” “middle,” and “low,” forming combinations such as “upper high,” “lower middle,” “lower low,” etc. That number includes all of the Thirty-six Heavenly Spirits save Mu Hong 穆弘, Xie Bao 解寶, Xie Zhen 解寶, and Zhang Qing 張清, and a single one of the Seventy-two Earthly Fiends, Shi Qian 時遷. Jin issues the ratings to the characters on the basis of their personalities and moral qualities as well as the skill with which they are depicted: this is fitting as, after all, the work’s content and its form are interconnected at several levels in Jin’s estimation. Lu Zhishen is an example of a character judged by personality and moral qualities: he rates as an “upper high” character because “he is shown to have an honest heart and an imposing physique” (23). Shi Jin, however, is an example of a character rated by skill in depiction: he ranks as “middle-high,” “because the second part of his story is not well done” (40).

The most elaborate character evaluations, however, are reserved for Li Kui and Song Jiang. The two are locked in to an opposing binary, with the former as the positive aspect and the latter as the negative. Li Kui is appraised on both the merits of his personal traits, as was the case with Lu Zhishen, and on the merits of the author’s skill in depicting
him, as was the case with Shi Jin. His is also the longest appraisal, taking up seven points of the How to Read essay (24-30) where most characters are afforded only one. Jin begins by describing Li Kui’s roughness (culu 粗鲁) as “wild” (man 魁) in style, as compared to the hastiness of Lu Zhishen’s roughness, the impulsiveness of Shi Jin’s, the unbound heroic quality of Wu Song’s, the “pent-up sorrow and anger” of Ruan the Seventh’s, and the moodiness of Jiao Ting’s (24).

Jin ranks Li Kui as an “upper-high” character. The quality for which Jin praises Li Kui’s personality is his inability to be swayed by externalities, whether they be wealth or the approval of others. He refers to Li Kui as possessed of an un tarnished, utter guilelessness (yi pian tianzhen lanman daodi 一片天真爛漫到底), and one who is not partial toward any of the other 107 members of the Mt. Liang band (literally, of the other 107 men, “not a single one can catch his eye 無一個入得他眼”). Quoting Mencius’s definition of a great man, Jin says of Li Kui: “He cannot be led into excesses when wealthy and honored or deflected from his purpose when poor and obscure, nor can he be made to bow before superior force” (25). Despite the fact that even some who might be considered heroes can be bought with silver, Jin concludes, Li Kui will only act on his own accord (30).

The depiction of Li Kui by the author plays a part in the evaluation. Jin remarks, “In writing Li Kui, every detail is incomparable in the extreme. It’s truly writing that transforms a likeness into being 習李達色色絕倒，真是化工肖物之筆.” As an example of the author’s detailed technique in expressing Li Kui’s qualities, Jin cites the fact that Li

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27 Mencius III B2, following D.C. Lau’s translation. In the passage, Jing Chun asks whether the persuaders Gongsun Yan and Zhang Yi should be considered great men (da zhangfu 大丈夫), as their power was such that they could cause the lords to tremble in fear.
Kui has an elder brother yet calls himself “Elder Li” until an emergency comes up and he must think of another name. Only then does he refer to himself as “Li the Second.” Jin states that while one could take that as an example of guile, a consideration of Li Kui’s character would cause one to lose such doubts (29).

The polar opposite to Li Kui and his pure guilelessness, in Jin’s appraisal, is Song Jiang and his hypocritical scheming. Jin rates Song Jiang a “lower low” character, remarking that he is the same sort of person as Shi Qian, a petty thief and the only one of the Seventy-two Earthly Fiends to be ranked at all (22). The How to Read essay emphasizes Song Jiang’s perceived ability to cunningly manipulate the rest of the band into carrying out his bidding without them becoming aware of it. In contrast to Wu Yong, a military leader who is upfront about directing the bandits, Song Jiang “always speaks of himself as sincere and refined” (32-34). The How to Read essay begins the criticism of Song Jiang right away, with the second and third items alleging the author Shi Nai’an’s contempt for the character. Jin claims that the author of the Shuihu zhuan has depicted Song Jiang as so contemptible that even dogs and swine would not eat him (2). The reason for this contempt is, according to Jin, because Song is the head of the bandits: by condemning the head, the others of the band are immune from blame (3).

The How to Read essay posits that the pairing of the guileless Li Kui and the deceitful, manipulative Song Jiang is intentional on the part of the author and inextricably built in to the design of the Shuihu zhuan: it is part of the motivation (yuangu 緣故) for writing (26). The essay points out that episodes featuring Li Kui tend to follow ones featuring Song Jiang in order to make an unflattering contrast between the admirable
qualities of the former and the despicable qualities of the latter (26, 27). Hatred for Song Jiang’s manipulative nature was the motivating factor for the writing, but in the process of expression of this hatred, the author exhibits his technical prowess (27): “This is like stabbing with a spear,” Jin says. “Though your intention is on the attack, you exhibit your school of spear-fighting此譬如刺鏗，本要殺人，反使出一身家數” (27). Again, content, form, and personal qualities are linked. Jin complains that others seem to have missed this point, overlooking the pairing of these opposites and even printing passages concerning Li Kui as a separate volume, *The Collected Writings of [Li Kui, Magistrate of] Shouzhang (Shouzhang wenji壽張文集)*. “They can be said to be like one who nip at people’s shits: not a good dog可謂咬人屎撅，不是好狗” (28).

**Filial Sons, Doppelgangers, and Tiger Killers, Revisited**

Chapter 42 presents a web of similarities, correspondences, and parallelisms from which a commentator might choose for elaboration. Before examining the way Jin Shengtan puts his character appraisal system as delineated in the How to Read essay into use in the body of the commentary itself, it is first necessary to outline the chapter and its themes very briefly to lay out the possibilities it presents to the commentator. It begins with Li Kui expressing his heartfelt desire to return home to fetch his mother and bring her back to the bandits’ lair on Mt. Liang. In the previous chapter, Song Jiang had unsuccessfully attempted to fetch his father and Gongsun Sheng had gone off for his mother, and these actions stirred filial emotions in Li Kui. From that point, the chapter
can be divided into three sections. The first section is Li Kui’s journey to his mother’s home, along the way to which he meets a man who has been posing as him in order to frighten and rob travelers. The second is Li Kui’s return to Mt. Liang with mother in tow, and his encounter with tigers. The third is the aftermath, in which Li Kui is to be rewarded for slaying the tigers but is recognized by the impostor’s wife as her husband’s killer.

In the first section of the chapter, the theme of filial piety is established and ironically undermined through the doubling of Li Kui. In the section, Li Kui leaves the Mt. Liang lair only after agreeing to the conditions set down by Song Jiang. Knowing Li Kui is apt to lose his temper and bring misfortune upon the band, Song Jiang demands that Li consume no alcohol during his trip, that he go directly to his mother’s home and back, and that he leave his trademark twin axes behind. Li agrees to these conditions so as to be able to retrieve his mother. After setting out, Li is stopped along the road by a highway robber who claims to be none other than Li Kui. When the true Li Kui reveals his identity, the false one, knowing he is no match, can only apologize and beg for his life. The false Li Kui, who reveals he is actually called Li Gui, pleads that to take his life would be to kill two people as he is responsible for the care of his elderly mother. Li Kui, as has just been demonstrated at the beginning of the chapter, is a filial son himself and takes pity on Li Gui, going to the extent of giving him some silver to start a reputable business. Li Kui then continues on his way and soon becomes hungry. He stops at a nearby house to ask for food and the woman living there says though she has no meat or alcohol she will cook some rice for him. The woman’s husband comes home by the back
door, and it turns out to be Li Gui. Li Kui overhears Li Gui tell his wife of his encounter with Li Kui, and how he invented a story about caring for his elderly mother to save himself from imminent danger. Li Kui is enraged and kills Li Gui as the wife runs away. His bloodlust sated, Li turns to the rice that has been prepared and wishes he had some meat to accompany it. He then remembers the body of Li Gui and, in a grotesque parody of stories of filial children offering their flesh to their sick or starving parents, Li Kui slices two pieces from Li Gui’s leg and cooks and eats them.

In the second section, the ironic treatment of filial piety continues through elements that echo not only the encounter with Li Gui in the first section but also what is perhaps the Shuihu zhuan’s most well-known scene, Wu Song’s slaying of a tiger. In the section, Li Kui reaches his mother’s house, discovering she has gone blind crying for him in his absence. Not wanting to tell her he is a bandit living on Mt. Liang, he at first tells her he’s become an official and will take her to his post. His brother intervenes, informing their mother of Li Kui’s residence among the bandits of Mt. Liang and storming off. Li Kui, worried his brother will contact the authorities, leaves a silver ingot behind for him and sets off with his mother on his back without telling her their destination. Along the way, as they climb a steep pass at Yiling Heights, she tells him she is thirsty, so he sets her down and goes in search of water. When he returns, his mother is nowhere to be found but he sees blood tracks. He follows them to the mouth of a cave, where he sees two tiger cubs playing with a disembodied human leg. This is obviously an ironic inversion of his own actions from the first section of the chapter, in which he ate flesh from Li Gui’s leg. He kills one and follows the other into the cave, where the mother
awaits. He kills the other cub and begins to battle the mother. When the mother attempts to swipe at him with her tail, he thrusts his knife into her anus and slices her through to her stomach, killing her. This is another ironic parallel; Wu Song famously fought a tiger and killed it with a blow to the head. The male tiger returns and Li Kui kills it as well. The filial son has killed the entire family.

In the third section of the chapter, the locals wish to reward Li Kui for ridding them of the tiger “pests.” Li Kui hides his identity, saying his name is “Gutsy Zhang,” though as he is being feted, the wife of Li Gui recognizes him and informs the authorities of his true identity. The authorities drug his drink and subdue him. The governor orders for him to be brought to the county seat. Li Kui’s bandit brothers catch word of this, and devise a plan to intercept the procession. They prepare drugged food and drink to offer the guards escorting Li Kui. The plan works, and as the procession is held up, Li Kui escapes his bonds. He goes on a murderous rampage, first killing his captors and Li Gui’s wife and then parties of hunters and soldiers.

Commentarial Choices

The ironies and parallels prevalent in chapter 42 (and carried over from the previous chapter) were not lost upon previous editors and commentators, from whose editions Jin based his own. Poems in the Yuan Wuyai edition, for example, make frequently ironic references to these parallels. When Li Kui believes Li Gui’s story about

28 Zhang Dadan 張大膽, translated by Dent-Young as “Big Zhang.”
29 See Rolston, Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary, pp. 30-35.
having a mother to care for and consequently lets him go, a poem interjects:

Li Kui meets his mother but encounters harm;  
When did Li Gui ever care for his mom?  
But it is apparent that of instances of loyalty and filiality in the world,  
Actions as well as words are worth taking into detailed account.

When Li Kui finds the tiger cubs gnawing on his mother’s leg, another poem interjects, drawing an ironic parallel between Li Kui’s eating of Li Gui’s leg and the tigers’ eating of Li Kui’s mother’s leg:

The False Black Whirlwind [ie. the false Li Kui] struck real fear;  
In life, a treacherous heart, in death a roasted leg.  
Who was to know a mother’s leg would also come to harm?  
Hungry tigers, hungry men—all act on account of their mouths!

Another notes the ironic parallel between Li Gui posing as a “false Li Kui” and the real Li Kui giving his name as “Gutsy Zhang”:

People speak only of the false Li Kui;  
Nobody mentions again Li Kui’s falsehood.  
How a Li assumed the name Zhang,  
Who’s false and who’s true? It’s all really play!

Remarks in the “Li Zhi” commentary of the Rongyu tang edition also touch upon the parallels. This commentary consistently holds Song Jiang up as a positive character who embodies loyalty and righteousness. In the previous chapter, Li Zhi remarks upon

32 Here the poem plays upon the phrase “Zhang the Third and Li the Fourth 張三李四,” which are hypothetical names. In the case of the story, a “Li” becomes a “Zhang,” fitting this phrase.
the parallels between Li Kui, Song Jiang, and Gongsun Sheng, all of whom set out to fetch a parent:

Big brother Li is a natural-born filial son. Song Gongming [Jiang] retrieving his father has some air of the study of the Way about it, but he also took account of benefit and harm. Gongsun Sheng’s thinking of his mother was a load of treachery. One like Big brother Li thinks only of his mother’s happiness, without any second thought.

At the end of the chapter concerning Li Kui’s adventure are the following remarks:

Elder Li Zhuo says: There is only the false Li Kui, and never again is there Li Kui’s falsehood.

This resembles the line from the Yuan Wuyai edition’s poem, but is moved out of its original context and placed at the end of the chapter. Then comes the following:

He also critiques himself: If Li Kui were to hear these words of mine, he would certainly take me as his chief examiner.

He also said: Big brother Li’s killing of four tigers does not surpass others in fierce bravery. It was because his pure filiality encompasses heaven and earth, his perfected integrity moves ghosts and gods, and his will was singular and spirit concentrated.

While these comments do not point to parallel structures the way the Yuan Wuyai edition’s poems do, they do take Li Kui and Song Jiang as straightforwardly filial characters and thereby further develop the theme of filiality in the chapter.

Jin Shengtan, on the other hand, excised the poems with ironic references to parallels from his edition. Furthermore, rather than develop the theme of filiality as Li Zhi did, Jin chose to use the chapter as an occasion to espouse his ideas of zhong 忠. In the case of Li Zhi’s writings, the term might be rendered as “loyalty”: Li saw the band, including Song Jiang, as embodying this positive trait. In the case of Jin Shengtan’s chapter commentary, the term is paired with shu 忍, in reference to the usage of the pair
忠恕 in the classical texts the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) and *On the Practice of the Mean* (*Zhong yong* 中庸). To fit this context, and in order to highlight the intertextual references of Jin’s writing, I translate the terms *zhong* and *shu* here as “fidelity” and “empathy,” respectively.34

Jin’s introductory comment for chapter 42 runs for more than 2,000 characters. It consists mainly not of a discussion of filiality or discussion of recurring figures, but a long meditation on *On the Practice of the Mean* and *The Highest Order of Cultivation* (*Da xue* 大學) that also references several other classical texts. It is not until the final quarter of the introductory comment that he relates his discussion to the characters and the writing of the *Shuihu zhuan*. The comment begins with a lamentation that the “thread” that ran through the teachings of Confucius, fidelity and empathy, are no longer cared for or discussed in the world. Placing *zhong* (here, “fidelity”) as a constituent of the pairing *zhong shu* rather than *zhong yi*, Jin subverts the usual discourse of the *Shuihu zhuan*’s band of outlaws as “loyal and righteous,” moving it into the realm of classical learning. Jin breaks the character *zhong* into its constituent parts, “center” and “heart,” and presents filiality and respect as products of the “centered heart” of fidelity. When these feelings are true and integral, one’s actions are spontaneous manifestations of them. Describing this sort of spontaneity, Jin employs phrases from *On the Practice of the Mean* and *The Highest Order of Cultivation*: “Like detesting a detestable smell, like being attracted to an attractive form,” (Da Xue 6) “one attains it without deliberation, one

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34 “Fidelity,” from the Latin *fidelitas*, or “faithful,” and meaning loyalty or dedication to a person, cause, or thing, carries with it a sense of embodiment that suits Jin’s writing. (Obviously, marital fidelity, or *jie* 節 in Chinese, is not the intended meaning here.) I translate *shu* as “empathy” in an attempt to convey a sense of the visual paronomastic gloss provided by Jin: *Shu* 愧 being of like 如 mind 心. (This is reminiscent of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Pity is feeling sorry for someone; empathy is feeling sorry with someone.” in *The Words of Martin Luther King Jr.*, p. 8.)
arrives at it without laboring.” (Zhong Yong 22). He goes on to say that all feelings, whether good, bad, or indifferent, are “integral internally and manifested externally,” and therefore, the sage and the fool are equals.

He continues to employ quotations from the *Practice* and the *Highest Order* throughout in the service of his own message. Chief among them is the phrase “integral internally and manifested externally,” a line from the *Highest Order*. The assemblage of quoted phrases culminates in a definition of fidelity as remaining true to spontaneous and integral emotions by spontaneously manifesting them without any mediating processes:

Now, “fidelity” as a word means a centered heart. When “joy, anger, grief, and pleasure have yet to emerge,” this is called “centered.” When they emerge and are manifested as “joy, anger, grief, and pleasure in balance and due proportion,” this is called “heart.” The phenomena that are of themselves “integral internally and manifested externally” as the joy, anger, grief, and pleasure that command one’s self are called “fidelity.”

Jin only now returns to the characters of the *Shuihu zhuan* as proof of what he has proposed:

Of those who could express fidelity, there has never been one who did not possess empathy. Of those without empathy, there has never been one who could express fidelity. See how Song Jiang does not allow Li Kui to retrieve his mother and deduce that he must be unfilial toward his own father. This is proof that one who does not have empathy cannot express fidelity. See how Li Kui misses his mother with all his heart and deduce that he is a man who is inexhaustible in caring for his mother. This is proof that one who expresses fidelity is never without empathy.

At this point, he restates the Song Jiang-Li Kui binary he has defined in the How to Read section, recapitulating that the two are placed in opposition to one another throughout the book with Song Jiang embodying evil hypocrisy and Li Kui embodying spontaneity and purity of action. At this point, he yokes the aforementioned discussion to Li Kui, granting
Despite the common and persisting perception of traditional vernacular fiction as a lowly genre in need of a champion to “elevate” it to the level of “the classics,” early editions of works such as the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Sanguo yanyi* were produced and circulated in high social circles. It is only through later historical processes that a need for
such a champion arose, and that Jin Shengtan was posthumously drafted to fill it. At the hands of later scholars, Jin was transformed first into a brave but fatally flawed historical champion of vernacular writing, and then into a literary critic who championed vernacular fiction through insightful yet eccentric literary theory. Elements of Jin’s work, such as his close attention to the surface level of texts, lent themselves to this transformative process well, while others, such as his frequent “digressions,” proved problematic to it. Those problematic elements assured Jin’s reputation as a playful and witty yet overly subjective literary critic.

Commentaries such as Jin’s can, however, also be viewed as a genre of writing in and of themselves. Works of this fiction commentary genre are obviously closely tied to the works with which they are printed, but they are not obligated to limit themselves to the explication of those other works; their “commentator” authors are able to appropriate elements of the other work and use them in the process of expressing their own views. In the case of Jin Shengtan, who pioneered the fiction commentary genre, those points are rather philosophical in nature, yet one hesitates to classify him as a “philosopher”; just as he presents no systematic literary theory, neither does he present a systematic moral or epistemological outlook. He is somewhere between a literary critic and a philosopher. He is also often deliberately provocative and difficult to pin down. He is, however, undoubtedly a writer working in a genre, and this is the space that this genre occupies. To Jin Shengtan, these two identities are inextricably linked: writing and literary style are the embodiment of character (xingge 性格). To the fiction commentator, the characters (renwu 人物) of the novel represent the meeting place of these two discursive spaces.
Before the twentieth century, commentaries were nearly universal features of printed vernacular fiction. Commentaries are evidence of more than fossilized contemporary readings of the texts to which they are attached: they are evidence of a mode of reading, in which two voices intertwine and interrupt, harmonize and diverge. For Jin Shengtan, the voice of the *Shuihu zhuang* was an ideal counterpart for his own.
Conclusion:

A Return to the Center

Jin Shengtan’s seventy-chapter edition of the *Shuihu zhuan* remained the most popular from the time of its first appearance in 1643 until the “modernized” edition with the Hu Shi preface was published nearly three hundred years later.¹ It was reprinted over thirty times during the Qing dynasty, far more than other recensions. So strong was the association of Jin’s name with this particular novel that even reprints of other, non-Jin recensions listed him as an editor or commentator. There were for example six reprints of the *Register of Heroes* (*Yingxiong pu* 英雄譜) in which a 115-chapter version of the *Shuihu zhuan* is printed alongside the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, each of which falsely claimed to feature his commentary. There were also at least four simple recension editions of 124 chapters that feature the words “The Fifth Book of Genius” (*Diyi caizi shu* 第一才子書) in the title, in imitation of the title of Jin Shengtan’s edition. Those editions also feature the words “Loyal and Righteous” in their titles despite Jin Shengtan’s own adamant insistence that the placement of them in the title was improper.

Jin’s edition was the most widely printed, and his influence extended even to editions with which he had no involvement. Yet how influential was the content of his commentary upon readers of the Qing? One way to gauge the extent of its influence is to

¹ I base these numbers on Ma Tiji’s *Shuihu shulu*. 
look to *Shuihu zhuan* sequels. The writing of sequels is a means of answering a book; the author of a sequel appropriates the book’s own themes and tropes as a way to intervene in its discourse.\(^2\)

The influence of Jin’s work on the *Shuihu zhuan* extended beyond these titling practices for subsequent editions or publishers’ preferences for the seventy-chapter version over other recensions. The content of his commentary held influence over readers as well, shifting readings toward his discourse on character. This can be seen in both the subsequent commentary of Wang Wangru 王望如 and in Qing-era sequels to the *Shuihu zhuan*.

The Wang Wangru commentary edition is the sole “original” commentary edition to appear in the Qing. It is, in fact, the Jin Shengtan edition with new material by Wang Wangru appended to it: Each chapter features Jin’s remarks at the beginning and interlinear commentary throughout, and Wang Wangru’s commentary at the end. Additionally, there is one new preface and one essay of “general remarks (zonglun 總論)” on the novel preceding Jin’s prefatorial materials. Wang Wangru’s message is, overall speaking, compatible with Jin’s and presented as reinforcing the earlier commentary. Furthermore, Wang presents the *Shuihu zhuan* as being based on outrage at the abuses of an age and as being grounded in the same sort of Confucian discourse as Jin had presented it. The preface, dated winter 1657, reads:

> The seventy-chapter book *Shuihu zhuan* is the arrayed biographies (*liezhuan*) of 108 men. Some say is was written by Shi Nai’an of the Eastern Capital and some say it was authored by Luo Guanzhong, a man of Yue, but none of this can be known. Whatever the

\(^2\) For a discussion of the writing of a sequel as a means to “correct” readings of a novel, see Siao-chen Hu, “In the Name of Correctness: Ding Yaokang’s *Xu Jin Ping Mei* as a Reading of *Jin Ping Mei,*” in Huang, ed., *Snakes’ Legs.*
Case may be, its acts of plundering and killing in the forest were edited together to serve as a warning. Its original meaning can be described thusly: “These 108, are they not the deviant ministers and rebels of the Song Dynasty? Were they born in the age of Yao and Shun, when land was ordered by the well-field system and local schools abounded, all of them could have been the eyes, ears, arms, and legs of their rulers, driving off threats to the realm. But unfortunately, they were born into the reign of Huizong. Some compelled by hunger and cold and some forced by edict, one by one they all became bandits.” The author’s intention was not to blame those on the bottom but to blame those on the top. While his wording explores the extremes and is full of bitter contempt for the characters, his heart feels compassion and maintains sympathy for them despite their crimes. This is, after all, a book concerned with the mores of the times—a far cry from those unofficial histories that encourage wantonness and direct readers’ desires. It is noticed that recently, the “Classics and Books” section of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Analysis of Documents, the Shuihu zhuan is listed, and “Zhong yi (Loyal and Righteous)” is added to the title. This cannot be allowed to be heard by neighboring states. It might be asked, if these 108, who start with plundering and move on to murder, who by the law of the sovereign should be executed and who by Heavenly principles deserve no quarter, are what we call “loyal and righteous,” then what is to stop the entire population from becoming bandits?

《水浒》一書七十回，為一百八人作列傳，或謂東都施耐庵所著，或謂越人羅貫中所作，皆不可知，要不過編輯緣林之劫殺以示戒也。原其意，蓋曰：之百八人者，非宋朝之亂臣賊子耶？苟生堯舜之世，井田學校，各有其方，皆可為耳目股肱，奔走御侮之具，不率生微末時，或迫飢寒，或遇廣令，遂相率而為盗耳。作者之旨，不責下而責上，其詞蓋探絕而痛惡之，其心則悲憤而矜疑之。亦有關世道之書，與宜奮勵欲諸裨史異也。近見《續文獻通考·經籍志》中，亦列《水浒》，且以“忠義”命之，又不可使聞於鄰國。試問此百八人者，始而奪貨，繼而殺人，為王法所必誅，為天理所不貸，所謂“忠義”者如是，天下之人不盡為盗不止？

How could that be what the author meant! Jin Shengtan of Suzhou put the title right, listing it as “The Fifth Book of Genius” for its finely crafted prose. However, he did not fully explain all of the pains that the author took in making this warning, so I have supplemented that which escaped him. I say: The 108 of the Shuihu are not loyal and righteous, though they had the potential to be so.” This is by the same principle that Mencius using Confucius’s statement that people are by nature alike and extending it to found the notion that human nature is benevolent.

The general remarks that follow are along much the same lines, and also include an admonition against simplistic readings of the Mount Liang band as unambiguously representing loyalty and righteousness. The reader is told to weigh Jin Shengtan’s critique carefully:

Latter-day meddlers added the words “Loyal and Righteous” to the title. With deep hatred of the rich and powerful who suck the marrow from people’s bones and wrest away their money, they came up with this reading to release their rage. Moreover, with
their words they make bandits and thieves into protective talismans. I say that this cannot be allowed to be overheard by neighboring states! In complete sincerity, this cannot be allowed to be overheard by neighboring states! Read Jin Shengtan’s critiques carefully: the book starts and ends with the words “Peace under Heaven.” It starts with a stone tablet releasing demons and ends with a stone tablet capturing them. This reflects the presence of the author throughout. Li Kui is held up as virtuous, and only Song Jiang is guilty of crimes. He is blamed for letting Chao Gai free, and for plotting to take Chai Gai’s place. The moral of the work is profound and the writing is refined. But what I admire the most is the use of the nightmare as an ending that causes bandits and thieves to tremble.

In a handful of the chapter-closing comments, Wang makes specific reference to Jin Shengtan’s comments.3 He also draws upon the same passages from the *Great Learning* that Jin had. In the note for chapter 35, Wang writes:

Jin Shengtan said that Song Jiang acts true throughout but is actually false throughout, and that he puts on an act of utmost sincerity throughout but is actually treacherous throughout. I say: this “true throughout” and “false throughout,” “utmost sincerity throughout” and “treacherous throughout,” where does one see them? They are seen in the internal sincerity manifested externally, as explained in the *Great Learning*.

Wang’s comments never reach the level of sophistication that Jin’s do. They do not display the attention to the subtle interplay of writing technique and character found in Jin’s and explored in the previous chapter of this dissertation. However it can be seen that Wang has followed some of the paths opened by Jin and shares Jin’s concern with the values represented by the novel’s characters.

Also following along Jin’s paths was Yu Wanchun 余萬春 (1794-1849), the author of a sequel to the *Shuihu zhuan* called *Record of the Elimination of the Bandits* (*Dang kou zhi* 蕩寇志) or *Terminating the Water Margin* (*Jie Shuihu zhuan* 結水滸傳). This novel picks up where Jin Shengtan’s seventy-chapter edition leaves off, and is

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3 Specifically, see Wang’s comments for chapters 14, 17, 35, 37, 42, and 64.
structured as a mirror image of Jin’s: It contains seventy chapters, numbered from seventy-one to 140, and whereas the Jin edition opens with a “prologue” or “opener” (xiezi 契子), *Elimination of the Bandits* ends with a “termination (jiezi 結子).” As David Der-wei Wang has pointed out, Yu sought not only to “terminate” the original *Shuihu zhuan* novel’s story by bringing it to a conclusion, he also sought to “terminate” the *Shuihu zhuan* literary tradition. In the preface and the ending to his novel, Yu rails both against the sequel *Shuihu hou zhuan*, in which surviving members of the Mount Liang band escape to a fictionalized Siam and create a utopian land, and against longer versions of the *Shuihu zhuan* itself that include the band’s surrender and campaigns on behalf of the Song emperor. However, it should be kept in mind that in doing so, Yu presents himself as following Jin Shengtan’s vision of the novel and, like Wang Wangru before him, reinforcing what he sees as a proper reading of the proper edition. But rather than using the commentary medium as a channel to express this agenda, he chose to write a sequel. He explains his reasoning in the preface:

*This book is called Elimination of the Bandits. Why, you may ask, was it written? It is because Shi Nai’an’s *Shuihu zhuan* did not portray Song Jiang as loyal and righteous. One only needs to look to his writing: There is not a single character that does not describe Song Jiang as treacherous. Where it calls him loyal and righteous is only the mouthing of the words. He is at heart a bandit, and so the words only show his treachery that much more. Jin Shengtan’s commentary explains this point very clearly: Where is the loyalty? Where is the righteousness? In so many words, one who is “loyal and righteous” could certainly not be a bandit, and a bandit could certainly not be considered “loyal and righteous.” But then came along Luo Guanzhong with his “Latter *Shuihu zhuan*,” saying that Song Jiang was truly loyal and truly righteous. Since that time, all those in the world who would be bandits took after the example of Song Jiang: In their mouths were the words “loyalty and righteousness,” but in their hearts they were bandits.*

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4 See Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*, pp. 125-137. See also Yang, “Growing from the Waist,” in Huang, ed., *Snake’s Legs.*

5 Yu seems here to be deliberately conflating the *Shuihu* sequel *Shuihu hou zhuan* and the portion of the *Shuihu zhuan* excised by Jin Shengtan under the pretense that it was added by Luo Guanzhong.
Murder and arson were acts of “loyalty and righteousness,” burglary and larceny were acts of “loyalty and righteousness.” Assassination and kidnapping, the sacking of cities and the plundering of towns were all acts of “loyalty and righteousness.” Imagine it, reader, what kind of talk is this? It truly is pernicious and decadent words that damage people’s hearts and bring about untold harm. If books like this are permitted to exist in the world, what will become of it? Don’t say that books of fiction and light reading are unimportant—it must be known that the more “fictional” and “light” a book is, the faster it circulates. In teahouses and wine shops, by lamplight or moonlight, everyone loves to discuss them. This book of Luo’s has already been put into circulation and is impossible to ban. Since in actuality Song Jiang never surrendered or quelled Fang La but was captured and brought to justice by Zhang Shuye, Luo has fabricated lies and covered up the truth. Why should I not, then, bring out the truth, smash his lies, make the world differentiate clearly between bandits and the loyal and righteous, and not tolerate a hair of falsity? Moreover, I was directed by a spirit of truth in a dream, so it is that much more difficult to put down the pen and ink under the lamplight. Readers must know that this book concludes Shi Nai’an’s “Former Shuihu” and has nothing to do with the Latter Shuihu whatsoever. Now that I have established my intentions, please turn to the main text.

The final chapter of the sequel, the “Termination,” mirrors Jin’s prologue, with the spirits of the Mount Liang band becoming subdued by a stone tablet. Free of their pernicious influence, the valley where the stone tablet is located is now renamed from “Uneven Valley (Buping gu 不平谷) to “Valley of Great Peace (Taiping gu 太平谷),” an echo of the words used by Jin to open and close the novel, Tianxia taiping 天下太平. The story ends with an old Daoist woman, who ends up promising to have Yu Wanchun, the real-life author, write the book Elimination of the Bandits, and Yu himself once again explains that he has attempted to restore the correct understanding of the book and its attitudes toward loyalty and righteousness. He again invokes the names of Shi Nai’an and Jin
On the other hand, sequels that follow from the 100- or 120-chapter editions—that is, the non-Jin editions—of the *Shuihu zhuan*, treat the death of the band as tragic. The early-Qing *Hou Shuihu zhuan*, for example, opens with the *Shuihu* character Yan Qing roaming the earth. He comes across the dilapidated remains of the Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness and the graves of Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, and swears to avenge them. The action then shifts to another, new bandit, Yang Yao 楊昘. The *Shuihu hou zhuan*, mentioned above, has the remnants of the Mount Liang band rise from the ashes after retreating to Siam.\(^6\)

The legacy of the Jin Shengtan edition of the *Shuihu zhuan*, which is reflected in those who followed him, was a discursive turn away from the level of the mimetic action of the novel’s plot and toward issues of character and values represented through the plot and the craft of the writing. The interventions into the novel at the level of these issues frequently employ the language of the Confucian classics in their attacks on what they portray as simplistic, superficial misreadings of the novel. Yet at the same time, those supposed misreadings, in which Song Jiang and the band are epitomes of loyalty and righteousness to be emulated, also have their precedents in the prefaces and commentaries of Yu Xiangdou and the “Li Zhi” of the Rongyu tang edition. Judging by the number of editions printed in the Qing, the Jin Shengtan edition had won out, yet the insistence of followers like Wang Wangru and Yu Wanchun suggests that the mimetic reading of the *Shuihu zhuan* was persistent enough for them to perceive it as a threat.

\(^6\) On the *Shuihu hou zhuan*, see Widmer, *Margins of Utopia*. 

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All of those editions, from Yu Xiangdou’s to Wang Wangru’s, and the answers to them in the form of sequels such as *Elimination of the Bandits*, were products of commercial publishing. The audiences targeted by commercial publishers, segmented as they were, were receptive to this range of discursive understandings, even among editions of a single work.

Yet, as I have shown in the first two chapters of this dissertation, the *Shuihu zhuan* did not begin its life as a commercial product. Rather, the *Shuihu zhuan* phenomenon began at the political center of the dynasty. It was the product of the Censorate and the family of Guo Xun, elite institutions with ties to the Jiajing court. Moreover, the orbits of these two institutions intersected: It will be recalled, for example, that Wang Tingxiang was a Censor in Chief whose own collected works were published by the Censorate and who worked closely with Guo Xun, and that the circles around Li Mengyang—whom, as Li Kaixian remarked, were early admirers of the *Shuihu zhuan*—had connections to both as well. With figures such as Guo Xun and Li Kaixian represented, these orbits encompassed both the civil and the martial. At the same time, that is not to say that the publications of these official and private institutions bore no similarities whatsoever to those of the commercial sphere. The overlap of their outputs with that of the commercial publisher Jintai Wang Liang demonstrates that they had similarities with the higher end of Beijing commercial publishing in the early years of the Jiajing era. The inclusion of arias from the high-quality commercially printed 1498 edition of the *Record of the Western Chamber* in Guo Xun’s edition of *Ballads of Everlasting Peace* suggests as much as well.
Those earliest editions, it can be assumed, were luxury products intended for consumption within those elite circles and valued for the craft of both their writing and their printing. How then had the *Shuihu zhuan*—and vernacular fiction—transitioned from that environment to the commercial publishing world of the late sixteenth century and later?

In essence, the *Shuihu zhuan*, along with the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the *Record of the Heroes*, discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, were the first of their kind, the genre that would later come to be called the vernacular novel. Borne of these circles in the first half of the sixteenth century, they inspired other narrative creations based on collated historical materials. The publisher Xiong Damu 蕭大木 (fl. 1553) in particular created vernacularized accounts of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties in the mid-sixteenth century. The modern scholar Chen Dakang has theorized that Xiong Damu sought to emulate the success of the earlier three and edited “new” works together from previously extant sources, in what Chen has termed the “Xiong Damu mode” of literary production. Chen only blames the relative artistic failure of Xiong Damu’s works in comparison to the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, if not the *Record of the Heroes*, on the shorter period of time their narratives had to coalesce. In addition to Xiong Damu, there was also Yu Shaoyu 余邵魚, an uncle of Yu Xiangdou, who was credited with creating a vernacularized version of the *Traditions of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳) titled *Record of the Arrayed States* (*Lieguo zhizhuan* 列國志傳).

Those works created by the likes of Xiong Damu and Yu Shaoyu, the products of

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the so-called Xiong Damu mode of production, continued to be transformed through editing and rewriting. Xiong’s 1553 *Popularized Edition of the Restoration of the Great Song* (*Da Song zhongxing tongsu yanyi* 大宋中興通俗演義), for example, emerged from waves of editing and rewriting as Qian Cai’s 錢彩 Qing-era novel *The Complete Tale of General Yue Fei* (*Shuo Yue quanzhuan* 說岳全傳). Similarly, Yu Shaoyu’s *Record of the Arrayed States* would be revised by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 and turned into *A New Record of the Arrayed States* (*Xin Lieguo zhi* 新列國志), then again by Cai Yuanfang 蔡元放 and turned into *A Record of the Arrayed States of the Eastern Zhou* (*Dong Zhou Lieguo zhi* 東周列國志). *The Record of the Heroes* would also be subjected to revisions credited to Xu Wei 徐渭.

Thus, the *Shuihu zhuan* found itself in new literary surroundings: commercial vernacular fiction. And as these other titles were in flux, so was the *Shuihu zhuan*. Through the commercial printers, the *Shuihu zhuan* accumulated the sort of prefaces and commentaries seen above—a transformation that took place literally in the margins of the page and the society. As a forerunner of a nascent genre, it had not always been found among such titles of vernacular fiction, however. In the earliest period, it was to be found on lists of publications alongside art-song collections, literary anthologies, musical instrument handbooks, and other such accoutrements of a particular lifestyle. The commonality that brought those books together was not literary genre but genre of function. Now, recast by commercial publishers, it opened a space for the sort of discourse we have seen above. Its themes were appropriated into positions within that discourse, and the end result was disseminated through the field of commercial
publishing. The discursive space also influenced the reception and creation of other novels as the commentarial practice spread.

The *Shuihu zhuan* had moved from the center to the margins, transformed in the process by commercial editor-commentators. Their reshaping of the novel gave rise to a space for discourse that was filled with colorful debate. This multiplicity of voices was obscured by modern editions, beginning with that of the Oriental Book Company that appeared in 1921. The commentary was stripped away under the notion that typesetting and Western-style punctuation obviated the need for the explication of traditional commentators. Yet the solitary voice of the novel itself those editions sought to preserve had never truly existed, and the result was a *Shuihu zhuan* rather different than the ones that had been read before. It remained in the context of vernacular fiction in which it had found itself in the course of its transformation, with its margins now cleared of commentarial voices. The same forces in the twentieth century that had erased the commentary tradition also brought this genre into the study of Chinese literature. There, transformed, it was once again at the center.
Appendix: Jin Shengtan’s Introductory Commentary for Chapter 42

(Translation note: In this introductory commentary, Jin makes several references to the classical canon. I have placed these in quotation marks and added citations in order to make them stand out. The references are, of course, unmarked in Jin’s original. Most notable are the references from the Da Xue 大學 and the Zhong Yong 中庸. I cite Plaks’ translation of these where.)

The False Li Kui Holds Up Travelers on the Highway
The Black Whirlwind Kills Four Tigers on Yiling Heights
假李逵剪徑劫單人
黑旋風沂嶺殺四虎

Much time has passed since Confucius left this world and the art “subtle phrasing” was lost, and the world no longer takes pains to understand the meaning of the singular thread of fidelity (zhong 忠) and empathy (shu 恕) that ran through his teachings. Regarding that, the definition of “fidelity” (忠) is a centered (中) heart (心) and the definition of “empathy” (恕) is being of like (如) heart (心):

The definition of “filiality” is seeing one’s father and knowing love;

The definition of “respect” is seeing one’s ruler and knowing love.
Now, filiality and respect arise from a centered heart and spontaneously extend themselves outward without one making any conscious effort:

“Like detesting a detestable smell, like being attracted to an attractive form,” (Da Xue 6)

“One attains it without deliberation, one arrives at it without laboring.” (Zhong Yong 22)

“This is called self-contentment.” (Da Xue 3) Sages are self-content, and the foolish are also self-content. Noble people feel self-content when they do good, and petty people feel self-content when they do that which is not good. Those who feel self-content by doing that which is not good may try to “hide it in disgust,” but in the end they are “seen through as if to their very lungs and liver.” (Da Xue 3) It follows that, whatever one’s intention may be, there is always an authenticity (cheng 誠) to it.

Just as goodness is authentic internally and manifested externally, so too is the opposite of good authentic internally and manifested externally. Even in cases where one experiences good and its opposite without discerning them, in the same immediate way one detests a detestable smell and is attracted to an attractive form, one still has internal sincerity that manifests externally. There is never a single person, act, or moment in which internal sincerity is not manifested externally.
Thus it is said, “Proceeding from sincerity to understanding is attributable to innate predisposition.” (Zhong Yong 23) The phrase “innate predisposition” means “original circumstance.” The words “original circumstance” mean “self-suchness.” The word “self-suchness” means “decreed by Heaven.” Sagehood is decreed by Heaven, so there is no single person who is not a sage. Ultimate sincerity is decreed by Heaven, so there is nothing, whether good or the opposite of good, that is not authentic. “By innate predisposition, people are close; by practice, people are far apart.” (Analects 17:2) Whether one is good or not good is a consequence of practice. That nothing, good or not good, is not authentic internally and manifested externally is innate predisposition. There is the line “Only the highest wisdom and the basest foolishness does not budge” (Analects 17:3): Even though one is a sage, he has the qualities of a fool; even though one is a fool, he has the qualities of a sage.

善亦誠於中形於外，不善亦誠於中形於外。不思善不思惡若惡惡臭好好色之微，亦無不誠於中形於外。蓋天下無有一人無有一事無有一刻不誠於中形於外也者。故曰，自誠明，謂之性。性之為言故也，故之為言自然也，自然之為言天命也。天命聖人，則無一人而非聖人也。天命至誠，則無善無不善而非至誠也。性相近也，習相遠也。善不善其習也，善不善無不誠於中形於外其性也。唯上智與下愚不移者，雖聖人亦有下愚之德，雖愚人亦有上智之德。

In “detesting a detestable smell” or “being attracted to an attractive form,” it is not only the fool who does not reach a realization of it. Even a sage would not realize it. This is the virtue of the basest foolishness. In “detesting a detestable smell” or “being attracted to an attractive form,” or even in doing good or doing the opposite of good, nothing is not authentic internally and
manifested externally; nothing is added by the sage and nothing is lost on the fool. This is the virtue of the highest wisdom. Why not have joy? Why not have anger? Why not have grief? Why not have pleasure? One need not be a sage to be able to feel joy, anger, grief, and pleasure. Common people are able to feel them, newborn children are able to feel them, and even birds and insects are able to feel them. This principle is what is known as the Way. “What we take to be ‘the Way’ does not admit the slightest separation therefrom, even for an instant.” (Zhong Yong 1, Plaks, p. 25) “The Way” is precisely what is called “one’s individual core (獨)”; “Not admitting the slightest separation even for an instant” is precisely what is called “paying heed (慎).”

What is called one’s individual core? By being authentic internally and manifested externally, a feeling of joy is a singular joy that fills the entire world, a feeling of anger is a singular anger that fills the entire world, a feeling of grief or pleasure is a singular grief or pleasure that fills the entire world. Moreover, there is no second thought standing at the ready as a back-up. What is called paying heed? This is “instruction in cultivating the Way.” (Zhong Yong 1, Plaks, p. 25) The word “instruction” means reaching sincerity by proceeding from understanding. (Zhong Yong 23) If one always realizes when one’s conduct is not good and, having realized it, does not
repeat it, then one is close to this ideal: he dares not “cover up his ungood deeds or publicize his
good deeds.” (Da Xue 3) Why? He detests that there is nothing to gain by doing so. Realizing
ungood behavior and not repeating it, he “chooses the Practice of the Mean and, upon attaining a
modicum of goodness, earnestly embraces it to be sure to never lose it.” (Zhong yong 8)

Whether the man of noble character despises the ungood in such-and-such a way or loves the
good in such-and-such a way, if he acts in accordance with the Way by loving the good and
despising the ungood, he will surely give up halfway: It is not by learning that one arrives at the
principles of sagehood.

The reason why a man of noble character who desires to achieve complete sincerity in his
consciousness must start by choosing good and then steadfastly hold onto it is because after he
does good, something seems lost and after he does something not good, something seems
gained. If it seems that something is gained, he can’t help but hide it in shame. If it seems that
something is lost, he might feel remorse for his lack. The sages realized that the impulse to cover
up a deed is difficult to control, and can’t compete with the ease of taking the situation in a
shameless manner, letting “the heart wax in breadth as the body grows sleek.” (Da Xue, 3, Plaks,
p. 11) For this reason, their earnest instructions for future generations on choosing good began with what is called “paying heed to one’s individual core” rather than the “good” of the “stopping at perfected good” in the Highest Order of Cultivation (Da Xue). “Choose the Practice of the Mean and, upon attaining a modicum of goodness, earnestly commit it to heart to be sure to never lose it” (Zhong yong 8): Once one is able to be like this, then one can be said to pay heed to one’s core. One pays heed to one’s core and knows that proceeding from the origin is the core. It is not only petty men who conceal their actions who are lacking a core; there are sometimes men of noble character who pay heed but not from the core.

By this accord, one begins with choosing, one then pays heed, and one concludes by unifying his efforts to pay heed and not paying heed again. At this point, joy, anger, grief, and pleasure “are attained without deliberation, arrived at without laboring” (Zhong Yong 22) “as detesting a detestable smell, as being attracted to an attractive form.” (Da Xue 3) One “strikes the mean with absolute effortlessness. This is to be a sage.” (Zhong yong 22, Plaks, p. 42) This process is what is known as “stopping at perfected good.” The reason it is not “arriving at perfected good” but “stopping at perfected good” is that perfected good is close by, not faraway. If one wanted to
“arrive” at perfected good, then that would mean that the Way was manmade and those who were faraway were unable to make the Way. This is why it is said “The worthies and the wise surpass it,” (Zhong Yong 4); since they desire to “arrive” at perfected good, they surpass it. If “the foolish and the unworthy do not reach it,” (Zhong Yong 4) then it is because they do not know how to choose good and pay heed to their cores, so they do not reach it. These then fall into the same category as those who are unable to fathom the practice of the great Way—what difference is there?

於是始而擇，既而慎，終而弁慎亦不復慎。當是時，喜怒衰樂，不思而得，不勉而中，如惡惡臭，如好好好色，從容中道，聖人也，如是謂之止於至善。不曰至於至善，而曰止於至善者，至善在近不在遠，若欲至於至善，則是人之為道，而遠人不可以為道也。故曰賢智過之，為其欲至至善，故過之也。若愚不肖之不及，則為其不知擇善慎獨，故不及耳。然其同歸不能明行大道，豈有異哉。

In the case of “stopping” at perfected good, “Shangdi bestowed correctness to the people” (Shang shu, Tang Hao 1) and none are lacking perfected good. None lack perfected good, so “stopping” is fitting. It is not only men of petty character who do ungood who do not stop; that man of noble character who does good also does not stop. It is not only doing good or doing ungood that is not stopping; that man of noble character still might not stop in his paying heed to the core. When a person authentically understands this, then he is able to know stopping. Knowing stopping is not only being able to know to stop when one arrives at goodness. One is also able to realize not stopping follows non-not-stopping. When one authentically understands not stopping follows non-not-stopping, and understands bright virtue, then one is even less
confused. Then one can settle, and with comprehension expanded, then one’s consciousness achieves sincerity. Then one can achieve stability, and with consciousness achieving sincerity, then one’s mind is set straight. Then one can achieve a state of quietude, and with the mind set straight, one can cultivate one’s person. Then one can deliberate, and with one’s person cultivated, then one’s house is put in order, orderly rule is established in one’s kingdom, and peace is achieved under heaven. Then one can attain, and with one’s house put in order, orderly rule established in one’s kingdom, and peace achieved under heaven, then one can completely fathom the volume of virtue. This is why the word “virtue” (德) is “attain” (德). [[weaving back and forth between the two causal chains in Da Xue 1 and 2]]

Thus one begins with understanding and ends with bright virtue, and setting one’s mind straight, cultivating one’s self, putting one’s house into order, establishing orderly rule within one’s kingdom, and bringing peace to all under heaven—none of these are left out in this process. For this reason it is said, “understanding then sincerity.” (Zhong Yong 23) “None but those who have attained the highest degree of sincerity in the entire world” are able to “partake in the transformative and generative processes of Heaven and Earth.” (Zhong Yong 23) Oh! This, then,
is the principle of “fidelity” of which Confucius the ancient one spoke. Now, the word “fidelity” means a centered heart. When “joy, anger, grief, and pleasure have yet to emerge” (Zhong Yong 1), this is called “centered.” When they emerge and are manifested as “joy, anger, grief, and pleasure in balance and due proportion” (Zhong Yong 1), this is called “heart.” The phenomena that are of themselves authentic internally and manifested externally as the joy, anger, grief, and pleasure that command one’s self are called “fidelity.” Realizing that all people in one’s family, one’s kingdom, and under Heaven are commanded by joy, anger, grief, and pleasure that are of themselves integral internally and manifested externally is called empathy. Realizing that joy, anger, grief, and pleasure, in one’s self and in others, are in all cases of themselves authentic internally and manifested externally is called “extending to all things the correct conceptual grid.” When emotions of the self and others are all able to take their natural courses, take their places in the world, and generate all phenomena, this is called peace under Heaven.

夫始乎明，終乎明德，而正心修身齊家治國平天下，無不全舉如此。故曰明則誠矣。惟天下至誠，為能贊天地之化育也。嗚呼。是則孔子昔者之所謂忠之義也。蓋忠之為言中心之謂也，喜怒哀樂之未發謂之中，發而為喜怒哀樂之中節謂之心，率我之喜怒哀樂自然誠於中形於外謂之忠。知家國天下之人率其喜怒哀樂無不自然誠於中形於外謂之恕，知喜怒哀樂無我無人無不自然誠於中形於外謂之格物，能無我無人無不任其自然喜怒哀樂而天地以位萬物以育謂之天下平。

Master Zeng got it: fidelity is called the singular element, and empathy is called the thread running through. Zisi got it: “Fidelity” means “the Mean” and “empathy” means “the Practice.” This is why it is said, “Without factions and without bias, the Way of Kings is level and
smooth.” (Shang shu, Hong Fan 7) Oh! This is certainly the essential meaning that Confucius the ancient one established in the Spring and Autumn Annals and practiced in the Classic of Filiality. Scholars who came after obtained word of this and were, internally, able to order their natures and their sentiments to become sages and, externally, able to order their peoples and things to become assistants to kings. But, lamentably, no one has spoken of this for three thousand years. The foolish want to speak of it but dread or reject the teaching of “a life of withdrawal without regret” (Zhong Yong 11). Therefore it is on the contrary by reading subordinate works of unofficial history that one will occasionally encounter it. The current generation is not lacking in the resources of a great worthy or a secondary sage. I believe that it can be passed on with these words.

Of those who could express fidelity, there has never been one who did not possess empathy. Of those without empathy, there has never been one who could express fidelity. See how Song Jiang does not allow Li Kui to retrieve his mother and deduce that he must be unfilial toward his own father. This is proof that one who does not have empathy cannot express fidelity. See how Li Kui misses his mother with all his heart and deduce that he is a man who is inexhaustible in caring for his mother. This is proof that one who expresses fidelity is never without empathy.
Everywhere in this book, Song Jiang and Li Kui are cast as opposing types. The intention is to expose Song Jiang’s evil; this is certain and need not be discussed further. But could I lightly assign the two words “fidelity” and “empathy” to Li Kui? It is actually the case that “fidelity” and “empathy” are inborn qualities: an old man of eighty cannot obtain it but a year-old baby can. Saying that Li Kui possesses fidelity and empathy is really a deep expression of the ease with which those qualities are obtained, and not a sigh of admiration for Li Kui’s accomplishment of some difficult task.

Song Jiang retrieves his father and meets a goddess in a village; Li Kui retrieves his mother and meets a “demon” (Gui) in a village. This couplet is just too much in its magnificence!

Song Jiang retrieves his father with malicious intentions and meets a Mystic Lady; Li Kui retrieves his mother with innocent intentions and meets a white rabbit. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

1 The term jue dao can mean overwhelming in either admirability or hilarity. I translate it here as “just too much” in the colloquial sense of the phrase in an attempt to cover both senses, adding “magnificence” to fit the context. Juedao can also mean to faint from grief or to fall on the ground and die: an even more colloquial translation might be Holden Caulfield’s “It slays me.”
Song Jiang’s meeting with the Mystic Lady was a case of a villain playing tricks; Li Kui’s meeting with the white rabbit was a case of pure filiality reaching the heavens. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江遇玄女，是奸雄搧鬼。李逵遇白兎，是纯孝格天。此一联又絶倒。

Song Jiang met the goddess and received three Heavenly books; Li Kui met the demon and saw two axes. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江遇神，受三卷天书。李逵遇鬼，见两把板斧。此一联又絶倒。

Song Jiang brought the Heavenly books himself; Li Kui didn’t bring the axes himself. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江天书，定是自家带去。李逵板斧，不是自家带来。此一联又絶倒。

There is no truth at all to Song Jiang; suddenly there is a false Li Kui. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江到底無真，李逵忽然有假。此一聯又絕倒。

On his trip to retrieve his father, Song Jiang ate celestial dates; on his trip to retrieve his mother, Li Kui ate a demon’s flesh. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江取爺喫仙棗，李逵取娘喫鬼肉。此一聯又絕倒。
Song Jiang’s father couldn’t stand to see a living thief; Li Kui’s mother didn’t make it to see a dead tiger. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江爺不忍見活強盜，李逵娘不及見死大蟲。此一聯又絕倒。

Song Jiang’s father was unwilling to see his son act as a thief; Li Kui’s mother didn’t get to see her son act as an official. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江爺不願見子為盜，李逵娘不得見子為官。此一聯又絕倒。

When Song Jiang went to retrieve his father, he brought back three fake books; when Li Kui went to retrieve his mother, he brought back two real tigers. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江取爺，還時帶三卷假書。李逵取娘，還時帶兩箇真虎。此一聯又絕倒。

Song Jiang’s father was better off dead than alive; Li Kui’s mother was more worthy in death than in life. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江爺生不如死，李逵娘死賢於生。此一聯又絕倒。

Song Jiang’s brothers were also thieves; Li Kui’s brother was also a filial son. This couplet too is just too much in its magnificence!

宋江兄弟也做強盜，李逵阿哥亦是孝子。此一聯又絕倒。
Chapter 22, the story of Wu Song killing the tiger, can truly be said to be an event that is extremely difficult to follow. Then suddenly, in the story of Li Kui retrieving his mother, there is another part in which four tigers are killed in succession in a single night. It amazes with every sentence and changes style with every word. If Li Kui were to copy Wu Song in the slightest, Li Kui wouldn’t be able to do it. If Wu Song were to copy Li Kui in the slightest, Wu Song wouldn’t be able to do it. Each stirs up amazement in his own way and acts odd in his own way, marvelous and evocative. This is the ultimate peak of skillful writing.

二十二回写武松打虎一篇，真所谓极盛难继之事也。忽然于李逵取娘文中，又写出一夜连杀四虎一篇，句句出奇，字字换色。若要李逵学武松一毫，李逵不能。若要武松学李逵一毫，武松亦不敢。各自见奇作怪，出妙入神。笔墨之能，已于斯竭矣。
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