



Southern Capital: Staging Commerce in Seventeenth-Century Suzhou

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Southern Capital:
Staging Commerce in Seventeenth-Century Suzhou

A dissertation presented
by
Ariel Ilana Fox
to
The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
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Southern Capital: Staging Commerce in Seventeenth-Century Suzhou

Abstract

This dissertation explores the intersection of literary and economic imaginaries through an examination of the market as both theme and structure in late imperial drama. Theater played a crucial role in helping late imperial subjects make sense of the sweeping transformations that defined China's so-called silver century (1550–1650), a period of tremendous social volatility in which the intensification of the commercial economy that began in the Song was increasingly and acutely felt throughout the lower Yangzi region. The rapid expansion of mercantile capital, the integration of local economies into global trade networks, and the frequent fluctuations in the availability of currency had far-reaching implications for all aspects of late imperial society. While historians have exhaustively documented the flows of silver and coin, the fiscal mismanagement of the court, and the tax riots that convulsed the lower Yangzi region, less attention has been paid to the multifarious ways in which the commercialization of everyday life was experienced and understood.

At the core of my study are a group of playwrights active in mid-seventeenth century Suzhou whose plays map the moral and affective terrains of an increasingly commercialized society. Although these plays were widely read and performed throughout the Qing, they have been largely neglected in modern scholarship, due in part to their unconventional subject matter. In examining the work of the Suzhou playwrights, I am particularly concerned with how the imaginary world of the play self-consciously engages with the material conditions of its own performance. Looking at these plays not just as texts but also as performances that happened

within private halls, in temples, and on pleasure boats reveals the ways in which the stage was a site for the performance of commerce itself—both in the dramatization of buying and selling and in the buying and selling of this dramatization of buying and selling. It was precisely through these nested performances in which virtually every strata of society was implicated as producers and consumers that the abstractions of commerce were made legible and the imagination of new loci of power outside the state was made possible. This dissertation asks not only how money, merchants, and commerce were represented on stage, but also how drama itself—its material history, its performance contexts, its conventions and language—informed understandings of money, merchants, and commerce.

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My grandfather, Sidney Fox, passed away shortly after my defense. This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of his boundless curiosity and adventurous spirit.

Introduction

This dissertation examines the role that theater played in making sense of the sweeping transformations that defined China's so-called silver century (1550–1650), a period of tremendous social volatility in which the intensification of the commercial economy that began in the Song Dynasty was increasingly and acutely felt throughout the lower Yangzi region. The rapid expansion of mercantile capital, the integration of local economies into global trade networks, and the frequent fluctuations in the availability of currency had far-reaching implications for all aspects of late Ming and early Qing society, from the increasing monetization of the individual's obligations to the state to the reorganization of household labor. While historians have exhaustively documented the flows of silver and coin, the fiscal mismanagement of the court, and the tax riots that convulsed the lower Yangzi region, less attention has been paid to the multifarious ways in which the commercialization of everyday life was experienced and understood.

In this dissertation, I examine the concept of the “market” as both a theme and an underlying structure of late Ming and early Qing drama. By the end of the sixteenth century, theatrical experiences suffused the private and public spaces of everyday life: from the lavish playbooks perused in the scholar's study, to the frequent performances of household actors in elite residences and of traveling troupes in the markets and temples. The imaginative freight of theater and theatricality was no less pervasive, with literati embracing the notion of role-playing as both metaphor and mode of the self.¹ After the fall of the Ming, literati and commercial

¹ See Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 27–58; Shamin Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories: Identity, Performance, and Xu Wei's Four Cries of the Gibbon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 15–36.

authors increasingly turned to the stage as a space to experiment with new possibilities of feeling and meaning: to indulge in nostalgic remembrance, to restage war trauma, to examine the causes of dynastic collapse, to envision a differently constituted society.

At the core of my study are a group of playwrights active in mid-seventeenth century Suzhou whose plays map the moral and affective terrains of an increasingly commercialized society. Like most elite playwrights of this period, this group—which I will be calling the “Suzhou circle”²—produced *chuanqi* 傳奇 (southern drama) that were written to be performed as *kunqu* 崑曲 (Kun opera), which was the predominant mode of *chuanqi* performance among cultural elites in the seventeenth century and which originated in the Kunshan region outside of Suzhou. Though these plays were widely read and performed throughout the Qing Dynasty, they have been largely neglected in both Chinese and Western scholarship, due in part to their unconventional subject matter and departure from *chuanqi* conventions. While much of elite drama is concerned with the exploits of high officials and talented scholars, many of these plays instead center around the denizens of the marketplace, bringing to the fore those who are often pointedly excluded from the roles of romantic lead or Confucian exemplar. Indeed, a number of the *chuanqi* written by these playwrights are structured not around the romance of a young student and a beautiful girl, but around the twin figures of the merchant and his money.

The ways in which the Suzhou circle’s plays dramatize their ambivalences toward the changing economic landscape carve out a more ambiguous space in seventeenth-century discourse between the embrace of vigorous entrepreneurialism and the rejection of the ethos of the marketplace, and point to an engagement with the complicated relationship between the literatus-author and the systems of commerce in which he is enmeshed. This already fraught

² The controversy surrounding the use of the term “Suzhou School” (*Suzhou pai* 蘇州派) and my argument for referring to these playwrights as the “Suzhou circle” will be addressed below.

relationship was inflected with further significance after the fall of the Ming. Throughout the Jiangnan cultural sphere, the *chuanqi* drama functioned as a site on which to stage the communion of the present with the specter of history. Although the nostalgic remembering (or sober repudiation) of late Ming courtesan culture that characterizes early Qing *chuanqi* like *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (Peach blossom fan) is largely absent in the works of the Suzhou circle, stories of exemplary acts of loyalty during times of dynastic crisis receive an almost obsessive retelling. In deeply resonant stagings of the heroics of Yue Fei and the cowardice of Jia Sidao, of the usurped Zhu Yunwen's flight into the hinterland, and of the violence and disorder of the Sui-Tang transition, the trauma of the Ming fall is articulated and contextualized.

Though less overt than these depictions of an empire in crisis, the plays that are situated within local systems of commerce, depicting the petty transactions of everyday life through which the fortunes of commoners rise and fall, are also attempts to grapple with the meanings and possibilities of dynastic collapse. These plays about the market are fundamentally concerned with the fate of the state; indeed, the structure of *chuanqi*—in which scenes of private, domestic action are interspersed with events of national crisis—pulls seemingly disparate spheres into an intimate relation of metaphor and counter-point. Thus, the same themes that drive plays about barbarian invasions and court intrigues—the righteousness of usurpation and rebellion, the scope of imperial dominion—are here reimagined and complicated, as concepts such as the universal sovereignty of the ruler are challenged by the domestic dramas of the townspeople, merchants, and commoner families who populate these plays.

By reading plays across the Ming-Qing cataclysm, I hope to draw out a more complex picture of the changing social identities of mid-seventeenth century Jiangnan elites in places like Suzhou. Unlike the commonly accepted narrative of late Ming Jiangnan gentry as jealously

guarding their (moral, social, political) supremacy vis-à-vis subordinated cultural others,³ these playwrights depict (and themselves embody) a world where the cultural elite are allied with and at times indistinguishable from striking workers, plundering pirates, displaced farmers, indebted street-performers, and roving merchants. This shifting multitude of identities generated in part by the dynamic economic conditions of the mid-seventeenth century is not easily integrated into a state-sanctioned, center-oriented social totality. Indeed, at the center of many of these plays lies a crisis of sovereignty, in which the authority of the state is fundamentally challenged. Out of this vacuum emerge new possibilities for organizing the state and society—possibilities that were elsewhere being explicated by thinkers such as Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) and Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695).

In examining the work of the Suzhou circle, I am particularly concerned with how the imaginary world of the play self-consciously engages with the material conditions of its own performance. *Chuanqi* are almost invariably structured around the circulation of an object like a fan or hairpin for which the play is named and through which the narrative's social relations are generated and sundered. This object that circulates across the stage is not just a symbol within a play, but also a physical prop that gestures towards the business of theatrical entertainment itself: the troupes and stages for rent, the actors and costumes for purchase. Looking at these plays as not just texts but also performances that happened within private halls, in temples, and on pleasure boats reveals the ways in which the stage was a site for the performance of commerce itself—both in the dramatization of buying and selling and the buying and selling of this dramatization of buying and selling. It was precisely through these nested performances in which virtually every strata of society was implicated as producers and consumers that the abstractions

³ See, for example, Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 141–165.

of commerce were made manifest and legible. This project is therefore not just concerned with how money, merchants, and commerce were represented on stage, but also how drama itself—its material history, its performance contexts, its conventions and language—informed the understanding of money, merchants, and commerce.

Subjects and Scholars

This project responds to significant lacunae in the study of Chinese literature. While the history of global trade networks and bullion flows has been an integral part of the study of late imperial Chinese history, the place of this commerce in the literary tradition—how literary texts both generate and critique an economic imaginary—has been largely absent from scholarly work on fiction and drama. I hope this project will open new avenues of research in late imperial Chinese literature by demonstrating that the discourses through which scholars read late Ming and early Qing literature—for example, the valorization of sentiment and the theatrical self-fashioning of the literatus-author—cannot be understood outside of this changing relationship to and evolving understanding of money and markets.

While the literary imagination of value is under-theorized in the field of Chinese literature, the far bigger lacuna to which this dissertation responds has to do with the plays themselves. The plays produced by the Suzhou circle were widely read and performed in the seventeenth century and continued to circulate throughout the Qing in collections of famous arias and as popular performance pieces.⁴ While the popularity of *kunqu* as a performance genre was eclipsed by other emerging opera forms in the mid to late Qing, several of these plays were

⁴ For example, Andrea Goldman writes of the performance of scenes from Zhu Suchen's *Feicui yuan* 翡翠園 in Beijing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing 1770–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 145–174.

rewritten and incorporated into the repertoire of other opera traditions such as *jingju* 京劇 (Peking opera) and *chuanju* 川劇 (Sichuan opera).⁵ With the designation of *kunqu* as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001, there has been a resurgence of interest in *kunqu* performance; over the last decade, Suzhou circle plays have returned to the stage in increasing frequency.⁶

These plays, however, have not received significant attention in Chinese scholarship. Only two monographs have been published on the Suzhou circle: Kang Baocheng's *Suzhou jupai yanjiu* (Research on the Suzhou drama school) and Li Mei's *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu* (Research on the late Ming and early Qing Suzhou writers' group).⁷ Li Jialian's *Qing chu Suzhou juzuojia yanjiu* (Research on the early Qing Suzhou playwrights) includes discussions of these plays in her broader examination of early Qing Suzhou dramatists, and Zhou Qin and Gu Lingsen have both published books on the history of *kunqu* in Suzhou with sections on the Suzhou circle.⁸ These plays also make brief appearances in larger studies in the literary histories

⁵ For example, Qiu Yuan's *Dangren bei* 黨人碑 was rewritten as a *jingju* and Zhu Zuochao's *Xuanyuan jing* 軒轅境 was translated into *jingju*, *Qinqiang* 秦腔 (Shaanxi opera), and *puju* 蒲劇 (Shanxi Puzhou opera) forms. Zhu Suchen's *Shiwu guan* 十五貫 enjoyed a particularly busy afterlife in *chuanju*, *Qinqiang*, *chaoju* 潮劇 (Chaozhou opera), *yueju* 粵劇 (Cantonese opera), and *huaguxi* 花鼓戲 (Hubei flower drum opera) versions, as well as in a "reformed" *kunqu* edition produced in 1956.

⁶ For example, scenes from *Shiwu guan*, *Jubaopen* 聚寶盆 [Cornucopia], *Zhanhua kui* 占花魁 [Winning the prize courtesan], *Qingzhong pu* 清忠譜 [Register of the pure and loyal], *Yujia le* 漁家樂 [Happiness of fishermen], *Fengyun hui* 風雲會 [Gathering of wind and clouds], and *Yi peng xue* 一捧雪 [A fistful of snow] are currently in the repertoires of the Suzhou, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Beijing, and Taipei Kunqu Troupes.

⁷ Kang Baocheng 康保成, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu* 蘇州劇派研究 [Research on the Suzhou drama school] (Guangzhou: Huacheng 1993); Li Mei 李枚, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu* 明清之際蘇州作家群研究 [Research on the late Ming and early Qing Suzhou writers' group] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000).

⁸ Li Jialian 李佳蓮, "Qingchu Suzhou juzuojia yanjiu" 清初蘇州劇作家研究 [Research on the early Qing Suzhou playwrights], *Gudian wenxue yanjiu jikan* 古典文學研究輯刊 14 (2013). Zhou Qin 周秦,

of Wu Mei, Zheng Zhenduo, Guo Yingde and Sun Shulei.⁹ There are a few notable studies of Suzhou circle playwright Li Yu 李玉, such as Wu Xinlei's pioneering article on Li Yu¹⁰ and Yan Changke and Zhou Chuanjia's *Li Yu pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Li Yu).¹¹ While many of the plays attributed to Suzhou circle playwrights survive only in manuscript editions, critical editions of most of the extant plays attributed to Li Yu were published in the *Li Yu xiqu ji* (Collection of Li Yu's dramas), while *Shiwu guan* 十五貫 (Fifteen strings of cash) by Zhu Suchen 朱素臣 has been the focus of a number of critical studies, such as Wang Shide's *Shiwu guan yanjiu* (Research on Fifteen strings of cash).¹²

Suzhou kunqu 蘇州崑曲 [Suzhou Kun opera] (Suzhou: Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 2007); Gu Lingsen 顧聆森, *Kunqu yu renwen Suzhou* 崑曲與文人蘇州 [Kun opera and literati Suzhou] (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 2005).

⁹ Larger literary studies that include discussions of these playwrights include Wu Mei 吳梅, *Zhongguo xiqu gailun* 中國戲曲概論 [General discussion of Chinese drama] (Shanghai: Dadong shuju, 1926; rpt. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 199–207; Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi* 插圖本中國文學史 [Illustrated edition of the history of Chinese literature] (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 1957), 4:995–1024; Guo Yingde 郭英德, *Ming Qing chuanqi shi* 明清傳奇史 [History of Ming-Qing drama] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999), 410–447; Sun Shulei 孫書磊, *Ming mo Qing chu xiju yanjiu* 明末清初戲劇研究 [Research on late Ming and early Qing drama] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2007), 94–101.

¹⁰ Wu Xinlei 吳新雷, “Li Yu shengping, jiaoyou, zuopin kao” 李玉生平、交游、作品考 [A study of Li Yu's life, acquaintances, and work] (1961), *Wu Xinlei kunqu lunji* 吳新雷崑曲論集 [Wu Xinlei's collected essays on kunqu] (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2009), 53. This article was originally published in *Jianghai xuebao* 江海學報 [Jianghai journal] in 1961.

¹¹ Yan Changke 顏長珂 and Zhou Chuanjia 周傳家, *Li Yu pingzhuan* 李玉評傳 [Critical biography of Li Yu] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1985).

¹² In addition to *Shiwu guan* and the seventeen Li Yu plays included in the *Li Yu xiqu ji* 李玉戲曲集, *Feicui yuan* can also be found in a modern typeset edition. Wang Shide 王世德, *Shiwu guan yanjiu* 十五貫研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1981); Li Yu, *Li Yu xiqu ji* 李玉戲曲集 [Collection of dramas by Li Yu], eds. Chen Guyu 陳古虞, Chen Duo 陳多, and Ma Shenggui 馬聖貴 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004); Zhu Suchen, *Feicui yuan*, ed. Wang Yongkuan 王永寬 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988). Most Suzhou plays are not available in modern typeset editions, which both bespeaks the lack of scholarly interest in these texts and perhaps helps to explain this lack.

There is significantly less scholarship on these plays in English. There are no monographs that take as their focus the Suzhou circle playwrights (whether individually or as a group), though a few of these plays have been discussed in articles or broader studies of late imperial literature.¹³ The plays that have received the most attention in Western language scholarship are plays by Li Yu that explicitly depict recent historical trauma: the 1625–6 persecution of Donglin partisans by imperial eunuch Wei Zhongxian (*Qingzhong pu* 清忠譜 [Register of the pure and loyal]); the uprisings and large-scale destruction that precipitated the collapse of the Ming and followed in its wake (*Wanli yuan* 萬里圓 [Thousand-li reunion], *Liang xumei* [Two with beard and brow]).

This dissertation will attempt to move the field beyond the conceptual orientations that have characterized much of the modern Chinese- and English-language scholarship on the Suzhou circle. If earlier scholars seemed to allergic to the commercial contexts and content of Suzhou circle plays, in the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese-language scholarship frequently portrayed these plays as the highest expression of elite drama. These playwrights that were heretofore ignored or dismissed were now recuperated by Wei Mei as the inheritors of

¹³ Paize Keulemans discusses Li Yu's *Qingzhong pu* and *Wanli yuan* in "Onstage Rumor, Offstage Voices: The Politics of the Present in the Contemporary Opera of Li Yu," *Frontiers of Chinese History* 9.2 (2014), 165–201. Wai-yee Li discusses Li Yu's *Liang xumei* in *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); she also draws on several Suzhou plays in "Heroic Transformations: Women and National Trauma in Early Qing Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59.2 (1999), 363–443, and her "Introduction" to *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). As mentioned above, Andrea Goldman discusses late Qing productions of Zhu Suchen's *Feicui yuan* in Goldman, *Opera and the City*, 145–174. Tina Lu discusses *Qingzhong pu* and *Yi peng xue* in the first chapter of *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial China Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Tang Xianzu¹⁴ and praised by Zheng Zhenduo within the schema of waxing and waning that typified a certain kind of Chinese literary history writing:

Ming *chuanqi* drama from Liang Chenyu to Tang Xianzu, and from Tang Xianzu to Li Yu and the Zhu brothers, is truly ‘a long river from an obscure source,’ with every stage there is a notable improvement. Only with Chen Erbai, Li Liweng, and later playwrights do we notice the indications of a decline.

明傳奇從梁辰魚到湯顯祖，再從湯顯祖到李玉、朱氏兄弟，卻是源微而流長，一步步都有極顯著的進步，由陳二白、李漁諸人而後，才開始呈現了衰微。¹⁵

In the post-*gaige kaifang* 改革開放 (reform and opening up) era, the veneer of commercial workmanship effaced above has become a source of renewed interest. The so-called “progressiveness” or “proletarian character” of these plays has become a constant refrain of PRC scholars, who praise the Suzhou School authors for their supposed non-elite backgrounds and their sympathetic treatment of commoners.¹⁶ This reading serves in part to rescue the plays from the charge of conservatism often levied against those premodern texts that center around such themes as loyalty to one’s master (as opposed to those that champion *qing* 情 [sentiment] and thus can be read as a challenge to the rigid hierarchies of “feudal” society). Since many of these scholars are concerned primarily with situating these texts within the academic polemics of the

¹⁴ Li Yu’s *Yi peng xue*, *Ren shou guan* 人獸關 [Between man and beast], *Yong tuanyuan* 永團圓 [Eternal reunion], and *Zhan huakui* 占花魁 [Winning the prize courtesan] “follow in the footsteps of Fengchang [i.e. Tang Xianzu]” (追步奉常). Wu Mei, *Zhongguo xiqu gailun*, 199.

¹⁵ Zheng Zhenduo, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 1007–1008. This chapter does not appear in the earlier 1932 edition of the *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi*, which ends at chapter sixty (“Ruan Dacheng yu Li Yu” 阮大鍼與李玉 [Ruan Dacheng and Li Yu] is chapter sixty-four in the 1957 edition). All translations mine unless otherwise noted. I have added modern punctuation to this and subsequent primary texts.

¹⁶ Such an orientation can be seen in the works of Li Mei, Gu Lingsen, and Zhou Qin among others.

PRC, the content of this supposed progressiveness is rarely explored. When it is explored, attempts to parse the ideology of these plays are characterized by recourse to anachronistic social categories and a vulgarized historical determinism. These plays are said to reflect the late Ming transition from feudalism to capitalism;¹⁷ they depict the exploitation of the proletariat at the hands of the capitalists;¹⁸ they are characterized by “patriotic fervor” (愛國熱情)¹⁹ and are engaged with “the liberation of the individual” (個性解放).²⁰ The relation of literature and history is similarly vulgarized, with drama as the reflection of the ‘reality’ that playwrights “recorded in their plays” (錄入劇中).²¹

This dissertation will engage with this scholarship by attempting to parse and historically situate these depictions of merchants, shopkeepers, and factory workers while explicitly rejecting the determinism and polemics that color much modern scholarship on this topic and, more generally, the intersection of literature and commerce. Rejecting the vulgar readings of culture as the reflection or mystification of market relations and the schematic teleology that positions premodern literary history as a linear progression towards modernity (or as an abortive

¹⁷ Gu Lingsen 顾聆森, “Lun kunqu Suzhou pai” 論崑曲蘇州派 [A discussion of the Suzhou School of Kun opera], *Yishu baijia* 藝術百家 [The hundred schools of art] 1 (2011), 162–169. Gu subscribes to the theory that the Ming produced the “sprouts of capitalism” (資本主義萌芽). Li Mei frequently frames her analysis as the clash of “over two thousand years of feudal society” (兩千多年的封建社會) with an increasingly dominant commercial economy. Unlike Gu, however, Li still characterizes the late Ming and early Qing as a “feudal economy” (封建經濟), albeit one that was undergoing “a high degree of development” (高度發展). Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 69–70.

¹⁸ Gu Lingsen, “Lun kunqu Suzhou pai,” 165.

¹⁹ Zhou Qin, *Suzhou kunqu*, 94.

²⁰ Gu Lingsen, “Lun kunqu Suzhou pai,” 167.

²¹ Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 67.

alternative modernity), I will instead theorize a relationship between the theater and the market that is mutually constitutive, rather than causative.

My use of close readings is a departure from much of the Chinese-language scholarship on these plays. Even the longer monographs and dissertations, such as the work of Li Mei, Kang Baocheng, and Li Jialian, will often only mention recurrent and complex themes in the form of lists (the ten plays with heroic servants, the twelve plays with commoner leads, etc.). Attention to the shape of individual plays is neglected in these sweeping attempts to characterize what can be hundreds of plays. Unlike those studies, this dissertation does not aim to provide a comprehensive introduction to all of the plays and playwrights of the Suzhou circle. Rather, by focusing on five plays I hope to call attention to the subtle intricacy of these narratives that is so often elided in the process of categorizing and cataloging.

Furthermore, as none of the five plays that form the core of this dissertation have been the subject of any dedicated study in English, this dissertation aims to broaden the understanding of the Suzhou circle plays in Western scholarship by introducing a dimension that has been hitherto unexplored with the narrow focus on a handful of Li Yu's "contemporary" or "political" plays. Moreover, as none of the Suzhou circle plays have been translated into English, the summaries provided within will hopefully be of some service to literary scholars outside of the field of Chinese studies.²²

In approaching these plays, I will also address a number of more broad concerns central to the study of late imperial Chinese literature by drawing on the growing body of work on local

²² Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi as well as A.C. Scott produced translations of the 1956 rewriting of *Shiwu guan*. See Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi, *Fifteen Strings of Cash: A Kunchu Opera* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1957); A.C. Scott, *Traditional Chinese Plays, Volume Two* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967). The political context of this revision, as well as its various departures from the source text will be discussed in Chapter One.

identity in the seventeenth century and in Suzhou, the development of Wang Yangming thought, and the debates surrounding the standardization of late imperial culture. I will also be engaged with the concerns of performance studies in tracing the ways in which *kunqu*—with its different registers of language, use of role types, and various written and oral/aural circulations—tests the meanings of “elite” and “popular” culture. This project will also address the process by which narratives are translated across genres, as many of these plays are adapted from a range of fictional sources. The transformations of theme, character, and structure involved in the writing of full-length dramas highlight the unique limits and potentials of *chuanqi*.²³ By asking how the theater (and the performance of *chuanqi* drama specifically) can function as a laboratory for the new possibilities of feeling and meaning enabled by the economic, social, and affective phenomena that constitute “the market,” I hope this project will suggest new avenues of exploration in the study of the seventeenth-century literary imaginary.²⁴

Names and Places

The group of playwrights I will be discussing in this dissertation are generally referred to as the *Suzhou pai* 蘇州派 (Suzhou School). This is a modern designation—none of the writers discussed ever described themselves as a “*pai*” nor did they all explicitly identify themselves and their work with the city of Suzhou. Though Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, and Zhu Zuochao 朱佐朝 were

²³ For example, in rewriting a relatively short vernacular tale as a fifty-act play, some of the author’s myriad concerns include: injecting a range of voices and dramatic devices (from densely-allusive arias to innuendo-laden patter to clowning and acrobatics), creating balance between the male and female leads, providing roles for the various members of the *kunqu* troupe (*lao dan* 老旦 [old woman], *chou* 丑 [clown], *jing* 淨 [painted face], etc.), and recrafting the narrative so that it ends with a grand reunion scene. In reading the Suzhou plays, I am careful to disentangle the thematic innovations of the text from the generic conventions and structural demands of *chuanqi*.

²⁴ I will be drawing from, and am indebted to, the work of what has been called New Economic Criticism, though it should be noted that this body of work does not represent a unified theoretical orientation but rather encompasses a number of diverse approaches.

the subject of literary scholarship starting in the 1920s, the notion that there was some sort of literary school to which they belonged did not emerge until the late 1950s and early 1960s.²⁵ As the concept of a group centered around Li Yu was one that had no prior historical antecedents, there was little consensus on what this group should be called. The earliest references note the formation of a “playwright circle” (編劇集團) or “artistic school” (藝術流派) or “writers’ group” (作家群), though the nature of what constitutes a circle, school, or group remained ill-defined.²⁶ Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, scholarship on these playwrights increasingly referenced a group of playwrights centered around Suzhou. Wu Xinlei, one of the first scholars to identify commonalities across these playwrights in the 1960s, coined the term *Suzhou pai* in 1981.²⁷

Who should be counted as a member of this *pai* has been the subject of much debate. While the earliest modern scholarship centered around the affinities (literary, social, and familial) between Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, and Zhu Zuochao, in 1957, Zheng Zhenduo proffered a list of the “most well-known of the Suzhou playwrights” (蘇州的戲曲家中最有聲者為). These playwrights were Li Yu (*zi* 字 [courtesy name]: Xuanyu 玄玉 and Yuanyu 元玉), Zhu He 朱雱

²⁵ For an overview of modern scholarship on the Suzhou School, see Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 6–10.

²⁶ See, for example, Zhou Yibai 周貽白, *Zhongguo xiju shi changbian* 中國戲劇史長編 [Preliminary history of Chinese drama] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1960), 396.

²⁷ Wu Xinlei, “Lun Suzhou pai xiqu dajia Li Yu” 論蘇州派戲曲大家李玉 [On the Suzhou School master playwright Li Yu] (1981) in *Zhongguo xiqu shilun* (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 175. This article was originally published in *Beifang luncong* 北方論叢 [The northern forum] in 1981. As Li Mei points out, Su Ning 蘇寧 first uses the term *Suzhou jupai* 蘇州劇派 the previous year. Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 9 n.3.

(Suchen),²⁸ Zhu Zuochao (Liangqing 良卿), Zhang Dafu 張大復 (Xinqi 心其),²⁹ Ye Shizhang 葉時章 (Zhifei 雉斐), Bi Wei 畢魏 (Wanhou 萬後), Zhu Yuncong 朱雲從 (Jifei 際飛), Chen Erbai 陳二白 (Yuling 于令), and Xue Dan 薛旦 (Jiyang 既揚).³⁰ Wu Xinlei in his 1961 essay “Li Yu shengping, jiaoyou, zuopin kao” adds Sheng Jishi 盛際時 (Changqi 昌期), Chen Ziyu 陳子玉 (Xifu 希甫), Guo Mengqi 過孟起 (Yizhi 繹之), and Sheng Guoqi 盛國琦³¹ “among others” to the core group of Suzhou playwrights.³²

Attempts to compile exhaustive lists of the Suzhou School playwrights have produced varied results, from Kang Baocheng’s twelve members (Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, Zhu Zuochao, Bi Wei, Ye Shizhang, Sheng Jishi, Zhu Yuncong, Guo Mengqi, Sheng Guoqi, Chen Erbai, Zou Yuqing 鄒玉卿 [Kunpu 昆圃], and Qiu Yuan 邱園 [Yuxue 嶼雪]) to Li Mei’s sixteen (same as Kang’s, with Sheng Guoqi and Guo Mengqi omitted and with the addition of Zhang Dafu, Xue Dan, Liu Fang 劉方 [Jinchong 晉充], Ma Jiren 馬佺人 [亘生], Chen Ziyu, and Wang Xugu 王續古 [Xiangyi 香裔]), to Zhou and Yan’s list of twenty three (including all of the playwrights mentioned by Kang Baocheng and Li Mei and with the addition of Zhu Ying 朱英, Zheng

²⁸ Zhu Suchen’s name (*ming* 名) was He, but according to the Republican-era Wu county gazetteer, Zhu was “known by his courtesy name” (以字行). As this convention is largely followed by modern scholars, I will refer to Zhu by his courtesy name throughout the dissertation.

²⁹ The confusion over Zhang Dafu’s various names will be addressed in Chapter Two.

³⁰ Zheng Zhenduo, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 1008. On playwrights Shen Jishi, Shi Jizhi, Chen Ziyu, and Wang Xugu, Zheng notes that although they also hailed from Wu county, they have not left much work. *Ibid.*, 1016.

³¹ Shen Guoqi’s courtesy name is unknown.

³² Wu Xinlei, “Li Yu shengping, jiaoyou, zuopin kao,” 53. This list is repeated in his entry for “Suzhou pai” in Wu Xinlei, ed., *Zhongguo kunju da cidian* 中國崑劇大辭典 [Dictionary of Chinese kun opera] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2002), 26–27.

Xiaobai 鄭小白, Mao Zhongshen 毛鐘紳, Wang Wujiu 王鳴九, and Zhou Gao 周杲 [Tanlun 坦
綸].³³

As Kang Baocheng and Gu Lingsen have noted, these larger lists include playwrights who left behind few or no extant texts, their inclusion in the *pai* being largely based on evidence that said playwright was born in Suzhou and was active during the late Ming and early Qing periods.³⁴ This problem of who to include points to a fundamental a problem with the so-called Suzhou School itself: namely, that it is a scholarly contrivance, a modern imposition on texts that made no such claims for themselves. My use of the term “Suzhou circle” in lieu of “Suzhou School” throughout this dissertation is meant to self-consciously draw attention to this contrivance while at the same time taking seriously what it means to examine these texts as a group.³⁵

Both my use of “Suzhou” and “circle” are meant to engage with the various debates around the geographic and social identities of these playwrights. While most contemporary scholars use “Suzhou School” or, less frequently, “Suzhou Writers’ Group” (蘇州作家群), some have argued that the common geographic identity is not Suzhou so much as Wu county (吳縣). During the mid-seventeenth century, Suzhou was split into two county jurisdictions: Wu county in the west, and Changzhou county (常州縣) in the east. Many of the writers identified with the

³³ Yan and Zhou, *Li Yu pingzhuan*, 6–7.

³⁴ Kang Baocheng, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 29. Kang suggests using the term “Suzhou zuojia qun” 蘇州作家群 (Suzhou writers’ group) for these peripheral or relatively unknown playwrights.

³⁵ My use of a lower case c, as opposed to the capitalized S of School, is also an attempt to draw attention to the contrivance of this concept and remove some of the legitimating authority of capitalized terms.

school hailed from the Wu county section of the city, such as Li Yu,³⁶ Zhu Suchen, Zhu Zuochao, Bi Wei, and Ye Shizhang. Craig Clunas has shown that these were not merely administrative distinctions but also correlated with deeper social and literary connections. In his examination of Wen Zhengming's circle of acquaintances through Wen's production of epitaphs, Clunas notes "the importance of *immediate* locality," with far more epitaphs written for residents of Wen's own district of Changzhou than in the Wu district.³⁷ Such a close association with sub-city units of urban space can be perhaps glimpsed in the early Kangxi edition of *Qingzhong pu*, that describes Bi Wei, Ye Shizhang, and Zhu Suchen as being from the "same ward" (同里) as Li Yu.³⁸ Thus, some scholars argue, to call these playwrights the "Wu County School" would be more appropriate, as that geographic designation is both more precise and would have been more meaningful to the writers' themselves.³⁹

However, not all of the writers associated with the Suzhou School came from Wu county—Chen Erbai came from the Changzhou side of the city. Some writers came from even further afield, such as Qiu Yuan, who was from Changshu. Zhang Dafu, Sheng Jishi, and Zhu Yuncong were all described in *Xin chuanqi pin* 新傳奇品 (New dramas), a catalogue of late Ming and early Qing plays compiled by Gao Yi 高奕 (c.1661), as hailing from "Wu prefecture"

³⁶ Gu Lingsen claims Li Yu is from Changzhou county, but most scholars follow the *Xin chuanqi pin*, which gives his place of registration as Wu county. "Lun kunqu Suzhou pai," 164.

³⁷ Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470–1559* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 96. Twenty-six epitaphs were written for residents of Changzhou county, while only fourteen were written for residents of Wu county.

³⁸ The *li* or ward was an administrative unit supposedly consisting of one hundred and ten households, though Wu Xinlei maintains this is a reference to them all being from Wu county. Wu, "Li Yu shengping, jiaoyou, zuopin kao," 136.

³⁹ Zhou Qin, *Suzhou kunqu*, 88.

(吳郡). Li Mei posits that since this was an archaic designation in the late Ming and early Qing, “Wu prefecture” might imply that it was unclear to which city district they were registered.⁴⁰

I will be using “Suzhou” to describe the circle of playwrights not only because it is a more inclusive term that accounts for playwrights like Zhang Dafu who might have hailed from either the Changzhou district or an area immediately outside of the city wall, but also because of how it highlights the playwrights’ concern with Suzhou as a specific urban entity.⁴¹ The imagination of the entire city as a specific place with a specific character is particularly central in the work of Li Yu, who styled himself the “Whistling Companion at the Suzhou Gate” (蘇門嘯侶)⁴² and wrote plays that addressed Suzhou-wide events. My use of Suzhou rather than the proper administrative designations is meant to call attention to how the city of Suzhou functions in these plays as a robust social and commercial space that frequently resists administrative control.

While the majority of contemporary Chinese scholars describe these playwrights as a *pai*, scholars in recent years have questioned the use of this terminology. Kang Baocheng criticizes the imprecise use of *pai* in previous scholarship, arguing instead for a distinction between the “Suzhou Writers’ Group” and the “Suzhou School.” In his formulation, the writers’ group should include all playwrights active in mid-century Suzhou, whereas the school should be more

⁴⁰ Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 278.

⁴¹ Another alternate name, “Wu Gate School” (Wumen pai 吳門派) uses terminology that would include the both Suzhou and the Suzhou region; this name is rarely used as there is already a well-known school of painters with this name.

⁴² This is a reference to the story about the “long whistle at Suzhou Gate” (蘇門長嘯), as told in the “Ruan Ji liezhuan” 阮籍列傳 [Biography of Ruan Ji] included in the *Jin shu* 晉書 [The history of the Jin]. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jin shu*, 130 vols., ed. Wu Zeyu 吳則虞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 49:1362.

narrowly defined (though the parameters of this narrowness are never explicated). Gu Lingsen makes a similar argument about differentiating a “community” (群落) from a “school” (流派).⁴³ A school, Gu argues, must be defined not merely by the geographic and social identities of the members, but by the content of their work. Gu argues that the parameters of the school are set by Li Yu: “Li Yu is the core of the Suzhou School, which is to say that the work produced by the Suzhou playwrights must largely accord with the ideology, techniques, and especially artistic style of Li Yu’s work” (李玉既是蘇州派的核心，這就是說，蘇州派成員所創作的作品必須與李玉的作品，無論在創作的思想理念、方式方法，尤其是藝術風格上要有較大的共性).⁴⁴ Gu eliminates those playwrights who have not left behind any work and examines the extant plays in terms of possessing Suzhou School qualities, which he defines as “national spirit” (家國精神), “national consciousness” (民族意識), “the conflict or comingling of the different class consciousness of gentry and townspeople” (貴族與市民兩個不同階層的精神碰撞或交融), and “reflecting history or unmasking reality” (對歷史的反思或對現實的穿刺).⁴⁵ Based on these criteria, Gu argues that the only members of the Suzhou School are Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, Zhu Zuochao, Zhang Dafu, Qiu Yuan, Ye Shizhang, Bi Wei, Sheng Jishi, Chen Erbai, Zhu Yuncong, and Zou Yuqing.

Against Gu Lingsen’s specificity is Li Jialian’s radical distancing of herself from the notion of any sort of formal grouping, rejecting all manner of “schools” and “groups” for the

⁴³ Gu Lingsen 顾聆森, “Lüelun ‘Wumen qupai’” 略論“吳門曲派” [A brief discussion of the Wu Gate Music School], *Suzhou daxue xuebao* 蘇州大學學報 [Journal of Suzhou University] 1 (1992): 86.

⁴⁴ Gu Lingsen, “Lun kunqu Suzhou pai,” 163.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

term “early Qing Suzhou writers” (清初蘇州劇作家).⁴⁶ While Gu considers the most important criterion to be the content of the plays themselves, Li delimits her field of playwrights based on time (active only during Shunzhi and Kangxi eras) and place (officially registered in Suzhou prefecture). As a result, many of the playwrights she includes in her study are generally excluded from scholarly works on the Suzhou “school” or “group,” such as You Tong 尤侗, Wu Weiye 吳偉業, Xu Hengnan 許恒南, Huang Zuzhuan 黃祖顛, and Zhu Kuixin 朱葵心. A number of these playwrights have left no traces of any interaction with the playwrights commonly associated with the Suzhou School and their plays reflect very different structural and thematic approaches. A few Western scholars have adopted the similarly cautious terminology of “Suzhou playwrights” in lieu of Suzhou School. However, their use of the term maps onto the conventional understanding of the Suzhou School and not Li Jialian’s more literal definition of all playwrights active in early Qing Suzhou. For example, Andrea Goldman uses the term “Suzhou playwrights” interchangeably with “Suzhou writers’ group” (a term she borrows from Li Mei), a group whose “major playwrights” include Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, Zhu Zuochao, Ye Shizhang, Bi Wei, Sheng Jishi, Zhang Dafu, and Qiu Yuan.⁴⁷

In this dissertation I will avoid using the term “school,” despite its continuing currency in Chinese language scholarship. While often imprecisely defined and demarcated, the term school implies both an orthodoxy and a hierarchy of transmission. The ways the aforementioned scholars refer to Li Yu make this abundantly clear: Li Yu is the “model” (典型), “leader” (領袖) and “nucleus” (核心) of the Suzhou School. Li Yu was indeed one of the most connected and

⁴⁶ Li Jialian, “Qingchu Suzhou juzuoja yanjiu,” 9.

⁴⁷ Goldman, *Opera and the City*, 146, 309 n. 5.

popular of the Suzhou playwrights, his work published in woodblock editions suitable for the aficionado's study, festooned with inscriptions and prefaces from leading literary figures like Wu Weiye and Qian Qianyi 錢謙益. He was also one of the older playwrights, born perhaps a decade earlier than playwrights like Zhu Suchen and Zhu Zuochao.⁴⁸ However, no textual evidence suggests that other Suzhou playwrights or contemporaneous literati saw him as a model or leader. And while a number of these playwrights (including Li Yu) published musical treatises, there does not appear to be a self-conscious participation in a particular way of writing plays based on an orthodox model embodied by Li Yu's work.

At the same time, Li Jialian's erasure of any sort of group identity—identifying them only by their shared time and place—elides important thematic and structural commonalities across the plays and important social relations across the playwrights.⁴⁹ My use of “circle” aims to call attention to these various commonalities, especially as they map onto to known relationships. While Li Mei's use of the term “writers' group” (作家群) is also meant to convey a set of “shared tendencies” (共同傾向), Li Mei does not delimit her group on the basis of actual cooperation, but rather based on dates of activity, place of residence, status, and playwriting style.⁵⁰ As a result, Li Mei includes in her group several playwrights who have not had any known contact with the other playwrights.

⁴⁸ Those who elevate Li Yu to a leadership position within the group often use a date of birth (c.1591) that would make him significantly older than the other playwrights and thus the natural elder statesman of the group. For example, Gu Lingsen, “Lun kunqu Suzhou pai,” 164. As will be discussed in chapter three, that date of birth has been largely discredited. While I am unconvinced by her assertion that Li Yu was born c.1601, Li Jialian provides a useful appendix that lists the dates of birth assigned Li Yu and other playwrights by modern scholars. Li Jialian, “Qingchu Suzhou juzuojia yanjiu,” 217–227.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 5–9.

⁵⁰ Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 14.

While my dissertation is not concerned with policing the membership rolls of a group that is itself a modern scholarly contrivance, only those Suzhou playwrights who actively collaborate with other Suzhou playwrights in the production of dramatic works will be discussed. This collaboration is not merely a way of diagramming social and literary networks, but a fundamental and defining characteristic of these playwrights—the collective process of writing, rewriting, and editing is inseparable from the production of plays that thematize the transformation of the multitudes into a unified body.⁵¹ This collaboration extends beyond the writing of prefaces, dedications, and inscriptions that were de rigeur for the well-connected literatus. Rather, Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, Zhu Zuochao, Zhang Dafu, Ye Shizhang, Bi Wei, Qiu Yuan, Sheng Jishi, Guo Mengqi, and Sheng Guoqi turned the plays themselves into a shared creative endeavor, co-writing plays and play-cycles,⁵² collaborating on anthologies and treatises, and editing, finishing, or proofreading each other’s work.⁵³

⁵¹ The move in modern scholarship to efface this collaboration (e.g. the attribution of *Qingzhong pu* solely to Li Yu) by recasting those plays as the work of a single author-genius is often made in tandem with the attempt to rescue these playwrights from the ignominy of “professional” playwriting.

⁵² There is of course a long history of writing circles that produced collaborative works. On the “talented writers of writing clubs” (書會才人) of the Yuan whose members were most likely “professional dramatists” rather than literati authors, see Wai-yee Li, “Introduction,” in *The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, ed. C. T. Hsia et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 5; and Stephen H. West, “Literature from the Late Jin to Early Ming,” in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature, Volume 1: To 1375*, eds. Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 621.

⁵³ The various connections between these playwrights will be discussed throughout the dissertation. A number of Suzhou circle plays are recorded as being co-authored works: *Si daqing* 四大慶 [Four great celebrations] is attributed to Ye Shizhang, Qiu Yuan, Zhu Suchen, and either Sheng Jishi or Zhu Zuochao; *Si qiguan* 四奇觀 [Four spectacular sights] is attributed Zhu Suchen, Zhu Zuochao, Qiu Yuan, and Ye Shizhang; *Ding changong* 定蟾宮 [Establishing the toad palace] is attributed Zhu Suchen, Guo Mengqi, and Sheng Guoqi; *Yipin jue* 一品爵 [Rank of nobility] and *Mai lun ting* 埋輪亭 [Pavilion of the buried wheel] are attributed to Li Yu and Zhu Zuochao. Works attributed to a single author still frequently bear the imprint of multiple hands: *Qingzhong pu* lists Bi Wei, Ye Shizhang, and Zhu Suchen as co-editors; Li Yu notes that Zhu Suchen proofread his *Beici guang zhengpu*; Zhang Dafu’s *Hanshanzi qupu* was written with the assistance of Li Yu among others. Zhu Yuncong supposedly finished Ye Shizhang’s *Hou Xixiang* when Ye fell ill, but this attribution is from the much later *Jushuo* 據說. Jiao Xun 焦循, *Jushuo*

Gu Lingsen's idea of a "community" (群落) approaches this notion of a collaborative circle, but Gu undercuts the possibilities of the term by referring to this group as "the Li Yu community" (李玉群落).⁵⁴ In this sense Gu's community is no different than his Suzhou School, as in both groups Gu positions Li Yu as the "nucleus" or "leader." My use of circle is an attempt to shed these assumptions that confuse Li Yu's stature in modern scholarship with his role in a non-existent orthodoxy.⁵⁵ While a school implies the vertical transmission of some sort of musical dogma from the originator(s) to the adherents, a circle connotes a continuous lateral movement without a beginning or a center. A circle conveys both temporal immediacy and physical proximity—these were contemporaries who had meaningful and sustained contact with at least one other member of the circle.

This concept of a circle is also an attempt to find ways to talk about texts that have problematic attributions and complex authorship. Scholarship on these plays is rarely critical of attributions based on later texts, undated editions, or the citation-less assertions of older scholarship.⁵⁶ Moreover, the traces of multiple hands are often erased in service to a tradition of

劇說, ed. Dong Kang 董康 (Songfen shi Du qu congkan 誦芬室讀曲叢刊, 1916–1922), *juan* 3, 2b in Beijing Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin 北京愛如生數字化技術研究中心, Electronic database: *Zhongguo jiben guji ku* (hereafter ZGJBGJK) 中國基本古籍庫 [Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books] (Beijing: Beijing Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin, 2009), <http://server.wenzibase.com/dblist.jsp>.

⁵⁴ Gu Lingsen, "Lun kunqu Suzhou pai," 163.

⁵⁵ Li Yu, who is the first name on all the lists of Suzhou playwrights and the first and primary focus of every scholarly study of the Suzhou School, will be discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation. The reason for this placement is primarily thematic, but I also hope to slightly decenter the literature on both Li Yu and these playwrights as a group.

⁵⁶ For example, Li Mei is largely unconcerned with textual issues, drawing on the manuscripts included in the *Guben xiqu congkan* 古本戲曲叢刊 and elsewhere often without noting which edition she is citing and without reference to the problematic dating and authorial attributions of these editions.

literary scholarship that reifies the literatus author-figure and fetishizes biography.⁵⁷ The concept of a circle is useful precisely because of this textual uncertainty, allowing us to approach a body of plays that were produced at a particular historical moment and within a particular social context without becoming overly invested in issues of oeuvre or biographical conjecture.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is composed of four chapters, focusing on five plays by three Suzhou circle playwrights. The first two chapters track the movement of merchants across land, social strata, and moral codes. In the first chapter on Zhu Suchen's *Shiwu guan* 十五貫 (Fifteen strings of cash), I explore the changing imagination of the circulation of people and money across the urban centers of Jiangnan and the corresponding reconfiguration of the merchant-figure from a parasitic outsider to a source of moral and social rejuvenation. The second chapter on Zhang Dafu's *Kuaihuo san* 快活三 (The three kinds of happiness) and *Dushu sheng* 讀書聲 (The sound of reading) turns from the cities to the ocean, showing how the possibilities generated by maritime commerce challenge the distinctions between capital and tributary, Han and barbarian, human and beast. All three of these plays depict a multitude of social roles in flux, where in the space of one play a character may self-identify as a student, a merchant, a loyalist, and a pirate. At the same time, these plays must contend with the place of the state and its agents in an increasingly decentered world.

⁵⁷ This is most apparent in the scholarly discussions of *Qingzhong pu*. The inclusion of Bi Wei, Ye Shizhang, and Zhu Suchen as co-editors in the early Kangxi woodblock edition indicates a fairly large role in the shaping of the text, and a number of scholars list the play as a “co-authored” (合作) work. However, much scholarly writing on this play treats it as emanating from the singular literary genius and the particular experiences of Li Yu. See for example Wu Xinlei, “Shilun Li Yu de daibiao zuo *Qingzhong pu* chuanqi” 試論李玉的代表作《清忠譜》傳奇 [On Li Yu's representative work, *Qingzhong pu*] in *Zhongguo xiqu shilun*, 165–174.

The second two chapters trace the path carved by money itself, showing how the various circulations of silver ingots, copper coins, and paper bills upend social relations and political institutions. Reflecting the complex money economy of the late Ming and early Qing, these plays depict a world in which money is minted by competing authorities (imperial, private, supernatural) and dramatize the ways various actors attempt to control its production, valuation, and circulation. The third chapter centers around Li Yu's *Taiping qian* 太平錢 (Coins of heavenly peace), in which a simple exchange is transformed into a complex economy centering around one hundred thousand strings of rare coin. By depicting a social whole delimited by the circulation of coins—a circulation that pointedly excludes the emperor—this play recalls the commercial economy's production of massive amounts of wealth outside of the state's control. I discuss the ways in which this dramatization of the struggle over the circulation of specie both diagrams and problematizes the complex money economy of mid-seventeenth century Suzhou.

The fourth chapter focuses on Zhu Suchen's rewriting of the conflict between a wealthy merchant and an emperor. In *Jubaopen* 聚寶盆 (Cornucopia), the late Ming court's losing battle to control the circulation and valuation of privately-minted money and older government issues is displaced to the early Ming, with the cash coursing through the seventeenth-century economy literalized in the endless productive capacity of the merchant's magical cornucopia. The cornucopia, with its incessant extra-governmental production of coins which the state could not control and from which it could extract no seigniorage, functions as a kind of illegal mint. Unable to compete with this unrestricted flow of bullion, the emperor turns to fiat money, usury, and counterfeiting. I situate Zhu Suchen's celebration of the infinite expansion of merchant capital and critique of imperial sovereignty within the emerging discourse of regional autarky.

In a coda, I address Li Yu's *Wan min an* 萬民安 (Peace for the ten-thousand people). Though this play is not extant, my tentative excavation of this depiction of the 1601 tax riots explores the stakes of staging the violent struggles over Suzhou's autonomy in the early Qing. While many early Qing plays castigate the leaders of rebellion as instigators of social turmoil and cultural annihilators-by-proxy, this play, along with Li Yu's *Qingzhong pu*, depicts recent anti-state uprisings that are openly praised and celebrated. These plays, in which a group of Suzhou townspeople rises up against agents of the central government, do not merely rehearse recent history, but deploy living memory in the production of local identity—an identity that is generated and embodied by the performances of Suzhou actors for Suzhou audiences in Suzhou dialect. I discuss how the local identity generated by these plays is born out of a changing imagination of the city as an economic space and how these imagined clashes between local interests and the center redraw the limits of imperial sovereignty. Finally, by linking the concerns of the Suzhou School playwrights with literary transformations taking place outside of the Chinese cultural sphere, I argue that the thematic and structural innovations of the Suzhou stage were rooted in global processes.

Chapter One

“Throwing Down the Brush, Picking Up the Oar”: *Shiwu guan* and Money in Motion

The first two chapters of this dissertation will track the overlapping circulation of man and money in Zhu Suchen’s *Shiwu guan* 十五貫 (Fifteen strings of cash) and Zhang Dafu’s *Kuaihuo san* 快活三 (The three kinds of happiness) and *Dushu sheng* 讀書聲 (The sound of reading), all of which trace a chain of events instigated by a merchant setting out on his voyage. Through these mappings of the geographic and moral terrains traversed by merchants, we can see the ways in which the playwrights, well versed in canonical understandings of the place of the traveling merchant in the social order, struggle to navigate the new moral topographies created by the intensification of the commercial economy.

The traveling merchant has long been a source of fascination, pity, and fear in Chinese literature. While scholar-officials and merchants are both occupational travelers, their movements are freighted with very different meanings. The scholar-official moves within set circuits: from home to exam site; from exam site to home or the imperial academy or an official post. His circulation around the empire serves to mark the administrative terrain: his journey to the (prefectural, provincial, imperial) capital links the almost bewildering multitudes of people and places to the center(s); on his departure from the capital as a newly-minted agent of the central government, he traces the very enclosure of state sovereignty.¹

¹ Even this boundary-delimiting travel is not without its uncertainties and anxieties. There is an extensive literary tradition that explores the strange experiences born of such travel in which a student leaves his family and local community for the first time and ventures into a new world of pleasures and dangers. This anxiety is thematized in the Tang classical tales *Li Wa zhuan* 李娃傳 (The tale of Li Wa) and *Renshi zhuan* 任氏傳 (The tale of Lady Ren).

The traveling merchant, however, is drawn from place to place by the demands of a market outside the state's bureaucratic control. Enmeshed as he is within a complex web of surpluses and needs that reach across administrative borders, the merchant frequently trespasses the edges of the state's sovereignty. The merchant's sojourns to the outside, exposing the porousness and vulnerability of these borders, create problems—both philosophical and diplomatic—for the state. In the late Ming, this theoretical violence to the state's claims to sovereignty is literalized in the increasing confusion of merchantry and piracy (with maritime restrictions turning many Chinese merchants into “Japanese pirates”),² and the intrusion of merchants-cum-extra-bureaucratic-diplomats into the affairs of foreign regimes.³ In the early Qing, piracy is even more explicitly linked to the subversion of state authority—rather than dismissed as isolated incidents of opportunistic banditry—as self-proclaimed Ming loyalists such as Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662) further blurred the distinctions between commercial trade and rebellion.⁴

This problem of loyalty to the empire of silver (in which all relations are horizontal, transactional, and geographically unbound) over the dynastic empire (a radiating network of hierarchical relations coterminous with a bounded territory) lies at the heart of the imagined philosophical incompatibility of a commercial economy and Confucian values.

² Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1367–1568* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 17, 111, 124; Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 720; Richard von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000–1700* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 115.

³ Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 120.

⁴ The legacy of the loyalist pirate Zheng Chenggong, also known as Koxinga 國姓爺, will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The division of the people of the world into occupational categories appears in the early philosophical tradition. The “four-fold division of people” (四民), delineated in the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan) as “gentry, farmers, artisans, and merchants” (士農工商) is a crystallization of the occupational hierarchies that pervade early political thought.⁵ The imbrication of occupation and character has roots in the *Lunyu* 論語 (The analects). Though profit was one of the things of which Confucius seldom spoke,⁶ we have the declaration that “[t]he gentleman understands what is right; the petty man understands what is profitable” (君子喻於義，小人喻於利).⁷ The petty lowness of the man concerned with profit is held against the gentleman who is “not a tool” (君子不器), i.e. one who is defined against usefulness and instrumentality.⁸ The merchant is pointedly placed at the final position of the occupational hierarchy, often grouped with the artisans as social leeches. In a dysfunctional state, the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 (Book of Master Han Fei) declares, “merchants and artisans spend their time making articles of no practical use and gathering stores of luxury goods, accumulating riches, waiting for the best time to sell, and exploiting the farmers” (其商工之民，脩治苦窳之器，聚弗靡之財，蓄積待時而侔農夫之利).⁹ The *shi* 士 (gentry) and the *nong* 農 (farmers), as the

⁵ Wang Yunwu 王雲五 et al., eds. *Guanzi* (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1968), 1:100.

⁶ “The master seldom spoke of profit, fate, or benevolence” (子罕言利與命與仁). *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 [Analects with annotation and commentary] 9:1 in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [Thirteen classics with annotation and commentary] (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2001), 19:193.

⁷ *Lunyu zhushu*, 4:16 in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 19:96.

⁸ *Lunyu zhushu*, 2:12 in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 19:45.

⁹ *Han Feizi jishi* 韓非子集釋 [Collected explanations of the Book of Master Han Fei], annotated by Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 2:1078. Translation from *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 117.

twin backbones of government and agriculture, provide for the social whole, whereas the *gong* 工 (artisans) and *shang* 商 (merchants) extract value from the *shi* and *nong* for private gain.

That the cultural elite, the *shi*, would group themselves together with farmers, against the artisans and merchants, masks the formal similarities of the *shi* and *shang* and their “products” of language and money. Unlike the producers of grain and textiles, the *shi* and *shang* are producers of abstraction, of knowledge and value. The *shi*’s deep insecurity with the notion of producing something out of nothing can be seen in their deeply felt affinity with woodcutters and fishermen, figures representative of the simplest economic engagement, immune from the profits and stockpiles of even the farmer. In the poetic self-fashioning and theatrical role-play of the late Ming and early Qing literati, they could be hermits, gardeners, even craftsmen. Never, however, would they cast themselves as merchants.¹⁰

While seldom discussed in the *Lunyu*, the role of the merchant in the well-functioning state was taken up by later Confucian and Legalist theorists. In a number of texts, the merchant is described as carrying out a socially necessary role in moving goods from places of surplus to those of scarcity. In the *Xunzi* 荀子 (Book of Master Xun), rulers are instructed thusly: “Goods and grain shall be allowed to circulate freely, so that there is no hindrance or stagnation in distribution; they shall be transported from one place to another as the need may arise, so that the

¹⁰ There is a tradition of romanticizing the itinerant merchant that appears in the stories surrounding Fan Li 范蠡, an advisor during the Warring States period who abandons political affairs and becomes a merchant. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, 41:1740–55, 129:3255–58. However, in many late imperial iterations, Fan Li cannot simultaneously be a merchant and a romantic hero. For example, in Liang Chenyu’s 梁辰魚 (1519–1591) *Huansha ji* 浣紗記 [Washing silk], arguably the most influential late imperial version of the story, Fan Li’s merchant persona is entirely effaced. Throughout the play no mention is made of Fan Li’s second career as a wealthy merchant. Rather, Fan Li’s final lines as he and his lover Xi Shi set off on their voyage serve as a repudiation of the pursuit for profit: “Such is the life of man—meeting and parting, to say nothing of flourishing and declining. Wealth and rank are like the passing clouds; the affairs of the world are like child’s play” (人生聚散皆如此，莫論興和廢。富貴似浮雲，世事如兒戲). See *Huansha ji* (Yiyun ge 怡雲閣 edn.) (Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1983), 2:80a.

entire region within the four seas becomes like one family” (通流財物粟米，無有滯留，使相歸移也，四海之內若一家).¹¹ The imagination of the merchant as an integral part of the social whole can be seen in utopian descriptions of the well-functioning state: “The farmers do not have to carve or chisel, to fire or forge, and yet they have all the tools and utensils they need; the artisans and merchants do not have to work the fields, and yet they have plenty of vegetable and grain” (農夫不斲削，不陶冶而足械用，工賈不耕田而足菽粟).¹²

As the *Guanzi* emphasizes, this division of social labor is only functional so long as it is balanced:

Since the former kings made the four classes of people—peasants, gentry, merchants, and craftsmen—exchange their skills and perform each other’s work, there was no way in which the benefits at the end of the year could be excessive for any one class. For this reason, the people did the same kind of work and their income was equal.

故先王使農士商工四民交能易作，終歲之利，無道相過也，是以民作一而得均。¹³

Despite these gestures towards some prelapsarian state of social harmony, the tendency of merchants to extract profits frequently arises as a problem for the state. The *Guanzi* and the *Shiji* 史記 (Record of the historian) both locate a solution in the articulation of the state in the market. In explaining the origin of Han Wudi’s infamous *bailu pibi* 白鹿皮幣 (white deer skin

¹¹ *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 [Collected explanations of the Book of Master Xun], annotated by Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 1:161. Translation from *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 43.

¹² *Xunzi jijie*, 1:162. Translation from *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings*, 44.

¹³ *Guanzi*, 2:98. Translation from *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China: A Study and Translation*, trans. W. Allyn Rickett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 2:179.

money), Sima Qian writes of the need of the state to alter its currency system in order to rein in hoarding:

The rich merchants and big traders, however, were busy accumulating wealth and forcing the poor into their hire, transporting goods back and forth in hundreds of carts, buying up surplus commodities and hoarding them in villages; even the feudal lords were forced to go to them with bowed heads and beg for what they needed. [...] With this the emperor consulted his high ministers on plans to change the coinage and issue a new currency in order to provide for the expenses of the state and suppress the idle and unscrupulous landlords who were acquiring such huge estates.

而富商大賈或蹠財役貧，轉轂百數，廢居居邑，封君皆低首仰給。[...] 於是天子與公卿議，更錢造幣以贍用，而摧浮淫並兼之徒。¹⁴

In addition to the creation of a new currency system, Sima Qian recounts a number of policies aimed at reducing the influence of the moneyed merchants, such as the effort to create a registry of merchants and a prohibition on registered merchants owning land. While Sima Qian was often critical of Han Wudi's massive personal and state expenditures, he lauded the emperor's efforts to create of a "balanced standard" (*pingzhun* 平準) office that would receive and store the goods gathered from around the empire:

All expenses were to be borne by the ministry of agriculture, whose officials would have complete control over all of the goods of the empire, selling when prices were high and buying when prices were low. In this way the wealthy merchants and large-scale traders, deprived of any prospect of making big profits, would go back to farming, and it would be impossible for any commodity to rise sharply in price. Because the price of goods would thereby be controlled throughout the empire, the system was to be called the balanced standard. The emperor agreed with this idea and gave permission for it to be put into effect.

¹⁴ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 [Record of the historian], annotated by Pei Yin 裴駙, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 30:1425. Translation from Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 2:68.

大農之諸官盡籠天下之貨物，貴即賣之，賤則買之。如此，富商大賈無所牟大利，則反本，而萬物不得騰踊。故抑天下物，名曰「平準」。天子以為然，許之。¹⁵

As a result of this intervention into the market, the state is able to cover its expenses and keep its granaries full without an undue burden on “the people” (which presumably includes only those in ‘primary’ occupations like farming and not ‘secondary’ occupations like trade). These lessons can also be found in the *Guanzi*’s promotion of a strong state able to assert control over both prices and supply, appropriating any surplus away from private hoards.¹⁶

Across and within early texts, there is a conflicting anxiety toward merchants as simultaneously blocking the natural circulation of goods (through hoarding and speculative practices) and moving things out of their place (though the movement of goods across space and the mobility of the rich merchant across social strata). While the state could intervene in the price/supply ratios frequently brought into chaos by the merchants, the rootlessness of the merchant was a more insidious problem. The *Han Feizi*, which describes merchants as one of the “five vermin of the state” (此五者，邦之蠹也), expresses this anxiety about the loyalty of merchants untethered to a particular place:

An enlightened ruler will administer his state in such a way as to decrease the number of merchants, artisans, and other men who make their living by wandering from place to place, and will see to it that such men are looked down upon. In this way he lessens the number of people who abandon primary pursuits [i.e., agriculture] to take up secondary occupations.

¹⁵ *Shiji*, 30:1441. Translation from *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 2:83.

¹⁶ On how mid-Qing bureaucrats negotiated between private-sector (i.e. merchant) hoarding and public-sector (i.e. the state) hoarding, see Helen Dunstan, *State or Merchant? Political Economy and Political Process in 1740s China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

夫明王治國之政，使其商工游食之民少而名卑，以寡趣本務而趨末作。¹⁷

Though this mistrust of the itinerant—who is perhaps only a few bad trades away from the socially unmoored *guanggun* 光棍 (bare stick)¹⁸—pervades canonical writings about the merchant, occasionally their positions as liaisons between inside and outside are figured as necessary to a well-functioning state. In the *Guanzi*:

[H]ave itinerant merchants move into the country. These are not ordinary people. They claim no district as their home nor adopt any prince as the object of their service. When selling it is to seek profit; when buying, it is not to acquire possessions. From the country's mountains and forests they take what they can for profit. In the official markets, their income will amount to twice their capital expenditures. Because of these flourishing markets, those on high will indulge in extravagant spending while their subordinates will be given luxurious living, and both the prince and his ministers will benefit accordingly. When both those on high and those below feel close to one another, the wealth of the prince and his ministers need not be hidden away. This being so, the poor will have work to do and food to eat. Moving people from feudal estates to the markets is another way to solve this problem.

然後移商人於國，非用人也，不擇鄉而處，不擇君而使。出則從利，入則不守。國之山林也，則而利之，市塵之所及，二依其本，故上侈而下靡。而君臣相上下相親，則君臣之財不私藏，然則貪動枳而得食矣。徙邑移市，亦為數一。¹⁹

The rhetoric of four occupations appears across Neo-Confucian writings into the late imperial period, even as these categories fail to map onto the irreducible complexity of social forms in flux. Starting in the mid-Ming, however, we see a dramatic shift in the discourse

¹⁷ *Han Feizi jishi*, 2:1075; translation from *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings*, 116.

¹⁸ Though anxiety about the itinerant can be felt across the early tradition, the *guanggun* only became an important concept in elite discourse in the late imperial period. See Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 96–101.

¹⁹ *Guanzi*, 2:58–9; translation from Rickett, *Guanzi*, 329–330.

surrounding occupational categories, epitomized by an epitaph written by the iconoclastic thinker Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) for a man who had abandoned scholarly pursuits for a career in trade. Here Wang maintains the prior four-fold divisions while asserting a fundamental sameness, decoupling occupation and character:

The four types of people in ancient times had different occupations but travelled the same path of exerting themselves to the utmost. The scholars use this utmost exertion to govern, the farmers use it to grow crops, the artisans use it in order to fashion tools, and the merchants use it to circulate goods. Each does his occupation according to his own capability, to the best of his power, seeking to exert himself to the utmost.

古者四民異業而同道，其盡心焉一也。士以修治，農以具養，工以利器，商以通貨，各就其資之所近，力之所及者而業焉，以求盡其心。²⁰

This fundamental sameness across occupational categories is not necessarily Wang Yangming’s intervention; Yu Yingshi points out that a few years earlier in 1523 Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1529) wrote, “The merchants and literati have different expertise but the same heart” (夫商與士，異術而同心).²¹ In the late Ming, the hierarchy of the four occupations was increasingly called into question. The radical thinker He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517–1579) declared, “Merchants and traders are greater than farmers and artisans; literati are greater than merchants and traders; the sages and worthies are greater than literati” (商賈大於農工，士大於商賈，聖

²⁰ Wang Yangming 王陽明, *Jie’an Fang gong mubiao* 節庵方公墓表 [Epitaph for Fang Jie’an] in *Wang Yangming xiansheng quanji* 王陽明先生全集 [Complete works of Mr. Wang Yangming], 24 *juan*, ed. Yu Lin 俞璘 (Dunhou tang 敦厚堂, 1680), 10:21b. The epitaph for Fang Lin 方麟 (Jie’an 節庵) is dated 1525.

²¹ Li Mengyang, *Minggu Wang Wenxian muzhiming* 明故王文顯墓志銘 [Epitaph for Wang Wenxian] cited in Yu Yingshi [Yu Ying-shih] 余英時, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen* 儒家倫理與商人精神 [The Confucian ethic and the spirit of capitalism] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 156–57. As in the epitaph written by Wang Yangming cited above, the subject of this epitaph—Wang Xian 王現 (Wenxian 文顯)—was also a merchant.

賢大於士).²² At the same time, contemporary observers began noting the mixing of *shi* and *shang*. Xu Min points out a number of such writers, like Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1506–1551), who declared, “The four people of ancient times had different occupations; as for later generations, the literati have now become mixed up with the farmers and merchants” (古者四民異業，至於後世而士與農商常相混).²³ Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525–1593), described the reversals and improvised roles of late Ming society in his native Huizhou: “In ancient times those most valued were literati and those less valued were merchants, but in my prefecture this is reversed. The inadequate ones who not have the ability to be merchants, leave trade and become literati. Those who have plenty do not have enough talent to be literati, then they conversely become merchants” (古者右儒而左賈，吾郡或右賈而左儒。蓋拙者力不足於賈，去而為儒，贏者才不足於儒，則反而歸賈).²⁴ This shift in elite discourse is matched in the literature written for merchant consumption, in which categories such as *shishang* 士商 (gentry merchant) or 儒商 (Confucian merchant) begin to emerge. As Richard Lufrano notes in his study on handbooks used by mid-level merchants, traders adapted notions of Confucian self-cultivation in the authorship of their social role as merchants.²⁵

The mixing of *shi* and *shang* noted by Gui Youguang and Wang Daokun has been borne out by the research of social historians on the changing roles of the merchant in late imperial

²² Xu Min 許敏, “Shangye yu shehui bianqian” 商業與社會變遷 [Commerce and social change] in Wan Ming 萬明, ed., *Wan Ming shehui bianqian wenti yu yanjiu* 晚明社會變遷問題與研究 [Issues and research in late Ming social change] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005), 138.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Richard Lufrano, *Honorable Merchants: Commerce and Self-Cultivation in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 51–67.

society. Indeed, one of the most fundamental challenges to the cultural fabric of late Ming society was the rising prominence of the merchant class. Eager to turn their newfound economic resources into cultural capital, wealthy merchants engaged in a range of strategies to overcome their historically unfavorable status vis-à-vis scholar-officials: adopting literati affectations and purchasing objects of connoisseurship, undertaking civic roles traditionally associated with the scholar-officials, preparing sons for the bureaucratic examinations, marrying children into scholar-official families.²⁶ At the same time, the stagnation of the size of the bureaucracy, despite the expanding population of candidates, left many sons of scholar-official families with little recourse but to pursue a career in trade.²⁷

While the social boundaries between literatus and merchant were increasingly eroded and trespassed, these boundaries were often fiercely guarded in literati-authored discourses. The depiction of the merchant elite in late Ming literature frequently betrays this anxiety by affirming the supremacy of literati-encoded social roles, moral values, and aesthetic signifiers. *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the golden vase), the sprawling late sixteenth-century epic of the decadence and depravity of the merchant *nouveau riche*, tracks an economy of extreme accumulation and expenditure in which wealthy merchants' unfettered consumption of objects of connoisseurship (lavishly illustrated books, rare *objets d'art*) and enthusiastic accumulation of luxury goods regardless of sumptuary restrictions leads inexorably to the breakdown of hierarchical relations, the bankrupting of the family coffers, and the extinction of the familial line. The merchant's insatiable consumption across class lines as both a cause and a proxy for the breakdown of the

²⁶ Yu, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen*, 155–212; Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, 212–214; Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 246–247, 376.

²⁷ Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 152–153; Yu, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen*, 164–167.

social order was already a familiar formulation in late Ming literature. From the vantage of the early Qing, the fall of the Ming dynasty seemed to confirm that such chaotic consumption could only end in cultural annihilation.

The vernacular stories of Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) avert this apocalyptic possibility by largely ignoring the elision of merchant/scholar boundaries. Instead, merchants and scholars are effectively contained in discrete roles, inhabiting different moral (and often narrative) universes. In stories that feature a scholarly hero, merchants often act as lustful and grasping foils. Merchants can be the heroes of their own stories, but these are what Patrick Hanan has termed the “folly and consequence” story which is primarily concerned with “the preservation and stability of the family, including its economic basis”²⁸—the “romance” being the domain of the literatus.²⁹

That these depictions of merchants—be it the anxiety of extinction that pervades *Jin ping mei* or the assertion of fundamental difference in Feng Menglong’s collections—are often found in vernacular fiction is not surprising, given the genre’s simulation of the story-telling of the marketplace.³⁰ *Chuanqi*, the long-form southern drama, is much less often populated with the commoners and currency of the marketplace. Indeed, while vernacular fiction frequently maps the circulation of money and commodities of entirely transferable and transparent value, *chuanqi* more often trace the transmission of objects of rarified connoisseurship: Du Liniang’s portrait in *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (Peony pavilion), Li Xiangjun’s fan in *Taohua shan*, Yang Guifei’s stocking

²⁸ Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49. Hanan’s distinction between “folly and consequence” and “romance” is rather schematic and overlooks some of the narrative complexity of these stories. However, his point about the differing moral and narrative expectations for literati and merchant protagonists is a valid one.

³⁰ On the affectedness of the storyteller’s manner, see Wilt Idema, *Chinese Vernacular Fiction: The Formative Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), xii–xxii, 35–36.

in *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 (Palace of eternal youth). Nevertheless, the denizens of the market—and their insidious commodification of literati value—are never entirely absent. They are often found lurking on the narrative margins in ways already familiar to readers of late Ming literature: as in Feng Menglong’s stories, they inhabit a different moral and narrative space than the scholar- and statesmen-heroes, and in keeping with the polemics of *Jin ping mei*, their circulation of literati objects as commodities in the marketplace functions as a sign of social dysfunction and cultural decay.

When merchants do appear in *chuanqi* drama, they often appear as part of larger critiques of the erosion of cultural values that seemed to accompany their social ascendancy. For example, the threat that a commercial economy—reliant on the frequent sojourns of many men—poses to the Confucian social order is given a rather lurid treatment in Zhu Zuochao’s *Jiqing tu* 吉慶圖 (The auspicious map), in which the merchant paterfamilias’ departure sets in motion a ghastly series of events (an affair, a murder, a false accusation) that rend the familial fabric and pervert almost every relation.

While late Ming observers witnessed the blurring of occupational categories—men from official families engaging in trade; sons of merchant families attaining positions in the bureaucracy; scholars from poor families marrying the daughters of wealthy merchants; rich merchants devoting themselves to literary pursuits and scholarly affectations—*chuanqi* frequently affirm the social and moral distinctions between merchants and scholars. Indeed, *chuanqi* as a genre is uniquely positioned to police these boundaries: the imbrication of occupation and character finds its analogue in the role types of *chuanqi* drama, in which the “work” of the drama is divided among the *dan* 旦 (female lead), *sheng* 生 (male lead), *jing* 淨 (character-actor or painted face), *mo* 末 (older male), and *chou* 丑 (clown), categories that

simultaneously encompass narrative, musical, and moral roles. A particular role type will identify in certain ways and behave in certain ways and move and sing in certain ways—his character and his place in the world inseparable from his body and its movements through the space of the stage.

These first two chapters will address three plays that rewrite the occupational and moral possibilities for role types. Unlike a similar experiment by Li Yu 李漁 [Liweng 笠翁] (1611–1680), which turns the clown (*chou*) into the lead (*sheng*) in service to comic deflation, the reversals of the Suzhou circle plays are at once more conservative and more radical.³¹ While these plays keep the *sheng* and *dan* in their generic place as the romantic and moral heroes, the Suzhou circle playwrights open up unexpected narrative and moral possibilities for both character and actor.

Fifteen Strings of Cash

Zhu He 朱雱 is commonly referred to in both contemporaneous and modern scholarship by his courtesy name Suchen 素臣³² and his penname Rui'an 荃庵.³³ Like most of the figures

³¹ See Li Liweng's drama *Naihe tian* 奈何天 [You can't do anything about fate], which adapts his story about an ugly man who marries a series of unwilling women. Most modern scholarship refers to this playwright by his *ming* 名 (given name) Yu 漁 and not his *hao* 號 (pen name) Liweng 笠翁. However, in this dissertation I will refer to him as Li Liweng to avoid confusion with the Suzhou circle playwright Li Yu 李玉.

³² The Shunzhi woodblock edition of *Qingzhong pu* from the collection of Daxing Fu shi 大兴傅氏 [Master Fu of Daxing] gives the name of the co-editor as “Zhu He [courtesy name] Suchen” (朱雱素臣). See *Yili'an hui bian Qingzhong pu chuanqi* 一笠庵彙編清忠譜傳奇 [Yili'an's compilation of *Register of the pure and loyal*], 1:1a, facs. rpt. in *Guben xiqu congkan san ji* 古本戲曲叢刊三集 [Third series of the collected publications of ancient editions of drama], comp. Guben xiqu congkan bianji weiyuanhui (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1957), vol. 37.

³³ See *Qinlou yue* (Wenxi tang 文喜堂, between 1661 and 1722), 1:1a, facs. rpt. in *Guben xiqu congkan san ji*, vol. 63. The twentieth-century *Bieben Chuanqi huikao biaomu* 別本傳奇匯考標目 gives Zhu's

associated with the Suzhou circle, he hailed from Wu county in Suzhou.³⁴ The precise dates of his birth and death are unknown. In the early Kangxi edition of *Qingzhong pu*, Zhu Suchen is listed as a co-editor along with fellow Suzhou playwrights Bi Wei 畢魏 and Ye Shizhang 葉時章.³⁵ Li Mei argues that because Zhu's name is listed last, he cannot be older than Bi or Ye, both of whom were born around the year 1623.³⁶ Based on the dates of birth of Zhu's friends and collaborators, Kang Baocheng argues that Zhu Suchen was roughly contemporary with You Tong 尤侗 (b. 1618) and Wu Qi 吳綺 (b. 1619).³⁷ The latest extant mention of Zhu's activity appears in a poem by Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1769) in which he talks about “recalling the *xinsi* year of Kangxi [i.e. 1701]” (憶惜康熙歲辛巳) and enjoying “new songs” (新曲).³⁸ After

hao as 笙庵 (which was repeated by a number of scholars, including Sun Kaidi and Guo Yingde), but the late date of its compilation makes this alternative *hao* unreliable. For a discussion of the 笙/笙 debate, see Li Mei 李玫, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu* 明清之際蘇州作家群研究 [Research on the late Ming and early Qing Suzhou writers' group] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 260–265. Li Mei also argues that 笙 should be taken in its meaning as an variant of 蕤 and thus read as “Rui.”

³⁴ According to the *Xin chuanqi pin*, he was “a native of Wu county” (吳縣人). Gao Yi 高奕, *Xin chuanqi pin* 新傳奇品 [New dramas] (Haining Chen shi 海寧陳氏, 1921), *xu* 續:3b. In the early Kangxi edition of *Qinlou yue*, the author's name is given as “Zhu Suchen of Wu Gate” (吳門朱素臣). *Qinlou yue*, 1:1a. The Shunzhi era Daxing Fu shi edition of *Qingzhong pu* describes Zhu Suchen as being from the same ward (*tongli* 同里) as Li Yu. *Yili'an hui bian Qingzhong pu chuanqi* 1:1a. Li Yu's residence in Wu county, Suzhou is well established. See the discussion of Li Yu's biography in Chapter Three.

³⁵ Li Yu, *Yili'an hui bian Qingzhong pu chuanqi*, 1:1a.

³⁶ Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 237.

³⁷ Kang Baocheng 康保成, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu* 蘇州劇派研究 [Research on the Suzhou drama school] (Guangzhou: Huacheng, 1993), 35.

³⁸ Shen Deqian 沈德潛, *Guiyu shichao* 歸愚詩鈔 [Collected poems of Guyi] (Qing woodblock edn.) 10:9a in ZGJBGJK.

the poem is an annotation that clarifies that “these were songs composed by Old Man Zhu Suchen” (時朱翁素臣制曲).³⁹

Little is known about Zhu Suchen’s life. A number of scholars have repeated an anecdote found in the Daoguang era *Zhapu beizhi* 乍浦備志 (Local gazetteer for Zhapu) that describes a Zhu Suchen who turned to farming after failing to make a career as a civil servant.⁴⁰ Guo Yingde is perhaps extrapolating from this anecdote when he says that Zhu was “born into straitened circumstances and did not become an official; he liked composing songs and was good at playing the reed-pipe” (出生寒素，未出仕，喜度曲，善吹笙).⁴¹ As Li Mei has argued, the Zhu Suchen described in the *Zhapu beizhi* is a person entirely distinct from the Suzhou circle playwright.⁴²

What we do know is that the Suzhou circle playwright Zhu Suchen worked closely with several other playwrights on a number of collaborative projects. Zhu is credited with co-

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 and Zhang Zengyuan 張增元, eds., *Fangzhi zhulu Yuan Ming Qing qujia zhuanlüe* 方志著錄元明清曲家傳略 [Biographical sketches of Yuan, Ming, and Qing musicians from local gazetteers] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 164–165.

⁴¹ Guo Yingde 郭英德, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu* 明清傳奇總錄 [Catalogue of Ming-Qing drama], 2 vols. (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 1:635. This description is repeated in other sources, such as Deng Shaoji 鄧紹基, ed., *Zhongguo gudai xiqu wenxue cidian* 中國古代戲曲文學辭典 [Dictionary of ancient Chinese dramatic literature] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 1041. Guo Yingde also includes this description in his *Ming Qing chuanqi shi* and cites Wang Yongkuan’s 王永寬 introduction to his edition of Zhu Suchen’s *Feicui yuan*. While Wang describes Zhu as “born into straightened circumstances and never serving as an official” (出生寒素，未曾做官) there is no mention of a love of playing the *sheng* (reed-pipe). This reference to being good at playing the *sheng* is possibly due to Guo Yingde taking Zhu Suchen’s *hao* as Sheng’an 笙庵 (Hut of the flute) rather than Rui’an 荃庵 (Leafy hut). See Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi shi* 明清傳奇史 [History of Ming-Qing drama] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999), 354–5.

⁴² Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhi ji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 264–265. Neither the date nor the place given in this anecdote would make sense for Zhu Suchen. The description of Zhu turning to farming on a mountain far from Suzhou after giving up the pursuit of an official career in the 1630s does not fit with what we know of Zhu’s life, literary output, and social sphere.

authoring two play-cycles: *Si qiguan* 四奇觀 (Four spectacular sights), with his brother Zhu Zuochao and “two other playwrights,” generally thought to be Ye Shizhang and Qiu Yuan,⁴³ and *Si daqing* 四大慶 (Four great celebrations) with Ye Shizhang, Qiu Yuan and Zhu Zuochao or Sheng Jishi.⁴⁴ Zhu also assisted Li Yu with several of his projects, such as helping him compile his *Beici guang zhengpu* 北詞廣正譜 (Comprehensive notation on northern lyric poetry) and edit his play *Qingzhong pu* alongside Ye Shizhang and Bi Wei. He is also credited with co-writing *Ding changong* 定蟾宮 (Establishing the toad palace) with Guo Mengqi and Sheng Guoqi.

Zhu Suchen also collaborated with literati outside of the Suzhou circle, for example editing the *Yinyun xuzhi* 音韻須知 (Essential knowledge on rhymes) compiled by Li Shuyun 李書雲 (*jinshi* 1647). The Kangxi woodblock edition of *Qinlou yue* 秦樓月 (The moon above the Qin pavilion) is a testament to Zhu’s participation in wide-ranging literary circles, with a preface by Wu Qi, a commentary by Li Liweng, and an inscription by You Tong among others.⁴⁵ Indeed, the fact that such an edition was produced shows the multiple worlds these texts inhabit. While most of the extant plays by the Suzhou playwrights are hand-written scripts for use in performance, the existence of woodblock editions festooned with approving testimonies from

⁴³ Dong Kang 董康, ed., *Quhai zongmu tiyao* 曲海總目提要 [Comprehensive catalogue with abstracts from the ocean of song], vol. 2 (1928, repr., Tianjin: Tianjin guji shudian, 1992), *juan* 25, 17a.

⁴⁴ Some scholars claim that Zhu Zuochao is the fourth co-author of *Si daqing* on the basis of a notation by Zheng Zhenduo that the play was written by “朱氏與邱園、葉時章。” This entry is cited by Zhuang Yifu 莊一拂, ed., *Gudian xiqu cunmu huikao* 古典戲曲存目匯考 [A comprehensive study of the extant titles of classical opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982) 2:1173, and Wang Yongkuan’s 王永寬 entry on the play in Li Xiusheng 李修生 et al., *Guben xiqu jumu tiyao* 古本戲曲劇目提要 [Abstracts of dramas in rare editions] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), 444. The attribution of the play to Zhu Suchen, Ye Shizhang, Qiu Yuan and Sheng Jishi is made on the basis of an inscription from a manuscript edition of *Si daqing* in Mei Lanfang’s *Zhuyi xuan* 綴玉軒 [Studio of patchwork jade] collection. See Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:661.

⁴⁵ *Qinlou yue*, *xu* 序 1a–4b, *tiqing* 題情 1a–4b, *xiuxiang* 繡像 1a–6b, 1a.

well-known contemporaries shows how the emphasis on the “commercial” nature of these plays in modern scholarship effaces the complexity of their popularity across social strata.

Twenty *chuanqi*⁴⁶ and three *zaju* 雜劇 (northern drama)⁴⁷ are usually attributed to Zhu Suchen. Twelve of these *chuanqi* and none of the *zaju* are extant.⁴⁸ By far the most studied and performed play in Zhu’s oeuvre is *Shiwu guan* (alternatively titled as *Shuangxiong meng* 雙熊夢

⁴⁶ These *chuanqi* are *Zhen sangang* 振三綱 [Restoring the three cardinal relationships], *Yizhao xian* 一著先 [Making a forward move], *Jinyi gui* 錦衣歸 [Returning the brocade robes], *Weiyang tian* 未央天 [Before daybreak], *Suanni bi* 狻猊壁 [The jade beast], *Zhongxiao lu* 忠孝閭 [Gate of the loyal and filial], *Si shengshou* 四聖手 [The four masters], *Wenxing xian* 文星現 [The appearance of the star of literature], *Longfeng qian* 龍鳳錢 [Dragon and phoenix money], *Yaochi yan* 瑤池宴 [Banquet at Jade Lake], *Zhaoyang feng* 朝陽鳳 [Phoenix facing the rising sun], *Quan wufu* 全五福 [Complete five happinesses], *Wannian shang* 萬年觴 [The ten-thousand year goblet], *Jubaopen*, *Shiwu guan*, *Qinlou yue*, *Feicui yuan*, *Si daqing*, *Si qiguan*, and *Ding changong*, the last three being collaborative projects. Fourteen of these plays are attributed to Zhu Suchen in the *Xin chuanqi pin*: *Zhen sangang*, *Yizhao xian*, *Jinyi gui*, *Weiyang tian*, *Suanni bi*, *Zhongxiao lu*, *Si shengshou*, *Jubaopen*, *Shiwu guan*, *Wenxing xian*, *Longfeng qian*, *Yaochi yan*, *Chaoyang feng*, and *Quan wufu* (Gao Yi, *Xin chuanqi pin*, xu:4a). *Qinlou yue*, probably written after the compilation of the *Xin chuanqi pin*, is attributed to Zhu in a Kangxi-era woodblock edition that was printed during Zhu’s lifetime. The *Chuanqi huikao biaomu* also attributes to Zhu Suchen *Wannian shang*, *Tong tiantai* 通天台 [Terrace of heavenly communication], and *Da jiqing* 大吉慶 [Great auspiciousness], but the last two are dubious attributions—as Guo Yingde points out, there is a *zaju* by Wu Weiye also called *Tong tiantai* and according to the *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, the author of the *Da jiqing* is unknown (Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:635). While these are not overwhelming reasons to exclude these plays (especially as the *Quhai zongmu tiyao* lists many plays as “author unknown” that are now attributed to other Suzhou authors), as the *Chuanqi huikao biaomu* is itself a later and unreliable source and the two questionable plays are no longer extant, I am following scholarly consensus in omitting them from Zhu’s oeuvre. The attribution of *Feicui yuan* and *Si qiguan* comes from the *Quhai zongmu tiyao* and the attribution of *Ding changong* comes from the *Quhai mu*. The attribution of *Si daqing* comes from one of the extant editions from Mei Lanfang’s collection that lists the names of the four authors. As these four plays are relatively late (or, in the case of *Si daqing*, undateable) attributions, they should be treated with some skepticism. However, most modern scholars include them in Zhu’s oeuvre.

⁴⁷ Shen Deqian lists three *zaju* written by Zhu Suchen: *Du Shaoling xian san dali fu* 杜少陵獻三大禮賦 [Du Shaoling presents three ceremonial poems], *Qincao wen chan* 琴操問禪 [Qincao discusses Zen], and *Yang Sheng’an jinü youchun* 楊升庵伎女游春 [The courtesan Yang Sheng’an goes on a spring outing]. Shen Deqian, *Guiyu shichao*, 10:9a.

⁴⁸ Out of the various plays attributed to Zhu Suchen, twelve are still extant: *Chaoyang feng*, *Jinyi gui*, *Wenxing xian*, *Jubaopen*, *Shiwu guan*, *Wenxing xian*, *Longfeng qian*, *Qinlou yue*, *Wannian shang*, *Feicui yuan*, *Si daqing*, and *Si qiguan*.

[The dream of twin bears]).⁴⁹ As evidenced by the inclusion of five scenes from *Shiwu guan* in the Qianlong drama anthology *Zhuibaiqiu* 綴白裘 (A coat of patched white fur), the play was quite popular well past its author's time and, like many Suzhou plays, had a rich afterlife in local drama and prosimetrical performance traditions.⁵⁰ The popularity of *Shiwu guan* in modern scholarship, however, can be traced to the much heralded 1956 committee-led rewriting of *Shiwu guan* as one of the centerpieces of the drama reform project.⁵¹ This radical revision and abridgement of *Shiwu guan*—and subsequent performances by the newly formed Zhejiang Kunqu Opera Company—was widely acclaimed in the national media, and no less than Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai attended and praised the production as instrumental in bringing into

⁴⁹ While the *Xin chuanqi pin* attributes *Shiwu guan* to Zhu Suchen, the *Quhai zongmu tiyao* states that “some have said it was written by You Tong” (或云亦尤侗筆也). This possibility is rejected by modern scholars. Dong Kang, ed., *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, 46:1a.

⁵⁰ With the rise of the northern capital of Beijing as the cultural center in the eighteenth century and the ascension of *jingju* as the preeminent dramatic form, *kunqu* fell from prominence—a fall that was complete after the devastation of the Jiangnan region during the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864). As *jingju* performances often consist of individual scenes cannibalized from well-known *kunqu* plays, particularly dramatic scenes from *Shiwu guan* reappeared on stage, albeit in truncated and radically rewritten forms. With the flourishing of myriad regional performance genres in the second half of the Qing dynasty, versions of *Shiwu guan* proliferated, with extant versions of *Shiwu guan* found in the regional opera and prosimetrical genres of *Qinqiang*, *chaoju*, *chuanju*, *huaguxi*, *yueju*, *jinju* 晉劇 (Shanxi opera), *muyushu* 木魚書 (Cantonese wooden fish texts), *tanci* 彈詞 (plucking rhymes), and *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scroll). A number of these rewritings can be found in Lu Gong 路工 and Fu Xihua 傅惜華, eds., *Shiwu guan xiqu ziliao huibian* 十五貫戲曲資料彙編 [Compilation of materials on the drama *Fifteen strings of cash*] (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 1957). A list of Suzhou plays and their later appearances in other opera traditions can be found in Kang Baocheng, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 239–247.

⁵¹ The play was first performed in Hangzhou in January of 1956, followed by performances in Shanghai in February and in Beijing in April. After touring through the end of May, this production was adapted into a film directed by Tao Jin 陶金 and produced by the Shanghai Film Studio (上海電影製片廠). In August, the script of this production was published with photos of the production. Zhejiang sheng Shiwu guan zhengli xiaozu 浙江省十五貫整理小組 [Jiangsu province committee for the arrangement of *Fifteen strings of cash*], *Shiwu guan (Kunqu)* 十五貫 (昆曲) [Fifteen strings of cash (Kun opera)] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1956). The next year the score of the movie was published. Tao Jin 陶金, Zhang Dinghe 張定和, et al., *Kunju Shiwu guan qupu: Yingpian gaibian ben zhong de qupu* 昆劇《十五貫》曲譜：影片改編本中的曲譜 [Kun opera *Fifteen strings of cash* musical score: Musical score for the film adaptation] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1957).

being a “reformed” *kunqu* form reclaimed from the feudal elite.⁵² In the wake of the tremendously popular stage production (and the diffusion of various adaptations in local performance genres, vernacular fiction, and film),⁵³ the original *kunqu* text and later adaptations became subjects of scholarly attention.⁵⁴ While recent years have seen an increased focus on the Suzhou circle plays that more directly engage with moments of historical trauma, such as Li Yu’s *Qingzhong pu* and *Wanli yuan* 萬里圓 (Reunion over ten-thousand li), *Shiwu guan* continues to be the rare Suzhou play with several dedicated studies.⁵⁵

⁵² Zhou Enlai 周恩來, “Guanyu kunqu *Shiwu guan* de liangci jianghua” 關於昆曲十五貫的兩次講話 [Two talks on the Kun opera *Fifteen strings of cash*], *Wenyi yanjiu* 文藝研究 [Research on literature and art] 1: 1980, 4–7. These talks were originally given in April and May of 1956. The rewriting of *Shiwu guan* dovetails with the judicial reforms that were being simultaneously enacted.

⁵³ The writer Lao She 老舍 produced an eight-scene *jingju* version of *Shiwu guan* in October 1956. Lao She 老舍, *Shiwu guan (Jingju)* 十五貫(京劇) [Fifteen strings of cash (Peking opera)] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1956). *Shiwu guan* was also rewritten for a number of other regional dramas and performance traditions, including *puju* 晉劇 (Shanxi opera), *yueju* 粵劇 (Cantonese opera) and *guci* 鼓詞 (drum ballads). Zhang Huan 張煥 et al., *Shiwu guan (puju)* 十五貫 (晉劇) [Fifteen strings of cash (Shanxi opera)] (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1956); Yueju *Shiwu guan gaibian xiaozu* 粵劇十五貫改編小組 [Committee for the Cantonese opera adaptation of *Fifteen strings of cash*], *Shiwu guan (yueju)* 十五貫 (粵劇) [Fifteen strings of cash (Cantonese opera)] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1956); Jin Kai 金鏗 and Wang Fuhui 王福慧, *Shiwu guan (guci)* 十五貫 (鼓詞) [Fifteen strings of cash (drum ballad)] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1957). The plot of the revised *kunqu* appeared in non-performance genres as well. In December of 1956, an illustrated synopsis was published “for the readership of the masses of workers and peasants who are beginning to learn about culture” (給初學文化的工農群眾看的). Liu Huaide 劉懷德, *Shiwu guan de gushi* 十五貫的故事 [The story of *Fifteen strings of cash*] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1956), publisher’s foreword, n. pag. In 1958, the martial arts fiction writer Li Shoumin 李壽民 produced a more elaborate novelization of the *kunqu*. Haizhulouzhu 還珠樓主 [penname of Li Shoumin 李壽民], *Shiwu guan* 十五貫 [Fifteen strings of cash] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1958).

⁵⁴ See Lu Gong and Fu Xihua, *Shiwu guan xiqu ziliao huibian*.

⁵⁵ For example, Wang Shide 王世德, *Shiwu guan yanjiu* 十五貫研究 [Research on *Fifteen strings of cash*] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1981); Yang Zhenliang 楊振良, “*Shiwu guan gushi de xingcheng yu yanbian*” 十五貫故事的形成與衍變 [The form and development of the story of *Fifteen strings of cash*], *Taibei shiyuan xuebao* 台北師院學報 [Journal of Taipei Teacher’s College] 5 (1992): 183–196.

There are four extant Qing editions of *Shiwu guan*, including a carefully copied manuscript dated (though perhaps inaccurately) the second month of the seventh year of Shunzhi (i.e. 1650).⁵⁶ Two of the other editions, including one from the collection of Xu Zhiheng 許之衡 (1877–1935), are undated; the fourth edition is from the Yongzheng or Qianlong era. The differences across these editions are fairly minor, though there are a few insertions or deletions of scenes.⁵⁷

Mercantile Confucianism

The problem at the heart of *Shiwu guan* is the problem of circulation. How does the movement of things and ideas—bodies and money, sound and stories, desire and authority—remap the social whole? Like a number of plays by the Suzhou circle, *Shiwu guan* interlaces multiple narratives so as to trace a closed economy centered around the circulation of a specific amount of money. However, while plays like *Taiping qian* (discussed in Chapter Three) focus on the supernatural circulations of an almost unimaginable quantity of money, *Shiwu guan* is positively mundane, centered around a mere fifteen strings—a modest sum that would be a significant amount for a tradesperson, but a negligible sum for landed gentry or wealthy merchants. The titular fifteen strings are woven through the fabric of everyday life: a wedding gift from a shopkeeper to his daughter-in-law, a loan to help a brother open a shop, and a gift from a merchant to a desperate comrade. It is through these exchanges that relationships are

⁵⁶ Zhu Suchen 朱素臣, *Shiwu guan* 十五貫 [Fifteen strings of cash], facs. rpt. *Guben xiqu congkan san ji* 古本戲曲叢刊三集 [Third series of the collected publications of ancient editions of drama], comp. *Guben xiqu congkan bianji weiyuanhui* 《古本戲曲叢刊》編輯委員會, vol. 60 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1954). Lu Gong and Fu Xihua suggest that the date of the seventh year of Shunzi (1650) that appears on the final page might be a later emendation, though they note that this edition was definitely written prior to Qianlong. Lu Gong and Fu Xihua, *Shiwu guan xiqu ziliao huibian*, 24. I will be quoting from this edition.

⁵⁷ For a list of the changes in scene names and order, see Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:642.

brought into being and communities are defined and delimited. At the same time, Zhu Suchen's play manages to find a place for literati values within a world where the commercialization of all human interactions is a *fait accompli*. But like the circulation of money, the source of Confucian rejuvenation is similarly unexpected. As the domicile becomes the site of ever more invidious commercialization, the commercial realm and the relationships forged therein become familiar and familial—the place where the possibilities of a non-economic calculus are kept alive.

When *Shiwu guan* begins, brothers Xiong Youlan and Youhui are struggling to support themselves after their parents' deaths. Over his brother's objections, elder brother Youlan decides to find work as an oarsman on a merchant boat so as to support Youhui's studies. Meanwhile, their neighbor Feng Yuwu gives live-in child-bride Hou Sangu fifteen strings in paper bills and a pair of gold rings to mark her official marriage to his son Jinlang. Yuwu is nervous about marriage, as his ugly son is no match for the lovely Sangu. His suspicions are further raised when Sangu remarks how she enjoys hearing the scholar next door recite the classics. Later that night, a rat sneaks into Sangu's room and makes off with the gifts; the rings are pulled into Youhui's study (which shares a wall with Sangu's room), while the bills pads the rat's nest within the wall.

When Youhui discovers the rings in his study, he is thrilled by his good fortune and decides to take them to Feng Yuwu's shop to exchange for food. First, however, Youhui buys some rodenticide-laced cakes to deal with the rats that are destroying his books. When Youhui brings the rings to Yuwu's shop, Yuwu's suspicions are confirmed and he angrily accuses Youhui of carrying on an affair with Sangu. Jinlang hears this and goes to confront Sangu himself. In her doorway he sees a cake, which he imagines to be a special treat that the lovers shared. He angrily eats the poisoned bait and immediately dies. When the case is brought before

the court, the magistrate Guo Yuzhi agrees with Yuwu that the young couple is guilty of adultery and murder. Youhui and Sangu are sentenced to death and Youhui is ordered to repay Yuwu the fifteen strings.

While docked at Suzhou, the crew of the merchant boat—including brother Youlan—learns about the recent scandal. A merchant named Tao Fuzhu takes pity on Youlan and gives him the fifteen strings to take to his brother. While on the road, Youlan encounters a lost girl named Su Shujuan. Though Shujuan comes from a gentry family, the death of her mother left her in the care of her cruel step-father You Hulu. One night an inebriated Hulu returned home with fifteen strings in copper coins; while the money was a loan from his sister to open a shop, Hulu tells Shujuan that he has sold her to be a maid. Distraught, Shujuan sneaks out of the house once he falls asleep. On the road she meets Youlan, who is walking in the same direction and accompanies her for her safety. Meanwhile, down-on-his-luck gambler Lou Ashu notices that the door to Hulu's house is ajar; though he only intended to steal the bag of money, when Hulu wakes up mid-robbery Ashu kills him. The next morning suspicions fall on the missing daughter and a search is launched. When authorities find her with Youlan, who is carrying exactly fifteen strings of cash, they are arrested. Guo Yuzhi, who has since been promoted, examines the case and determines that Youlan and Shujuan are guilty. The two cases are later reopened by the upright Suzhou prefect Kuang Zhong, who has doubts about the four convicts' guilt. During his investigation, he discovers the rat's nest between the Feng and Xiong houses containing the fifteen strings of paper bills. He then poses as a fortune-teller and extracts a confession from Lou Ashu. The brothers are freed and shortly thereafter pass the examinations (their examiner being none other than a demoted Guo Yuzhi). The play ends with a double marriage ceremony

orchestrated by Kuang Zhong and Guo Yuzhi in which Youlan and Shujuan and Youhui and Sangu are wed.

Narrative Strings

In writing *Shiwu guan*, Zhu Suchen borrows extensively from the earlier *huaben* 話本 (vernacular story) *Cuo zhan Cui Ning* 錯斬崔寧 (The wrongful execution of Cui Ning) that appears in Feng Menglong's *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Constant words to awaken the world) as *Shiwu guan xiyan cheng qiaohuo* 十五貫戲言成巧禍 (A joke about fifteen strings of cash leads to tragedy).⁵⁸ In this story, which serves as the basis of the Youlan-Shujuan narrative thread, a poor scholar turned unsuccessful merchant named Liu Gui is given fifteen strings by his father-in-law in order to open a business. When Liu Gui drunkenly tells his concubine that the money was obtained from selling her off, she runs away to her natal family. On the road, she meets a traveling merchant who just completed a large sale. When Liu Gui is found dead, the concubine and the traveling merchant are arrested. The traveling merchant is revealed to be carrying fifteen strings of coins, which damns him in the eyes of the court. Both merchant and concubine give false confessions under torture and are executed. Later Liu's primary wife is kidnapped by a bandit, who reveals that he had murdered Liu and let two innocents take the

⁵⁸ Feng Menglong attributes this story to a *huaben* supposedly written in the Song dynasty. This story appears in the *Jingben tongsu xiaoshuo* 京本通俗小說 [Popular stories from capital editions], which was purportedly discovered by the scholar Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 and published in 1915. Though some scholars such as Jaroslav Průšek have treated the *Jingben tongsu xiaoshuo* as predating Feng Menglong's version (and possibly serving as a source), most scholars consider it a more recent forgery. Jaroslav Průšek, *Chinese History and Literature: Collection of Studies* (Prague: Academia, 1970), 308; Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997), 213–214; Wang Shide, *Shiwu guan yanjiu*, 13–21; Hsu Hui-Lin, "Revision as Redemption: A Study in Feng Menglong's Editing of Vernacular Stories" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010), 9. Patrick Hanan argues that the story that appears in Feng Menglong's collection was mostly likely written in the early Ming, with the ending rewritten by a later editor. Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1973), 61, 165–166.

blame. The primary wife reports this injustice to the magistrate, who has the bandit executed. The emperor issues pardons to the wrongfully executed.

Aside from the obvious changes in plot—the omission of the bandit-wife plotline; the ending that rescues the innocents from execution—the *chuanqi* departs from the *huaben* in key thematic respects. By locating the central tragedy of the main tale (and the near-tragedy of the introductory tale) in the misunderstanding of a joke, the *huaben* shows how uneasily language translates meaning. The *chuanqi*, however, shows a faith in the ability of meaning to be communicated through the addition of the investigator Kuang Zhong, who is able to ferret out the truth through a close attention to language (the testimony of witnesses, the dreams-cum-word games). That meaning is ultimately recovered through the judicial process points to a different role for the state. While in the *huaben* the state can only extract repayment in blood and issue posthumous honors, in the *chuanqi* the state is the generative force that puts families back together again. The contingency and coincidence of the *huaben* is rewritten as a surface-level misapprehension of the logic of the universe, which brings both things and people to the places they need to be.

The Youhui-Sangu thread shares narrative elements with a story attributed to a non-extant biography of Li Jing in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han). As recorded in the Tang dynasty compilation *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Thematic compilation of literary sources):

The *Hou Han shu* also records: Li Jing of Runan was the prime minister of Zhao. A servant found women's linked pearl ornaments in a rat hole. He asked the Master of Records about it, who replied, "In the past, the former prime minister's wife lost three pearls. She suspected that her daughter-in-law stole them. Because of this, she had her sent away." Jing thereupon sent the pearls to the former prime minister. The former prime minister was ashamed, and sent for the daughter-in-law to be brought back.

又曰：汝南李敬，為趙相。奴於鼠穴中得繫珠璫珥相連，以問主簿，對曰，前相夫人昔亡三珠，疑子婦竊之，因其去婦。敬乃送珠付前相，相慚，追去婦還。⁵⁹

The Youhui-Sangu plot line also tracks closely with the plot of a story from Li Liweng's *huaben* collection *Wusheng xi* 無聲戲 (Silent operas). *Mei nanzi bi huo fan sheng yi* 美男子避惑反生疑 (A handsome man tries to avoid temptation and instead attracts suspicion) recounts a similar tale of injustice caused by a missing object hidden in a rat's nest.⁶⁰ While the similarity in character names, narrative details, and language indicate a clear relationship, the question of which version inspired the other remains controversial.⁶¹ Some, like Fu Chengzhou 傅承洲, take the stance that Li Liweng's *huaben* was based on Zhu Suchen's play, a stance supported by the fact that the publication of *Wusheng xi* is generally accepted as occurring during the eleventh and

⁵⁹ Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641), ed., *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 [Thematic compilation of literary sources] (Southern Song woodblock edition), 84:4b, rpt. in *Yiwen leiju* (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1960), 9:2148.

⁶⁰ See Li Yu 李漁, *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 [Complete works of Li Yu] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1991) 8:34–55. This story appears as the fourth story in Li Liweng's later collection *Liancheng bi* 連城璧 [Precious jade] as *Qingguan bushou pahui bang, yishi nan shen qie fu yuan* 清官不受爬灰謗，屈士難伸竊婦冤 [The upright official does not accept slanderous accusations of incest; a wronged man finds it difficult to redress the injustice caused by the eavesdropping woman] in the table of contents; the word *qu* 屈 (wronged) is replaced with *yi* 義 (righteous) in the title as it appears in the chapter itself. See *Liancheng bi* (Kangxi edn.), *muji* 目次:1a; 4:1a in ZGJBGJK.

⁶¹ Both stories feature a beautiful girl engaged to an ugly man. Both girls arouse the suspicions of their fathers-in-law when they mention overhearing the student next door reciting the classics. Both girls receive an expensive gift from their fathers-in-law; when the gift is dragged into a neighboring residence, the girls are accused of adultery. In both stories, the original judgment against the girl and her neighbor is overturned and evidence of their innocence is found in a rat hole. Both stories end with the judge marrying the girl to the neighbor. The father in *Shiwu guan* is named Feng Yuwu 馮玉吾 and his son is named Jinlang 錦郎, while in *Wusheng xi* the father is Zhao Yuwu 趙玉吾 and his son is Xulang 旭郎.

twelfth years of Shunzhi's reign (1654–55), while the earliest extant edition of *Shiwu guan* is dated the seventh year (1650).⁶²

Other scholars like Guo Yingde have argued that Zhu Suchen based his play on Li Liweng's *huaben*.⁶³ Li Liweng's commitment to a particular notion of originality coupled with the Suzhou circle's habit of drawing on *huaben* plots may indeed point to the *Wusheng xi* story as the source text.⁶⁴ Indeed, the Suzhou circle drew frequently from Feng Menglong's *San yan* 三言 and Ling Mengchu's *Er pai* 二拍 collections, and Suzhou playwright Chen Erbai based one of his plays on another story from *Wusheng xi*. It is possible, these scholars argue, for Zhu Suchen to have had access to an early manuscript edition of the Li Liweng *huaben*. This argument is bolstered by a note appended to the title of the *huaben* in the first print edition of *Wusheng xi*: "There will be a play based on this story" (此回有傳奇嗣出).⁶⁵ While some scholars like Hu Yuanling 胡元翎 take this to mean that Li Yu was himself planning on adapting the story into the play, it could also be read as publicity for his friend's upcoming adaptation.⁶⁶

Regardless of which text is earlier, the two versions are quite different. Li Liweng, who frequently demonstrates a preference for contemporaneity in his stories and plays, sets the *Wusheng xi* version in the more recent Zhengde period 正德 (1506–1521). Zhu Suchen, however,

⁶² Fu Chengzhou 傅承洲, "Li Yu huaben de chuangxin yu yinxi" 李漁話本的創新與因襲 [Innovation and imitation in Li Yu's vernacular tales], *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小说研究 [Journal of Ming-Qing fiction studies] 4 (2007): 246. However, as others have noted, the inscription at the end of the play with this date might be a later emendation.

⁶³ See, for example, Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:643.

⁶⁴ Though Li Liweng had elsewhere been inspired by Zhu Suchen's dramatic creations, as when he provided commentary and wrote additional sequences for *Qinlou yue*.

⁶⁵ *Li Yu quanji* 8:3. This notation does not appear when the story is reprinted in the *Liancheng bi*. See *Liancheng bi*, *muci*:1a in ZGJBGJK.

⁶⁶ Hu Yuanling, *Li Yu xiaoshuo xiqu yanjiu* 李漁小說戲曲研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 138.

sets the story in the period between Xuande 宣德 (1426–1435) and Zhengtong 正统 (1436–1449), which accords with the historical lifespan of Kuang Zhong 況鐘 (1383–1442).⁶⁷

Unlike Zhu Suchen’s play, Li Liweng’s story highlights the role of meddling neighbors as the architects of calamity. His undifferentiated mass of neighbors lays bare the danger of the crowd, the distortion and unreliability of their gossip, and the terrifying transformation of their idle chatter into fatal action. After watching first Yuwu and then his neighbor Jiang Yu (the Youhui figure) swan across their lane with the same pendant, the neighbors are no longer content to play the audience. Instead, they stage a confrontation: sending Jiang Yu to get the pendant appraised by Yuwu and insisting that Yuwu produce his pendant for the sake of comparison. When Yuwu tries to keep the matter private, the neighbors again intervene, insisting that he take the matter to court. Their enthusiastic willingness to bear false witness for Yuwu in his legal complaint brings full circle the bankruptcy of their speech, from gossip to accusations to lies. In their marshaling of confusion and tragedy into dramatic entertainment, they demonstrate no particular investment in the outcome of this human drama. As they swing from humiliating Yuwu to helping him, their only desire is to see this narrative through to its climax. The pleasure of spectacle and of moral judgment prefigures the courtroom itself, which serves as merely another stage on which to continue this drama.

In *Shiwu guan*, however, the crowds that gather to listen to and to make sense of the Youhui-Sangu adultery case play a different role entirely. In the scene “Shang zhu” 商助 (The merchants’ assistance), a group of traveling merchants gather on the deck of a boat and listen to the *wai* 外 (secondary elder male character) share a story he just heard on shore of a young

⁶⁷ This setting in the more distant past also helps blunt any perceived political content.

scholar who met misfortune.⁶⁸ The story he tells is not the narrative that prevailed in court. Rather, the *wai* recounts the events as they had unfolded on stage just a few scenes prior: that Youhui and Sangu moving into adjacent rooms was a coincidence, and that Youhui came into possession of the rings by accident. When the listeners express suspicion about these coincidences, the *wai* silences their doubts by telling them that “everyone says this was a miscarriage of justice” (人人說是冤枉).⁶⁹ While Li Liweng claims (with tongue lodged firmly in cheek) that he wrote his *huaben* to convince readers not to gossip, in the *Shiwu guan chuanqi*, rumor and gossip prove to be more reliable than official accounts, and the intuitions of the townspeople of Suzhou more insightful than those of the ruling elite. That the truth needs to be ferreted out on the street is a notion borne out in the investigation itself, which emphasizes the centrality of physical evidence found at the scene of the crime. The magistrate of the *huaben* only uncovers the truth through simile—when the slipper of the magistrate’s daughter-in-law is dragged into his study by a rat, the magistrate realizes that this must explain the case of the pendant as well. *Shiwu guan*’s Kuang Zhong, however, is led not by his personal experience, but by a careful, almost systematic, practice of observation. In paying close attention to the specifics of place and case, Kuang models a kind of bureaucratic behavior at odds with the personal and contingent nature of justice in the *huaben*.

It is by looking that the magistrate resolves the problem of orality that sits at the heart of the play. In a self-conscious tribute to the power of the opera-form itself, the play’s surfeit of diegetic speech—the jokes and eavesdropping and gossip and accusations and confessions—can

⁶⁸ Following the convention of Chinese play texts, in which lines are denoted with the name of the role-type and not the name of the character, I will refer to the figures in these scenes by their role-type. In this scene in particular, most of the characters do not reveal their names, so the only way to identify them is by role-type.

⁶⁹ *Shiwu guan*, 1:33a.

only be resolved through the transformation of stories into reality, with the pairs accused of being lovers turned into actual lovers. Ultimately it is an agent of the state who does this work that, like Zhu Suchen, authors a new reality from multiple and often conflicting speech acts. And as will be discussed below, it is through the transacting of money that talk is transformed into reality.

Domestic Economies

Shiwu guan begins with a series of household scenes in which family members exchange money. In each case, these exchanges are framed not as gifts but as investments—the depositing of money in the domicile is imagined to create some sort of future profit in which both money and family are multiplied. In the second scene, Youlan decides to leave home and find work, reasoning, “What use [lit. profit] is there if both of us brothers starve to death? It would be better if I temporarily leave home and find some sort of modest occupation and earn wages, no matter how meager, to support my brother in his studies” (吾弟兄每，雙雙餓死，殊爲何益。不若小生，暫爾出門，身執微業，多少覓些工價，爲吾弟膏火之資).⁷⁰ When Youlan presents this plan to his brother, he again frames their dilemma in terms of profit: “I think that it is completely useless [lit. unprofitable] for both of us to die of starvation.” (我想雙雙餓死，甚是無益).⁷¹

While Youhui recognizes the need to avert the looming bankruptcy of the Xiong household and the annihilation of the Xiong line, he is concerned about the ritual propriety of his brother’s plan:

⁷⁰ *Shiwu guan* 1:2a. Youlan’s decision to pursue a livelihood in trade mirrors the choices faced by many of Jiangnan’s elite families facing dwindling family fortunes and the increased competition for official positions.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:3b.

You are the eldest son of the Xiong household with ritual responsibility; “to toil for your elders when they have troublesome tasks” was originally the duty of sons and younger brothers.⁷² It is natural that you, the older brother, study in the home, and that I, the younger brother, should leave home to find work.

你乃熊門長子，宗社所關，有事服勞，原系子弟職分，自然哥哥在家讀書，兄弟出門纔是。⁷³

Youlan’s solution enlists a kind of financial thinking that envisions the household not as a ritual space but as an economy of needs and resources. Youhui’s academic talent, here figured as “endowment” or “capital” (*zi* 資), surpasses Youlan’s “a hundred-fold” (*baibei* 百倍);⁷⁴ at the same time, Youlan has a stronger constitution than his younger brother and is thus better suited for manual labor.

Youlan gives his salary advance to Youhui, investing his wages in Youhui’s future success in the examination system. Anticipating the time when his investment in Youhui’s studies turns a profit, Youlan declares: “As for your achievements of honor and rank in the future, my expectations are indeed great” (異日功名之事，所望弟不小). Here the imagined yield far outstrips the investment of a few strings of cash. Money, when invested properly, will multiply all forms of value; these few strings will not merely beget more money, but rank and sons, who will themselves multiple the family’s value.

⁷² Youhui is here alluding to a line from the *Lunyu*: “Zixia asked about filiality. The Master said: ‘What is difficult is managing the expression on your face. When there are troublesome tasks, the young should be the ones to toil; when there is food and wine, the elders should be served first—how can this be the meaning of filiality?’” (子夏問孝。子曰：色難。有事，弟子服其勞；有酒食，先生饌；曾是以為孝乎) *Lunyu zhushu* 2:8 in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 19:43. Youhui’s use of this allusion runs counter to Confucius’ larger point here that there are more important aspects of filiality than just laboring on behalf of one’s elders.

⁷³ *Shiwu guan*, 1:4a–b.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:4a.

The next scene turns to the Xiongs' neighbor, the shopkeeper Feng Yuwu, who gives his live-in daughter-in-law fifteen strings of *baochao* 寶鈔 (paper bills) and a pair of gold rings. As they are given to mark Sangu's entrance into marriage (and, it is implied, bribe her into marrying the unappealing Jinlang), these objects function as a kind of pseudo-dowry. However, since Sangu was raised as child in the home of her future husband, this "dowry" is not passed from one household to another. Rather, these are Feng household resources that she is tasked with managing: "This is a pair of gold rings and this is fifteen strings of paper bills; I am giving it to you for safe-keeping. In the future when I hand over household management to you, these are things that will belong to both of you in any case" (這是金環一雙，這是寶鈔十五貫，你與我收藏好了。將來交付，家計這些多是你每應有之物).⁷⁵ Yuwu sees the transfer of household wealth to Sangu as both the symbolic ritual of marriage gifts and a pragmatic financial decision. By bringing the marriage into being, the money and rings will ensure that his line will continue and that he will be cared for in old age. At the same time, the objects also function to insure his family enterprise, as his idiot son is not up to the task of managing the finances of the family home and grain shop.

The third such domestic exchange happens in the fifth scene. The brutish You Hulu fights bitterly with his step-daughter Shujuan, whom he resents for not earning her keep:

Other people's daughters twist hempen thread and grind nettles and do needle work, earning a big piece of silver to help subsidize the family income. But you wench don't generate one bit of profit!

別人家女兒，績麻碾苧做針指，大塊銀子賺來幫貼，偏是你這丫頭，一點出息也沒有。⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Shiwu guan*, 1:9b.

⁷⁶ *Shiwu guan*, 1:16a.

When his sister overhears the ruckus and intervenes, Hulu complains that he “has little capital” (我本錢少) with which to continue supporting Shujuan.⁷⁷ Faced with the prospect of familial dissolution—Hulu repeatedly threatens to “sell [Shujuan] by the water” (賣你到水裡去)⁷⁸—Hulu’s sister offers to broker an agreement between Hulu and her husband:

Come to my house some time and talk to my husband, he will arrange for you to take a few taels of silver so that you can together open a butcher’s shop. This will be a joint venture in which you share the profits, and we will all make a good living.

另日來到我家，與你姐夫商議，待他措置幾兩銀子，與你開張肉舖，合伙分利，大家多好度日了。⁷⁹

These three scenes, in which the four leads (*sheng*, *xiaosheng* 小生 [young male secondary lead], *dan*, and *xiaodan* 小旦 [young female secondary lead]) are introduced, locate us in a world in which any distinction between domestic and commercial spheres has been dismantled. This is a world in which in which profit (*yi* 益) and value (*zhi* 值) are the categories through which the household operates; in which commercial activity is the only way to preserve the familial unit; in which ritual propriety is subjugated to economic calculations and traditional

⁷⁷ *Shiwu guan*, 1:17b.

⁷⁸ *Shiwu guan*, 1:16b, 17a–b. The Qing era manuscript in Fu Xihua’s collection makes the threat more explicit, rendering the line as “sell [Shujuan] to a maritime merchant” (賣你到水販去). Wang Wenzhang 王文章 et al., eds., *Fu Xihua cang gudian xiqu zhenben congkan* 傅惜華藏古典戲曲珍本叢刊 [Rare editions of ancient books from the collection of Fu Xihua] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2010), 19:32, 33. Unlike the 1650 edition, the Fu Xihua edition is unpunctuated, includes musical notation, and omits most dialectical elements (for example “*womei*” 我每 becomes “*women*” 我們).

⁷⁹ *Shiwu guan*, 1:17b–18a. I will be following the conventions of using “tael” as the translation for *liang* 兩, a unit of weight (approximately 1.3 ounces), when it is describing the weight of silver functioning as currency.

means of advancement are only possible through wage labor. If the first of these scenes shows the intrusion of a larger economy of goods and needs into the Confucian study, the second two scenes show that for the rest of the social whole, the family is already fundamentally and necessarily a commercial enterprise. In these scenes, which introduce the eponymous fifteen strings, familial bonds are always already figured as commercial bonds.

The expressed goal of these exchanges is the multiplication of profit—the expansion of the family’s coffers and lineage. However, these various investments do not expand outward but rather turn inward. Youlan gives Youhui money to seclude himself in the study like a maiden in the inner chamber. Yuwu gives his daughter-in-law the dowry-cum-inheritance to ensure that both she and the family fortune stay within home. And Hulu’s sister arranges the transfer of capital to Hulu to prevent his stepdaughter from running away. This inward turn—this freezing of people and money in the home like treasures in a hoard—is a problem of both sociality and narrative. If people don’t circulate, then there are no new families and no new stories.

The incestuousness of this inward turn—of keeping things “in the family”—plays as a subtext to the interactions between Feng Yuwu and his daughter-in-law Sangu.⁸⁰ From his first scene, he pays close attention to his daughter-in-law’s charms and expresses anxiety about his ability to keep her in house:

But if I look at the situation objectively, my daughter-in-law has a lovely, graceful countenance. At the same time, she is talented and clever. When looking at my son’s hideous appearance, she must harbor some resentment.

但我冷眼看去，媳婦容顏娉婷，兼且資性伶俐，見我孩兒醜陋，不無怨望之心。⁸¹

⁸⁰ The possibility of incest is made much more explicit in Li Liweng’s *huaben*: the gossipy neighbors speculate that Yuwu gives his daughter-in-law such a valuable gift because the two are carrying on an affair.

⁸¹ *Shiwu guan*, 1:7b.

His rueful comments that Sangu's beauty is wasted on his ugly son perhaps hints at some desire to keep her for himself:

Daughter-in-law, look at you: Worries pile up in your limpid eyes, your eyebrows knotted in sorrow.⁸² *Hai*, I know how this is all because the fine steed is mismatched with the rustic, and he is unworthy of your peach blossom visage.⁸³

咳媳婦兒，看你愁添秋水妍，恨鎖春山遠。咳，我曉得，多只為駿馬村夫，辜負你桃花面。⁸⁴

⁸² This aria evokes the poetic tradition of referring to women's eyebrows as "spring mountains" (春山) or "distant mountains" (遠山). In the *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 [Miscellaneous records of the western capital], a collection of tales about the Western Han, Zhuo Wenjun is described as having "eyebrows that looked like distant mountains" (眉色如望遠山). Ge Hong 葛洪 (attr.), *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 (Ming Jiaping edn.) 2:2b in ZGJBGJK. The line as it appears here evokes the phrasing of Yuan poet Wang Delian 王德璉 (*zi* Guoqi 國器) (c.1285–after 1366), who uses similar language to describe "eyebrows knotted in sorrow over limpid eyes" (恨鎖春山，嬌橫秋水) in his "'Traces of tears on a jade cheek' to the tune of 'Treading on grass'" (踏莎行玉頰啼痕). See *Yuxuan lidai shiyu* 御選歷代詩餘 [Imperial selection of verses from each dynasty] vol. 36 in *Yingyin Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 [Fascimile reprint of the Pavilion of Literary Profundity edition of the *Complete collection of the four treasuries*] (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986), 1491:741.

⁸³ This line is an allusion to the saying "Just as the fine steed must carry the clumsy rider, the beautiful woman must share a bed with her doltish husband" (駿馬卻馱癡漢走，美妻常伴拙夫眠), which appears in the twenty-fourth chapter of the hundred-chapter edition of *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water margin) (and is slightly modified in the twentieth chapter of the Jin Shengtan recension) and the second chapter of *Jin ping mei*. Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 and Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (attrib.), *Shuihu zhuan* (Rongyutang 容與堂 edn., 1610), 24:17a in ZGJBGJK. Xiaoxiaosheng 笑笑生, *Jin ping mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話 [The plum in the golden vase] (Wanli edn.) 1:2.14a in ZGJBGJK. Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624) attributes a variant of this line (駿馬每馱癡漢走，巧妻常伴拙夫眠) to Tang Yin, though it does not appear in any of Tang Yin's published works. See Liu Hongqiang 劉洪強, "Cong Tang Bohu yi ju shi kan *Shuihu zhuan* de chengshu niandai—*Shuihu zhuan* chengshu shangxian xiaokao" 從唐伯虎一句詩看水滸傳的成書年代——水滸傳成書上限小考 [Dating *Water margin* from a line of Tang Bohu's poetry—A brief examination of the upper limit date of *Water margin*], *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 [Research on Ming-Qing novels] 2 (2008): 92–97.

⁸⁴ *Shiwu guan*, 1:9a.

His quick suspicion of outsiders coming to steal her away, his fixation on the possibility that she is having an affair with the neighbor, his impulse to move her further inside the house—all point to an inappropriate closeness that is finally spoken aloud by his idiot son:

Jing: This is not good! Our daughter-in-law did a shameful thing.

Chou: What did she do? Can it be that you committed incest with her?

淨：不好了，我家媳婦做出醜事來了。

丑：甚麼事。敢是你要扒灰。⁸⁵

Yuwu does not respond to the accusation of incest; instead he lays out the evidence of Sangu and Youhui's affair. While Jinlang's question elicits no further comment, it renders explicit the uncomfortable possibilities of Yuwu's close attention to Sangu as an object of desire.

In keeping with the thematizing of hoarding as incestuous, the circulation of money is figured as the lifeblood of a well-functioning society. While the circulation of people and goods is often represented as a destabilizing danger to a settled polity, here it is not the circulation of money but the blockage that is dangerous and anti-social. Indeed, all of the narrative problems result from two such blockages: the money caught in the rat's hole (instead of reinvested into the family enterprise) and the money stolen by the gambler (instead of invested in a new shop). In both cases the culprit is a rat—the first an actual rodent, the second a gambler-turned-thief who has taken the name “Ratty” (Ashu 阿鼠).

The rat is of course a classic hoarder—stealing from man to pad his nest.⁸⁶ That Ashu is characterized as a gambler seems to be at odds with his analogue, the rat, as the gambler is a

⁸⁵ *Shiwu guan*, 1:21a. *Pahui* 爬灰 (“crawl in the ashes”), here written with the alternative *pa* 扒, puns on *wuxi* 污膝 (“filthy knees”) and *wuxi* 污媳 (“defiled daughter-in-law”).

profligate spender and not a hoarder. The hoarder refuses to allow money to function as money by freezing it in his hoard, turning it into something useless. The gambler tries to multiply money out of nothing; like a failed usurer, he thinks that by spending his money, more will be returned to him.⁸⁷ Miserliness and profligacy have been juxtaposed throughout the late imperial literary tradition as anti-social deviations from the balanced ideal of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation and Daoist longevity practices.⁸⁸ But the hoarder and the gambler are more than just poles on a spectrum of excess. They are both obsessed with the accumulation of value, which they experience as pure abstraction. And through their attempt to accumulate abstract value, they render money unproductive—the money in the hoard ceases to buy and sell, the money gambled gives itself away while getting nothing in return.

The hoarding rat and gambling Rat are but the most egregious threats to the circulation of money; though as we have seen, the money was not exactly circulating freely prior to its theft. The blockages and closed exchanges that characterize the role of money in the first seven scenes are unhealthy for both the macro and the micro—just as the *qi* 氣 that is congested causes bodily enervation and sickness, blockages of people and money lead to the sad state of affairs of the opening chapters: Youhui and Youlan are starving, Sangu is engaged to an ugly moron, and Shujuan is suffering at the hands of her vicious step-father. While the thefts of the fifteen strings worsen their lot, the status quo is one of social enervation and the creeping commodification of

⁸⁶ The most famous depiction of rats in the classical canon appears in the *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of songs], in which rats are depicted as voracious tax officials stealing the grain of the hard-working peasant. See “Shuo shu” 碩鼠 [Large rat] in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 3:587–91.

⁸⁷ This is similar to the emperor in Zhu Suchen’s *Jubaopen*, who uses usury to try to multiply the state’s wealth. See Chapter Four.

⁸⁸ See Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 9–12; Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 82–98.

every intimate relation. The solution to these conundrums—both the immediate problem of the missing strings and the more intractable problem of domestic dysfunction—is located in the figure of the traveling merchant Tao Fuzhu, who breaks these narrative and economic impasses through the circulation of fifteen strings of cash.

Forty-five Strings

While the titles of *chuanqi* often refer to a single, incommensurable object that circulates throughout the play, *Shiwu guan* does not refer to a particular set of fifteen strings (or rather, it is not clear to which fifteen strings the title refers), but rather an amount that reoccurs throughout the play. Indeed, a more accurate title would be “(Si)shiwu guan” (四)十五貫. That there are so many competing, identical strings gives the illusion of circulation within the play—that the paper bills Yuwu gives Sangu ends up with Youhui, that the coins Hulu receives ends up with Youlan.⁸⁹

While it is paper money that pads the rat’s nest (and not Youhui’s coffers, as suspected), the strings that get confused for each other are the strings of coin. In the *chuanqi*, as in the *huaben* source material, the fifteen strings that are stolen by the home invader and the fifteen strings carried by the young man mistaken as the thief are copper coins. There was no narrative precedent for the fifteen strings that get dragged into the nest; the two potential source stories—the *Hou Han shu* anecdote and Li Liweng’s *huaben*—both depict a small object (a pearl ornament, a jade fan pendant) as being snatched by the rat. Fifteen strings of cash, however, is an impossible task for even the most well fed rodent. Given the average size of *wen* copper coins during the Ming, fifteen strings each consisting of a thousand coins could easily weigh over one

⁸⁹ The diagetic multiplicity of the coins—that there are more in circulation than initially thought—finds its opposite in the physical stage prop, in which the different sets of strings were most likely represented by the same object.

hundred pounds.⁹⁰ Zhu Suchen seems acutely aware of the size of this burden. While the difficulty of moving such a quantity goes unremarked upon in the *huaben*, both Hulu and Youlan remark on the heft of the coins. In the beginning of the tenth scene, the sheng enters, exclaiming, “*Ai ya*, how heavy!” (阿呀，好重嘎)⁹¹

While it makes sense that the fifteen strings in the Sangu-Youhui thread needed to be something more portable than copper coins, why did Zhu Suchen not change the money in the Shujuan-Youlan thread to *baochao* as well? A man may be able to carry one hundred pounds of coins better than a rat, but it still strains credulity he would do so when better options were available. Indeed, the use of *baochao* and coins in the play runs counter to their actual use in the early Ming (when the story was set) and early Qing (when the play was published). In the play, Feng Yuwu gives Sangu the family fortune in *baochao* to store (*cang* 藏); that *baochao* would

⁹⁰ The amount that individual copper coins weighed varied across the Ming and early Qing. From the more flimsy Xuande coins in use when the play was set to the heavier Shunzhi coins with which Zhu Suchen would have been familiar, official standard copper coins ranged from approximately 0.8 to 1.4 mace (*qian* 錢). Private issue could be as low as 0.6 mace; the older pre-Ming coins in circulation during the Ming were generally one mace. If we calculate one coin at one mace (one tenth of a tael, approximately 3.7 grams) each, a standard string of one thousand coins would weigh 8.2 pounds and fifteen strings would weigh 123 pounds. Even if we assume the coins are lighter, debased issues of 0.7 mace, fifteen strings would weigh 85.5 pounds. Peng Xinwei 彭信威, *Zhongguo huobi shi* 中國貨幣史 [A history of Chinese currency] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988 [1958]), 640, 677–78, 754; Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune* 87, 184. Zhang Jingwen makes a similar point about the weight of the fifteen strings, though his conclusions that the “original” story refers to *baochao* is premised on the *huaben* being written during the Southern Song, for which there is little evidence. Zhang Jingwen 張競文, “Lun jingdian zhong de lishi ewu: Jiyu *Shiwu guan* zhong de shiwu guan fenxi” 論經典中的歷史訛誤：基於十五貫中的十五貫分析 [A discussion of historical errors in classic texts: an analysis of the fifteen strings of cash in *Fifteen strings of cash*], *Xiandai shangmao gongye* 現代商貿工業 [Modern business trade industry] 18 (2009): 231. On Hanan’s argument that the *huaben* was written in the early Ming, see note 54. Zhang argues that *Shiwu guan* turns what were probably *baochao* into copper coins because the devaluation of the Hongwu *baochao* in the early Ming made *baochao* an impossible method of payment during the Xuande reign in which the play was set. However, Zhang overlooks the fact that Zhu Suchen does not turn all of the *baochao* into coins—the fifteen strings that are pulled into the rat’s nest are explicitly referred to in the play as *baochao*. See, for example, *Shiwu guan*, 1:7b.

⁹¹ *Shiwu guan*, 1:43b.

function as a stable store of value would have been a laughable proposition during the purported Xuande setting, as by 1425, *baochao* had rapidly depreciated and were circulating at 2% of their face value.⁹² While the Xuande and Zhengtong emperors pursued monetary policies that attempted to restore the supremacy of *baochao*, its primary function was as a means of tax payment. Though the use of *baochao* as a store of household wealth would have been unthinkable in the early Qing as well as the early Ming, it would have made sense for it to have been employed in the transport of large sums across great distances. That Zhu Suchen decides to forgo this more common use of paper money for coins in the Shujuan-Youlan thread is a deliberate choice, showing that his concern is not verisimilitude. Rather, the surplus of identical coins lugged around the stage in identical bags lays bare the problem of money in a way a stack of papers never could.⁹³

That these two sets of coins could be circulating simultaneously and interchangeably introduces the problem of money as an object both on stage and off. Other plays attempt to rescue the commensurability of money by turning it into a singular token that does not circulate (as in *Longfeng qian* 龍鳳錢 [Dragon and phoenix coins]) or that has a particular quality and specific history (as in *Taiping qian*). These plays try to turn the coin into a proper *chuanqi* object—something that can be tracked across the stage, that has a value that only certain people recognize. *Shiwu guan*, however, does not attempt to turn a coin into something more than a coin, something that has a value and a history unlike any other coin. Rather, the very sameness and reproducibility of coins—their regular shape, their anonymous creation and circulation

⁹² Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 74.

⁹³ Most noticeably absent from this play is silver, which was rapidly become the dominant form of commercial currency in the 1420s and would most likely have taken the place of the coins given by the merchant Tao Fuzhu to Youlan (and possibly the other strings of *baochao* and coin as well).

histories—becomes the center of the plot, as the two sets of fifteen strings are mistaken for each other. The interchangeability of coins becomes an index of the interchangeability of bodies: just as the various sets of fifteen strings of cash are easily confused, so too are murderer and innocent, stranger and lover. While the final third of the play goes to great pains to recover the true identities of the mixed-up people and cash, the social chaos produced by the proliferation of identical coins represents the possibility of a world in which authenticity is impossible to discern.

While the sets of fifteen strings are interchangeable, the exchanges in which they are proffered are quite different. The first two exchanges of this amount—from Yuwu to Sangu and from Hulu’s brother-in-law to Hulu—wed familial and financial obligations. The third exchange, however, slips the net of both family and commerce. It is this gift given to a stranger to which we now turn.

Merchant Exceptionalism and the Exceptional Merchant

In the eighth scene, student-turned-oarsman Youlan learns of his brother’s fate while his merchant boat is docked at Suzhou. After going ashore to offer their thanks at a temple, the merchants assemble on the deck of the ship. The charms of Suzhou seem to have turned the four career merchants into lyrical poets:

Wai: Mounting the crane to Yangzhou to look for traces.⁹⁴

Jing: On the Xin’an River, I pursue the heavenly wind.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ This expression comes from an anecdote in the collection *Xiaoshuo* 小說 [Minor accounts] by Yin Yun 殷芸 (471–529), in which men were discussing whether their highest wish was for power, riches, or immortality. One replied that he would like “to ride a crane down to Yangzhou with one hundred thousand strings of coin around his waist” (腰纏十萬貫，騎鶴下揚州), i.e. to have all three. Yin Yun, *Yin Yun xiaoshuo*, ed. Zhou Lengjia 周楞伽 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), 6:131–32.

⁹⁵ While there are earlier poetic antecedents, “pursue the heavenly wind” is a possible reference to a line that appears in the *chuanqi Yujue ji* 玉玦記 [Story of the jade ring] written by Kunshan playwright Zheng

Mo: One glance at Mt. Xi, all that is visible are clouds and trees.

Chou: In the distance I hear the chiming of the dawn watch in Suzhou.

外: 跨鶴揚州來問鯨。

淨: 新安江上趁天風。

末: 錫山一望皆雲樹。

丑: 遙聽姑蘇報曉鐘。⁹⁶

This allusive and evocative map traces the merchant-poets' journey from Yangzhou, down the Xin'an River, past Mt. Xi in Wuxi to—just off in the distance—Suzhou. Switching back to a less elevated register, they sing the praises of Suzhou as a trading center:

All: Every time we go back and forth to trade in goods, we are lucky to be able to meet in Suzhou. We are truly brothers on the road.

Jing: What you, sir, said is true. When the ship is full of wares from Suzhou, every time we go to Henan to sell them, we make at least a five-fold profit.

Mo: We can rely on that. Around here the boatmen are all honest folks. As we go forth, we can be at ease.

眾: 我每往來商販貨物，僥倖在蘇州相遇，就是旅邸骨肉了。

淨: 老客長說得是。舟中貨物，多是蘇州土產。我每載往河南發賣，少也有五分利息哩。

Ruoyong 鄭若庸 (c.1535), in which a character sings of “taking advantage of the heavenly wind to go straight up to the blue sky” (好趁天風，直上青霄). *Yujue ji* (late Ming Jigu ge 汲古閣 edition), 1.3b, facs. rpt. of *Liushi zhong qu* 六十種曲 in *XXSKQS* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 1772:383. The references to the crane and the heavenly wind recall a similar line in *Mudan ting*. In the forty-ninth scene, Liu Mengmei sings, “Now how can I mount a crane and roam freely, blown by the heavenly wind with one hundred thousand coins around my waist” (那裏有纏十萬順天風、跨鶴閒遊). Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭, eds. Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 and Yang Xiaomei 楊笑梅 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963), 231.

⁹⁶ *Shiwu guan*, 1:31a–b.

末：仰賴仰賴。此間船板主人，甚是忠厚。我每一路前去，可也放心。⁹⁷

This scene, seemingly brought to us by the seventeenth-century Suzhou tourism board, would have certainly played well to a Suzhou audience. The focus on Suzhou as seen by outsiders highlights a recurrent theme—that no one in this play centered around Suzhou is actually from Suzhou. Indeed, these merchants are not the only outsiders who are drawn by various commercial and administrative concerns to Suzhou: Feng Yuwu is from Huai'an, Shujuan is from Xishan, Kuang Zhong is from Jing'an. And most importantly for the exchange that is about to take place, Tao Fuzhu is from Wuxi and the Xiong brothers are from Huaiyin. The impulse to keep one's capital (both silver and semen) in the home seems to make sense in this world in which even one's neighbor is an outsider.⁹⁸

While up until this point, the highest virtue of the major characters has been to keep people and property in the home, the merchants in this scene introduce the joy of circulation. After celebrating the bounty of Suzhou, the merchants turn to a description of the bounty of an itinerant life:

Wai: Scholars, farmers, laborers, and merchants, each carries out a line of work. Although we occupy the lowest position of the four kinds of people, we often freely travel the waterways. The others pitifully toil for half of their lives. How can they have a happy life like us?

Jing: Indeed. To be a laborer means to be hired in the morning and work through dusk. To be a farmer means to plow in the spring and till in the summer. Pitifully toil for half of their lives, how can they have a happy life like us!

⁹⁷ *Shiwu guan*, 1:31b.

⁹⁸ On the figuration of capital as silver and semen, see David Tod Roy, "Introduction," *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei: Volume One: The Gathering*, trans. David Tod Roy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xxxviii–xl. On sex as theft, see McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Fiction*, 79.

Wai: Forget the mean labor of the farmers and artisans, even those who occupy the scholar-official class are truly not free and easy like we are. Rather, they are often poor and frustrated and only rarely make a fortune.

外: 列位士農工商，各執一業。我等雖居四民之末，每常放浪江湖，可憐他每半世辛勤，那得似我每快活？

淨: 正是。爲工的朝傭暮作，爲農的春耕夏耘，可憐半世辛勤，那得似我每快活！

外: 不要說農工微業，就是爲士的，到底不似我每灑落，偃蹇的多，發達的少。⁹⁹

After invoking the hierarchy of occupations, the *wai* asserts that the debasement of the merchant obscures his actual lived experience. While held in low social regard, the merchant actually has a much better lot than his “betters.” The merchant here is recast as a Zhuangzian “free and easy” wanderer, whose traffic in worldly goods unexpectedly removes him from the worldly cares and constraints that plague scholars and farmers.

As an example of how the more exalted classes have worse lives, the *wai* shares a story he just heard on shore of a young scholar who met misfortune. After recounting the story of Youhui’s injustice, the *wai* exclaims, “Gentlemen, how pitiful! Is it not because of reading books that such a disaster was brought about?” (列位可憐！這不是爲了讀書，惹出來的奇禍麼)¹⁰⁰ While the *huaben* pins the disaster on a joke, here the calamity is attributed to reading—a practice fundamentally characteristic of scholars.

⁹⁹ *Shiwu guan*, 1:32a–b.

¹⁰⁰ *Shiwu guan*, 1:33a.

Like Wei Gu in *Taiping qian*, Youlan hears of his family's private matters second-hand as a public spectacle.¹⁰¹ And like Wei Gu, the realization that the story he has heard is actually his story—that he is not audience but actor, not off-stage but on—causes him to faint. While the other merchants chastise the oarsman for not being careful, the *mo* realizes that this must be related to the story and has the sailors anchor the boat so he can talk with him. Youlan tells the merchants that he “threw down his brush to travel to the edges of the earth to learn to work the rudder” (我投筆天涯學舵工)¹⁰² to pay for his brother's living expense so that “if [they] are lucky, he may win honor for [their] ancestors” (倘能僥倖，與先人爭光).¹⁰³ But, Youlan cries, it was all for nothing (成空), echoing the merchants' earlier comments that Youhui's life was destroyed by books.¹⁰⁴

The assembled merchants are quick to laud Youlan's “peerless filial and brotherly devotion” (孝友無雙) in toiling for his brother's sake. The *mo* is particularly touched and suggests they take action:

Mo: Gentlemen, to save a man's life brings greater merit than building a seven story stupa. Although his brother's execution warrant is already drawn up, this wrong can still be made right. That his brother will be flogged if these fifteen strings of *baochao* are not produced in time, that is truly hard to endure. We are all on this boat together and there are a number of us here, so if everyone gave one or two strings, however much you wish to donate, we will manage to raise the fifteen strings. Then he can go hand it in to the authorities and perhaps save his

¹⁰¹ This scene from *Taiping qian* will be discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁰² By punning on the expression “throwing down the pen to join the army” (投筆從戎), Youlan equates his decision to work on the merchant boat with the need to take action when the state is in crisis. Here, it is a crisis in the family (a microcosm of the state) that requires decisive action.

¹⁰³ *Shiwu guan*, 1:34b.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

brother's life. How could we be sure that he won't one day get a reprieve?
Gentlemen, is this feasible?

末: 列位, 從來救人一命, 勝造七級浮屠。他令弟大辟雖已擬定, 將來還可申雪。只這寶鈔十五貫, 立限追比, 實難禁受。我每同舟合伙, 却有數人在此, 每人一貫的、兩貫的, 隨意捐助, 湊足十五貫, 前往交納, 便可他性命, 此去再行告理, 焉知沒有開招之日。列位, 可使得麼。¹⁰⁵

While the *wai* applauds this plan (“This is a good thing to do; who would dare not go along with this?” 這是好事, 誰敢不從),¹⁰⁶ the clown turns the conversation from the language of charity to that of commerce:

Chou: Hold on, we still need to calculate. The interest we earn from our capital—these copper coins and pieces of silver—is hard to obtain. His brother committed a crime and yet we must bear the financial burden?

Jing: True, true. These one or two strings could buy some oil, enough for one or two years [of cooking].

丑: 且住, 還要算計算計, 我們將本求利, 銅錢銀子, 好不難撰, 他家兄弟犯了事, 我們衆人倒要破起財來。

淨: 不差不差, 有這一貫兩貫, 買些脂油, 吃他一年兩年。¹⁰⁷

The *mo* is exasperated by these attempts to reframe his charity within a commercial calculus:

Mo (angrily): *Hai!* With talk like this, can it be that there isn't a merciful thought in the world? From ancient times to see the path to righteousness but to not act is cowardice.¹⁰⁸ I am Tao Fuzhu, originally from Wuxi. At the age of seventeen I

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:35a–35b.

¹⁰⁶ *Shiwu guan*, 1:35b.

¹⁰⁷ *Shiwu guan*, 1:35b.

¹⁰⁸ This is an almost direct quotation from the *Lunyu*: “To see the path to righteousness but to not act is cowardice” (見義不為, 無勇也). See *Lunyu zhushu*, 2:24 in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 19:56.

left home to become a merchant; now I am fifty-eight years old.¹⁰⁹ I have been plying my trade on these rivers and lakes for over forty years. Where have I docked and not spent a few taels of silver? Since all of you fellow merchants are unwilling to help, forget it! Elder brother Xiong, I alone will help you go!

末[怒介]: 咳。如此說，難道天地間，再沒有個慈悲之念了。自古見義不為，是無勇也。在下叫做陶複朱，原是無錫人氏。十八歲出外為商，今年五十九歲，在江湖上，走過四十多年。那一處馬頭上，不費幾兩銀子。既眾客商不願協助，罷，熊大哥，我就獨力捐助你去。¹¹⁰

That the *mo* only now introduces himself to the audience is significant. Unlike the other characters who introduce themselves at the beginning of a scene with a monologue, Fuzhu introduces himself towards the end of the scene. While the main characters often signal their import to the audience through the reflective arias and prose introduction at the start of each act, Fuzhu's disclosure of identity—of both his moral character and his narrative importance—is unexpected, almost contingent, a figure on the margins momentarily drawn into the center. Before this moment, he was but one of a group of merchants (who themselves remain nameless). It is by acting in a noble, morally righteous way that he differentiates himself from the group and 'earns' a name. In this scene, Tao Fuzhu is simultaneously marginal and central, unnamed and named. He is at once part of a larger group of merchants and an exemplary, a *shang* who is somehow *shi*.¹¹¹

Fuzhu's autobiography affirms that he is a career merchant. Despite the Suzhou circle's frequent elevation of merchant figures to positions of narrative and moral import, the essential

¹⁰⁹ Fuzhu says he left home at eighteen *sui* and is now fifty-nine *sui*. Since traditional calculations of age count the first *sui* at birth and the second *sui* at the lunar New Year, in Western counting Fuzhu would have left home at approximately seventeen and would now be fifty-eight years-old.

¹¹⁰ *Shiwu guan*, 1:35b–36a.

¹¹¹ In this way Tao Fuzhu lives up to his apparent namesake, Fan Li, who adopted the name Lord Tao Zhu 陶朱公 after resigning from politics and taking up the life of a merchant.

merchant-ness of these merchants is always qualified. Just as Youlan's foray into wage labor is contingent and temporary, these characters may under take the occupation of the merchant without becoming a merchant. In one example that will be discussed in Chapter Four, Shen Wansan, the wealthy merchant protagonist of *Jubaopen*, comes from official stock and only transitions to merchant as a way-station on his path from loyalist fisherman to God of Wealth.¹¹² While such occupational arcs (however fanciful) capture the flux of seventeenth-century social life, beneath these ever changing occupational roles there remains a stable moral character attributable to one's fundamental *shi*-ness: you can take a man out of the *shi* class, but you cannot take the *shi* out of the man. Since these merchant protagonists come from *shi* families, it is not inconsistent that they are embodied by the *sheng* role type, with his elevated diction and moral superiority.

The oil-peddling protagonist of Li Yu's play *Zhan huakui* 占花魁 (Winning the prize courtesan) similarly embodies this bifurcation of occupation and character, signaling the possibilities of a differently constituted subjectivity. *Zhan huakui* is set during the fall of the Northern Song. Qin Liang of Kaifeng serves under the famous Song general Zhong Shiheng; when Kaifeng falls to the Jin, Qin Liang is captured and imprisoned. His son, Qin Zhong, flees south to Hangzhou, where he finds work peddling oil. Also fleeing south is Yaoqin, the niece of palace eunuch Shen Shan, accompanied by her servant Shen Yangqiao and his wife Su Cui'er. While lost on the road, the women are abducted by bandits. While Cui'er is eventually rescued by her husband, Yaoqin is sold to a brothel in Hangzhou. Yaoqin—renamed Wang Meiniang—quickly becomes the toast of Hangzhou. One day Qin Zhong sees Meiniang and instantly falls in

¹¹² A similar arc will be discussed in Chapter Two.

love. When he learns that she is a celebrated courtesan, he begins to save his earnings so as to afford a visit.

After a year, Qin Zhong has finally accumulated enough and makes an appointment with Meiniang's madam. On the night of his scheduled visit, Meiniang returns late from another appointment. Highly inebriated, she collapses on her bed. Qin Zhong attentively waits on her, offering her his sleeve when she needs to vomit, serving her tea, and watching over her while she sleeps. The next morning, Meiniang recalls Zhong's kindness and is deeply moved. Shortly thereafter, Meiniang pays a visit to Lord Moqi on his boat on West Lake. After she proves less than compliant, Moqi has her stripped and thrown out in the snow. She is rescued by a passing Qin Zhong, who takes her to a nearby house that happens to be Cui'er and Yangqiao's. Once she has returned to the brothel, Meiniang decides to use her substantial savings to redeem herself and marry Qin Zhong. Meanwhile, Qin Liang escapes his Jin captors and makes his way to the south. When Emperor Gaozong holds a celebration on West Lake, Qin Liang and Shen Shan are reunited with Qin Zhong and Meiniang, who are subsequently lauded and given titles.

As with many plays produced by the Suzhou circle, *Zhan huakui* is based on a *huaben* from one of Feng Menglong's *Sanyan* collections. While the general narrative outline of *Zhan huakui* is taken from the *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Stories to awaken the world) story *Maiyou lang du zhan huakui* 賣油郎獨占花魁 (The oil vendor wins the prize courtesan), in the process of rewriting the story as a drama, Li Yu has made a number of alterations. Most significantly, he has transformed the characters' backgrounds. In the version anthologized by Feng, Shen Shan is Yaoqin's father, not uncle, and he is a shopkeeper. While Qin Liang's prior occupation in Kaifeng is unknown, upon fleeing south he is unable to support himself, so he sells his son to the owner of an oil shop and joins a monastery. The *huaben* ends with not so much a social

transformation as an elaboration: the principal characters go from struggling merchants to rich merchants.

That this change is effected by Meiniang is significant, as her foray into buying and selling is radically different than that of Qin Zhong. While Qin Zhong sells his commodity (oil) to accumulate money to buy another commodity (Meiniang), Meiniang's body is bought by the madam to be sold for more money.¹¹³ Qin Zhong's circulation of commodities is finite; as he is selling to buy, his exchange ends once he has satisfied his desire. Meiniang's circuit, however, is fundamentally capitalist: her commodified body is merely the conduit through which money turns into more money, through which fifty taels becomes three thousand taels of profit. The end of the *huaben* suggests a new life for our heroine, as she has accomplished the impressive feats of freeing herself, of selecting a husband, and of reuniting with her parents. With the investment of her money into the new family ventures (the oil shop, land), she is still the engine turning money into more money, though now as the commodity-owner rather than the commodity.

Unlike the *huaben*, however, the play *Zhan huakui* is not the story of career merchants or the transmutation of cash into more cash. The rewriting of Shen Shan as a palace eunuch and Qin Liang as a military hero creates pedigrees for Meiniang and Qin Zhong that are anything but *shang*. In the final scene, the emperor promotes Qin Liang and Shen Shan and gives Qin Zhong a position in the Dongxiao Palace. Once their titles are conferred, Qin Zhong and his wife change their clothes to reflect their elevation in station; the mercantile travails of the two leads are neither their inheritance nor their destiny. In *Zhan huakui*, selling things is not an identity so much as an activity—it is something they do, but it is not who they were or who they become.

¹¹³ This is what Marx calls the monetary form of capitalism (M-C-M') as opposed to the simple circulation of commodities (C-M-C). Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976 [1867]), 247–57.

Li Yu captures the experience of a world in which one's occupation, one's place in the social order, is constantly in motion. As men like Qin Zhong slip the net of *shi* and *shang*, the ontology of these discreet categories of subjectivity is called into question. The depiction of this slippage is aided (perhaps even instigated) by the generic conventions of *chuanqi*; here the young merchant materializes on stage in the person of the *sheng*, whose elegant mien and finely-wrought arias reveal a poetic sentimentality and noble spirit. This double consciousness of sorts can be seen in Qin Zhong's simultaneous, almost schizophrenic, affirmation and obliteration of the commensurability of person and coin during his first night in the brothel, when he both pays for the object of his longing and, out of a gentlemanly sense of honor, refuses to get what he paid for.

The qualification of merchant leads like *Zhan huakui*'s Qin Zhong and *Jubaopen*'s Shen Wansan as fundamentally not merchants—that the merchant hero is capable of moral exemplarity only so far as he has a scholarly lineage—shows that the received occupational categories were increasingly inadequate to capture the complexity of social life. These plays reject the long-held assumptions about the imbrication of occupation and subjectivity, instead treating occupation as a costume rather than a role type—a distinction made manifest in Youlan's changing into and out of commoner robes on stage.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Instructions that Youlan should “pantomime changing clothes” (換衣介) appear at the end of the second scene, when Youlan leaves the study to work on the merchant boat. In scene twenty-five, Youlan and Youhui have recently passed the examination and received official positions, but decide to change into the clothes of commoners to pay their respects to Kuang Zhong. Kuang is embarrassed by their prostrations and tells them to “quickly change back into [their] official cap and robe” (快取冠帶換了). Youlan replies, “Being dressed like this is already a hundred times better than how we looked that day in prison, clad in prison garb and our hair disheveled” (如此打扮，比當日囚首囚服已勝過百倍了). Nevertheless, the brothers are compelled to change back into their official clothes. *Shiwu guan*, 1:6b, 2:55b.

Youlan is fundamentally a *shi*, and his foray into wage labor does not alter his station above occupational merchant, as seen in this scene in which Tao Fuzhu subordinates himself to the much younger oarsman in his employ. Upon learning Youlan is a student fallen on rough times, Fuzhu calls him *dage* 大哥 (elder brother). He tells Youlan that the fifteen strings he gives him is not merely buying Youlan's brother out of torture, but buying Youlan back into his proper class:

Mo: All of us entrust our fate to heaven; what are these few strings of cash? Wait for me to fetch them from my bag. (Pantomimes taking money out of bag) Elder brother Xiong, you can verify that the fifteen strings are here. You can take them, go to the county seat, and hand them in. You will no longer be vexed with this lowly occupation of oarsman.

末: 大家靠天過日，那在這幾貫錢上。待老夫囊中取來。[取錢介] 熊大哥點明十五貫在此，你可收下，前往縣中交納。這當稍賤業，也不好再煩了。¹¹⁵

Though Fuzhu and the other merchants address Youlan with the familiar though vaguely honorific *dage* once they learn of his literati background, Youlan refers to them vis-à-vis their profession: “Merchant Tao, please accept my bow” (陶客長請上，受我熊友蘭一拜)¹¹⁶

Unlike the literati described above who must stoop (however temporarily) to mercantile activity, “Merchant Tao” has no such noble lineage. In telling his own story, it becomes clear that he was a merchant all his life, with perhaps no formal Confucian education. It is his status as a life-long merchant that marks his embrace of *shi* values so dramatic; indeed, the exemplarity of his action stems in part from its radical departure from both the principles of buying and selling that undergird his identity as a merchant and the cliquishness of occupational group identity in which one only takes a loss to help a fellow merchant.

¹¹⁵ *Shiwu guan*, 1:36a.

¹¹⁶ *Shiwu guan*, 1:36b.

When Fuzhu hands over his fifteen strings, for the first time we see money functioning not as an investment, but as a gift. The giftedness of Fuzhu's gift is clear: as Fuzhu has no expectation of ever seeing Youlan again, there can be no expectation of repayment. Indeed, rather than obliging Youlan to reciprocate Fuzhu's generosity, the gift only further obligates Fuzhu. Later in the play, when Fuzhu hears that Youlan is accused of stealing the money, he comes forward to testify, even though doing so might result in his own implication in the crimes.

That the career merchant gives the only true gift of the play is a source of much diegetic bemusement and praise, as characters of unassailable Confucian *bona fides*, such as Kuang Zhong, affirm the merchant's Confucian exemplarity. All within the play recognize that "for an old merchant to have this sense of righteousness is hard to find" (老客長這般仗義，也是難得的哩).¹¹⁷ Unlike Youlan, whose foray into the commercial sphere is preceded by many years of Confucian studies, or *Zhan huakui*'s Qin Zhong, who comes from a family of military heroes, Tao Fuzhu has no prior education on which to draw. His righteousness serves as a rebuke to the condescending and uncharitable officials Zhu Suchen so witheringly parodies. Not unlike the discourse of *qing*, in which the highest virtues are intuited by those outside of the orthodox elite (women, peasants, etc.), the Confucian morality that is valorized here is spontaneous and intuitive, expressed by those who not only not been inculcated, but have been alienated from the dominant Confucian discourse. Indeed, the vaunted Confucian ethic of righteousness (*yi* 義) that Fuzhu demonstrates springs from his experience as a merchant. While his gift of the strings functions as an extraordinary rupture that sets him apart from the other, nameless merchants, the foundations of this economy of sentiment were established earlier in the scene. The contingent and ad hoc community of merchants (who, it should be noted, share an occupation but not a

¹¹⁷ *Shiwu guan*, 37a.

native place) is described as a brotherhood, “a kinship of bone and flesh on the road” (旅邸骨肉).

The very ability of these merchants to profit hinges on their creation of trustworthy (忠厚) communities. These interdependent networks form an economy governed by sentiment as much as by profit.

Once Youlan departs, the merchants discuss the status of their interrupted voyage:

Jing: This righteous assistance is a good thing. But it is only the first day of our voyage and right away we have run into mishaps. When setting out on a voyage, this is our biggest taboo.

Chou: Just now when that merchant talked about the four classes, it led to a lively conversation that brought up this affair. Having come across something inauspicious as we set out, we absolutely should not go to Henan. In my humble opinion, we should have the boat docked at Fengjiang. We should each put up a small share and start everything afresh—make our wish known to the gods, select an auspicious day, and go on another southern route, perhaps Zhejiang or Fujian, and sell our goods there.

Wai: What this merchant says makes sense. Give order to the boatman: tell him there is no need to go through the pass. Gentlemen, let's sit comfortably in the cabin and move the boat to Fengjiang for docking after dinner.

淨：義助是好事，只第一日開船，就有許多蹭蹬。我每江湖上行走，最有忌諱的。

丑：纔是這位客人說，士農工商，你一句我一句，說出這一樁事體來。出門不吉利，河南斷斷不該去了。依我學生，還把船兒移泊楓江，各人出個小分，從新賽過了願，擇個上吉之日，另往南路，或是浙江，或是福建，前去脫卸可好。

外：這位客長說得有理。分付船家，不消過關去了。列位，我與你大家中艙穩坐，用過晚膳，移住楓江泊船便了。¹¹⁸

In the first scene with the Xiong brothers, we see literati ritual obligations subjugated to financial decisions. Here, conversely, merchants' financial decisions are governed by ritual and

¹¹⁸ *Shiwu guan*, 1:37a–37b.

superstition. The superstitious behavior of those merchants reliant on maritime trade was widely known by their contemporaries, with temples dedicated to the gods of traveling traders dotting the southern landscape, testaments to the unpredictability and risk of such ventures. Indeed, in recent years much work has been done by social historians documenting the central roles of various rituals in the lives of traveling merchants both on the road and back in their home villages.¹¹⁹ Within *Shiwu guan*, however, this display of mercantile superstition also performs an important narrative function, as it parallels the larger reversal of the play that turns family members into business partners and business partners into “flesh and blood” kinsmen, in which the intrusion of the commercial into the domicile is set against the intimacy and sociability of commerce.

Tao Fuzhu reconciles these seemingly incompatible value systems into a sort of double consciousness of mercantile ethos and Confucian ethics. The opening scene, in which Xiong Youlan decides to leave home to make a living on a merchant boat, seems to echo those distinctions, framing the Xiongs’ decision as a conflict between economic necessity and Confucian propriety. However, just as Fuzhu undermines concerns about the moral bankruptcy of career merchants, this imagined tension is shown to be misplaced—the economic impetus that drives Youlan to temporarily neglect his ritual duty and embroils both brothers in legal drama is that which leads to their ultimate ascension within officialdom and their ability to perform the most important ritual duties to their ancestors by marrying and carrying on their line. When one is morally righteous, it does not matter if one sets sail on a merchant ship for one month or forty years. Indeed, the lesson to be learned from the principal moral drama of the play—Guo Yuzhi’s

¹¹⁹ For example, Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

overconfident rise, humbling fall, and ultimate redemption—is the danger of using occupation as a shorthand for character.

While the language and imagery of commercial exchange suffuses nearly every scene of the play, Zhu Suchen carves out a space for Confucian moral behavior in unexpected corners. The recuperation of the merchant as a moral subject through student-turned-boatman Xiong Youlan and merchant-cum-Confucian-exemplar Tao Fuzhu points to the increasing slippage between “literatus” and “merchant” as a surprising source of moral rejuvenation and social revitalization.¹²⁰ This integration is literalized in the marriages enabled by both merchant cash and the intervention of a pair of scholar-officials: the one-time boatman who marries the girl of gentry stock, and the scholar who marries the merchant girl.

Red String and Red Tape

While it is the merchant who undoes the twin blockages of money and story, allowing the first half of the narrative (Youhui-Sangu) to transition to the second (Youlan-Shujuan), it is the magistrate who must ultimately disentangle these monetary and narrative strings. In a departure from Zhu Suchen’s other plays, *Shiwu guan* is a foray into *gong’an* 公案 (legal case) drama, which, along with *gong’an* stories in fiction collections, was very much in vogue in the late Ming and early Qing.¹²¹

¹²⁰ On the conceptualization of the *rushang* 儒商 (Confucian merchant) and *gudao* 賈道 (way of the merchant), see Yu Yingshi, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen* 儒家倫理與商人精神, ed. Shen Zhijia 沈志佳 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 155–212, 234–357.

¹²¹ On the origins and popularity of Judge Bao narratives in performance texts, see Wilt Idema, *Judge Bao and the Rule of Law: Eight Ballad Stories from the Period 1250–1450* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2010), ix–xxxiv; Patrick Hanan, “Judge Bao’s Hundred Cases Reconstructed,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40.2 (1980): 301–32; Y. W. Ma, “The Textual Tradition of Ming Kung-an Fiction: A Study of the Lung-t’u kung-an,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 35 (1975): 190–220.

This perhaps explains the play's enduring popularity both as a *kunqu* and in later adaptations into other regional opera forms. Indeed, the scenes of interrogation and investigation that form the core of *gong'an* stories were among those most frequently performed as *zhezixi* 折子戲 (individual scene excerpts). The Qianlong collection *Zhuibaiqiu* includes five scenes from *Shiwu guan*: scene fifteen, *Pan zhan* 判斬 (“Sentenced to beheading”); scene sixteen, *Jian du* 見都 (“Seeing the capital”); scene seventeen, *Takan* 踏勘 (“On-the-scene investigation”); scene eighteen, *Fang shu cezi* 訪鼠測字 (“Interviewing the rat by divining characters”); and scene twenty-five, *Baixiang* 拜香 (“Offering Incense”). As scenes from any given opera were often performed as stand-alone pieces on programs with scenes from other plays, the inclusion of four contiguous scenes is unusual. It is possible that these scenes were performed as a sequence, as such a series encompasses a complete narrative arc centered around the Judge Bao figure, Kuang Zhong. Reading these scenes together produces a *chuanqi* in miniature: in the first four scenes, Kuang has a prophetic dream about the accused, interrogates the accused, secures permission to investigate, and then investigates the two crime scenes. The final scene functions as a *da tuanyuan* 大團圓 (grand reunion), with the formerly accused brothers returning triumphant from the national exams to thank Kuang. This arc also reproduces the sense of place seen in a number of Suzhou circle plays that begin and end in Suzhou.¹²²

Even if these scenes were not performed together, there was something deeply compelling about the process, demonstrated within and across these scenes, through which the

¹²² Idema and Haft note that while the Wanli period saw the publication of many *gong'an* story collections, “[t]he only collection to remain popular in later centuries was that in which Judge Bao solved all of the cases.” See Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 218. This collection, most popularly circulated under the title *Longtu gong'an*, was first published in the early seventeenth century and would have been well known to a writer like Zhu Suchen. In a departure from the conventions of this genre, Zhu chooses to make the Judge Bao figure not actually Judge Bao but another historical personage with ties to Suzhou.

truth is ferreted out. Zhu Suchen here enlists the various investigative modes popularized by the Judge Bao canon: the supernatural clues that set the case in motion, the on-the-ground investigations that yield physical evidence, and the clever ruses that entrap the criminal. Zhu Suchen's emphasis on the procedural aspect of the story is a departure from the source texts. The Feng Menglong's version of the Youlan-Shujuan story turns on the joke that goes awry. As the story unfolds, the consequences of the seemingly trifling joke metastasize, leading inexorably to injustice and suffering. While this process of discovery—of tracking the accumulation of misunderstandings and coincidences until they lead to an unexpected and horrible climax—is possible in *huaben*, *chuanqi* conventions dictate that the broad contours of the plot be revealed in the opening scene. As there are no surprises in where a *chuanqi* plot will go, the narrative interest is generated in how it will get there—how the various twists and turns will ultimately be disentangled and made right. While the pleasure of *huaben* is the gradual unraveling of a contingent, unexpected ending, there is nothing contingent or unexpected in a *chuanqi*.¹²³ The pleasure of *chuanqi* (and its source of narrative suspense, since the plot is a given) is the pleasure of complexity itself. Zhu Suchen's shift to a court-case procedural (as well as the tremendous popularity of these scenes) points to this interest in the logic and structure of the narrative puzzle, rather than the resolution itself.

While the ruse Kuang uses to capture Ashu is arguably the climax of the play, he uses another ingenious trap in the final scene to trick the four protagonists into marriage. In the twenty-third scene, after the Xiong brothers have passed the examinations, Guo Yuzhi suggests that they should marry Shujuan and Sangu: “From olden times it has been said, ‘If it was not

¹²³ Cf. Tina Lu's discussion of novels and *chuanqi* as, respectively, open and closed systems in *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 175–180.

fated, you would not be brought together.’ Could it be that you and those two girls have some sort of predestined bond?” (自古不是冤家不聚頭，莫非這兩個女子與二位反有夙緣).¹²⁴ Youlan retorts that if they marry the girls then “everyone will think that [they] had actually committed adultery in the past” (只道平昔果有私情了).¹²⁵ A similar conversation occurs in the next scene, when Kuang has his wife broach the subject with Shujuan and Sangu. Though the girls are grateful for Kuang and his wife for taking care of them after their trials, they also refuse to sacrifice their reputations. Although their virtue is a “flawless piece of jade” (琬琰無疵), to marry the men they were accused of committing adultery with would “elicit suspicions about stealing melons and plums” (嫌生瓜李也).¹²⁶

Since the foursome will not marry willingly, a ruse is employed: exploiting the ambiguities and expansiveness of kinship terms, Kuang’s wife tells the girls that they will be matched with her “nephews” (內侄) while Guo tells the Xiong brothers that they will be paired with Kuang Zhong’s “own children” (親生).¹²⁷ When the foursome discovers each other’s true identity during the wedding ceremony, Kuang and his wife reassure them that “the details of their case have been transmitted across the empire” (這公案天下遍傳) and thus no one would

¹²⁴ *Shiwu guan*, 2:49a.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Shiwu guan*, 2:52b–53a. This is a reference to the poem *Junzi xing* 君子行 attributed to Cao Zhi 曹植: “A gentleman takes precautions and does not place himself in a suspicious position. In a melon field he does not adjust his shoes; under a plum tree he does not fix his hat” (君子防未然，不處嫌疑間，瓜田不納履，李下不整冠), i.e. if he stoops down in the melon field or raises his arms under the plum tree, it might appear as if he is stealing fruit.

¹²⁷ *Shiwu guan*, 2:58a. While Kuang himself describes this as a lie (假說), he later tells the Xiong brothers that the adopted girls “are just like his own children” (也就是下官親生一般了).

doubt their virtue.¹²⁸ They are convinced, and Shujuan marries Youlan and Sangu marries Youhui.¹²⁹

Though Guo Yuzhi, Kuang Zhong, and his wife repeatedly frame this double wedding as the fated marriage of “twin pairs of predestined lovers tied together with red string” (雙雙冤對也, 綰紅絲), their investment in this wedding has as much to do with their own expiation as it does with carrying out the will of fate.¹³⁰ Guo Yuzhi sees the marriage as a way for him to “atone for mistakes by doing good deeds” (將功折罪), while Kuang Zhong wishes for the marriage to “wash away the injustice of the past year” (一洗當年冤苦).¹³¹

By absolving the various state actors, this wedding clears the way for a new relation with the state. The final scene offers a surfeit of overlapping and interconnected kinship terms—the children (親生) marrying the nephews (內侄); the parents (爹媽) pairing up their adopted daughters (螟蛉); the sons-in-law (婿) paying their respects to their father-in-law (岳丈). These new relations are explicitly generated by state actors, as administrative relations (judge and defendant; jail mates) are transformed into intimate ones (father-in-law and son-in-law; sisters). The imbrication of the familial and the political can be seen from the very beginning of this scene, when Guo Yuzhi pledges to “use every possible method to bring about an alliance

¹²⁸ *Shiwu guan*, 2:60a.

¹²⁹ The obvious way around their reservations would have been to marry Shujuan to Youhui and Sangu to Youlan, thus obviating potential suspicions that the prior charges of adultery had merit. However, this sort of asymmetric pairing (*dan* and *xiaosheng*, *xiaodan* and *sheng*) would disrupt the normative relations between role types and narrative that pair *sheng* with *dan*, and *xiaosheng* with *xiaodan*.

¹³⁰ *Shiwu guan*, 2:52b. According to legend, the old man in the moon (月下老人) would tie the feet of destined lovers with red string. The predestined lovers are here described as “enemies” (冤對), a common way of denoting that “each lover is the fated captive or tormentor of the other.” McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction*, 91.

¹³¹ *Shiwu guan*, 2:50b.

between Qin and Jin” (曲成秦晉).¹³² And as the play draws to a close, Kuang Zhong gives thanks to the city god of Suzhou for his role in bringing these families into being.

This final scene, with the two presiding judges serving as the fathers of the orphaned quartet, brings the impulses of the market and the state into harmony, turning the incestuous impulses of the beginning of the play outward in the creation of new, productive families. However, this resolution, in which agents of the state are able to fold the chaotic circulations of people and coins back into a legible social order, is increasingly impossible in the years following the collapse of the Ming. As we will see in the following chapter, the circulations of bodies and money across administrative and cultural borders can generate new communities that evade (and in some case, challenge) bureaucratic control.

¹³² *Shiwu guan*, 2:57a. During the Spring and Autumn period, the states of Qin and Jin retained diplomatic ties through frequent marriage arrangements.

Chapter Two

Troubled Seas: *Dushu sheng* and *Kuaihuo san*

While *Shiwu guan* is arguably the most well-known and frequently performed play to emerge from the Suzhou circle, *Kuaihuo san* 快活三 (The three kinds of happiness) and *Dushu sheng* 讀書聲 (The sound of reading) are two of the most obscure. Both are attributed to Zhang Dafu 張大復, a writer about whom little is known and who in modern scholarship is frequently confused or conflated with an earlier drama aficionado with the same name.¹ According to roughly contemporaneous sources, Zhang Dafu hailed from the Suzhou area.² While the dates of

¹ The earlier Zhang Dafu 張大復 (c.1554–1630), courtesy name Yuanchang 元長, hailed from Kunshan and authored the *Meihua caotang bitan* 梅花草堂筆談 [Essays from Plum Blossom Thatched Hall], which includes discussions of kunqu and how his sudden onset of blindness in middle age affected his experience of music. While this Zhang Dafu, who corresponded with Tang Xianzu (see *Yu Zhang Dafu* 與張大復 [To Zhang Dafu] in *Tang Xianzu quanji* 湯顯祖全集 [Complete works of Tang Xianzu], ed. Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 [Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1999], 2:1520), was from a significantly earlier generation, a number of modern critics have confused elements of his life with that of the Suzhou circle playwright. For example, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 attributes the dates of the earlier Zhang Dafu, i.e. 1554–1630, to the later one. Zheng also describes the *Dushu sheng* author as a 蘇州人, which would more accurately describe the earlier Zhang Dafu. See “Ruan Dacheng yu Li Yu” 阮大鍼與李玉 [Ruan Dacheng and Li Yu] in *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi* 插圖本中國文學史 [Illustrated edition of the history of Chinese literature] (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 1957), 4:1014. More recently, Jing Shen attributes the *Meihua caotang bitan* to Zhang Dafu, “a dramatist of the late Ming and early Qing,” though the Zhang Dafu that wrote the *Meihua* was dead in the third year of Chongzhen (i.e. 1630). See *Playwrights and Literary Games in Seventeenth-Century China: Plays by Tang Xianzu, Mei Dingzuo, Wu Bing, Li Yu, and Kong Shangren* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 55. Yang Dongfu 楊東甫 notes the influential works that have contributed to this confusion and attempts to disentangle the many misattributions (of personal names, biographical details, and literary works) that have occurred in scholarship on these two Zhang Dafu. See “Wanming wenxuejia Zhang Dafu sikao” 晚明文學家張大復四考 [Four issues concerning the late Ming writer Zhang Dafu], *Guangxi shifan xueyuan xuebao* 廣西師範學院學報 34.2 (2013): 42–47.

² *Xin chuanqi pin* states that Zhang is a “person of Wu prefecture” (Wu jun ren 吳郡人), which was an archaic way of referring to the region that did not map on to contemporary administrative districts. Li Mei believes that the use of *jun* instead of *xian* implies that Zhang hails from another city in the prefecture and not Suzhou. She also suggests that Gao Yi uses Wu prefecture here because he was unsure if Zhang hailed from Wu county or Changzhou county. Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 246. The later *Quhai zongmu tiyao* says that Zhang lived outside the Suzhou city gates.

his birth and death are unknown, textual evidence indicates that he was active from late Chongzhen (1627–1644) through early Kangxi (1661–1722).³

Zhang has left a profusion of proper, courtesy, and pen names, which are still the subject of some controversy.⁴ In Zhang's *qupu* 曲譜 (aria manual) *Hanshan tang Xinding jiugong shisan diao nanqupu* 寒山堂新定九宮十三調南曲譜 (Newly established southern scores in the nine modes and thirteen tones from Cold Mountain Studio), written under the pen name (*hao* 號) Hanshanzi 寒山子, his name is given as “Zhang Yixuan, courtesy name Dafu, of Suzhou” (蘇張彝宣大復甫).⁵ In *Xin chuanqi pin* 新傳奇品 (New dramatic works), a catalogue of late Ming and early Qing playwrights compiled by Gao Yi 高奕 (c.1661), a list of Zhang Dafu's plays is attributed to “Zhang Xinqi (張心其).”⁶ The *Quhai zongmu tiyao* 曲海總目提要 (Comprehensive catalogue with abstracts from the ocean of song) makes explicit the connection between Xinqi and the *qupu* author: “Zhang Xinqi of Suzhou whose pseudonym was Hanshanzi” (蘇州人張心其...自號寒山子). Starting from the late Qing, variants on Xinqi 心其 such as Xingqi 星期 and

³ The earliest extant edition of *Kuaihuo san* is dated 1635. However, the majority of Zhang's output appears to be from the early Qing. The opening line of the *Hanshan tang quhua* 寒山堂曲話 makes clear that Zhang is writing from the vantage of the Qing (論前明作家，首推湯臨川). See *Hanshan tang Xinding jiugong shisan diao nanqupu* (hereafter referred to as the *Hanshan qupu*) in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 1750:638. Zeng Guoguo argues that the celebratory titles of Zhang's non-extant *zaju* seem to indicate that they were “birthday celebration plays” (*zhushou xi* 祝壽戲) written during Kangxi's reign in “*Rushi guan wei* Zhang Dafu suo zuo xianyi,” 50. In the *Qu hua* 曲話 of his *qupu*, Zhang mentions meeting his friend and mentor Niu Shaoya when the *kunqu* master was 78 years old, and that at time of writing Niu had already passed away (*Hanshan tang Xinding jiugong shisan diao nanqupu*, 1750:638–9). Since Niu did not die until after 1661, we know that Zhang also lived until at least that date.

⁴ See Yang Dongfu, “Wanming wenxuejia Zhang Dafu sikao,” 46–47.

⁵ This authorial attribution was most likely written by Zhang's sons and nephew who were listed as the editors of *qupu*. While here Dafu is positioned as a courtesy name, in modern scholarship Dafu is more often cited as a *ming*. For example, see Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 278; Zheng Zhenduo, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 4:1014.

⁶ *Xin chuanqi pin*, xu: 4b.

Xinqi 心期 are cited as alternative courtesy names.⁷ To these various pseudonyms are attributed twenty-nine *chuanqi* (eleven extant),⁸ six *zaju* (none extant), and a variety of musical treatises.⁹

⁷ See Wang Guowei 王國維, *Qulu* 曲錄 [Register of drama], in *Haining Wang Jing'an xiansheng yishu* 海寧王靜安先生遺書 [Posthumous works of Mr. Wang Jing'an of Haining], 14 vols. (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1979), 14:6376. In “Ruan Dacheng yu Li Yu,” Zheng Zhenduo writes, “Zhang Dafu’s *zi* was Xingqi, his other *zi* was Xinqi, and his *hao* was Hanshanzi (張大復字星期，一字心其，號寒山子).” *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 4:1014. Li Mei writes, “Zhang Dafu’s other *ming* was Yixuan, his *zi* was Xinqi, he was also styled Xingqi and Xinqi, his *hao* was Hanshanzi, and his residence was called Hanshan tang” (張大復，一名彝宣，字心其，亦作星期，心期，號寒山子，室名寒山堂). *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 278.

⁸ Between the *Hanshan qupu*, the *Chuanqi huikao biaomu*, and the *Xin chuanqi pin*, a total of 25 *chuanqi* are attributed to Zhang Dafu. These are: *Diaoyu chuan* 釣魚船 [The fishing boat], *Jing zhong tian* 井中天 [The sky in the well], *Xiao chunqiu* 小春秋 [Little Spring and Autumn], *Ta jing yuan* 獺鏡緣 [The destiny of the otter’s mirror], *Zi qiongyao* 紫瓊瑤 [Purple jade], *Shuang fushou* 雙福壽 [Double fortune and longevity], *Zhi chuanqi* 智串旗 [Wisdom flag], *San zhu bei* 三祝杯 [Cup of three Blessings], *Rushi guan* 如是觀 [A view like this], *Zui puti* 醉菩提 [The drunk bodhi], *Jingang feng* 金剛鳳 [The warrior’s phoenix], *Haichao yin* 海潮音 [The sound of the ocean], *Tianxia le* 天下樂 [Happiness under heaven], *Kuaihuo san*, *Bajiao jing* 芭蕉井 [The banana well], *Xi chongchong* 喜重重 [Layers of happiness], *Longhua hui* 龍華會 [The dragon-flower assembly], *Shuang jiexiao* 雙節孝 [Double fidelity and filiality], *Dushu sheng*, *Niangzi jun* 娘子軍 [The detachment of women], *Tian you yan* 天有眼 [Heaven has eyes], *Longfei bao* 龍飛報 [Report on the flying dragon], *Fa lang chuan* 發琅釧 [The jade bracelet], *Jixiang zhao* 吉祥兆 [Auspicious omen], and *Chiqing pu* 痴情譜 [Register of infatuation]. The attribution of the plays *Da jielie* 大節烈 [Great chastity], *Luojiang yuan* 羅江怨 [The Luo River grudge], *Xinting lei* 新亭淚 [Tears in the new pavilion], and *Jinfeng chai* 金鳳釵 [The golden phoenix hairpin] comes from a 1942 essay that refers to a no longer extant copy of the *Hanshan pu*. See Zhou Gongping 周功平, “Zhang Dafu xiqu zuopin kao ban” 張大復戲曲作品考辦, *Xiqu yanjiu* 戲曲研究 19 (1986): 114. In a note most likely written by Zhang’s sons and nephew, the *Hanshan qupu* states that there are nineteen plays by Zhang that have not been published and six that are not yet finished. *Hanshan qupu*, 1750: 646. Li Mei says that twenty-nine of these titles are listed in the *Hanshan qupu*, but in fact only seven *chuanqi* and six *zaju* titles are given. Out of these *chuanqi*, four are attributed to Zhang Dafu in the *Chuanqi huikao biaomu* (*Diaoyu chuan*, *Jing zhong tian*, *Xiao chunqiu*, *Ta jing yuan*, and *Zi qiongyao*) and three also appear in Gao Yi’s *Xin chuanqi pin* (*Diaoyu chuan*, *Ta jing yuan*, and *Shuang fushou*). The plays *Zhi chuanqi* and *San zhu bei* appear in the *qupu* but not the *Xin chuanqi pin* or *Chuanqi huikao biaomu*. The plays *Rushi guan*, *Zui puti*, *Jing zhong tian*, and *Jingang feng* are listed in the *Xin chuanqi pin* and *Chuanqi huikao biaomu* but not the *qupu*. *Haichao yin*, *Tianxia le*, *Kuaihuo san*, *Bajiao jing*, *Xi chongchong*, *Longhua hui*, *Shuang jiexiao*, *Dushu sheng*, and *Niangzi jun* appear only in the *Xin chuanqi pin*, and *Tian you yan*, *Fa lang chuan*, *Jixiang zhao*, *Longfei bao*, and *Chiqing pu* appear only in the *Chuanqi huikao biaomu*. The *Quhai zongmu tiyao* (compiled by Huang Wenyang 黃文暘 [b.1736], collated by Dong Kang [1867–1947], and first published in 1928) attributes *Haichao yin*, *Zui puti*, and *Tianxia le* to Zhang. However, *Rushi guan* is attributed to late Ming author Wu Yuhong 吳玉虹, while the author is listed as unknown for *Diaoyu chuan*, *Jing zhong tian*, *Kuaihuo san*, *Jingang feng*, and *Ta jing yuan* (see *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, 471). It is noted, however, that *Diaoyu chuan* and *Ta jing yuan* were written by near contemporaries. See Huang Wenyang 黃文暘, *Quhai zongmu tiyao* 曲海總目提要 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji

The plays attributed to Zhang Dafu do not comfortably fit within the parameters modern critics have designated for the “Suzhou School.”¹⁰ In his monograph on the Suzhou School,

Kang Baocheng writes:

Zhang Dafu’s work tells of immortals and the Buddha, of obsession and madness, of savages and the strange; his work is completely lacking in the orthodox flavor found in the plays of the Suzhou School. Although he and Li Yu were acquainted, he should not count as a member of the Suzhou School.

張大復的作品，寫仙寫佛，寫痴寫顛，寫野人寫奇怪，完全沒有蘇州派劇作中的正統腔調。雖然他與李玉有過交往，卻不能算是蘇州派的成員。¹¹

While he overstates the extent to which the other playwrights conventionally associated with the Suzhou circle eschew these subjects, Kang captures the liminal worlds conjured on Zhang’s stage.¹² According to the *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, Zhang “lived in the Cold Mountain Temple outside of Suzhou’s Chang Gate, adopting Lad of Cold Mountain as his pen name” (居閭關外寒

shudian, 1992 [1928]), 21:953–4. The only extant play-text that bears an authorial attribution is *Zui puti*, which says that it is “written by Zhang Dafu, courtesy name Xingqi, of Old Wu Kingdom [i.e. Suzhou]” (古吳張大復星期撰). Zhang’s authorship of *Rushi guan* has recently been contested by Zeng Guoguo. See Zeng Guoguo 曾果果, “*Rushi guan* wei Zhang Dafu suo zuo xianyi” 《如是觀》為張大復所作獻疑 [Doubts about Zhang Dafu’s authorship of *Rushi guan*], *Hainan daxue xuebao* 海南大學學報 30.5 (2012): 49–53. Out of these plays, *Rushi guan*, *Jixiang zhao*, *Kuaihuo san*, *Jingang feng*, *Xi chongchong*, *Haichao yin*, *Diaoyu chuan*, *Zi qiongyao*, *Zui puti*, *Shuang jiexiao*, and *Dushu sheng* are extant.

⁹ The *zaju* attributed to Zhan Dafu are *Wanguo tihang* 萬國梯航 [Journeys to the myriad countries], *Wanjia shengfo* 萬家生佛 [The protector of the myriad people], *Wanhu chaotian* 萬笏朝天 [The myriad tablets presented to the court], *Wanliu tonggui* 萬流同歸 [The myriad streams return to the same place], *Wanshan heyi* 萬善合一 [The myriad kindnesses merge into one], and *Wande xiangyuan* 萬德祥源 [The origin of the myriad virtues].

¹⁰ For a discussion of the problematics of “schools,” and the “Suzhou School” in particular, see the Introduction.

¹¹ Kang Baocheng, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 30.

¹² For example, Li Yu’s *Taiping qian* tells of immortals and the strange.

山寺, 自號寒山子).¹³ Indeed, many of Zhang's plays bear this religious imprint, such as *Zui puti* and *Haichao yin*, which deal with explicitly Buddhist themes.¹⁴

At the same time, Zhang's plays, particularly *Kuaihuo san* and *Dushu sheng*, appear to have emerged from the same milieu as those plays most closely associated with the Suzhou circle. According to the *Quhai zongmu*, Zhang Dafu's background was similar to that of other Suzhou playwrights: "[Zhang Dafu] had a rough understanding of the Classics and was good at setting lyrics to music. He was not very concerned with making a living; his nature was plain and simple. He was also quite knowledgeable about diction and allusions" (粗知書, 好填詞, 不治生產, 姓淳樸, 亦頗知辭典).¹⁵ Zhang was in fact acquainted with Li Yu, perhaps through their mutual friend Niu Shaoya 鈕少雅 (1564–after 1651), who had worked closely with Li Yu.¹⁶ According to his *qupu*, Zhang had on more than one occasion accessed Li's private collection: an entry for the play *Zhang Zi zhuan* 張資傳 notes that it is "housed in Li Yuanyu (Yili)'s collection" (李元玉一笠庵藏本) and an entry for *Zimu yuanjia* 子母冤家 states that he "borrowed it from Yili's collection (一笠庵假來).¹⁷ Zhang was also familiar with Li Yu's own work, including arias from *Taiping qian* and *Yong tuanyuan* 永團圓 (Eternal reunion) in his

¹³ *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, 21:953–4. This is a reprint of the original 1928 edition.

¹⁴ See Zeng Guoguo 曾果果, "Zhang Dafu zongjiaju yanjiu" 張大復宗教劇研究 [Research on the religious plays of Zhang Dafu], *Guiyang xueyuan xuebao* 貴陽學院學報 3 (2013): 113–116.

¹⁵ *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, 21:953–4. I am following modern scholars in reading 性 for 姓.

¹⁶ *Hanshan qupu*, 1750:638–9. Zhang's comments about Feng Menglong (using Feng's penname) also indicate an acquaintance. See also Yang Dongfu, "Wanming wenxuejia Zhang Dafu sikao," 43.

¹⁷ *Hanshan qupu*, 1750:645.

qupu.¹⁸ Furthermore, these plays by Li Yu resonated with the work Zhang Dafu was producing, sharing many similar structural and thematic elements, from the intertwining of narrative threads derived from stories popularized by Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu to an attention to the lives of those outside the cultural elite.

Like the other Suzhou circle plays discussed in this dissertation, *Kuaihuo san* and *Dushu sheng* have plots that are set in motion by the larger dynamics of goods being brought to and from market. The mechanics of commerce—how goods are transported, prices set, money exchanged—serve not just as a plot device or as a way to add local color, but as a fundamental structure that governs every interaction, every narrative turn. However, in a departure from the other Suzhou plays, these two plays locate the site of commerce not in the bustling marketplaces that dot the Lower Yangzi region but in the vast ocean that lies beyond.

While the actual impact of maritime trade on the domestic economy has been the subject of some debate, the experience of everyday life along the southeast coast was indelibly transformed by the expansion of inter-regional trading networks in the East and South China Seas in the sixteenth century and the establishment of Dutch, Portuguese, and English maritime empires in the seventeenth.¹⁹ The reorienting of local economies toward the needs and surpluses of an increasingly complex global system had wide-ranging impact beyond the fluctuation of

¹⁸ *Hanshan qupu*, 1750:429, 500.

¹⁹ On the impact of these European maritime empires in the sixteenth-century China, see John E. Wills, Jr., “Maritime Europe and the Ming” in *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions*, ed. John E. Wills, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24–77. For a comparison of European and Chinese overseas trade systems in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 166–207 passim. On the long-distance and local maritime trade in sixteenth Suzhou, Michael Marmé, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 195–198. Richard von Glahn argues that the role of foreign silver in the seventeenth-century domestic economy is overstated. *Fountain of Fortune*, 233–245.

silver prices—from the pirate raids that decimated coastal communities to the trade diasporas that upended traditional social structure; from the frequent promulgation of edicts banning maritime trade that transformed local merchants into foreign pirates to the equally frequent retractions that transformed them back again.²⁰ In a phenomenon not limited to the Chinese literary tradition, narrative fiction and drama became increasingly popular arenas wherein authors explored the potent possibilities of risk and reward offered by cargo ships and faraway ports.²¹ From the thematic and structural exploration of venture in the late Ming *huaben* of Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu to the politics of overseas migration in the early Qing novel *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 (Sequel to Water margin), the various practices of maritime commerce became a part of the seventeenth-century literary vocabulary.²² The ocean, and the commerce it facilitates, appears less frequently in *chuanqi* drama; with its conventions of protagonists drawn from the cultural elite, *chuanqi* set in this milieu are rare. The late Ming *Kuaihuo san* and early Qing *Dushu sheng*, both of which center around the ocean voyages of merchant ships and have heretofore been the subject of very limited scholarship, thus offer windows onto the changing imagination of the maritime world that cannot be found elsewhere.²³

²⁰ Robert Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2003), passim (especially 19–37). On the piracy crisis in Suzhou, see Marmé, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge*, 221–230.

²¹ On the relation of literary genre and the experience of risk endemic to early modern maritime ventures, see Valerie Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). The genre of tragicomedy is strikingly similar to the *chuanqi*, as both attempt to reconcile loss with some sort of profitable return—in English tragicomedy, this is figured as Christian salvation; in *chuanqi*, it is the *da tuanyuan*, the final scene of reunion that physically recuperates socio-political wholeness.

²² See Ellen Widmer, *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 51–77; 157–182.

²³ The only dedicated study of these plays is a short article by Gu Lingsen. Li Mei also briefly mentions *Dushu sheng* in her monograph. It should be noted, though, that her short discussions of the play are marred by misquoting. In the first quote she attributes a line (朝廷失禮不威) to scene nine that does not

In *Kuaihuo san* the ocean is the source of both anxiety and rejuvenation—of pirate raids and fearsome waves, of untold riches and foreign allies. Not surprising for a story written during the waning years of the Ming Dynasty, the very personal stories of the prices and profits of maritime commerce are folded into a fantasy of the Ming expanding its dominion across the ocean. In the early Qing play *Dushu sheng*, however, the ocean no longer contains these benevolent possibilities—whereas *Kuaihuo san* depicts the camaraderie of fellow travelers, in *Dushu sheng* the merchant ship is a place of sickness and scheming; while the earlier play leaves its hero shipwrecked on the island of a China-admiring king, the later play strands its protagonist with a savage bearman. Zhang further muddies the waters with his rewriting of the pirate villains. While the pirates of *Kuaihuo san* are a nameless, bloodthirsty horde, in *Dushu sheng* the loyalist motives of the pirate Shi Yi are treated with seriousness and sympathy.

In the aftermath of the fall of the Ming, the vast ocean's promise of an all-encompassing Sinosphere—in which foreign kingdoms desire to become vassal states and the riches of the world are sent in tribute—has been replaced with a fractured, hostile world. The ocean is no longer a site of an infinitely expansive empire, as it was in *Kuaihuo san*, but a dangerous, liminal space outside the reach of the state, a site of betrayal and competing loyalties that ultimately must be put in order back on land.

appear there. In the second quote she inverts the order of two characters and inserts a character that does not appear in the text. Li Mei does not provide the sources for any of the plays she quotes from in her monograph, but there is only one edition of the play and it is in the *Guben xiqu congkan* (which also appears in her bibliography). Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 201.

Vessels and Vassals in *Kuaihuo san*

Kuaihuo san is one of the few Suzhou circle plays that survives in a dated late Ming edition.²⁴ None of the extant premodern editions list an author; the attribution of the play to Zhang Dafu comes from the *Xin chuanqi pin*, which lists it as the seventh of Zhang's sixteen plays. While the *Quhai zongmu* lists the author as unknown,²⁵ current scholarly opinion follows Wu Mei in attributing authorship to Zhang Dafu.²⁶

The protagonist of *Kuaihuo san* is Jiang Zhen, a poor orphan from Hangzhou. Despite his upbringing as an educated man, he is prone to infatuations (*chi* 痴) that have rendered him fairly useless in supporting himself and have given rise to his nickname Jiang Chi. Knowing that Jiang is particularly enthusiastic about sightseeing, his friends Wang Qifeng and Ju Mu'an invite him

²⁴ One manuscript housed in the Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan bears the inscription “copied by Bian Duanfu of Suzhou in the *yihai* year of Chongzhen [1635]” (崇禎乙亥姑蘇卞端甫錄). This edition contains many transcription errors; the musical notations and stage directions seem to indicate that this was a performance script. There is also an “old” manuscript from Wu Mei's collection that was included in the third collection of the *Guben xiqu congkan*; this edition is carefully written and was perhaps intended for literati consumption. Neither of these editions lists an author. According to Guo Yingde, there is also a Republican-era edition housed in the Beijing Library and an undated “red-lined” manuscript 紅格抄本 in the Peking University Library. The *Guben* edition consists of 2 *juan* and 28 scenes, though Guo Yingde incorrectly states that there are twenty-nine scenes and Zhou Gongping that there are thirty. See Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:556; Zhou Gongping, “Zhang Dafu xiqu zuopin kao ban,” 122. All quotes will be from the *Guben xiqu congkan* edition.

²⁵ Zhou Gongping states incorrectly that this play is attributed to Zhang Dafu in the *Quhai*. See “Zhang Dafu xiqu zuopin kao ban,” 121. The *Quhai* author states, “It is not known who wrote it” (未知何人所作); this is not unusual, as the *Chuanqi huikao* fails to identify a number of Suzhou circle playwrights as the authors for many of the plays commonly attributed to them in other seventeenth-century sources. Deng Changfeng argues that this not only shows that the author of the *Chuanqi huikao* had not read the *Xin chuanqi pin*, but that he was not from the Suzhou area. Deng Changfeng 鄧長風, “*Chuanqi huikao tanwei*” 《傳奇彙考》探微 [An investigation of the *Chuanqi huikao*], *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 17.1 (1999): 237.

²⁶ See, for example, Zhou Qin, *Suzhou kunqu*, 96; Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:556–557; Kang Baocheng, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 30; Sun Shulei, *Ming mo Qing chu xiju yanjiu*, 33. It is unclear how many are simply repeating Wu Mei's attribution, as the reason for this attribution is never given. I find the internal evidence that suggests that both plays were produced by the same author to be compelling. However, as there is limited textual evidence for the attribution of this particular text to Zhang Dafu, I will refer to the text's author(s) as “the author.”

to accompany them on a business trip to Zhuji village. When they are caught in a downpour and take cover in the doorway of house, Jiang jokes that they should go inside as this is his father-in-law's house. Unbeknownst to Jiang, the patriarch of the house, Tao Jing, could hear him. Tao is irritated by the young man's impertinence, so he invites the other two inside while leaving Jiang outside in the rain.

Meanwhile, Tao's wife, Lady Li, is secretly setting in motion her plan to help their daughter Ying'er flee a terrible marriage arrangement. As an infant, Ying'er was promised to the son of the Mei family. Recently the boy has contracted leprosy and appears to be near death. His father, Mei Dechun, learns via divination that the only hope for his son's recovery is for him to marry immediately. While Tao insists that it would be improper for Ying'er to back out of the arrangement, Lady Li plots with her nephew Li Hou'er to hide Ying'er in a nunnery and later marry her to a more suitable mate. At the appointed time that night, a bag of Ying'er's valuables is tossed to the nephew waiting outside; Ying'er and her nursemaid then follow the man at a distance throughout the night as he leads them to safety. In the morning, however, they are shocked to discover that the man is not the nephew, but a very confused Jiang. Ying'er asks that he walk them back home, but he suggests that they instead get married. After some cajoling and appeals to ancient precedents, Ying'er agrees and they decide to settle in Ningbo.

Shortly after Ying'er's escape, the Mei family sends a marriage procession to fetch her. To avoid telling the Mei family that Ying'er is gone, Li Hou'er pretends to be Ying'er. As the groom is too weak to join his bride in bed, Li's disguise is not discovered until a month later when Mei Dechun, in a fit of passion, tries to force himself on the blushing young bride. Mei drags the imposter and the Tao family to court, but the magistrate decides that all parties are guilty of wrongdoing.

After six months of living in Ningbo, Ying'er and her maid pressure Jiang to pursue some sort of livelihood. While Jiang is out researching how to become a merchant, pirates lay siege to the city, and Ying'er and her maid are forced to flee. When the maid is killed, Ying'er decides to drown herself, only to be saved by a madam from Yangzhou who happens to be passing by in boat. Jiang returns home and is distraught to find his wife and maid missing and presumed dead. His friend Wang Qifeng convinces him to join him on trading venture to Japan. Jiang does not have any capital or merchandise, so he grabs a bucket of olives that were abandoned during the pirate raid. Once they are out at sea, a massive storm sweeps all of the merchants and their merchandise overboard, leaving only Jiang, the boatman, and the bucket of olives. They land on an island country call Qiuci, where they share some olives with the natives.²⁷ A crowd begins to gather, with natives offering Jiang pieces of silver for a single olive. An emissary from the king arrives and brings Jiang to the palace. The king, a great admirer of China, was excited to learn of his presence and asks him questions about Chinese history and the strange fruit he brought. The king tries an olive and finds that it has cured him of a long-standing illness. He buys the remaining stock and decides to return with Jiang to China to pay tribute to the emperor.

The emperor is impressed with Jiang's abilities and confers on him the status of *jinshi* and appoints him the Inspector of Yangzhou. Jiang learns from his friend Ju Mu'an that Ying'er

²⁷ It is unclear if Qiuciguo 邱慈國 is meant to refer to a known country or if the name is invented Zhang. Qiuci is a possible Sinicization of the Central Asian kingdom Kucha (more commonly Sinicized as Qiuci 龜茲), but as *Kuaihuo san's* Qiuci is in the middle of the ocean (海中), it is clearly not meant to the land-locked Kucha. However, in Ling Mengchu's *Zhuanyun Han*, which serves as the source material for this narrative thread, the foreign country is Jiling 吉零國, which was an important trading center during the Tang. Jiling (Killah or Kalah), located off of the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, was the site of much Chinese-Arab trade after the Huang Chao rebellion created trade disruptions in southern China. John Guy, "Tamil Merchant Guilds and the Quanzhou Trade," in *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400*, ed. Angela Schottenhammer (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 284; Chang Tien Tse [Zhang Tianze], *Sino-Portuguese Trade from 1514 to 1644: A Synthesis of Portuguese and Chinese Sources* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1969 [1933]), 15–16.

is being kept against her will in a Yangzhou brothel and arrives just in time to save her from another suicide attempt. They reunite with her parents, who had also come to Yangzhou to rescue her. Though Tao is initially ashamed of Ying'er and Jiang's self-made marriage arrangement, he is persuaded to accept them as his daughter and son-in-law.²⁸

Like many plays written by Suzhou playwrights, *Kuaihuo san* draws from two late Ming *huaben*: *Tao jia weng da yu liu bin*, *Jiang Zhenqing pianyan de fu* 陶家翁大雨留賓, 蔣震卿片言得婦 (Old Man Tao takes in visitors during a rainstorm; Jiang Zhenqing gets a wife with only a few words) and *Zhuanyun Han yu qiao Dongting hong*, *Bosi hu zhipo tuolong ke* 轉運漢遇巧洞庭紅, 波斯胡指破鼉龍殼 (A Chinese man changes his luck with the help of Dongting tangerines; a Persian breaks open a turtle-dragon's shell), both from Ling Mengchu's collection *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案驚奇 (Slapping the table in amazement).²⁹ The first story, in which a young man lucks into a marriage through a joke and a misunderstanding, provides the basis for much of the play's plot and the details, including character and place names, remain largely unchanged.³⁰

²⁸ As Guo Yingde has noted, the *Quhai zongmu* summary states that the story ends with Jiang and his wife ascending to heaven as immortals but this does not appear in the extant edition; *Quhai* also says that the protagonist's name is Jiang Ting, which is the name of the protagonist of the earlier story as circulated by Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460–1527) (discussed below in note 30) but not the name as it appears in any extant version. It cannot be determined if the *Quhai* compilers were using a version that is no longer extant or if they had confused the plot of the play with another story (perhaps the Yin Yun-attributed anecdote about riding the crane to Yangzhou?). While this non-extant ending and name are repeated in synopses of the play by some modern scholars (for example Zhou Miaozhong 周妙中, *Qingdai xiqu shi* 清代戲曲史 [History of Qing drama] [Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987], 28), these scholars appear to be borrowing the language of the *Quhai* and are not referencing a heretofore unknown version of the text.

²⁹ For a discussion of the latter story, see Tina Lu, *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, 34–38.

³⁰ This story is an elaboration of a story about Jiang Ting 蔣霆 recounted by Zhu Yunming in his *Jiuchao yeji* 九朝野記 [Unofficial history of the nine reigns]. Ling Mengchu incorrectly attributes the story to the *Xiqiao yeji* 西樵野記 [Unofficial history of Xiqiao], which was written by Hou Dian 侯甸.

The few alterations that were made seem in keeping with the conventions of the *chuanqi* genre: *Kuaihuo san* gives the *chou* some comic business with the cross-dressing scenes and preserves the virtue of *guimen dan* 閨門旦 (damsel of the inner-chambers) Ying'er by eliminating the plot about her plans to elope with her lover.³¹ *Kuaihuo san*'s Ying'er is also not to blame for running away, as her mother is responsible for orchestrating her escape. While the play adheres closely to the narrative turns of Ling's *Tao jiaoweng* story, in the secondary thread, it diverges quite dramatically from the story told in *Zhuanyun Han*. The major contours of the story remain: a slightly hapless protagonist makes a great profit selling fruit overseas. But while the Ling Mengchu story skewers the contingency of value, *Kuaihuo san*'s foreign adventure serves to reaffirm it.

Golden Opportunities

Ling Mengchu's *Zhuanyun Han* turns on a series of unexpected reversals in which something that is cheap in one context is dear in another: the oranges that cost one tael per hundred catty in Suzhou but fetch a tael each in Jiling; the tortoise shell that is a worthless curio to the Chinese but is a rare treasure to the Persians. But as the narrator notes, these discrepancies that generated so much profit in this case are not indicative of a larger, legible system of value that can be understood or exploited. When the imagined reader asks why all merchants do not attempt to sell fruit to the people of Jiling, the narrator reproaches him:

Dear reader, it is not like this. This person came into this unexpected windfall entirely by chance. He went forth with the goods and happened upon great gain. Suppose he decided to go back a second time with more fruit. If the conditions were not favorable, by the third day or so the fruit will have started to rot. [...]

³¹ The *guimen dan* is a subset of the *dan* role part. A *guimen dan* role is usually a virtuous and highborn girl.

This line of argumentation that holds fast to one mode of reasoning is really untenable.

看官，又不是這話。也是此人偶然有此橫財，帶去著了手。若是有心第二遭再帶去，三五日不遇巧，等得希爛。[...] 是這樣執一論不得的。³²

Aside from plugging the holes of the story, the narrator is reiterating the point made in the introductory story, in which a man learns that the money he thought was his does not belong to him at all and can leave him at any moment for another “owner.” The protagonist Wen Ruoxu similarly recognizes that he has no control over the movement of money. The other merchants urge Wen to use his newly acquired silver as capital—to use it to purchase Chinese goods to then sell to the natives and thus turn his money into more money. Wen, however, does not see the generation of money as the result of any process that can be understood. While the merchants make their arguments based on their understanding of the local economies—the relative values of silver coins, Chinese goods, and Jiling goods in both the domestic and foreign markets—Wen Ruoxu, like the narrator above, dismisses this line of thinking. There is no economy, no system of surpluses and lacks that can be negotiated. There is only risk and chance, incommensurable value systems that accidentally intersect in a way that generates profit but could just as easily result in ruin.

The mid-story digression into Jiling’s monetary system shows how even value itself has been rendered contingent. The people of Jiling use minted silver coins that all have the same weight (and would therefore be of equal value in China) and are assigned relative values based on the type of image etched on the coin’s face. These face values follow a symbolic logic, with the dragon and phoenix coins worth more than the coins that depict humans, the human coins

³² Ling Mengchu, *Pai’an jingqi* (1628 edn.), 1:13b–14a, facs. rpt. in *Pai’an jingqi*, 4 vols. (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), vol. 1.

worth more than the animals, and the animals worth more than the trees. At the very bottom are the seaweed coins, which are worth one hundredth of the dragon and phoenix coins. The ludicrousness of such a system is clearly meant to skewer the Ming's reliance on fiat money that divorces face value from metallic content. But more than just recalling the more dysfunctional aspects of the Ming's copper coinage, these coins confront the reader with the contingency and instability of all forms of value. That the coins are silver—which so frequently comes to stand for value incarnate—is a loaded choice, making the decoupling of money and meaning particularly jarring to a seventeenth-century audience.

Like *Zhuanyun Han*, *Kuaihuo san* also features a merchant who invests no capital and yet accrues great returns. The drama takes even greater pains than the *huaben* to paint the protagonist's path to riches as contingent. While Wen Ruoxu makes a measured decision to buy the Dongting oranges due to their quality and cost-effectiveness, Jiang Chi grabs a bucket that was abandoned during the chaos of the pirate raid, not learning until later what was inside.³³ And while Wen and his traveling companions arrive in a familiar country as planned, Jiang and his olives survive the storm that drowns his merchant comrades and their goods and fortuitously land on an unknown island.

Jiang's experience selling the olives to the enthusiastic natives is not unlike Wen's, though the money proffered is entirely legible—while the silver that the natives throw at Jiang are described as silver coins (lit. “silver copper cash” 銀銅錢), there is no complex symbolic

³³ The change from oranges to olives is more consonant with performance needs. In *Zhuanyun Han*, Wei brought a crate of oranges aboard the ship; a bucket of olives functions as more practical prop while still providing the protagonist with enough fruit capital to feed a curious crowd. The olives are small enough to not need to be represented with any sort of prop and are also easier to pantomime eating than an orange. This change also heightens the contrast between value in Jiangnan and value abroad, with a single olive of unknown provenance being clearly less valuable than a ripe “Dongting” red orange and yet still commanding over a tael of silver each. Olives also suggestively resemble coins in size and shape, a similarity made explicit in a description of the exchange: “One silver coin, one olive” (一個銀銅錢一個橄欖). *Kuaihuo san*, 2 vols., N.d. MS, 1:53b, facs. rpt. in *Guben xiqu congkan san ji*, v. 79.

system that needs to be mastered. Rather, Jiang is quickly whisked away to the palace, where he is remunerated with silver and gold fashioned into Chinese-style “horseshoe” (馬蹄) ingots as well as with objects like rhinoceros horn that are highly valued by Jiangnan elites. While Wen is frequently confronted with other metrics of value (the confusing silver coinage of Jiling, the obscure tortoise pearls of the Persians), Jiang’s travels to a distant land reveal that China is the only measure of value that matters.

Middle Kingdom

China (figured interchangeably in the play as *Zhonghua* 中華 and *Nanchao* 南朝) sits at the psychical center of *Kuaihuo san*’s island periphery. The first mention of Qiuci’s king explains his particular interest in the visitors and their strange fruit as he “greatly admires China, its people and things beyond compare” (慕中華，人物真無賽).³⁴ When the king later appears on stage, he tells the audience about his true allegiance: “My body resides overseas, but my heart longs for China” (咱身居海外，心慕中華思念).³⁵ The king then mentions a long-standing illness before turning his attention to the visitors and their olives. When the Chinese olives prove to be the cure for his illness, it becomes clear that the king’s sickness and his longing are intimately related, the physical manifestation of his distance from the center.

The opportunity to close this distance arrives in the visitors from China. As the nineteenth scene opens, the king declares to his advisors: “Today I have summoned the Chinese visitors to the palace to ask them about the southern dynasty’s scenery” (寡人今日特召中華客

³⁴ *Kuaihuo san*, 1:54a.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:4b.

哥上殿，問他南朝山川風景).³⁶ The king seems to possess Jiang's appreciation of mountains and streams; while Jiang can slake his infatuation by traveling with his merchant friends, the king must rely on Jiang for a virtual trip:

Xiaosheng: I have received His Majesty's command. He asks the Chinese guest who are the most important personages of the southern dynasty? Where are the most perilous or strategic peaks and rivers? Please take your time to describe them and I will translate for his majesty.

Sheng: Hold on, he wants to ask me about matters of state? How can I answer? Bah! No one here can verify what I say, so I will just say some nonsense. Listen to what I am about to say: (singing) Master Pangu was the first to rule over the universe. The mountains and rivers, listen I will tell you (spoken) he divided clear heaven from the muddy earth. At that time humans came into being. The Duke of Zhou established the rites. Confucius spoke about "achieving benevolence"³⁷ and Mencius referred to "choosing righteousness."³⁸ Then heaven unexpectedly collapsed on the southeast side.³⁹ Luckily there was someone at that time.

Xiaosheng: Luckily there was who?

Sheng: (singing) Luckily there was Lady Nüwa who smelt stones to repair heaven. (speaking) At that time yin and yang had not yet divided. The nine suns appeared simultaneously in the sky, burning to death nine out of every ten people on earth. At that time, luckily there was someone.

Xiaosheng: Luckily there was who?

Sheng: There was a man called Houyi. With his left hand he held an iron bow and with his right he drew a golden arrow, shooting the suns down one after another, leaving only one sun in the sky. (singing) This is Houyi shooting down the sun.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Reference to *Lunyu* 15:9 in which Confucius says that moral individuals "may sacrifice their lives to achieve benevolence" (有殺身以成仁). *Shisan jing zhushu*, 19:349.

³⁸ Reference to *Mengzi* 6a:10 in which Mencius declares, "Life is something I desire. Righteousness is also something I desire. If I cannot have both, then I will give up my life and choose righteousness" (生，亦我所欲也。義，亦我所欲也。二者不可得兼，舍生而取義者也). *Shisan jing zhushu*, 20:487–88.

³⁹ Jiang here butchers the classic geographical formation "Heaven is collapsed in the northwest, and earth is caved in the southeast" (天傾西北、地陷東南) that appears with variations across early texts like the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [Master Huainan], *Liezi* 列子 [Master Lie], and *Shanhai jing* 山海經 [Classic of mountains and seas].

(speaking) With the sun and moon settled, unexpectedly the earth caved in in the northwest. At that time luckily there was someone who broke apart the giant sea turtle's four legs to settle all under heaven. (singing) This is about breaking the legs of the giant turtle to establish the poles and support the cosmos. (speaking) Heaven is measured in length, the earth is measured in li, the sun and moon measured in waxing and waning, winter and summer are measured by the calendar. (singing) If you analyze the maps of the terrestrial poles of yin and yang, you will see that the land of China is ideal for excellence in both literary and military matters.

小生: 領旨。中華客哥，大王問你，南朝人物何人最高，山川風景何地為險，慢慢的說來，我與你傳上去。

生: 且住，他要問我南朝事體教，我如何回答。呸，左右沒對証的，就亂說些天話便了。聽我道，(唱) 盤古氏首出御宇。山川景，聽吾說與，(白) 纔分天清地濁。那時就生出人來了。周公制禮，孔子成仁，孟軻取義。其時不想天傾了東南半邊。那時虧了一個人。

小生: 虧了那個。

生: (唱) 虧了那女媧氏，煉石將天來補。(白) 其時陰陽未分，九個日頭一齊並出，十分人到晒死了九分。那時又虧了一人。

小生: 又虧了那個。

生: 那人喚名后羿，左挽鐵胎弓，右搭金鈹箭，把那日頭一輪輪都射了下來，只留輪在上。(唱) 這是后羿射落金烏。(白) 剛定得日月，不想地又陷了西北一角。其時又虧了一人，斷了海中巨鯨四足就定天下。(唱) 這是斷鯨立極將宇宙扶。(白) 我那裡天有度数，地有里数，日月有盈虧之数，寒暑有往來歷数。(唱) 剖出陰陽地極圖，中華土真個是能文善武足智多謀。⁴⁰

This grandiose bit of topographic history is then followed by an equally grandiose litany of the curative properties of the humble olive:

Xiaosheng: I have received His Majesty's command. Brother Traveler, the emperor also wanted to ask you what the name is of the fruit that you just brought?

Sheng: This fruit is exceedingly rare in the world. The branches and leaves are extremely luxuriant, the flowers bloom in five colors, and it is as big as a large bamboo basket. Three thousand years pass before fruit is produced. Beneath the

⁴⁰ *Kuaihuo san*, 2:5a–6a.

tree the immortality-granting *lingzhi* mushroom reflects its brilliance and atop the tree phoenixes make their nests. It confers immortality and the flavor is balanced.

Xiaosheng: How much do you want for one?

Sheng: The price is one thousand gold each.

小生: 領旨。客哥，大王又問你，適纔的菓兒叫什麼名兒。

生: 此菓世間絕少，枝葉甚是婆娑，花開五色大如籬，年過三千結菓，下有靈芝相映，上多鸞鳳巢窠，長生不老味調和。

小生: 要多少一個。

生: 實價千金一個。⁴¹

The king buys everything the merchant is selling, from questionable analysis to overpriced olives. The trope of the foreign fool is no stranger to the *chuanqi* stage, though the king and his translator are certainly treated with more dignity than the ridiculous, drunken Jurchen envoy who appears in the forty-seventh scene of *Mudan ting*. However, like the aforementioned envoy scene, this scene at the Qiuci court derives much of its humor from the performance of linguistic difference. Before Jiang arrives, the king speaks to his court and translator in Chinese (which the audience is meant to understand as being in Qiuci language). This device allows the king to function as any other *chuanqi* character—able to introduce himself to the audience and convey his thoughts through the direct address of the aria.⁴² Once Jiang enters, Qiuci language is communicated by the use of gibberish, though interspersed with enough Chinese that the audience can follow the contours of the conversation:

Jing: Translator, ask him ai ke ma ya gou bu de er ha duo sa li li meng chi chi.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2:6a–6b.

⁴² Unlike the barbarian envoy in *Mudan ting*, who remains unintelligible and unknowably other.

[...]

Xiaosheng: (speaking) Your majesty, (singing) he said there's plenty of wu gu er, that bu er is there for all to see, that mu hua er ha ye compelling, that faking this way, creating that pretty thing, mu ke he er duo duo wu wu luo bo bo er ha ha dang dang making this big ke ke tuo tuo ye gu gu he.

净: 通事你去問他，愛刻麻牙苟不的兒哈多撒里里蒙赤赤。

[...]

小生: (白) 啟上大王 (唱) 他說道，烏骨兒多也多呀不兒羅也羅木花兒哈也當當做假波波捏出光光母可呵兒朶朶烏烏羅波波兒哈哈當當做大咳咳拖拖也姑姑賀。⁴³

In the twenty-first scene, the need for a translator suddenly vanishes. When the king of Qiuci appears in the unnamed Ming emperor's court, he speaks to the emperor (via his eunuch) in Chinese. While a reasonable explanation is not out of the question (perhaps Jiang taught the king Chinese on their voyage to the capital), none is provided to the audience. Possible explanations aside, one imagines that the seriousness of the imperial court renders improper such comic performances as the translator's gibberish aria. However, this turn from the exotic color of the island language to the elevated *guanhua* of the Ming court is not merely a tonal or stylistic shift, but an ideological one as well. The act of translation would cede the emperor's sovereignty over meaning, reorienting the bestowal of imperial grace into a horizontal negotiation.⁴⁴ Within the majestic ambit of the Ming court, all references to foreignness are erased, as that which is outside or beyond the court is incorporated into it.

⁴³ *Kuaihuo san*, 2:5a–6a.

⁴⁴ On the role of hetero-linguistic moments in the production of modern notions of sovereignty, see the Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 70–107.

Unlike the earlier scene in the Qiuci court, the scene in the Ming court has a conspicuous absence at its center. When the scene opens, we are greeted by a nameless eunuch of the present dynasty.⁴⁵ He then proceeds to ask questions on behalf of the emperor, collect memorials for the emperor, and hand down titles from the emperor. Not once is the emperor seen or heard.⁴⁶ His absence serves to foreground the very conspicuous presence of the China-admiring king, not only in the previous scene set in his own court but in this scene in which he eagerly prostrates himself before the Ming. From the exhortation of *qiansui* 千歲 (one thousand years) that greets the king to the deferential *wansui* 萬歲 (ten thousand years) that the king wishes the emperor, the relationship between the king of Qiuci and emperor of China is inscribed with the hierarchical language of vassaldom. And while no such relation between the two lands exists, the king of Qiuci is quite eager to bring it into being. The emperor approvingly notes that the foreign king has an intuitive understanding of China's cultural superiority, and by personally bringing tribute to the Ming court, the king recognizes the natural sovereignty of the Ming empire. For this display, the emperor bestows on him the title of *Haidao dazongguan* 海道大總管 (Grand Commander-in-Chief of Sea Transport) and invites him to a royal banquet.⁴⁷

The fantasy of the self-subjugating foreign king, who instinctively recognizes the universal dominion of the Ming, must have been particularly seductive in the waning years of the dynasty, as threats to the Ming's mandate appeared from rebellions within and foreign pressures

⁴⁵ He introduces himself thusly: "I am a palace eunuch of this dynasty" (下官本朝黃門官是也). *Kuaihuo san*, 2:12a.

⁴⁶ This is in accordance with legal statutes banning the appearance of the emperor on stage, which will be further discussed in Chapter Four. This prohibition was frequently ignored, and some plays like *Mudan ting* found a way around the prohibition by having emperors speak from the wings.

⁴⁷ Hucker notes that the title *dazongguan* 大總管 is reserved for frontier positions. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), 473.

without. While the pirates looting Ningbo raise the specter of a new maritime order outside of the state's control, the enfeoffment of the island king reasserts the state's mediation of overseas trade via the tribute system.⁴⁸ With trade thus folded into diplomacy, commercial relations are reinscribed within tributary hierarchies; sovereignties are transformed into tributaries and foreign economies incorporated into domestic networks. While the Ling Mengchu story ends with the dragon pearls being sent back to Persia, *Kuaihuo san* stages the shipment of cart after cart of treasure to China. Though foreign locales might be rich in jewels and silver, China is the source of true and enduring value, the center to which people and things must return and submit.

Profit Margins

The king of Qiuci is not the only one who is given a new identity by the Ming emperor. For the first half of the play, Jiang Chi moves among merchants and local elites without occupying any particular position himself. From the references to his education—and his tendency towards obsession and aesthetic pleasure, as well as the expectations of the *sheng* role type—Jiang comes off as a vaguely dissolute and *fengliu* “student” who has no intention of studying. His lack of occupation becomes a problem once he, Ying'er, and her maid have settled in Ningbo. The women confront him about the importance of finding some sort of work, but Jiang counters that he is unsuited for, or lacks the resources to pursue, the work of a scholar, artisan, or farmer. As his wife points out, that leaves the fourth occupation: “You may as well do a little trade” (做一些商賈也好). Jiang rather hubristically declares, “I think trade will not be too

⁴⁸ Angela Schottenhammer: “[W]ithin this tribute system diplomacy and commerce were inseparable; paying tribute was not solely an act of formal submission but at the same time an opportunity for trade.” “Characteristics of Qing China's Maritime Trade Politics, *Shunzhi* through *Qianlong* Reigns” in *Trading Networks in Early Modern East Asia*, ed. Angela Schottenhammer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 102.

difficult...the only problem is I don't know where to buy and where to sell" (我想生意原是不難的[...]只是一件不知買于何處，賣于那裡).⁴⁹

Ying'er sends Jiang out into the city streets to learn how to be a successful merchant, where he encounters his old friend Wang, who has graduated from his regional trade in firewood to more lucrative overseas ventures. Wang encourages Jiang to join him on his upcoming trip to Japan, where merchandise purchased in Ningbo would fetch a ten-fold profit. While Jiang is initially excited by this opportunity, he is aghast when he learns that overseas commerce is not, in fact, "not difficult" (不難) and requires many months away from home. As Wang explains, this sort of occupation is not compatible with family life: "The merchants I mentioned, they don't have wives. They are only involved in trade to make money" (說起來方纔個星客人纔是無家婆个做生意，只要賺銀子).⁵⁰ While the drinking game and impromptu opera performance on the boat show the makeshift families that form among merchants, the reproduction of their silver 'children' has replaced the continuation of the family line—a dead end made literal by the wave that later sweeps them out to sea. Jiang pushes back against this new world of risky trading ventures:

Sheng: From ancient times, money was made by the south of the bridge, not in the southern seas. If fortune is meant to be mine then naturally it will be mine. Why must I endure such hardship going overseas to seek it?

生: 自古道，錢在橋南，不在海南。該是我的，自然是我的。為什麼苦苦要出去求他。⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Kuaihuo san*, 1:39b.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:47a.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

However, after his wife goes missing in a pirate raid, the orphaned and now presumably widowed Jiang joins the merchant expedition. Untethered from both the family he was born into and the family he made, Jiang joins the motley crew of men “abandoning children and leaving wives behind to travel to dangerous locales in search of profit” (棄子拋妻，向虎穴龍潭，求財覓利).⁵²

While the protagonist of the Ling Mengchu story begins as an unsuccessful merchant in Suzhou and ends as a wealthy merchant in Fujian, the hero of *Kuaihuo san* dons and sheds his merchant identity as exigency and convenience demands. Unlike his predecessor in the source story, who had pursued a string of failed business ventures before finding great success abroad, Jiang only engages in trade once and entirely by accident. However, this single foreign adventure is sufficient to mark him as a merchant in the eyes of the state: when he appears before the Ming court, the eunuch announces the arrival of “the maritime merchant Jiang Chi” (泛海商人蔣痴).⁵³ Later, the eunuch reads the emperor’s proclamation: “Although Merchant Jiang Chi is only a trader, he is quite capable, so I bestow on him the status of *jinshi* and appoint him the prefect of Yangzhou. He will immediately take office. Thank His Majesty for His beneficence” (商人蔣痴雖為商賈，信有辦才，欽賜進士出身，除授揚州刺史。即日走馬上任謝恩).⁵⁴ The state’s assertion of discrete, mutually exclusive categories of being provides a striking contrast to the fluidity of identities that we see across the play. Even the state’s pronouncement itself undoes its own logic of separate spheres: while the emperor tries to distance the stain of commerce from government office, it is clear that the ability that landed Jiang the prefectship is entirely tied to

⁵² Ibid., 1:50a.

⁵³ Ibid., 2:12a.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2:12b–13a.

his demonstration of business acumen. Indeed, this path to office—in which a career in commerce provides the means to attain the traditional benchmarks of literati success—was increasingly commonplace across mid-seventeenth century Jiangnan.⁵⁵

Indeed, in the short time that Jiang was “Merchant Jiang” we see the extent to which commercial and political spheres have become entangled and blurred. After inquiring about the price Jiang is charging for the olives, the king does not merely pay the requested per olive amount:

Xiaosheng: The king decreed thus: He bestows on you one cart of gold ingots, one cart of silver ingots, and one cart each of pearls, agate, ivory, and rhinoceros horn, all of which will be sent to your residence. Tomorrow the king will travel with you to China to present tribute.

小生: 大王有旨, 賜客哥馬蹄金一車, 馬蹄銀一車, 珍珠瑪瑙象牙犀角各載一車, 送到公館住下。明日大王親自同你到南朝進貢哩。⁵⁶

What seemed to be a commercial transaction turns out to be an act of diplomacy: while Jiang might have aggrandized the potency of the Chinese earth for the sake of shilling his wares, to the king of Qiuci it is understood as testimony to the natural sovereignty of the Ming. The revelation that the king will be returning to China with the merchant gestures towards the merchant’s shadow role as a diplomat in regions in which no formalized relations exist, bespeaking a world in which political ties are structured by the needs and surpluses of international trade.

The emperor attempts to erase Jiang’s merchant-status—and the problematic loyalties of the subject who subjects himself to the hierarchies and economies of other lands—by giving him the status of a *jinshi*. With this bestowal, the emperor both reinscribes Jiang’s identity within a

⁵⁵ Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 246–247, 376–377.

⁵⁶ *Kuaihuo san*, 2:6b.

feudal relation and rearticulates the distinction between *shi* and *shang* (even as he inadvertently reaffirms the *shishang*'s existence).

Despite this act of imperial legitimation, Jiang's father-in-law still sees Jiang as illegitimate. In a departure from the *huaben*, in which the runaway girl's parents are thrilled that their daughter is safe and immediately accept her husband as their son-in-law, *Kuaihuo san* stages an uncomfortable confrontation, with the tearful catharsis of the source material thwarted by the stubborn Tao. While Jiang attempts to impress Tao with his newfound wealth, status, and office, Tao refuses to cede moral ground: "Although your marriage may be predestined, it runs counter to the teachings of Confucius and the Duke of Zhou and brings shame to your parents and everyone in the realm" (雖是天緣法，非孔周，國人父母共遺羞).⁵⁷ Where Jiang had once invoked the Chinese cultural tradition to sell some olives, here he derides his father-in-law's inability to overlook these dictates as they apply to his family.

This final scene in the Yangzhou yamen echoes that of *Mudan ting*, in which the staunch Confucian Du Bao refuses to recognize his daughter and her husband. But while Du Bao's objections are answered by the emperor's proclamation that places both Liniang and her marriage within the social and moral order, Tao only accepts Ying'er and Jiang's arrangement under threat of violence: when Jiang threatens to have him beaten, Tao cries out for his daughter to save him. That which was once solved through imperial grace is here solved only through coercion and trickery. While *Mudan ting*'s ending is a symbolic victory of *qing* over Neo-Confucian pedantry, *Kuaihuo san*'s sympathies are less clear, especially considering the treatment of the protagonist at the center of the play. Jiang Chi, with his obsessions and

⁵⁷ *Kuaihuo san*, 2:39b. This is an allusion to *Mengzi* 3b.3, in which men and women who do not wait for the marriage arrangements of their parents and a matchmaker, and instead engage in illicit relations, "will be despised by both their parents and everyone in the realm" (則父母國人皆賤之). *Shisan jing zhushu*, 20:268.

foolishness, his jests and boasts, and his complete lack of talent, ability, or agency, is even more ridiculous and hapless a romantic hero than the typically useless male lead.⁵⁸ Jiang's ultimate achievement of the three kinds of happiness comes at great cost: the maid murdered by roving pirates, the friends swept out to sea.

While money and status emerge victorious over the teachings of Confucius and the Duke of Zhou, there still exists a place where the cultural tradition is valued more highly than silver or gold—the kingdom of Qiuci.⁵⁹ This possibility of the foreign other as the guardian of the Chinese cultural tradition reemerges as a prominent trope in the later play *Dushu sheng*. However, by that point, the establishment of the Manchu dynasty rendered this trope less a fantasy of total empire than a symbol of a very real socio-political crisis.

Loyalty and Commerce in *Dushu sheng*

In many ways, *Dushu sheng* can be seen as a rewriting of *Kuaihuo san*, with central plot elements reworked and reframed. Both plays are set in southeastern coastal cities thrown into chaos by pirate raids. Both feature scholarly protagonists who find themselves first on a merchant ship and then on a strange island. It is on this island (and not in the examination hall) that both protagonists make their fortune, and both parlay this extra-governmental success into state-sanctioned status. But in the early Qing moment, the expansive optimism of *Kuaihuo san* is untenable, and the various hierarchies reaffirmed at the end of that play are replaced with a more

⁵⁸ His wife tells him to be a merchant, his friend tells him to grab the bucket of olives, the boatman instructs him on how to sell them to the natives. What the emperor praises as capability is sheer luck.

⁵⁹ This ending echoes a much-quoted saying that appears in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Zhao 17): “When the son of Heaven has lost his officials, their learning remains amongst the barbarians of the four quarters” (天子失官，學在四夷).

nuanced deconstruction of the distinctions between center and periphery, Chinese and barbarian, and human and beast.

Set in the early years of the Yuan dynasty, *Dushu sheng* centers around a young orphan named Song Ru who is obsessed with reading books.⁶⁰ A member of the local elite is so impressed by Song's devotion to his studies that he provides him with financial support to travel to the capital for the civil examinations, paying for his passage on the merchant vessel of Dai Laoda. Dai Laoda's daughter Run'er overhears Song Ru reciting books at night and is intrigued. When her parents catch her eavesdropping on the young student, they accuse her of carrying on an affair with him; humiliated, Run'er strangles herself with her sash. Her parents and the boat-hand Wu Xiaosi (who was to marry Run'er) blame Song Ru for her death and lock him into a room with her corpse while they go to file an accusation in court. When Run'er revives, the Haimen county magistrate Yelü Wulitiemu'er dismisses the charges and compels Dai Laoda to accept Song Ru as his son-in-law.

Once they are back on the boat, Song Ru falls ill. Dai Laoda and Wu Xiaosi use the pretext of procuring medicine to abandon Song Ru on an uninhabited island. The ailing Song Ru comes under the protection of a "bearman" and discovers the treasure trove of the Song loyalist pirate Shi Yi. Song Ru is finally rescued when his patron happens to pass by the island while going on a pilgrimage. Meanwhile, Shi Yi has amassed a pirate army and surrounded Haimen. Magistrate Yelü confronts the bandits and is taken hostage. When Shi Yi demands ten thousand pieces of gold for his ransom, Yelü's daughter Maozhuan resolves to sell herself to raise the money. When Song Ru learns of Yelü's predicament, he immediately sends the treasure to

⁶⁰ The period in which the play is set would most likely be stated in first scene, which is no longer extant. Shi Yi mentions trying to rescue historical personage Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283). If this is supposed to refer to Wen's capture by the Yuan, then that would date the setting of the play to approximately 1278.

redeem him. Song Ru then helps Yelü lead the government troops against the pirate forces and defeats Shi Yi. After his martial victory, Song disguises himself as a beggar and boards Dai Laoda's boat under an assumed name. Though he is ridiculed by Dai, he soon reveals his true identity and reunites with Run'er, who has remained faithful. The play ends with a memorial from the Yuan emperor, who decrees that Song Ru take Maozhuan as his second wife and that all receive titles and high honors.

The only extant edition of *Dushu sheng* is an incomplete and undated manuscript from the collection of the famous *jingju* male *dan* Cheng Yanqiu 程硯秋 (1904–1958).⁶¹ As the first scene and part of the second are missing from the extant play text, it is unknown if Zhang Dafu was originally listed as the author. As with *Kuaihuo san*, the consensus of the scholarly community on the attribution of the play to Zhang Dafu is based on a reference in the *Xin chuanqi pin* and an attribution by Wu Mei. *Dushu sheng*'s position in *Xin chuanqi pin* as the fifteenth of Zhang's sixteen plays seems to imply that it is a later work; while it is impossible to say when the extant edition was written or how it was transmitted, the content speaks very specifically to the experience of eastern coastal Jiangnan in the early Qing.⁶² As will be discussed below, pirate leader Shi Yi is clearly meant to conjure those pirates of Zhang Dafu's time whose raids along the southeastern coast were ostensibly in service to a larger loyalist project. That Shi Yi was a general under the Song Dynasty and claims to act out of loyalty to the fallen dynasty seems to be a clear reference to Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (aka Koxinga 國姓爺,

⁶¹ The editors of the *Guben xiqu congkan* used Cheng's collection of texts for their definitive editions of Li Yu's *Wanli yuan* and *Qianzhong lu*, Zhu Zuochao's *Wudai rong*, *Shuanghe hui*, *Xuanyuan jing*, and *Shilin jing*, Sheng Shishi's *Yanzhi xue*, and another Zhang Dafu play, *Haichao yin*.

⁶² Scholars all list the play as written in the early Qing. For example, Sun Shulei, *Ming mo Qing chu xiju yanjiu*, 33.

1624–1662), himself a former Ming general who similarly refused to capitulate to the new conquest dynasty.

Though the attribution to Zhang Dafu remains tenuous, the play itself is consistent with what we know about Zhang’s post-Ming politics. The play is set in the early Yuan, an evocative period for an audience in the early Qing. However, in a departure from a number of Suzhou circle plays in which the heroic Han resistance of the Jurchens, Mongols, or some other “northern barbarians” reenacts the plight of Ming loyalists, the Song loyalists are not the heroes of this play. Rather, Zhang lionizes the Yuan official (and member of the Mongolian royal family) Yelü as an upstanding and devoted servant of the people and ends the play with Song Ru’s triumphant victory over the loyalist-pirates. Zhang’s treatment of the pirates is not unsympathetic; the nobility of Shi Yi’s aims seems to indicate a respect for the Ming loyalist-pirates to whom the name Shi Yi (lit. “suitable to the times”) seems to refer. At the same time, the defeat of Shi Yi at the hands of Yelü, a figure reminiscent of Judge Bao, situates the conquest dynasty as the inheritor of the Song/Ming cultural tradition.

Such a stance is consistent with Zhang Dafu’s apparent embrace of the Qing’s ruling mandate. In her argument for excluding *Rushi guan* from Zhang Dafu’s oeuvre, Zeng Guoguo argues that anti-foreign sentiment would be highly unusual for Zhang Dafu.⁶³ Zeng notes that Zhang’s *qupu* lists his sons’ courtesy names as Junfu 君輔 and Junzuo 君佐.⁶⁴ These names, which Zeng argues were most likely given in the early Qing (and at the very least not changed by the time of the *qupu*’s publication during Kangxi), demonstrate a commitment to helping the new

⁶³ Zeng argues that *Rushi guan* was authored by Wu Yuhong, to whom the play is attributed in the *Quhai zongmu tiyao* (*Rushi guan* is attributed to Zhang Dafu in Gao Yi’s *Xin chuanqi pin*). Zeng Guoguo, “*Rushi guan* wei Zhang Dafu suo zuo xianyi,” 49–53.

⁶⁴ See *Hanshan qupu*, 1750:643.

regime (i.e. “assist the ruler with governing” 輔佐君王). Zeng also argues that the titles of Zhang Dafu’s *zaju* (all non-extant) indicate that they were *zhushou xi* 祝壽戲 (plays celebrating the advanced birthday of a viewer) most likely written for the Kangxi emperor or the empress dowager. Zeng’s assertions about the seemingly political names of Zhang Dafu’s kin are perhaps further bolstered by the given name of Zhang’s nephew Jixin 繼新, which, along with Zhang’s sons’ given names of Jiliang 繼良 and Jixian 繼賢, seems to gesture towards the continuity of virtue in a new era.⁶⁵

Like *Kuaihuo san*, *Dushu sheng* shares many narrative and structural elements with *Shiwu guan*. Like *Shiwu guan*, *Dushu sheng* weaves a story from two narrative threads that were widely circulated in the mid-seventeenth century as both classical and vernacular tales. As in *Shiwu guan*, the *sheng* is cast as a poor young man from a scholarly family who finds himself on a commercial vessel. Both narratives are complicated by the seemingly innocuous act of reading and the salacious possibilities of listening: a hard-working student recites the classics late into the night; when a merchant’s daughter is caught listening, they are accused of having an affair. This injustice is ultimately corrected by an upright magistrate, who facilitates the marriage of the formerly accused.

Despite these similarities, *Dushu sheng* explores new geographic and political terrain, as evidenced in a concern with history (both human and dynastic) that is absent in *Shiwu guan*. Whereas the Ming ruling house is quite pointedly omitted from *Shiwu guan*’s network of Jiangnan urbanites, the inhabitants of *Dushu sheng* are deeply enmeshed in dynastic politics. The play, however, resists the stock characterizations on which most other thinly veiled allusions to the Manchu conquest are based. Instead, the distinction between inside and outside, center and

⁶⁵ Zhang Dafu’s nephew is also listed as a co-compiler of the *qupu*, along with Zhang’s sons. *Hanshan qupu*, 1750:668.

periphery, self and other is constantly trespassed and inverted. A member of the Yuan royal clan assumes the mantle of the beloved Song Dynasty judge Bao Zheng, meting out justice and upholding Confucian morality. A loyalist general-cum-pirate is by turns noble and mercenary, heroic and villainous. A savage bearman reveals a truly humane heart. And the protagonist, whose name means “Song [Dynasty] Confucian” (宋儒) leads the routing out of the Song holdouts.

This porousness of identity—the fluid movement between one thing and another—is made possible by the liminal spaces created by the maritime economies of the south China coast. While *Shiwu guan* demonstrates the capacity of monetary exchanges across townspeople to open up the stagnant and “incestuous” domicile, *Dushu sheng* takes a more expansive view, turning from the metropolis to open waters. Much of *Dushu sheng* is set in spaces like merchant boats, pirate ships, and uninhabited islands that slip the net of dynastic authority, the trauma of the Song-Yuan transition set against the timeless pull of the ocean waves (and sound waves) carrying people and things into unexpected places.

Profitable Pairings

Dushu sheng brings together two narrative threads. The first thread (daughter accused of illicit sexual behavior and hangs herself; suspected lover is locked up with her body and brings her back to life; judge rules they should be married) appears in Feng Menglong’s *Qingshi leiliè* 情史類略 (A classified history of sentiment) as *Wusong Sun sheng* 吳淞孫生 (Student Sun from Wusong), which was expanded into the vernacular tale *Cuo tiaoping Jia mu li nü; Wu gaozhuang Sun lang de qi* 錯調情賈母詈女, 誤告狀孫郎得妻 (Over mistaken accusations of flirting, Mrs. Jia curses her daughter; from a false lawsuit, Mr. Sun obtains a wife) in Ling Mengchu’s *Erke*

pai'an jingqi 二刻拍案驚奇 (Slapping the table in amusement, second volume). The second thread (a young man marries the daughter of a merchant family and lives with them on their boat; he becomes ill and his in-laws abandon him in a desolate area where he discovers bandit treasure; he is eventually reunited with his faithful wife) appears in the anecdotal collection *Ertan* 耳談 (Tales overheard, 1597) by Wang Tonggui 王同軌 (c.1530–after 1608), which was anthologized in Feng Menglong's *Qingshi leilüe* as *Jin San qi* 金三妻 (The wife of Jin San). This story is given an expanded treatment in Feng's *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 (Stories to caution the world) as the vernacular tale *Song Xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli* 宋小官團圓破氈笠 (Mr. Song brings about a reunion by means of a tattered felt hat).⁶⁶

In a departure from many of the other plays written by the Suzhou circle, *Dushu sheng* does not draw much from the elaborated *huaben* versions of the classical anecdotes.⁶⁷ The first thread borrows the basic narrative elements of the classical story *Wusong Sun sheng* as it appears in *Qingshi leilüe*, while omitting the more lurid details (such as the protagonist confusing the neighbor girl and her mother and accosting the latter in the privy or the corpse-sex that brings the girl back to life). The *huaben* in Ling Mengchu's collection follows the outline of the classical

⁶⁶ There are other plays from this period that also draw on this material. The first play in the *zaju* collection *Sumen xiao* 蘇門嘯 (preface dated 1642) by the late Ming playwright Fu Yichen 傅一臣 is based on first strand sources. Yang Jingxia 楊景夏 (*ming* 名 Hong 弘; dates unknown) is credited with writing the play *Ren zhanli* 認毡笠 [Recognizing the tattered hat], which draws on the sources from the second narrative thread. While the play is not extant, three arias are preserved in the *Nanci xinpu* 南詞新譜. The first aria seems to be sung by the student, who talks about his hopes for the marriage and his illness. The second one takes the perspective of a merchant singing about profit and good fortune and the third one seems to be sung by the mournful young wife who thinks her husband is dead. See Shen Zijin 沈自晉 (1583–1665), *Nanci xinpu*, 16:13b–14a. Facs. rpt. of 1655 edition in *Shanben xiqu congkan* 善本戲曲叢刊 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1984), ser. 3, 30:620–621.

⁶⁷ For example, *Taiping qian* and *Shiwu guan* draw many narrative elements from the *huaben* in Feng Menglong's collections.

tale while further expanding the ribaldry, with the scene of the reviving corpse-sex turned into an erotic *tour de force*.⁶⁸ While *Dushu sheng* emphasizes the propriety of the romantic leads, some elements from the *huaben* did make their way into the play, such as use of a variant of the character Run 閏 in the name of the female lead and the characterization of the male lead as an avid reader.

The second thread is also drawn almost entirely from the classical tale *Jin San qi* rather than from the *huaben*. One of the major plot points in *Dushu sheng* is clearly derived from the ending of the classical tale, in which the newly wealthy hero raises an army to quell rebellious brigands—a plot point that is entirely omitted in the *huaben*. Furthermore, all of the Buddhist and karmic elements that are inserted into the *huaben*—that the protagonist is a reincarnated monk; that a mysterious monk saves him on the island by giving him a sutra to recite; that he and his wife become devoted practitioners—are all absent from the play. The only element from the *huaben* that can be found in the play is the surname given to the protagonist, Song, which takes on additional meaning when Zhang moves the story from the mid Ming setting of the *huaben* to the early years of the Yuan.

In the various transformations of the source material, the author brings into relief the tension between Confucian and mercantile ethos. While *Dushu sheng*, like *Shiwu guan*, shows how new configurations of urban, commercial space make inevitable class-crossing intercourse of all kinds, *Dushu sheng* shares none of *Shiwu guan*'s embrace of the leveling and integration of the social totality. While *Shiwu guan* effaces the distance (both physical and moral) between *shi* and *shang*, *Dushu sheng* stages violent attempts to pry them apart; whereas the class-crossing of

⁶⁸ A similar scene can be found in “Nao Fanlou duoqing Zhou Shengxian” 鬧樊樓多情周勝仙 [The Fan tower restaurant as witness to the love of Zhou Shengxian] from Feng Menglong's *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恒言 [Stories to awaken the world], *juan* 14.

the *xiaosheng* and *xiaodan* in *Shiwu guan* goes unremarked upon, in *Dushu sheng*, the potential marriage of the Confucian *sheng* to a boatman's daughter elicits murderous rage from her family.⁶⁹ This is a departure from the source material, which either does not remark upon the backgrounds of the characters or treats the student as a desirable son-in-law.

In the source material for the first thread, the source of conflict is the perceived premarital affair, not the unsuitability of the pairing. While the *Qingshi leilüe* story *Wusong Sun sheng* does not indicate that the young man and young woman are of different backgrounds, the *Cuo tiaqing Jia mu li nü*; *Wu gaozhuang Sun lang de qi huaben* emphasizes that the young man is from a scholarly family, presumably unlike the Jia 賈 (a play on the other reading of 賈 as *gu*, lit. merchant) family. That such a man would marry into this family is considered a boon—the magistrate remarks that the girl's mother would be lucky to have a scholarly son-in-law, and the mother admits that she was always quite fond of him. The classical language source materials for the second thread, much like the first, do not indicate that the young man is of a different social group than the boat family. As above, it is only in the *huaben Song Xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli* that the young man is said to hail from a scholarly family. In this story, the young man's father is unenthusiastic about marrying his son to his friend's daughter as he looks down on their non-scholarly pedigree. The boatman and his wife, however, consider the young student to be an ideal match for their daughter, as his ability to write and manage the account books prove invaluable to their business. It is only when the young man becomes sick with grief after the death of his infant daughter that they decide that he is no longer a useful member of the family.

The boatman and his wife in *Dushu sheng*, however, are aghast at the prospect of a scholarly son-in-law. The ideal match for their daughter is not a poor student, but the “hard-

⁶⁹ In *Shiwu guan* the *sheng*, *xiaosheng*, and *dan* are from scholarly families; the *xiaodan* was adopted as a child bride into the home of a shopkeeper.

working and frugal” (勤儉) deck-hand Wu Xiaosi.⁷⁰ Run'er, however, bristles at the pairing.

When her mother, Woman Na, asks her to sew a jacket for Wu Xiaosi, she objects:

Dan: He is our family's hired hand. How can I make it for him?

Fu: My child, although he is a hired hand, he is quite useful. Your father is getting old and needs to be looked after by him. What harm is there in just doing it?

旦：他是我家雇工人，怎麼我與他做。

付：我兒，他雖是雇工，却也得用。你爹爹年紀老了，須要他照顧照顧。就與他做了何妨。⁷¹

The scholarly Song Ru is deemed a much less acceptable match. From Song Ru's first appearance on the boat, Woman Na is concerned about the lodging arrangements: “The ship is packed with merchandise; where will the young man stay?” (多莊下貨物，那裡還住得下)⁷²

Dai is not terribly concerned—as the student is traveling alone and does not have much luggage, why not have him stay in the small cabin that is adjacent to their main cabin? Woman Na objects that Run'er's sleeping berth would be on the other side of the wall. Dai reassures her that the young man would only be on board for a month or so; if they keep an eye on him, they have nothing to fear.

Despite their vigilance, Run'er becomes captivated by the sounds of the young man reading on the other side of her wall. When they catch Run'er eavesdropping on the student late

⁷⁰ This is revealed to be an act. The villainous Wu Xiaosi had long had his sights on the Dai's daughter and was “only pretending to such an honest, hard-working guy” (假老實假勤儉) so that he could hoodwink Dai and his wife (只要騙得渠). *Dushu sheng*, 2 vols., N.d. MS, 1:3b, facs. rpt. in *Guben xiqu congkan san ji*, v. 84.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:4a.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:5a.

at night, they are horrified. Woman Na berates her daughter not so much for her improper behavior as her impractical choice. Her daughter should “find someone who can support the family” (招一個養家活口); as she “already has a good potential husband, [she] absolutely should not marry this impoverished scholar” (自有個好郎君，決不嫁這寒賤).⁷³ Later, when Yelü suggests the elegant solution of marrying Run'er to the falsely accused student, Dai objects that such a man could never support their family:

Wai: I can see that this Mr. Song is an honest student. Since your daughter enjoys listening to reading, I will take it upon myself to marry your daughter to him, and that will be that.

Jing: *Ai ya*, Your Honor, this will not do.

Wai: Why is that?

Jing: I am (singing) the provider for my family, trying to keep them warm and fed. How can I be willing to let her starve by giving her to someone spouting “Confucius says this” and “the Book of Odes says that”?

Wai: Nonsense! You are a boatman; for you to gain a scholar as a son-in-law would not be disgrace to you!

Jing: Your Honor, I am still unwilling. (singing) I need the right man because I need to rely on my daughter in my old age.

Wai: A student can pass the exam and become famous overnight. Do you really mean that you cannot rely on such a man in old age?

外：我看的那宋生員是個誠實的書生。你女兒既喜聽讀書，我如今做主把你女兒招他為婿便了。

淨：阿呀，爺爺這個使不得。

外：為何呢。

淨：小人是（嘆）把家做活圖溫飽。怎麼肯與子曰詩云作餓殍。

⁷³ *Dushu sheng*, 1:6b.

外：哇胡說。你是個船戶，就招了秀才為女婿，也不辱抹了你。⁷⁴

淨：爺爺，小人是再不情願的。（嘆）為兒郎大要女孩兒靠老。

外：讀書人一舉成名，難道靠不得老麼。⁷⁵

Here we see different value systems coming into conflict. Yelü, who is invested with the authority of the Confucian cultural tradition despite being a member of the Mongol ruling family, places the *shi* above all else.⁷⁶ This is the logic of the late imperial elite, which is elucidated in *Taiping qian* when the parents of a scholar-official family rank the potential matches for their daughter: the best suitor would be a high official, then a brilliant scholar, and then a wealthy merchant.⁷⁷ While a number of late imperial narratives depict scholar-official families (often in straitened circumstances) who begrudgingly accept a match with wealthy merchants, unlike the nouveau riche families featured in these class-crossing marriages, Dai is not a wealthy merchant seeking to expand his cultural capital with a pedigreed son-in-law. Rather, he is boatman, eking a precarious living out on the margins of others' economies. Situated at the nexus of the intersecting people and things flowing up and down the southeast coast, the boatman traffics not in goods so much as movement. In the liminal spaces between administrative zones, the distinctions between tax payments, tribute, contraband, and commercial wares become nominal and contingent, an unending flow of cargo. In one of the source stories, it is the student who has the potential to impede this movement:

⁷⁴ The character *mo* 抹 in this line appears to be a transcription error for *mo* 沒.

⁷⁵ *Dushu sheng*, 1:12a–12b.

⁷⁶ That the Confucian exemplar is also a Khitanese member of the Yuan imperial family will be discussed further below.

⁷⁷ This scene will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The next day, when Old Man Liu woke up, he saw Song Jin sitting idly on the boat's bow. He thought to himself, "This guy just arrived; I don't want to spoil him." So he chastised him, shouting: "You, boy, eat my family's food and wear my family's clothes. In your leisure time you should twist some cord or make some rope—something that is useful. How can you sit there doing nothing?"

次日，劉翁起身，見宋金在船頭上閑坐，心中暗想：初來之人，莫慣了他。便貶喝道，個兒郎吃我家飯，穿我家衣，閑時搓些繩，打些索，也有用處，如何空坐。⁷⁸

Song Jin thenceforth works eagerly to earn his keep, applying his scholarly skills to keep the business in motion. It is when he is rendered useless by grief and illness, when he becomes lost in the thicket of sentiment and nostalgia (a particularly literati affliction), that he is dumped on the shores of the uninhabited isle.

Song Ru in *Dushu sheng* ends up on the boat under very different circumstances. While Song Jin is a charity case, a supplicant whom the boatman helps out of fondness for the young man's late father, Song Ru's passage is paid for by his patron Hong Laoda. Song Ru is thus never pressed into service by the boatman's family. Instead, he stays in his room, studying for the exam he will never take, drawing Run'er away from her industrious labor and threatening her marriage prospects. After the marriage by judicial fiat, Song Ru immediately proves his unsuitability for the boat-dwelling life and falls ill.

While the *huaben* tracks the class-crossing exploits of a late imperial literatus—Song Jin is by turns the educated son of a scholarly family, an orphaned beggar, and a capable boat-hand and accountant—the play is far more invested in guarding the boundaries between these identities. Song Ru is never a beggar; he never labors on the boat nor lowers himself to clerical work. *Dushu sheng* heightens the contrast between the student and the boatman, eliminating the

⁷⁸ *Song Xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli* in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ed., *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, 40 vols., 1624 edn., 22:11a, electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK.

friendships and slippages that characterized the *huaben*. Here Song Ru is, first and foremost, a *ru*, a Confucian scholar, who can never fully infiltrate the insular world of boatmen, with its particular cultural traditions and needs.⁷⁹ Neither Song Ru nor Yelü, the other *ru* in the play, seem to grasp that the preference for the hired boat-hand Wu Xiaosi comes from both his in-group status and his supposed amenability to a uxori-local marriage that would keep both daughter and husband on the boat as laborers.

It is not surprising that the boatman, caught up in the immediacy of his precarious livelihood, would see the abnegation and deferral of the Confucian scholar—in which years of study may one day result in appointment—as an unwise wager. But Dai Laoda does not merely reject Song Ru as a suitor; more shockingly, he treats him with contempt, derisively referring to him as a southern barbarian (*manzi* 蠻子)⁸⁰ and ruffian (*guanggun* 光棍).⁸¹ Such treatment is echoed in a few other contemporaneous texts. Judith Berling writes of a similar incident in the late Ming novel *Sanjiao kaimi guizheng yanyi* 三教開迷歸正演義 (The romance of the three teachings clearing up the deluded and returning them to the true way), in which uneducated boatmen treat a poor scholar with scorn.⁸²

The latent violence that suffuses these interactions bespeaks a fundamental incompatibility between the commercial economy's virtue of utility and the Confucian

⁷⁹ On the ritual world of boatmen, see for example David E. Kelley, "Temples and Tribute Fleets: The Luo Sect and Boatmen's Associations in the Eighteenth Century," *Modern China* 8 (1982): 361–391.

⁸⁰ *Dushu sheng*, 1:7b.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1:10b.

⁸² This novel, published between 1612 and 1620 in Nanjing, depicts everyday life in southeastern China during the late Ming. See Judith A. Berling, "Religion and Popular Culture: The Management of Moral Capital in *The Romance of the Three Teachings*," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 202.

intellectual tradition that eschews instrumental thinking;⁸³ between the Confucian directive to rectify names and the impulse of the maritime economy to turn a world of discrete objects into “merchandise” (*huowu* 貨物); between the desire of the cultural elites to keep people and things in their place and the ceaseless ebb and flow of the people and things drawn into the maritime economy. The work of this play is to resolve these contradictions, which it does by making that which seems most antithetical to profit the most profitable of all.

Speech Acts

The act of reading aloud, from which the play derives its name and on which its plot hinges, is not in any of the source material. However, the trope of the reciting student as a source of moral danger figures in a number of late imperial works. Reading out loud—which was the dominant mode of Confucian study in late imperial China—was frequently lauded in late imperial writings as the necessary instantiation of moral discipline, an indivisible part of the act of self-cultivation.⁸⁴ The cliché of the poor student reading late into the night is frequently deployed in late imperial fiction to signal scholarly dedication and moral uprightness and to identify the likeminded. In the eighteenth-century novel *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (Unofficial history of the scholars), a passing county magistrate need only hear a poor student reading late at night before he offers to be his patron.⁸⁵

⁸³ “The gentleman is not a tool” (君子不器), *Lunyu*, 2:12, in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 19:45.

⁸⁴ For a brief discussion of reading aloud see Li Yu, “A History of Reading in Late Imperial China, 1000–1800” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2003), 94–97.

⁸⁵ Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701–1754), *Rulin waishi huijiao huiping* 儒林外史彙校彙評, ed. Li Hanqiu 李漢秋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 212.

When the listener is a woman, however, the act of reading becomes problematic. Throughout the late imperial period, female readers are often described as lacking the sophistication to discern didactic intent from narrative content; the possibly illiterate women who listen to others read are even more vulnerable.⁸⁶ This anxiety about female listeners is particularly acute in the discussion of erotic fiction. Zhang Zhupo, in his preface to *Jin ping mei*, is troubled that “[n]owadays there are many men who read passages out loud to their wives or concubines while taking pleasure with them inside the bed curtains...what would be the consequence if women were to imitate, however slightly, the things they read about?” (世有鎖金帳底，淺斟低唱之下，念一回於妻妾聽者多多矣。[...]少有效法，奈何奈何).⁸⁷ Like Paolo and Francesca, passions enflamed from reading *Lancelot du Lac*, these lovers engage merely with the titillating surface rather than the deeper ironizing of the narrative content.⁸⁸

The seductive power of hearing and imitating (rather than reading and interrogating) is repeatedly raised as a concern of vernacular fiction—that the wrong audience will encounter the text in a wrong way.⁸⁹ However, the specter of female (mis)interpretation is not limited to tales

⁸⁶ On the development of a female readership in the Ming and the anxiety a female audience produced among literati, see Anne E. McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 67–76.

⁸⁷ *Zhang Zhupo piping diyi ben qishu Jin ping mei* 張竹坡批評第一奇書金瓶梅 [Zhang Zhupo’s commentary on the foremost book of wonder *Jin ping mei*], eds. Wang Rumei 王汝梅 et al. (Jinnan: Qilu shushe, 1991), 45. Translation by David Tod Roy, “Chang Chu-p’o on How to Read the Chin P’ing Mei (The Plum in the Golden Vase)” in David Rolston, ed., *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 236.

⁸⁸ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, 5:127–136, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1982), 47. On instances of mistresses reading pornographic novellas to maids, see Richard G. Wang, *Ming Erotic Novellas: Genre, Consumption and Religiosity in Cultural Practice* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), 99.

⁸⁹ As the moralizing narrator is often himself a winking performance, the exhortation to read for moral instruction over pleasure should not always be taken at face value.

of the erotic, violent, and strange. Even the Confucian canon can lead the wrong ears astray, as in *Mudan ting*, when a lesson from the *Shijing* is met with bawdy humor and stirred passions.⁹⁰ The comic inversion of the self-serious textual tradition delimited (if not entirely authored) by men used for libidinous ends by desiring women becomes something of a trope in late imperial literature. In Feng Menglong's *Guazhi'er* 掛枝兒 (The hanging branch), a collection of popular songs attributed to courtesan-performers, a humorous ditty called *Shusheng* 書聲 (The sound of reading) is sung from the perspective of a woman eavesdropping on her husband as he recites the classics in his study. Feng jokingly praises the woman for her ingenuity in taking a line from the *Daxue* 大學 (Great learning) as an exhortation to have more frequent sex.⁹¹

In *Shiwu guan* and *Dushu sheng*, the erotic possibilities of listening are not a source of titillation and humor, but panic. Both plays feature uneducated fathers (a shopkeeper, a boat-dweller) who treat the late-night chanting as a siren's song, luring their daughters to ruin. In *Shiwu guan*, when Sangu tells her father-in-law that she enjoys listening to the scholar next door reciting the classics, he immediately suspects them of having an affair and moves her room. In *Dushu sheng*, Dai testifies before the magistrate about the student's devious plot: "From the moment he stepped on the boat, he noticed my daughter's beauty. Every day and every night, I don't know if it was some sort of folk tune or what, but his endless chanting seduced her" (他自到船上。目見小人女兒姿色。無日無夜。不知是山歌曲子。不住的念唱勾引小的女兒)。⁹²

Both plays register these accusations with irony—that the textual basis of Confucian propriety supposedly becomes the vehicle of adultery and, in the case of *Dushu sheng*, that the boatman is

⁹⁰ See scenes 7 ("Guishu" 閨塾) and 9 ("Suyuan" 肅苑) in *Mudan ting*, 25–31, 38–42.

⁹¹ For a discussion of this song and its antecedents, see Katherine Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th- and 17th-Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 222–223.

⁹² *Dushu sheng*, 1:10b.

too unsophisticated to be able to differentiate folk songs from the Confucian canon. But while these accusations are derided, the power of listening—and more broadly, of spectatorship—is taken very seriously.

The meta-theatricality of this eavesdropping scene, which enacts the emotional impact of the recitation of words, brings to mind the self-dramatizing impulses of the seventeenth-century literatus. Here one's true identity is revealed through role-playing—the speaking of others' words as the unveiling of the self. If the act of reading is a performance of the self through which Song Ru identifies himself as a dutiful Confucian, the act of listening is a process of recognition and discovery. This enactment of a Confucian education, this moral awakening of the merchant's daughter, seems to mitigate the unease (however increasingly common an occurrence it may have been in mid-seventeenth century Jiangnan) of marriage across class lines. Later in the play it becomes apparent that Run'er was not merely listening to the dulcet sounds of Song Ru's voice, but the content of his words. Her steadfast fidelity in the face of her parents' pressure to remarry proves her to be an adept student of the Confucian lessons Song Ru was unknowingly imparting—a noblewoman by action if not birth.

Significantly, it is the act of reading, rather than any mercantile activity, that sets in motion a chain of events that leads (however indirectly) to great riches. While the sudden transformation of one's fortunes in a way that bypasses the examination system calls to mind the radical reversals of the commercial economy, *Dushu sheng* links the accumulation of money with the Confucian virtues that resist the self-interest of the market. It is through Song's uselessness to the family enterprise that he is abandoned and discovers the treasure, and it is through the steadfast chastity of their daughter—through her resistance to being placed on the marriage market—that her merchant parents ultimately come into great wealth. In tracing the

shared sea voyage of a naïve young student and a predatory merchant, *Dushu sheng* not only highlights the toxic interdependence and hostilities between scholar and merchant, but also points to a world in which the cachet of the scholar has been considerably eroded. Zhang's project, then, is to not only restore the humble student's place at the center of the moral universe, but also to elevate him above the merchants and pirates as the champion of the commercial arena as well.

The way Song Ru's newfound wealth functions—and the way Song's riches are ultimately revealed to his erstwhile family—departs significantly from the source material. In both the classical tale *Jin San qi* and the *huaben* *Song Xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli*, the protagonist uses the bandits' money to buy a lavish home, numerous servants, sumptuous clothes, and rare delicacies. *Dushu sheng*, however, seems to eschew this conspicuous indulgence. Before Song Ru has the chance to spend his newly acquired riches, he gives it away: immediately after Song is rescued from the island, he learns of Yelü's capture and his daughter's pitiful plight and sends the money to buy their freedom. This expenditure is not without precedent: in *Jin San qi*, Jin San uses his wealth to raise an army to suppress a bandit uprising.⁹³ However, this act occurs at the end of the story, after Jin San and his wife have been reunited and settled in his Nanjing estate. Song Ru's involvement in military affairs—as the payer of ransom and as the advisor of the government troops—occurs before he puts his personal affairs in order.

After successfully putting down the rebel-pirates, Song Ru boards the Dais' merchant vessel in disguise. In the earlier versions of this story, the protagonist decks himself out in finery, enjoying the obsequious pandering of the merchants who had previously spurned him before revealing his true identity. In this rewriting, however, Song Ru dresses as a beggar. Again *Dushu*

⁹³ This plot point is omitted from the *huaben* version. However, in that version, Song Jin's newfound Buddhist devotion serves a similar function, mitigating the questionable morality of enormous wealth.

sheng omits the crass excesses of the protagonists of previous iterations, excesses that cannot help but recall images of the nouveau riche merchant in contemporaneous literature. Dai and his wife, meanwhile, are eviscerated for their inability to see worth beyond the trappings of wealth.

The play's self-conscious depiction of occupational identity as a costume, in which "beggar" is merely a role that the truly worthy can see through, is but the final example of the ways in which *Dushu sheng* spurns surface for complexity, rejecting a singular identity for a multitude. Throughout the play, characters defy the parameters of their roles. While Song Ru himself moves through a series of unexpected identities, it is the characters on the margins—the pirate, the barbarian, and the beast—who subvert audience expectations and open up new narrative and political possibilities.

Narrative Hijacking

The most dramatic transformation of the source materials—and the most striking contrast with the earlier *Kuaihuo san*—comes in the problematic loyalty of the pirate antagonists. The classical tale *Jin San qi* ends with a brief mention of Jin San's heroics in putting down a revolt:

Not long after, the brigands Liu the Sixth and Liu the Seventh led a rebellion in Wu. San used his wealth to raise a volunteer army and accompanied Prefectural Administrator Hu in storming the caves of Wolf Mountain, where they tied up the rebel leaders and put down the revolt. For his achievements Jin was named the Commandant of Military Calvary, and his wife also received a title.

未幾，會劇寇劉六、劉七叛入吳。三出金帛募死士，從郡別駕胡公，直搗狼山之穴，縛其渠魁，討平之，功授武騎尉，妻亦從封云。⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Feng Menglong, ed., *Qingshi leilue*, 1:11a–11b, facs. rpt. of late Ming printing in *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 318:22. I am citing Feng Menglong's edition as it is the most likely source text for *Kuaihuo san*, but the language is identical to the earlier Wang Tonggui version. See "Wujiwei Jin San chonghun" 武騎尉金三重婚 [Commandant of Calvary Jin San remarries] in Wang Tonggui, *Ertan leizeng* 耳談類增 [Tales overheard, expanded edition], 54 vols., 1583 woodblock edn., 8:7a, electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK.

As the central problem of the story has been resolved—come-uppances served, reunions accomplished—this digression makes possible the conventional ending of such stories, i.e. the bestowal of state honors. While these military heroics are omitted in the *huaben* rewriting, Zhang brings these clashes with the rebel bandits to the narrative fore.

While pirates also play a pivotal role in *Kuaihuo san*, they remain the stock villains throughout. In that play, the lead pirate, Haiqiu'er 海鯨兒, makes his grand entrance bragging of his stockpile of “a million spears and swords” (百萬鎗和劍) that his fearsome band of pirates will use to “turn heaven and earth upside down, bringing chaos everywhere” (地覆天翻到處胡麻亂).⁹⁵ These pirates are not driven by any sort of political agenda; rather, they “used to traffic in private salt” (向販私鹽) and are driven to looting when a government crackdown cuts into their business.⁹⁶ These erstwhile merchants are concerned only with booty; in Scene Fourteen, Haiqiu'er orders Ying'er's nursemaid killed when she is unable to provide them with anything of value.

The pirates of *Dushu sheng*, however, are led by a former Song Dynasty general who enters not bragging of the destruction he has wrought, but bemoaning the dire state of affairs that drove him to the life of an outlaw: “The Song ruling house was destroyed, and ten thousand people were slaughtered” (宋室摧殘萬姓屠). In an echo of much of the (Qing-sanctioned) discourse surrounding the fall of the Ming, the collapse of the Song is not blamed on northern invaders but “treacherous officials” (奸臣) who “undermined the state and harmed the people”

⁹⁵ *Kuaihuo san*, 1:29a.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

(誤國害民). Shi Yi has gathered a band of “heroes and exemplars” (英雄豪傑) who style themselves after the Liangshan outlaws. While the pirates in *Kuaihuo san* are motivated by a crude acquisitiveness, valuing treasure qua treasure, the pirates in *Dushu sheng* participate in several shadow economies in order to fund their loyalist activities. Shi Yi talks about their gradual accumulation of food and supplies through years of pillaging. In the third scene, one of Shi Yi’s men presents him with “gold, pearls, jade, and silk; strange perfumes and unusual treasures from foreign lands” (金珠玉帛, 外國奇香異寶). These valuables are buried on the abandoned island until the time is right to launch their attack on the capital.

The impetus to launch a land campaign arrives with the abduction and imprisonment of the martyr Wen Tianxiang in Yanjing. Since the magistrate of Haimen is a member of the Yuan royal family, the pirates decide to loot the city, hold the magistrate for ransom, and from there continue inland to the capital. But this loyalist economy, through which the pirates fund their exploits, is also the source of their ruin. Song Ru steals their hidden treasure and uses it to pay Yelü’s ransom; when the pirates return to the island to retrieve this treasure, they discover that they have been tricked and pay with their lives.

When he is captured in battle, Shi Yi defiantly faces his imminent death: “Today I have become a dragon without water.⁹⁷ There is nothing left but to die” (我今日成失水之龍。有死而已).⁹⁸ No attempt is made to recruit him to his enemy’s side; unlike the erstwhile bandits in Li

⁹⁷ Unlike Western dragon iconography, Chinese dragons live in the water and are closely associated with both bodies of water and rain.

⁹⁸ *Dushu sheng*, 2:17b.

Yu's *Liang xumei*, Shi Yi's unwavering loyalty to the Song cannot be overcome.⁹⁹ In resisting *chuanqi*'s compulsive restoration of wholeness, Shi Yi's death captures the fractures and loss elided by *Liang xumei*'s vision of the reconstituted polity or *Kuaihuo san*'s seamless incorporation of the periphery into the center.

Shi Yi's steadfast dedication is treated with a nuance not usually reserved for antagonists, in part due to the character's historical antecedents.¹⁰⁰ Shi Yi is clearly meant to evoke the general-turned-loyalist-pirate Zheng Chenggong, with Shi Yi's various exploits in the early Yuan recalling Zheng's in the early Qing: Shi Yi's abortive campaign to retake Yanjing echoes Zheng Chenggong's failed attempt to take Nanjing, and just as Zheng retreated to Taiwan in the face of this defeat, Shi Yi flees to the abandoned island. The pirate's loaded name, Shi Yi 時宜, which references the saying "to take action according to the circumstances" (因時制宜), serves to not only make explicit the connection to the present day, but also to offer a justification of sorts—he is only resorting to piracy as an expedient means. However, while Shi Yi is treated sympathetically, he is not the heroic redeemer of a fallen dynasty like other Zheng Chenggong proxies that appear in early Qing narratives like *Shuihu houzhuan*. As the name Song Ru makes clear, he and not the loyalist pirate is the true inheritor of the Song Dynasty.

Foreign Affairs

At the heart of *Dushu sheng* are the ever-deepening reciprocal exchanges between Song Ru and Yelü Wulitiemu'er. Yelü grants Song his freedom and his first wife; Song buys Yelü's

⁹⁹ On the distinction between "local bandits" whose loyalty is a free-floating quality that could be re-directed (versus the "roving bandits" who cannot be redeemed), see Wai-yee Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, 254–68.

¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the real villains are the treacherous Dais and the murderous Wu Xiaosi, who in the final scene suffers the ignominy of being hacked into a hundred pieces.

release and marries his daughter. The path of their relationship from recognition (in which the magistrate sees true character of the falsely accused student) to mentorship and ultimately kinship echoes the homosocial bonds that structure many late imperial *chuanqi* like *Shiwu guan*. That Yelü is a member of the Mongol royal family brings this development of affinity (and affinal bonds) into the realm of ethno-dynastic politics.¹⁰¹ However, while Yelü's blood and bureaucratic ties to the Yuan court are repeatedly mentioned, markers of ethnic difference are conspicuously absent. When Yelü makes his first entrance in scene seven, he led on stage by a procession and is wearing a cap and belt (冠帶) as befitting a (Chinese) official. Conversely, the Jurchen envoy in *Mudan ting* "enters on horseback, clothed in a barbarian costume and brandishing a sword" (番將帶刀騎馬).¹⁰² While the envoy babbles in foreign gibberish, Yelü speaks in *guanhua* 官話, the standardized language of officialdom.¹⁰³ As Yelü insightfully adjudicates the case against Song Ru, the role that he embodies—the upright and perceptive judge—owes a significant debt to the Song Dynasty personage-turned-legend, Judge Bao.¹⁰⁴ And while Yelü's name is marked as foreign, both his wife, Lady Qu, and his daughter, Maozhuan, have Chinese names.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ While there are no records of someone with this name, Yelü was the surname of a prominent Khitanese clan whose members attained high office during the Liao and Yuan Dynasties.

¹⁰² Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, 217.

¹⁰³ Presumably in performance the *wai* playing Yelü would speak the same modified *guanhua* as other high-status scholar-official characters in *kunqu* operas, which incorporates some elements of Suzhou-region pronunciation. Within the context of the play this would not mark Yelü as being from the Suzhou-region; rather, it would read as the language of a generic official.

¹⁰⁴ On the post-Song emulation of Bao Zheng as the epitome of a "pure official" (*qingguan* 清官) see Wilt Idema, *Judge Bao and the Rule of Law*, ix–xxxiv.

¹⁰⁵ A variant on this configuration can be found in the twelfth chapter of Chen Chen's 陳忱 (c.1608) *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 [Later tales of the water margin], in which the Queen of Siam, Imperial Consort Xiao, is originally from Kaifeng, and marries her daughter Yuzhi to Hua Fengchun, the son of

It is this daughter—herself the product of Han and Mongol parentage—who will serve as the physical link between the Yelü and Song Ru, between the Yuan and the Song, when she is given in marriage to Song Ru. That this marriage comes at the behest of the emperor himself, rather than a low-level official (as in Song Ru’s earlier marriage, which was arranged by Yelü) highlights the larger symbolic significance of this union between the Mongolian royal family and the “Song Confucian.” However, that Maozhuan is given as Song’s secondary wife (二夫人) reveals fault lines in a seemingly harmonious solution.¹⁰⁶ While the marriage between Song and Run’er certainly predates the union of Song and Maozhuan, the final configuration whereby the daughter of a boatman is accorded a higher rank than the daughter of an aristocrat-cum-official serves as a comment on the increasing acceptability of marrying across “status” while perhaps expressing some unease with this fantasy of an assimilated Sinosphere authored by the invading rulers.

A Self-Made Man

Just as the daughter of boatmen demonstrates an innate capacity for a particularly Neo-Confucian performance of chastity, the depiction of Yelü as an upright magistrate and his daughter as a filial exemplar does much work to elide the boundaries between those who are inside the cultural tradition and those who are outside. While not seamless, this expansion of a certain kind of personhood forms the moral core of the drama. Nowhere is this more evident than in the treatment of Song’s “third wife,” the bearman (*renxiong* 人熊). This mysterious creature is

one of the original *Shuihu zhuan* heroes. The King of Siam, Ma Saizhen, is a descendant of Ma Yuan, a Han general who conquered Vietnam.

¹⁰⁶ *Dushu sheng*, 2:22a

first mentioned in the third scene, when the pirates journey to a supposedly uninhabited island to stash their ill-gotten treasure. A group of the pirates report to Shi Yi that in the forest they encountered “a savage, fierce and strange” (一個野人，勇猛異常).¹⁰⁷ They tried to kill the creature, but “spears and knives were unable to harm it” (鎗刀俱傷他不得). Shi Yi explains that this was not just some wild animal: “I have heard that the bearman is a most numinous beast and cannot be injured” (我聞人熊。乃至靈之獸。不可傷他).¹⁰⁸

The bearman first appears on stage in scene thirteen, when the sickly Song Ru is abandoned on the island. As the dusk turns to dark, a chilly Song Ru comes to the frightening realization that his in-laws have purposely left him there. Suddenly the *jing* enters “dressed as a savage” (扮野人) and grabs him.¹⁰⁹ The first half of the play comes to a dramatic close as the savage carries Song off stage while Song exclaims, “Oh my, this is not good!” (哎呀，不好了嚇).¹¹⁰

This cliffhanger is not resolved until scene sixteen, when Song reappears to tell the audience what happened that fateful night: “Then I saw something that was like a man but wasn’t a man, like a beast but not a beast, that carried me to this cave” (只見一個似人非人，似獸非獸，負我到此山洞中).¹¹¹ Though he thought death was imminent, it turns out that the bearman wanted to take Song as its mate; Song tells the audience that they “performed the rituals to make

¹⁰⁷ *Dushu sheng*, 1:3b.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:21a.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:4b.

them husband and wife” (我成其夫婦之禮).¹¹² Luckily the cave contained medicinal plants and Song made a full recovery in a matter of days. As for the bearman, Song declares that “although it is a ferocious beast, it also can understand humans” (只是那人熊雖則猛獸，亦頗解人意).¹¹³ Song shares that every day, whenever there is free time, the bearman teaches him how to spar with spear and sword and that he is now quite proficient.

Their quasi-domestic idyll is interrupted when Song Ru catches sight of Hong Laoda’s boat. As Song sails off with the pirates’ booty, the bearman enters crying out for Song; when it realizes Song is gone, the bearman throws itself into the water. When Song learns of the bearman’s suicide, he is racked with guilt: “Dear bear, it is I who heartlessly harmed you!” (熊熊是小生無情害了你了)¹¹⁴ He swears that if he ever attains fame and fortune, he will have a memorial tablet erected in its honor. In the final scene of the play, Song remembers this promise: “The achievements and the rank and riches I have today all have been made possible by the bearman. I cannot not repay this debt” (今日功或富貴，此人熊之賜也。不可不報).¹¹⁵ Yelü says that he will arrange for his trusty servant Shiba to establish a shrine for the bear spirit (神熊祠) on the island.

¹¹² Ibid. While it might appear that a more apt name for this creature would be “bearwoman,” the ambiguous gendering of the *renxiong* is such that I use “bearman” for lack of a better gender-neutral term. The *renxiong* is never described in feminine or female-gendered terms outside of this reference and is played by the *jing*, which is generally reserved for male characters.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2:6a.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 2:23a.

What this *renxiong* is—exactly what space between man and beast it occupies—remains ambiguous.¹¹⁶ The bearman does not seem like the other animals that have appeared on the late imperial stage. As Wilt Idema has noted, animals in the Chinese literary tradition appear most frequently in human guises, like the vixen that manifests as a beautiful girl in innumerable *zhiguai* tales.¹¹⁷ When animals appear as animals, they are often humanized to the point of possessing not only the capability for human speech but also the capacity for complex philosophical thought. In staging performances of *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the west) and *Zhongshan lang* 中山狼 (The wolf of Mt. Zhong), the animalistic elements could appear “both spectacular and hilarious”—as befitting the genres of fable and farce, the fur-covered costumes and bravura performances of simian or lupine movements are comically juxtaposed with the elevated language and sophisticated argumentation of the supposed “beast.”¹¹⁸ At the same time, the animal is still an animal—its ability to comport itself as a human is not indicative of its hybrid nature but is a narrative and performative device. The bearman, however, is not an animal that acts like a human, but rather something else entirely.

¹¹⁶ According to Li Shizhen’s 李時珍 (1518–1593) *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 [Compendium materia medica], *renxiong* was used during the late Ming to refer to both brown bears and baboons. However, Song Ru’s comment that the *renxiong* is neither fully human nor fully beast seems to eliminate the first and the later reference to the Bear God Shrine seems to preclude the second. Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu* (Nanjing, 1596), 51a.15b; 51b.63b, electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK.

¹¹⁷ See Wilt Idema, “Animals in Court: Swallow versus Sparrow and Rat versus Cat” (lecture, Collège de France, Paris, October 17, 2012). Idema attributes the rarity of talking animals in animal form to an aversion to blatant fictionality in elite literature.

¹¹⁸ “The stage-action may well have been both spectacular and hilarious: not only will the soldiers of the King of Chao and the mountain-god and his underling have done their usual comic acrobatic routines, but also the actors masquerading as the scholar’s donkey, the wolf, the apricot tree and the buffalo will certainly have given imaginative performances.” W. L. Idema, “*Yüan-pen* as a Minor Form of Dramatic Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR), 6 (1984): 69. See also Tian Yuan Tan, “The Wolf of Zhongshan and Ingrates: Problematic Literary Contexts in Sixteenth-Century China,” *Asia Major*, Third Series 20.1 (2007): 105–131.

Dushu sheng's bearman is perhaps drawn from the depiction of a similar creature in the twenty-ninth chapter of the late Ming novel *Han Xiangzi quan zhuan* 韓湘子全傳 (The complete biography of Han Xiangzi) by Hangzhou writer Yang Erzeng 楊爾曾 (fl. 1590–1602). Indeed, the incident involving the bearman in this novel closely mirrors that of *Dushu sheng*. Like Song Ru, Han Qing encounters a terrifying beast when he is alone in the forest: “He saw a bearman, its entire body and face covered in fur with only a pair of glowing eyes shining through” (只見一個人熊，滿身滿面都是毛披蓋著，止有一雙眼睛紅亮亮露出來).¹¹⁹ Just as Song is initially fearful of the beast, Han Qing “at first worries that the bearman will eat him alive” (初然間怕他夾生吃了下去), before realizing that the bearman intends to carry him to another location.¹²⁰ In both stories, the bearman is non-verbal but “seems to possess an understanding of human matters” (他像個曉得人事的模樣).¹²¹ Both bearman are described as having numinous natures and a level of consciousness that separates them from other animals: “Oh bearman, bearman! You possess intelligence and sentience. You are not some stupid, insentient beast” (人熊，人熊，你是有靈性知覺，不是那蠢然無知的畜生).¹²² While *Dushu sheng*'s bearman brings Song medicine and sustenance, this bearman brings Han Qing a kind of spiritual sustenance: “This bearman is Immortal Mumu's servant. That he carried you here is your good fortune...you will

¹¹⁹ Yang Erzeng, *Han Xiangzi quan zhuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 2:842. A woodblock illustration of the bearman carrying Han Qing can be found on 1:31.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2:843. The trope of the bear that appears threatening before revealing itself to be helpful can also be seen the anecdote “Shengping ru shan ren” 昇平入山人 [The Shengping-era man who went into the mountains], attributed to the *Xu Sou shen ji* 續搜神記 [The sequel to the search for spirits] in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (hereafter *TPGJ*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986 [1961]), 442:3611.

¹²¹ *Han Xiangzi qian zhuan*, 2:844.

¹²² Ibid.

become the Immortal's disciple and he will pass on to you the formula for the elixir of immortality” (這個人熊也是沐目真人案下伏事的，他馱了你來，是你的造化到了[...] 投拜真人，做個徒弟，傳些金丹奧訣).¹²³

While the bear-man in *Han Xiangzi quan zhuan* is described exclusively as a *renxiong*, the creature in *Dushu sheng* is also called a savage (野人), a beast (獸), and a bear (熊). This recalls a similar conflation in the thirteenth scene of *Shiwu guan* in which Kuang Zhong has a prophetic dream. According to the stage directions, “from offstage, two savages enter and dance for a bit; holding two rats in their mouths, they kneel and cry” (內二野人舞一回介，作啣二鼠跪哭介).¹²⁴ Upon waking, Kuang uses the same language to describe this vision to the audience: “As I started to drift off, it seemed like I saw two savages” (朦朧之際，彷彿見兩個野人).¹²⁵ Later, when two prisoners surnamed Xiong 熊 (“bear”) are kneeling and crying before him, Kuang suddenly understands his dream: “In my dream there were two savages, holding rats in their mouths and sobbing. Those savages were bears” (夢有兩個野人，啣鼠哀泣。野人者，熊也).¹²⁶ Indeed, as the alternative title of the drama tells us, this was a dream of two bears (*Shuangxiong meng* 雙熊夢).

Dushu sheng's bearman, however, is not a symbolic apparition, but a deeply physical, bodily presence on stage—grabbing, carrying, moaning, jumping, dying. Played by the *jing*, a painted face role typically reserved for male characters, the bearman's large physical presence

¹²³ Ibid., 2:848.

¹²⁴ *Shiwu guan*, 1:61a. This citation is from the *Guben xiqu congkan* edition. Later versions also include that the savages “jump” (跳) on and off stage.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2:7a–7b.

and terrifying painted exterior masks a surprising capacity for feeling. More so than the bearman of *Han Xiangzi quan zhuan*, Song's bearman exhibits not just a capacity for human understanding, but a desire to enter into human relationships—to not just do its master's bidding, but become an actor in this human drama. In its nursing of Song Ru back to health and its suicide upon being abandoned, the bearman acts in ways not unlike a proper *chuanqi dan*.¹²⁷ Like the manservant Shiba who risks his life for his master, or the boatman's daughter who refuses to remarry, or the descendant of Mongols who tries to sell her body to redeem her father, the bearman demonstrates an intuitive understanding of moral behavior. Despite not being fully human, fully Chinese, or fully elite,¹²⁸ they, and not the fairly useless Song Ru, become the play's exemplars of chastity, loyalty, and filiality.

While the noble savage archetype is certainly not foreign to the Chinese literary imaginary, and the late Ming discourse of *qing* similarly lauds the spontaneous behavior of women and non-elites, the appearance of these exemplary others in the early Qing moment is particularly loaded. In *Dushu sheng*, the categories that structured earlier *chuanqi* like *Kuaihuo san* begin to break down, as characters move across and back between hero and villain, pirate and soldier, loyalist and traitor, merchant and student, Chinese and foreign. The elision of man and beast at the end of the play—in which the bearman is given a state-issued monument for its human-like sacrifice, while the Dais are derided for having “the face of a man but the heart of a beast” (人面獸心)¹²⁹—shows both the perils and possibilities of this new world in which the self is no longer defined by what he is but what he does.

¹²⁷ Or parody of the *qing*-addled *dan*.

¹²⁸ During the legal proceedings, the Dais claim scholarly lineage.

¹²⁹ *Dushu sheng*, 2:22a.

In *Dushu sheng*, as in *Kuaihuo san*, it is the ocean that brings these new social relations into being. The ocean in these plays functions as a kind of stage—a liminal space that acts as both a surface and a boundary. The formal similarities between ocean and stage can be glimpsed in those scenes where the stage “acts” as the ocean, as characters pantomime sailing on and drowning in its waves. As site and metaphor, the ocean-stage becomes a way to imagine communities beyond the state and selves beyond the role.

Chapter Three

Divine Economies: *Taiping qian* and the Circulation of Value

While none of his plays have had the singular impact of *Shiwu guan*, Li Yu is the most well-known figure to emerge from the Suzhou circle, with his oeuvre receiving the most critical attention by modern scholars. Li Yu was one of the older and more prolific of the Suzhou playwrights, his social networks and collaborative projects generally setting the boundaries of who is considered a member of the “school.” For this reason, modern scholars often refer to him as the “representative” or “model” (典型) playwright of the Suzhou circle.

Thirty-three plays are generally attributed to Li Yu,¹ with seventeen fully extant and three surviving in partial editions.² With the publication of seventeen of these plays in the critical

¹ In *Xin chuanqi pin*, Gao Yi writes that “there are thirty-two plays written by Li Yu” (所著一笠庵傳奇三十二本), but the *Quyuan* 曲苑, Wu Mei 吳梅, and Nuanhongshi 暖紅室 editions of *Xin chuanqi pin* only list thirty: *Yi peng xue*, *Renshou guan*, *Zhanhua kui*, *Yong tuanyuan*, *Qilin ge* 麒麟閣 [Unicorn pavilion], *Fengyun hui*, *Niutou shan* 牛頭山 [Cow-head mountain], *Taiping qian*, *Liancheng bi* 連城璧 [Priceless jade disk], *Meishan xiu* 眉山秀 [Scholar of Mt. Mei], *Haotian ta* 昊天塔 [Pagoda of great heaven], *Sansheng guo* 三生果 [The karma of three lives], *Qianzhong hui* 千忠會 [Gathering of the thousand loyalists] (alternatively titled *Qianzhong lu* 千忠戮 [Slaughter of the thousand loyalists], *Qianzhong lu* 千鐘錄 [Register of the thousand bells], *Qianzhong lu* 千忠錄 [Register of the thousand loyalists], and *Liuli ta* 琉璃塔 [Glazed pagoda]), *Wu gaofeng* 五高風 [Five noble personages], *Liang xumei*, *Changsheng xiang* 長生像 [Statue of eternal life], *Feng yunqiao* 鳳雲翹 [Phoenix lifting the clouds], *Chanzen hui* 禪真會 [Gathering of the true way], *Shuanglong pei* 雙龍佩 [Twin dragon pendants], *Qianli zhou* 千里舟 [The thousand li boat], *Luoyang qiao* 洛陽橋 [Luoyang bridge], *Wudang shan* 武當山 [Mt. Wudang], *Qingzhong pu*, *Gua yudai* 掛玉帶 [Putting on the jade belt], *Yizhong yuan* 意中緣 [Ideal marriage match], *Wanli yuan*, *Wanmin an*, *Qilin zhong* 麒麟種 [Unicorn seed], *Luotian jiao* 羅天醮 [The Daoist ritual], and *Qinlou yue*. The Qinghe Prefecture edition of the *Xin chuanqi pin* includes a thirty-first play, *Huqiu shan* 虎丘山 [Tiger hill]. See Gao Yi, *Xin chuanqi pin* 新傳奇品, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1980 [1959]), 6:289 n. 13. All editions of the *Xin chuanqi pin* omit the play *Qiguo zhuan* 七國傳 [Story of the seven countries] (alternatively titled *Qiguo ji* 七國記 [Record of seven countries]), which is attributed to Li Yu in the *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, vol. 1, *xu*, 12; vol. 1, *juan* 19, 875. Also missing from the *Xin chuanqi pin* are *Mailun ting* and *Yipin jue*, both of which were co-written with Zhu Zuochao (*Quhai zongmu tiyao* vol. 2, *juan* 25, 1139, 1146). As *Qinlou yue*, which Gao Yi attributes to Li Yu, is now generally accepted to be written by Zhu Suchen, modern scholars generally count Li Yu as having

edition *Li Yu xiqu ji* 李玉戲曲集 in 2004, there has been a surge of interest in Li Yu and the plays included in this modern typeset edition.³ Much of the Chinese scholarship on Li Yu has focused on his first four plays: *Yi peng xue*, *Renshou guan*, *Yong tuanyuan*, and *Zhan huakui* (as a group often abbreviated to *Yi ren yong zhan* 一人永占). These plays, all written in the late Ming, are frequently praised for being Li Yu's finest work, mostly clearly displaying his finely wrought prosody. In recent years, interest has shifted to his early Qing works that directly engage with contemporary politics: *Yi peng xue*, which is set in motion by the conniving son of the corrupt Jiajing-era minister Yan Song; *Qingzhong pu*, which dramatizes the eunuch Wei Zhongxian's persecution of the Donglin faction in late Ming Suzhou; *Liang xumei*, which depicts peasant uprisings in Sichuan during the Ming-Qing transition; and *Wanli yuan*, which stages Huang Xiangjian's journey to reunite with his family in the wake of the Ming's fall.⁴

authored thirty-three plays. See Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:521; Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 242.

² Out of the plays attributed to Li Yu, seventeen are fully extant: *Yi peng xue*, *Renshou guan*, *Zhanhua kui*, *Yong tuanyuan*, *Qilin ge*, *Fengyun hui*, *Niutou shan*, *Taiping qian*, *Meishan xiu*, *Haotian ta*, *Wu gaofeng*, *Liang xumei*, *Qingzhong pu*, *Wanli yuan*, *Qiguo zhuan*, *Qianzhong lu*, and *Yi pin jue*. Li Mei lists *Liancheng bi* as being fully extant, but there is no evidence that such a version exists, and she does not give the name or location of such an edition. This same claim appears in *Li Yu pingzhuan*, 10. The surviving *Liancheng bi* is a fragment of a performance text from the Daoguang-era palace opera bureau (Shengping shu 昇平署), which was included in the *Li Yu xiqu ji* 李玉戲曲集 (2:887–899). See also Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:544. The plays *Mailun ting* (eight scenes) and *Luoyang qiao* (three scenes) also survive in fragments.

³ Included in the *Li Yu xiqu ji*: *Yi peng xue*, *Renshou guan*, *Zhanhua kui*, *Yong tuanyuan*, *Qilin ge*, *Fengyun hui*, *Niutou shan*, *Taiping qian*, *Liancheng bi*, *Meishan xiu*, *Qianzhong lu*, *Wu gaofeng*, *Liang xumei*, *Qingzhong pu*, *Wanli yuan*, *Yi pin jue*, and *Yizhong ren* 意中人 [Perfect love match]. The inclusion of *Yizhong ren* is controversial, as many scholars do not believe that this is necessarily the same play as *Yizhong yuan* (Li Mei on the lack of evidence for the *Guben xiqu congkan* attribution: *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 243 n.1; Guo Yingde lists *Yizhong yuan* as lost, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 1:521). In the foreword to the *Li Yu xiqu ji*, the editors state that they did not include *Mailun ting*, *Qiguo zhuan*, *Luoyang qiao*, and *Haotian ta* because they were unable to locate them.

⁴ What limited English-language scholarship there is on Li Yu focuses almost exclusively on these plays. See for example Tina Lu, *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late*

Li Yu's theories on music and prosody survive in his *Beici guangzhengpu* 北詞廣正譜 (Expanded and corrected scores to northern lyrics),⁵ as well as in his prefaces his *Yili'an piping Yuzan ji* 一笠庵批評玉簪記 (Yili'an commentary edition of *Yuzan ji*) and Yuan Yuanke's 袁園客's Kangxi edition of Ling Mengchu's *Nanyin sanlai* 南音三籟 (Three kinds of southern sound). Unlike Zhang Dafu, the names used by Li Yu at various point in his life are clear and well recorded. Li Yu styled himself "Yili'an zhuren" 一笠庵主人 (Master of the hut of the straw-hat), with many of his collections published with the prefix "Yili'an" 一笠庵. He also styled himself "Sumen xiaolü" 蘇門嘯侶 (Whistling companion at Suzhou gate), an indication of how closely his sense of himself and his literary pursuits were bound up with Suzhou region.⁶ Throughout his life, Li Yu went by two courtesy names: Xuanyu 玄玉 and Yuanyu 元玉. A number of scholars have claimed that prior to the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, Li Yu used the name Xuanyu; when the Kangxi emperor came to power and the characters in his personal name Xuanye 玄燁 were made taboo, Li Yu changed it to Yuanyu.⁷ However, Li Yu used the courtesy name Yuanyu at least seven years before the Kangxi Emperor ascended the throne.⁸

Imperial Chinese Literature, 1–21; Paize Keulemans, "Onstage Rumor, Offstage Voices"; Wai-ye Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, 254–68.

⁵ For a study of this text, see Li Jialian 李佳蓮, *Li Yu Beici guangzhengpu yanjiu* 李玉《北詞廣正譜》研究 [Research on Li Yu's *Beici guangzhengpu*] (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2012).

⁶ On this name, see Introduction, note 42.

⁷ Kang Baocheng, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 10; Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 278.

⁸ Li Yu is called Yuanyu in Qian Qianyi's preface to *Meishan xiu*, which is dated the *jiawu* 甲午 year of Shunzhi (1654), as well as on the first page of the first scene. See *Meishan xiu*, *xu*:3a, 3b, 4a, 5b, 7a, 8a; 1:1a. Electronic rpt. of Shunzhi woodblock edn. in ZGJBGJK.

As with most of the playwrights in Suzhou circle, what little information survives about Li Yu's life is fragmentary and occasionally contradictory. According to the *Nanci xinpu* and *Xin chuanqi pin*, Li Yu is a native of Wu county, a fact borne out by both the aforementioned *hao*, and the large number of dramas that are concerned with events taking place in Suzhou.⁹ The poet and playwright Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609–1671) offers a few biographical details in his preface for Li Yu's *Beici guangzhengpu*.¹⁰ Wu indicates that he knows Li personally (“When I arrived in the prefectural city [i.e. Suzhou], I visited his cottage” [予至郡城，嘗過其廬]) and presents an account of Li Yu's life that evokes the stock trope of the frustrated artist—that despite Li Yu's tremendous learning and talent, official success evaded him.¹¹ In such narratives, continual exam failure provides the impetus for turning to literary expression. Here, however, Wu offers a more topical wrinkle: “In later years he came close to getting it [i.e. government office], receiving an honorable mention in the provincial exam.¹² After 1644, he abandoned the pursuit of an official career. Endowed with Shilang's poetic talent,¹³ he followed Qiqing's model and set words to tunes,¹⁴ producing scores of *chuanqi* dramas” (晚幾得之，仍中副車。甲申以後，絕意仕進，

⁹ “Li Xuanyu...his name was Yu and he was from Wu prefecture” (李玄玉[...]名玉吳郡人), *Nanci xinpu*, 1:57. He is also described as being from Suzhou on 1:23. Plays centered around Suzhou include *Qingzhong pu* and *Wanmin an*.

¹⁰ Published by Qinglian shushi 青蓮書屋 during Kangxi (as indicated by the use of Yuanyu in lieu of Xuanyu).

¹¹ Photo-reprint of the Qing dynasty Qinglian shushi 青蓮書屋 woodblock edition that was compiled by Xu Qingqing 許慶卿 and “personally revised by Li Yuanyu of Suzhou” (吳門李元玉手訂). *Yili'an Beici guangzheng pu* 一笠菴北詞廣正譜 [Expanded and corrected scores to northern lyrics from Yili's hut] in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995–1999), 1748:138.

¹² I.e. an honorable failure. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 217.

¹³ This is a reference to Tang poet Li Yi 李益 (746–829).

¹⁴ This is a reference to Song dynasty poet Liu Yong 柳永 (c.987–1053).

以十郎之才調，效耆卿之填詞，所著傳奇數十種。¹⁵ Wu positions “Master Li” (李子), whom he describes as a “scholar of antiquity” (學古士), firmly within the mold of a late imperial literatus.¹⁶ However, as Wu Weiye elsewhere engages in the sort of hyperbolic praise typical of such inscriptions (“His knowledge encompasses the entire world of art!” [其學足以囊括藝林], etc.), it is unclear how much of this description is merely fulfilling the expectations of the genre or perhaps eliding those details less befitting the persona of literary genius or loyalist stalwart.

Modern scholars give a number of different dates for Li Yu’s birth and death, from as early as 1586 to as late as 1681.¹⁷ In establishing the date of Li Yu’s birth, Kang Baocheng points to a line in the prelude scene of *Yi peng xue* in which the narrator sings of his “half-life dream” (半生夢),¹⁸ which Kang treats as an autobiographical insertion indicating that Li Yu was thirty when he wrote the play. While the precise date when Li Yu wrote *Yi peng xue* is unknown, Qi Biaoia records in his diary that he saw a performance in 1643.¹⁹ Assuming that at the latest Li Yu wrote the play a year or two earlier, Kang places Li Yu’s date of birth around 1610. Further support for this date is given by Li Mei, who argues that Wu Weiye’s quote that Li Yu’s honorable mention was “in [his] later years” (晚幾) implies that Li Yu was at least thirty, the age

¹⁵ *Yili’an Beici guangzheng pu*, 1748:137. Unlike Wu himself, who served in the Qing regime.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See Kang, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 10–13; Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 234–35 n.2.

¹⁸ *Yi peng xue*, in *Li Yu xiqu ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), 1:4.

¹⁹ Qi Biaoia 祁彪佳, *Qi Zhongmin gong riji* 祁忠敏公日記 [The diary of Qi Zhongmin], facs. rpt. of late Ming manuscript in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1988), 20:990.

at which one was no longer considered young.²⁰ If Li Yu was over thirty before the fall of the Ming, he would have been born around the year 1610.

While these arguments for placing Li Yu's birth around 1610 are largely convincing,²¹ the dating of Li Yu's death is more specious. The latest dated evidence of Li Yu's activity is from his preface to Yuan Yuanke's edition of Ling Mengchu's *Nanyin sanlai*, which is dated the fifteenth day of the fifth month of the sixth year of Kangxi (康熙陸年伍月望日), i.e. 1667.²² Kang Baocheng argues that "as we now know, Li Yu in fact wrote nearly forty plays" (而我們現在知道, 李玉實則作了近四十種),²³ but in the 1667 preface, Li Yu says that he has only written "over twenty plays" (二十餘種).²⁴ Kang estimates that it must have taken Li Yu at least ten years to write that many new plays, and so puts his death date after 1677. Li Mei attempts to bolster this calculation by referencing the *Nanci xinpu* entry that notes that Li Yu had written over ten plays in 1647, which means that between 1647 and 1667 Li Yu wrote maybe ten plays.²⁵ Since Li Yu wrote "at least over thirty plays and at most over forty" (三十多種乃至四十多種), she agrees that Li Yu would have had to have died after 1677 in order to produce "over ten or over twenty" (十多種或二十多種) additional plays. This rationale is probably also behind the

²⁰ Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 235.

²¹ A few of scholars continue to use Wu Xinlei's dates of 1591–1671. See Wang Ailing [Wang Ayling] 王愛玲, "Jiyi yu xushi: Qing chu juzuojia zhi qianchao yishi yu qi yidai ganhuai zhi xiju zhuanhua" 記憶與敘事: 清初劇作家之前朝意識與其易代感懷之戲劇轉化 [Memory and narrative: Early Qing playwrights' late Ming consciousness and the reflections on dynastic change in their plays], *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 24 (2004): 39–103.

²² Facsimile in *Nanyin san lai* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1963), vol. 4, xu 敘, 4b.

²³ Kang, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 13

²⁴ *Nanyin san lai*, 4a.

²⁵ *Nanci xinpu*, 1:61.

dates given by Yan and Zhou, who state that Li Yu died in approximately 1681 but do not give an explanation.²⁶

However, the “close to forty” or “over forty” estimations of Li Yu’s plays include the eight plays attributed to Li Yu in the *Chuanqi huikao biaomu* that are not extant and not attributed to Li Yu in any of the other seventeenth or eighteenth century source and have been excluded from Li Yu’s canon by Guo Yingde.²⁷ Since we can reasonably attribute thirty-three plays to Li Yu,²⁸ it is possible that between 1667 and Li Yu’s death, he was able to write at most twelve plays (and possibly significantly less)—not “over twenty.” Indeed, as Li Yu has not left a definitive list of his plays, it is possible that some of these thirty-three plays are incorrectly attributed. Furthermore, as we know very little about Li Yu’s creative process, we cannot extrapolate that his writing pace remained the same early in his career as later, just as we cannot assume that the figures given in the *Nanci xinpu* or *Nanyin sanlai* represent some sort of statistical data or even a reliable number. While it seems likely that Li Yu lived for a few years after 1667, in the absence of any evidence (and knowing that the above estimates of his life span are based on problematic scholarship), statements that he lived until “at least” 1677 or 1681 should be regarded as unreliable.

During his lifetime, Li Yu’s literary output was critiqued, revised, and praised by several of the leading literary figures of late Ming and early Qing Jiangnan. Unlike the aforementioned preface to *Beici guangzhengpu*, these various revisions, inscriptions, and prefaces reveal scant biographical information about Li Yu; nevertheless, they provide insight into the

²⁶ Yan Changke and Zhou Chuanjia, *Li Yu pingzhuan*, 3.

²⁷ As noted elsewhere, Li Mei and Kang Baocheng make other errors in their listing of Li Yu’s oeuvre (listing fragments as full plays, etc). See Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing chuanqi zonglu*, 521.

²⁸ See note 1 above.

contemporaneous reception of his work. In addition to the *Beici guangzhengpu* preface, Wu Weiye also wrote a preface for Li Yu's play *Qingzhong pu*. In this moving preface recounting the turmoil of the late Ming from the vantage of the early Qing, Wu casts Li Yu in the role of not just playwright but also historian:

Master Li Xuanyu's *Qingzhong pu* is the most recent [of plays on this topic], but it alone uses Wensu²⁹ and his honor³⁰ to reflect on each other. Furthermore all of the events depicted are based on what actually happened, and his language is polished and elegant. Although this is called 'setting lyrics to music,' we can regard it as a true history.

李子玄玉所作《清忠譜》最晚出，獨以文肅與公相映發，而事俱按實，其言亦雅馴；雖云填詞，目之信史可也。³¹

Wu argues that it is this quality of historicity, of crafting a plot "according to facts" (按實) that makes the play so powerful. The sense of immediacy that pervades *Qingzhong pu* is due not just to Li Yu's proximity to and emotional investment in these events, but to the fidelity to and specificity of historical detail: "I am old and will not see what is to come in future years, so I don't know if later lyricists will also be able to capture the facts of the register of the righteous and cause spectators a hundred or a thousand years hence to weep or listeners to sigh, just like what happened when we read Master Li's lyrics!" (余老矣，不復見他年事，不知此後填詞者亦能按實譜義，使百千歲後觀者泣、聞者嘆，如讀李子之詞否也)³²

²⁹ I.e. the prominent Suzhou scholar-official Wen Zhenmeng 文震孟 (1574–1636)

³⁰ I.e. Zhou Shunchang 周順昌 (1584–1626), the Suzhou scholar-official on whose persecution and death the play is based.

³¹ *Yili'an hui bian Qingzhong pu chuanqi*, xu:5b.

³² *Ibid.*, xu:8a–8b.

The poet-historian-official Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) also wrote a preface for one of Li Yu’s early Qing plays. However, Qian is much less invested than Wu Weiye in establishing Li Yu’s scholarly and moral bone fides. Rather, in his 1654 “*Meishan xiu tici*” 眉山秀題詞 (Inscription for *Meishan xiu*), Qian emphasizes the performance-centered nature (and tremendous popularity) of Li Yu’s plays. After acknowledging that “past masters like those called Bolong³³ and Boqi³⁴ have already left this world” (謂伯龍, 伯起諸子已成隔世), Qian turns to the present generation of *kunqu* composers:

However, among new music being produced, Mr. Yuanyu’s plays like *Zhan huakui* and *Yi peng xue* really fill people with admiration. Yuanyu’s lyrics permeate all under heaven. Every piece of paper that falls from his hand, aficionados as far away as Korea vie to play it.³⁵ This is like Dafu³⁶ and Changling³⁷ who were enjoyed great reputations in their own time, all of the courtesans in the taverns sang their verses.

而新聲聞出，則元玉氏《占花魁》、《一捧雪》諸劇，真足令人心折也。元玉言詞滿天下，每一紙落，雞林好事者爭被管絃，如達夫、昌齡聲高當代，酒樓諸妓，咸歌其詩。³⁸

³³ Bolong was the *zi* of the foundational *kunqu* dramatist Liang Chenyu, whose play *Huansha ji* was discussed in Chapter One.

³⁴ Boqi was the *zi* of playwright Zhang Fengyi 張鳳翼 (1527–1613), who wrote the play *Hongfu ji* 紅拂記 [Red whisk].

³⁵ Originally a reference to the poems of Bai Juyi being sought by merchants from the Kingdom of Silla. While Silla no longer existed (it was defeated by the Koryŏ in the tenth century; by Qian Qianyi’s time, the area formerly considered Silla was part of the Chosŏn Kingdom), the expression of interest from Jilin 雞林 was still used to indicate widespread literary renown.

³⁶ Tang poet Gao Shi 高適 (c.702–765).

³⁷ Tang poet Wang Changling 王昌齡 (c.690–756).

³⁸ *Meishan xiu, tici* 題詞:3a-3b. Electronic rpt. of Shunzhi woodblock edn. in ZGJBGJK.

Though this depiction of near-global popularity fits within the hyperbolic requirements of this genre, such an image nevertheless echoes the clamor that Feng Menglong describes as greeting the publication of an earlier Li Yu play: “the first edition of *Renshou guan* became incredibly popular, whenever actors bought scripts with variants, they would rush out to buy the new drama; once the draft was completed, they grabbed it up” (初編《人獸關》盛行，*优人每獲異稿，競購新劇，甫屬艸，便攘以去*).³⁹

While Qian does not indicate that he met Li Yu in person, he offers his experience reading Li Yu’s plays: “In 1646, when I resided in the Humble Administrator’s Garden in Suzhou, I got to read all of the profound contents of his ‘bag of verse.’⁴⁰ Even Yannian, with his harmonious tunes, would also admire Li Yu’s clarity and suppleness,⁴¹ and Master Zhou, who often looked up, would not be able to find an error”⁴² (丙戌歲，予寓郡城拙政園居，得盡讀其奚囊中秘義，即使延年協律，當亦賞其清柔；善顧周郎，無能摘其紕繆). Though Qian begins with an image of him reading Li Yu’s plays, he quickly turns to allusions that evoke the performance-context itself. These references to Li Yannian and Zhou Yu, like his earlier references to musicians in Korea and courtesans in taverns, gesture towards the almost

³⁹ From Feng Menglong’s preface to his own revision of Li Yu’s *Yong tuanyuan* published during Chongzhen. Facsimile reprint in Feng Menglong, ed. *Mohan zhai dingben chuanqi* 墨憨齋定傳奇 [Definitive editions of dramas from the Mohan Studio] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1960), vol. 3, *xu*, 2a–b.

⁴⁰ The *xinang* 奚囊 or “servant bag” is a reference to Li He 李賀 (791–817), who would supposedly ride around on a donkey while writing lines of poetry, which he would then throw in a bag and give his servant.

⁴¹ This is a reference to the Han court musician Li Yannian 李延年 (d. 87 BCE), who was given the title “Chief of Harmonizing Tunes” (協律部尉).

⁴² This is a reference to the general and strategist Zhou Yu 周瑜 (d. 210). According to an anecdote about his musical acumen in the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, if Zhou heard a musician make a mistake, he would look up.

immediate translation of his text into music and singing. Through their embodiment in voices, strings, and flutes, Li Yu's plays become a force of nature that "cause fish to leap out of the water to listen and clouds to cease their movement in the sky" (令魚出聽而雲爲停矣). While Qian clearly indulges in the overblown praise and stock descriptions that characterize this genre ("He can almost be called Qinglian's⁴³ descendant and Jinsu's⁴⁴ reincarnation!" [殆所謂青蓮苗裔，金粟後身耶]), much like in Feng's preface we can also discern some level of Li Yu's commercial success. Qian's emphasis on performance in varied and wide-ranging quarters indicates that these were plays staged not (or not only) in the homes of the rich or the studies of literati aficionados, but in the streets, marketplaces, and halls of the city.

While Qian seems to hint at the crossing of high and low both in Li Yu's compositions and his personal life (元玉上窮典雅，下漁稗乘), specifics of Li Yu's background remain elusive. A number of modern scholars have debated the veracity of a comment by the philologist and drama aficionado Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820) in his *Ju shuo* 劇說 (Discourse on theater) (1805) that "Li Yu was a household servant of Grand Secretary Shen" (元玉係申相國家人), i.e. Shen Shixing 申時行 (1535–1614), and was thus "unable to take the civil service examination" (不得應科試).⁴⁵ As we know from the Wu Weiye's *Beici guangzhengpu* preface, Li Yu did in

⁴³ This is a reference to Li Bai 李白 (701–762), who used the *hao* Qinglian jushi 青蓮居士 and who shares a surname (and thus a lineage) with Li Yu.

⁴⁴ Also a reference to Li Bai, who once called himself "the reincarnation of Jinsu" (金粟如來是後身).

⁴⁵ Jiao Xun concludes with the conventional logic that Li Yu "wrote *chuanqi* to vent his frustrations [about his inability to participate in politics]" (因著傳奇以抒其憤). *Ju shuo*, *juan* 4, facs. rpt. of Beijing Library manuscript edition in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, 1758:662–3. While the accuracy of these comments is doubted by a number of scholars, this background is cited as fact by others. See Gu Lingsen, "Lun Wu zhong kunju liupai" 論吳中崑劇流派 [Discussion of Wu Kun opera school], *Suzhou keji xueyuan xuebao* 蘇州科技學院學報 1 (2006): 93; Wang Ailing, "Jiyi yu xushi: Qing chu juzuoqia zhi qianchao yishi yu qi yidai ganhuai zhi xiju zhuanhua," 43.

fact sit for the provincial exam in the late Ming. Feng Yuanjun and others have maintained that this does not necessarily discredit Jiao Xun's account of Li Yu's childhood in the Shen household, pointing to exemptions that would have allowed someone of a servant background to sit for the exam.⁴⁶ Some have pointed to a *ci* Wu Qi 吳綺 (1619–1694) wrote in honor of Li Yu that contains the line: “Your family tradition of ‘Qingping tune’ you made your own (家傳自擅清平調).”⁴⁷ Qingping tune is a reference to a Tang dynasty melody that Li Bai famously set to lyrics, linking Li Yu's lyrical production with that of his surname forbearer Li Bai. However, scholars have argued that the use of *jiachuan* 家傳 (family tradition) also gestures to Li Yu or his father's role in the theatrical and musical entertainment of the Shen household. That contemporaneous writers either omit or hint obliquely at such a background is interpreted as an attempt to spare Li Yu the embarrassment of such low origins. However, insufficient evidence exists to support these claims.⁴⁸

Though Li Yu is the best known and most studied playwright of the Suzhou circle, the play *Taiping qian* is one of the more obscure of his plays. While Li Yu's historical plays are currently receiving some scholarly attention, *Taiping qian*, with its immortal hero and setting in a land outside of time, resists history. *Taiping qian* certainly lacks the pathos and urgency of

⁴⁶ Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君, “Zenyang kandai *Yi peng xue*” 怎樣看待一捧雪 in *Feng Yuanjun gudian wenxue lunwenji* 馮沅君古典文學論文集 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1980), 270–272. Feng claims that in the marginal notes of *Nanbeici jianpu* 南北詞簡譜, Wu Mei asserts that Li Yu's father was the servant of Shen Shixing's son, Shen Yongmao 申用懋. I was unable to locate this quote.

⁴⁷ “Ci Chuwan yun zeng Yuanyu” 次楚畹韻贈元玉, *Linhui tang ji* 林蕙堂集, *juan* 25, facs. rpt. in *Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 1314:725.

⁴⁸ On this debate, see Yan Changke and Zhou Chuanjia, *Li Yu pingzhuan*, 3–5; Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 256–260; Li Jialian, *Qing chu Suzhou juzuojia yanjiu*, 54–58.

contemporary plays like *Qingzhong pu* and *Wanli yuan*; rather than the drawing from grand historical struggles or recent local traumas, *Taiping qian* has more in common with Li Yu's earliest plays like *Renshou guan* and *Zhanhua kui* that draw from popular *huaben*, not history, and are more concerned with the everyday affairs of shopkeepers and local landowners than with palace intrigue or dynastic crisis. At the same time, *Taiping qian* has been critiqued as lacking the finesse of those earlier works, with Yan and Zhou labeling this play as the “dregs” (糟粕) of Li Yu's oeuvre.⁴⁹

While *Taiping qian* might not be popular among modern scholars, it certainly appealed to earlier audiences, as evidenced by the two surviving Qing manuscripts, the four scenes that survive in 18th century *qupu*, and an early Qing palace edition.⁵⁰ Part of this popularity must have been the skillful way that Li Yu interwove two well-known stories to produce a surprisingly new narrative. In this chapter, I will explore how attention to one aspect of this literary project—Li Yu's manipulation of the titular money as both prop and concept—similarly reveals surprising insights into how the circulation of value generated a new kind of social relations and a new kind of politics.

Money Properties and Prop Money

The *chuanqi* stage is a world of quasi-materiality, populated by objects that gesture towards a physical, material world while calling attention to their position outside of it: the whip without the horse, the teacup without the tea, the room without walls or doors.⁵¹ The boundaries

⁴⁹ Yan Changke and Zhou Chuanjia, *Li Yu pingzhuan*, 115.

⁵⁰ These various editions will be discussed below.

⁵¹ Sofer points to a similar “nonillusionistic” representational tradition on the Elizabethan stage, which also had the effect of emphasizing the physical, symbolic, and semiotic meanings of those objects that did

of literal and abstract are policed by both the limits of the stage and the limits of imagination—that which cannot be represented on stage and that which must be represented on stage. At the center of *chuanqi* plays is such an object that cannot be abstracted, that is always represented by a physical thing on stage, as the logic of the play is predicated on its singularity as a thing-in-the-world and the narrative hinges on its circuit around the stage. This object, which I will call a fetish prop, is not only the accretion of the meanings (often in tension) projected onto it, but also a force in disrupting or constituting the social relations of those who handle it.

It is not a coincidence that the generic conventions of *chuanqi* that invest a fan or cup with totemic importance emerged in the mid Ming. The *zaju* of the Yuan and early Ming are rarely if ever named for objects, nor are their plots centered around objects.⁵² Starting with the *nanxi* 南戲 (early southern drama) *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (The story of the lute), the organizing conceit of the southern drama came to be the unexpected circulation of an object, and it is this object for which the play is named. This emerging fixation on objects in the mid-late Ming coincides with a period of intensified commercial activity in which the “the market” came to suffuse the language and structure of everyday life.⁵³ The affective and metaphysical dimensions of this parceling of

appear on stage. That the Elizabethan and late Ming stages both emphasize the generative and transformative nature of things in motion at this particular moment will be discussed further below and in Chapter 3. Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 21. It should be noted, however, that the often-cited nonillusionistic nature of the Chinese stage owes much to Qi Rushan's 齊如山 (1875–1962) “national drama” (國劇) interventions and less to the actual material worlds of late imperial theater. See Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 134–171. For descriptions of an illusionistic seventeenth-century stage, see Zhang Dai's 張岱 (1597–1684?) *Tao'an mengyi* 陶菴夢憶 [Dream reminiscences of Tao'an].

⁵² See for example the plays listed in Zhong Sicheng 鐘嗣成, *Lugui bu* 錄鬼簿 [Register of ghosts] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 1–44. While some *zaju* focused on material objects, most of those are Judge Bao plays in which the objects are treated as clues or evidence of wrongdoing.

⁵³ This phenomenon is discussed further in Chapter One.

the world into discrete, salable objects was an experience not limited to Jiangnan. As Douglas Bruster's work shows, English Renaissance dramatists grappled with the novelty of merchandise in similar ways, as the obsessive attention paid to moveable props "replicates a larger social fascination with the material" in early modern London.⁵⁴ Bruster notes that in the seventeenth century these props become implicated in "the commercial inscription of an identity [...] by which identity is constructed by being 'written' into or onto objects."⁵⁵ A similar process—in which identity is built, dismantled, and reimagined through material objects—is repeatedly reenacted in the *chuanqi* of the late Ming and early Qing.

The objects fetishized in late Ming and early Qing *chuanqi* are often eroticized proxies for the desired female body, animated by bodily traces like the blood on Li Xiangjun's fan or the suggestion of intimate contact with an erogenous zone like Yang Guifei's stocking. The fetish prop is subjected to a complex process of valuation and circulation, in which the literatus elevates the object to the vaunted place of a text to be carefully read, interpreted, and inscribed. The fate of Du Liniang's portrait in *Mudan ting* is instructive. After Liu Mengmei discovers the scroll in a garden temple, he brings it back to his room to carefully examine it, piecing together the identity of the mysterious subject from details like her tiny shoes. This portrait, he realizes, is a self-portrait, a bodily relic doubled— an image of a body produced by that body.⁵⁶ Mengmei then notices a quatrain on the painting, which he parses aloud. This performance of interpretation

⁵⁴ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 63. Bruster charts the movement towards the props becoming "focus of interest in themselves" during the period of 1590–1620.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁶ "What painter could have achieved this! Surely this brushwork shows the skill of lovely maid herself" (想來畫工怎能到此，多敢他自己能描會脫). *Mudan ting*, 130; Tang Xianzu, *Peony Pavilion*, trans. Cyril Birch (Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, 1994), 144.

is simultaneously a self-assertion of literati hermeneutics and an act of self-discovery—the portrait that seemed to be of a girl is really a portrait about him. As he reads the poem, he is shocked to find references to his name and his discovery of the scroll. And though it seems that he is gazing at the woman in the painting, it is the painting that is gazing at him: “See how she gazes back at me! [...] And she bears a green sprig of apricot in her hand, as if somehow she were carrying my own self in her arms.” (好不回盼小生! [...]卻怎半枝青梅在手，活似提掇小生一般).⁵⁷ Hermeneutical strategies are here revealed to be fundamentally ontological exercises.

Liu Mengmei’s response to reading Liniang’s poem is to compose a corresponding verse. It is this impulse to inscribe or reinscribe that transforms a *thing* with unclear, competing, or surplus meanings into an *object* that exists within a certain relation to the subject.⁵⁸ Such a process is dramatized most explicitly in *Taohua shan*, when Yang Wencong decides to paint twigs and leaves on Li Xiangjun’s bloodied fan, thereby turning it into “a genuine peach blossom fan” (真乃桃花扇也).⁵⁹ Here the literati interventions of artifice and skill turn these bloodstains—at once abject (menstrual blood, bodily seepages) and erotic (the blood of the deflowered)—from a messy, overdetermined thing, simultaneously repulsive and alluring, into a legible object. Once transformed, the fan becomes the site for the performance of connoisseurship and the staging of homosociality: Su Kunsheng declares, “That is the finest

⁵⁷ *Mudan ting*, 130; *Peony Pavilion*, 145.

⁵⁸ On the distinction between objects and things see Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (2001): 1–22.

⁵⁹ Kong Shangren 孔尚任, *Taohua shan* 桃花扇, ed. Wang Jisi 王季思, Su Huanzhong 蘇寰中, and Yang Deping 楊德平 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1986 [1959]), 154; Kong Shangren, *Peach Blossom Fan*, trans. Chen Shih-hsiang and Harold Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 171.

picture of peach blossoms I have ever seen” (妙妙，竟是幾筆折枝桃花);⁶⁰ Lan Ying proclaims, “The brushwork is so skillful that one cannot detect the bloodstains” (畫的有趣，竟看不出是血跡來).⁶¹ Through this “fine” “skill” the fan is brought into language—it is amenable to being talked about, appreciated, and understood. By way of these performances of recognition and appraisal, the implicit, amorphous complaint registered by Xiangjun’s body on the fan is given narrative shape by the ever-widening chorus of male literati readers and writers. Indeed, as Yang Wencong tells Xiangjun: “Now that you have this peach blossom fan, you need a partner who can appreciate it (你有這柄桃花扇，少不得個顧曲周郎).”⁶² Just as her blood—her inside made outside—is on display, so does her story circulate throughout Jiangnan society. As the fan passes through hands and under admiring eyes, the exquisite beauty of the “peach blossoms” and the pathos of Xiangjun’s story turn a private token into public totem and Xiangjun’s suffering into aesthetic spectacle and political metaphor. The shredding of the fan in the final scene as an indictment of romantic and cultural commitments completes the circuit of the prop from body to language to symbol.

The assertion of value as generated by literati investment is often brought into tension with the market value of commodities. *Changsheng dian* dramatizes the ways in which the sentimental object is always on the verge of being co-opted and commodified. In the scene *Kan wa* 看袜 (Looking at the stocking), an innkeeper named Wang tells how she discovered a silk stocking dropped by Yang Guifei before her death: “Those people from near and far who have heard of the stocking come to drink and take a look. In addition to paying for liquor, they pay for

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Taohua shan*, 185; *Peach Blossom Fan*, 209.

⁶² *Taohua shan*, 155; adapted from *Peach Blossom Fan*, 173.

seeing her stocking as well. As a result, my business is flourishing!” (但是遠近人家，聞得有錦
袜的，都來鋪中飲酒，兼求看袜。酒錢之外，另有看錢，生意十分熱鬧).⁶³ Like a madam,
Innkeeper Wang plies curious patrons with wine and charges them a fee to “fondle and toy with”
the stocking that still retains Yang Guifei’s scent. Li Mo, a former palace musician, mournfully
declares: “In olden days in the Golden Palace, no one laid eyes on her tiny steps. How sad that
her stockings are now on display in a wineshop where anyone can thoughtlessly fondle it” (昔在
黃金殿，小步無人見。憐今日酒壚邊，等閒攜展).⁶⁴ While Li Mo bemoans the way in which
the stocking is pimped out by the innkeeper, he nevertheless offers up copper coins to pay for his
own fondling session.

Though Li Mo figures the display of the stocking as a violation of Guifei’s body, this
scene dramatizes the way in which the commodification of objects has brought the literati notion
of ownership into crisis. It is he, Li Mo, who can truly appreciate this relic—his personal
relationship with Yang Guifei, his position in the imperial palace, his refined aesthetic and
sentimental disposition (including his performance of a particularly theatrical grief over the death
of the consort) mark him as a connoisseur and thus true owner of the object. If the stocking is to
be seen and touched and smelled, it should be he who does so. However, his access to the object
is the same as any other patron of the inn with a few coins to spare, an undifferentiated mass of
spectators who flock to gape and fondle (“outside the capital, a hubbub draws onlookers” 郊外喧

⁶³ Hong Sheng 洪昇, *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 [Palace of eternal youth], ed. Xu Shuofang 徐朔方
(Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980 [1958]), 158.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

喧引看人).⁶⁵ The delicate stocking through which the literatus performs his refinement, his sentiment, and his place in the social order is not only exposed to the eyes and hands of the anonymous crowd (the very antithesis of the individuated literatus), but it is also exposed to ridicule. As in the similarly post-Ming *Taohua shan*, the material fetishism of literati connoisseurship practices is implicated in narratives of late dynastic decadence. The disgruntled farmer Guo Congjin launches into a searing critique of the fetishized object, the body to which it refers, and those who would define themselves through its aesthetic appreciation and circulation. Confronting Li Mo with the obverse of his wistful nostalgia (“looking back on decline and fall, I cannot but wipe away tears” 回想顛危還淚揩), Guo declares the stocking a detestable emblem of the folly that led to years of war and suffering.⁶⁶ Guo refuses to pay the innkeeper for what he has seen, attempting to extricate himself from the economy in which copper coins are traded for poetic nostalgia and erotic titillation. There is, of course, no way out: the stalemate between Guo and the innkeeper is broken when Li Mo insists on paying for him.

Changsheng dian thematizes the literati’s anxiety over the object rendered as an abstracted value—the seeming disintegration of the densely allusive object into so many undifferentiated, interchangeable things. In *Taiping qian*, however, the central object is the emblem and embodiment of abstracted value itself: specie money. The transformation of money into the play’s central object poses a problem of representation. As the above discussion of fetish props demonstrates, the singularity or authenticity of objects is a recurrent concern, around

⁶⁵ *Changsheng dian*, 161. This line quotes from Song Zhiwen’s 宋之問 (c.656–712) poem “Longmen yingzhi” 龍門應制 [Dragon Gate, written on imperial command]. This poem details Empress Wu’s excursion to Longmen; its usage here links Yang Guifei to another problematic female emblem of political turmoil.

⁶⁶ *Changsheng dian*, 160.

which entire plays like *Yi peng xue* are built. As the self-identity of the literatus is generated through the collection, inscription, and circulation of objects, the counterfeit poses an existential threat. The doubles and copies that shadow the fetish prop would be particularly suggestive to the literatus navigating a Ming luxury marketplace glutted with fake paintings and vases and Taihu rocks.⁶⁷

As the authenticity of the object becomes a central concern, the reproducibility of money poses a particular problem. In the plays discussed above, bodily traces like Xiangjun's blood and Guifei's scent are held up as undeniable proof of the authenticity of the circulating object. A coin, however, is not a singular thing marked with a bodily aura, but a manufactured thing that collapses the distinction between original and copy. While the stocking or portrait has value as a singular thing in the world with a knowable history, the coin is only meaningful in its being identical to and exchangeable with other coins. This is a problem that is followed to its horrifying end in *Shiwu guan*, with the interchangeability of coin an index of the interchangeability of bodies: just as the various sets of fifteen strings of cash are easily confused, so too are murderer and innocent, stranger and lover. The social chaos produced by the proliferation of identical coins represents the possibility of a world in which authenticity is impossible to discern. Instead of a world of objects with particular histories and differing values, coins resist the accretion of narratives (what is the history of one coin?) while leveling out value. In the play discussed in this chapter, Li Yu attempts to overcome this problem by turning the coins into objects that are marked and have a provenance, transforming abstracted value into particular and legible objects that acquire a history as they circulate throughout the play.

⁶⁷ It was not just objects but also identities that could be counterfeited. The proliferation of handbooks of connoisseurship allowed merchants to build a collection of objects through which they could inscribe their own literati personae. The identity that was constructed in opposition to commodities became a commodity that could be bought, with the merchant's class-crossing persona as the uncomfortable flip side of the literatus' penchant for theatrical self-fashioning.

From *chuanqi* to *chuanqi*

Taiping qian tells the story of Old Man Zhang, an eighty-year-old gardener who wishes to marry the sixteen-year-old daughter of his neighbor, the official Wei Shu. Deeply offended at the suggestion of this match, Wei Shu agrees to the marriage if Zhang is able to produce a bride-price of one hundred thousand strings of Taiping coin. To Wei's dismay, Zhang quickly produces the money, and soon he and his new bride are happily farming melons together.⁶⁸ When Wei Shu's son, Wei Gu, returns home from a border campaign, he is furious to learn that the old gardener married his sister. He goes to confront Zhang, but he and his wife have already left for a distant mountain village. Gu pursues them, and after a trying journey, he finds Zhang and his sister in an enchanted mountain fairyland, where he learns that Zhang is the Great Emperor of Eastern Florescence. Upon returning home, Gu discovers that twenty years have passed and his parents have become immortals. Following Zhang's instructions, Gu retrieves one hundred thousand strings of cash from an immortal posing as a local pharmacist. Shortly thereafter, Gu passes the civil service examination as the *zhuangyuan* 狀元 (top candidate) and seeks a marriage arrangement to the daughter of Chancellor Han Xiu, who agrees to the match on the condition that one hundred thousand strings of Taiping coin be offered as a bride-price. Earlier in the play, Gu had a prophetic dream that revealed that he was fated to marry an impoverished infant; angered by this unfavorable match, he tracks her down and stabs her. Once married, Gu discovers that his wife Hui'e is the same girl he attempted to kill.

⁶⁸ The emphasis in the early part of the narrative on Old Man Zhang's strange and marvelous melons references the story of Shao Ping 邵平 (fl. 210 BCE). A noble under the Qin, Shao Ping turned to growing melons after the Qin was overthrown by the Han. See *Shiji*, 53:2017. This allusion hints at both Old Man Zhang's more regal identity and a friction between the immortal and the ruling regime that will only reemerge in the final scenes.

Taiping qian brings together two narratives that first appeared in late Tang classical tale collections. *Zhang Lao* 張老 (Old Man Zhang), which probably originated in the collection *Xuanguai lu* 玄怪錄 (Records of mysterious anomalies) by Niu Sengru 牛僧儒 (780–849), tells of the old gardener-cum-immortal who produces an extraordinary amount of cash in order to marry a young maiden.⁶⁹ *Dinghun dian* 定婚店 (Betrothal inn) from *Xu xuanguai lu* 續玄怪錄 (A sequel to Records of mysterious anomalies) and attributed to late Tang author Li Fuyan 李復言 (c.775–833) tells of a young man whose desire to marry a well-born girl leads him to stab the poor infant girl he is fated to marry.⁷⁰ Both of the classical tales would have been familiar to a late Ming readership. They were included in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive records from the Taiping era), which was compiled 977–978; assorted manuscripts circulated until it was republished in 1566. Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) included both stories in his redaction, the *Taiping guangji chao* 太平廣記鈔 (Selections from the *Taiping guangji*), published around 1626. Feng also anthologized both of these stories in his anthology of classical tales, *Qingshi leilüe*, published between 1626 and 1631. In Feng’s c.1621 collection *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (Stories old and new), the *Zhang Lao* story is rewritten as the *huaben* 話本 (vernacular story) *Zhang Gulao zhong gua qu Wennü* 張古老種瓜娶文女 (Old Man Zhang grows melons and

⁶⁹ *TPGJ*, 16:112–15. In the *TPGJ* edition, *Zhang Lao* is mistakenly attributed to the *Xu xuanguai lu*.

⁷⁰ *TPGJ*, 159:1142–43. This story bears a strong resemblance to “Guanyuan yingnü” 灌園嬰女, which appears in *TPGJ*, 160:1151–52 and is attributed to Wang Renyu’s 王仁裕 (880–956) *Yutang xianhua* 玉堂閒話 [Idle talks from the jade hall]. On the disputed authorship of the *Xu xuanguai lu*, see Cheng Yizhong 程毅中, *Tangdai xiaoshuo shihua* 唐代小說史話 (Beijing: Wenhua tishu chubanshe, 1990), 174–176, and Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義, *Sui, Tang, Wudai xiaoshuo shi* 隋唐五代小說史 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1997), 112.

marries Wennü).⁷¹ Li Yu merges the characters of the son Wei Yifang from the *Zhang Lao* narrative with Wei Gu, the protagonist of *Dinghun dian*, collapsing the latter narrative into the primary Zhang Lao storyline that draws extensively from the *huaben* version.⁷²

Taiping qian is attributed to Li Yu in a number of Qing sources, including *Xin chuanqi pin*, the *Chuanqi huikao biaomu*, Jiao Xun's *Ju shuo*, the *Chongding quhai zongmu* 重訂曲海總目 (Revision of *Quhai zongmu*), and Yao Xie 姚燮 (1805–1864)'s *Jinyue kaozheng* 今樂考證 (Textual criticism of new music).⁷³ This play should not be confused with an earlier play entitled *Zhu Wen gui zeng Taiping qian* 朱文鬼贈太平錢 (A ghost gives Zhu Wen Taiping coins), in which a ghost gives her human lover Taiping coins in a case bearing her own embroidery. In some cases, like in the *Nanci xinpu*, the earlier play's title is listed as *Taiping qian* 太平錢.⁷⁴

Quhai zongmu tiyao mentions an “old” copy of the play from the Ming, though no author is given.⁷⁵ The description of the play is identical to the plot and setting of the three extant editions of the play: the “old” manuscript from the Beijing Library, which was included in the *Guben xiqu congkan*; an “old” manuscript from the collection of Xu Zhiheng 許之衡 (1877–

⁷¹ An early Ming *zaju*, *Yuexia Lao ding shijian pei'ou* 月下老定世間配偶 [The old man under the moon arranges the world's marriages], by Liu Dui 劉兌 is also based on *Dinghun dian*. However there is no indication that Li Yu read this version and it is no longer extant. Many of Li Yu's earlier plays (e.g. *Zhan huakui*, *Shiwu guan*, *Ren shou guan*) are, like this one, based on *huaben* in Feng Menglong's collections. The role of these *huaben* in transforming the thematic material of *chuanqi* is a topic that needs to be further explored.

⁷² Li Yu gives the son both names: his name is Wei Gu, his *biaozi* is Yifang.

⁷³ See for example *Xin chuanqi pin*, 續 3a; Yao Xie, *Jinyue kaozheng*, *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, 10:253.

⁷⁴ *Nanci xinpu*, 1:57. It is described as an “old *chuanqi*” (舊傳奇).

⁷⁵ *Quhai zongmu tiyao* on *Taiping qian*, 18:824–826. Kang Baocheng, however, argues that the plays is 語氣老邁 and thus must have been written in Li Yu's later years. Kang, *Suzhou jupai yanjiu*, 16.

1935); and an early Qing palace edition housed in the Fu Ssu-nien Library at Academia Sinica.⁷⁶ While both the Beijing Library and Xu Zhiheng editions are undated, the arias of two scenes appear in the *Jiugong dacheng* 九宮大成 (The great achievement of the nine modes, 1746),⁷⁷ and the arias of three scenes appear in Ye Tang's 葉堂 *Nashuyin qupu* 納書楹曲譜 (Scores from the Studio of Acquiring Books, 1792),⁷⁸ and contain only minor differences from the Beijing Library and Xu Zhiheng editions.

The Beijing Library and Xu Zhiheng editions have mostly minor differences (scene titles, some wording differences). The most significant difference is the Xu edition's inclusion of two scenes that do not appear in the Beijing Library edition.⁷⁹ The seventeenth scene in the Xu edition shows Wei Gu's adventures during his journey to find Old Man Zhang. This scene is predicated on a series of misunderstandings involving linguistic doubling or homophones. In a comedic exchange, an old vendor thinks Wei is asking about his various wares; when Wei thinks he has finally located Old Man Zhang and his sister, it turns out he has found another old man named Old Man Zhang also married to a young girl.⁸⁰ Scene Twenty-two is another such scene that does not appear in the Beijing Library edition. In this scene, Han Xiu goes to check on Hui'e, who was knocked unconscious the previous day in the garden. Hui'e tells Han Xiu about her

⁷⁶ This edition consists of two *juan* with a total of twenty-two scenes. While this edition will be discussed briefly below, the Beijing Library and Xu editions will be the primary focus of this chapter.

⁷⁷ “Shang xue” 賞雪 [Enjoying the snow] and “Zhong gua” 種瓜 [Farming melons].

⁷⁸ “Zhui mao” 綴帽 [Mending the hat], “Kui zhuang” 窺妝 [Spying on the toilette], and “Zhong gua.”

⁷⁹ No equivalent of these two additional scenes appears in the Palace edition either.

⁸⁰ Huang Wenzheng notes the similarity to the popular story of Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤, the future founder of the Song Dynasty, rescuing Zhao Jingniang 趙京娘. Huang Wenzheng 黃文政, “Li Yu chuanqi de wutai banyan yanjiu” 李玉傳奇的舞台搬演研究 (MA thesis, Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue, 1997), 138.

strange dream, recounting her experience in the previous scene in Old Man Zhang's palace. Han Xiu reassures her that although it felt real, it was just a dream brought on by sickness.

The Beijing Library and Xu Zhiheng editions are manuscripts copied with an eye towards performance and not aesthetics; the inclusion of stage directions and musical notation (along with homonymic errors) indicate that these were written with the troupe (and not the literatus aficionado) in mind.⁸¹ The third extant edition is a beautifully copied “four color” (with red, yellow, green, and black ink) manuscript from the archive of the imperial treasury.⁸² Though Li Yu's plays, closely tied as they were to Suzhou-centered commercial entertainment, might seem out of place in the Beijing palace, many found their way into the imperial collection—Ye Xiaoqing recorded twenty three plays by Li Yu in the palace library catalog.⁸³ The palace version of *Taiping qian* has clearly undergone the rewritings required of plays performed for the imperial household.⁸⁴ While the plot remains the same, various spectacular elements have been added or aggrandized: the special effects of falling snow and magic tricks, the elaborate descriptions of lavish costumes, the golden boys waiting on Old Man Zhang. The ritual function of these plays—and occasion-based performance—can be seen in the insertion of scenes depicting the wedding of Old Man Zhang and the Wei daughter as well as celebrations of Spring Festival and Tomb Sweeping Day.

⁸¹ Huang Wenzheng also argues that these are scripts for a “popular” troupe on the basis of the conventions used during the opening sequence.

⁸² This manuscript has been digitized and is available through the Fulltext Database of Rare Books at Fu Si-Nian Library. The play is described as early Qing but unclear on what basis this made.

⁸³ Ye Xiaoqing, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial Court* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012), 125 n.150.

⁸⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of these differences, see Huang Wenzheng, “Li Yu chuanqi de wutai banyan yanjiu,” 135–156. Huang also points out differences in the way tunes and role parts are utilized across the Xu and Palace editions.

Also noticeable are the expanded roles of emperor figures. In the opening scene, the Jade Emperor commands Old Man Zhang to enter the human world;⁸⁵ in a later, parallel scene, Han Xiu receives his official appointment from the imperial court.⁸⁶ In another scene, after learning of the events surrounding the ascension of the Wei family, Tang Minghuang orders the enshrinement of their house and bestows titles upon the ascended immortals.⁸⁷ In each of these three scenes, the ultimately authority of the (heavenly or terrestrial) emperor is exercised over potentially disruptive or extra-imperial subjects. This subtext is made explicit in the inclusion of two scenes depicting Wei Gu helping the Tang general Wang Zhongsi defeat the Tufans.⁸⁸ While the insertion of this scene adds a bravura martial sequence to a play that is otherwise lacks such display, this scene does more than pander to the imperial household's penchant for boisterous spectacle. Rather, by reenacting the incorporation of the Tibetans into the (Qing) imperium, the scene collapses the emperor-spectator's dominion over on- and off-stage realms.

The reorientation of the play around the emperor-spectator could also account for the blunting of the two major plot twists. While the other editions of the play obscure the true identity of Old Man Zhang until Wei Gu discovers his mountain fairyland, the palace edition announces Zhang's identity the very first time he appears on stage. Similarly, the Xu and Beijing Library editions stage a dramatic storytelling sequence wherein Wei Gu learns that his entire family has ascended to heaven and nearly faints; in the palace edition, Wei Gu knows of his family's fate before listening to the storytelling performance. While the other editions place the

⁸⁵ See scene one (*Dijun jiezhi xia chenfan* 帝君接旨下塵凡).

⁸⁶ See scene four (*Wei zujian keshe kaiyuan* 為祖餞客舍開筵).

⁸⁷ See scene twenty-one (*Ming shengzhu da ban enshang* 明聖主大頒恩賞).

⁸⁸ See scenes thirteen (*Wuhuaying can shu mou lian* 五花營參熟謀練) and fourteen (*Baguazhen ju kou chengqin* 八卦陣巨寇成擒)

audience in the subject position of the mortal and flawed Wei Gu—through whom we learn of Old Man Zhang’s identity and his family’s fate—the palace edition’s redactors have elevated the emperor-spectator to a position of omnipotence. There is nothing hidden from his gaze, no tricks or twists that he does not anticipate.

Marrying Money

The large quantity of money that Old Man Zhang offers as a bride-price is disruptive in all versions of this narrative, not only as a jest made literal, but also for highlighting as it does the uncomfortable “price” of the bride-price. In *Taiping qian*, the disruptiveness of the cash is brought into relief by the series of successful gift exchanges that precede it. Before the play begins, the emperor gives Wei Shu a white donkey.⁸⁹ When this donkey wanders onto Zhang’s property, Zhang sends it back along with some melons as gifts. Wei and his family pay Zhang a visit in thanks. The emperor’s gift, which sets the play in motion, both acknowledges and reiterates the particular relationship of emperor and official-subject, in which the bounty of the country is figured as a gift given by the imperial head. This material gift is not intended to beget a material counter-gift; rather the display of imperial largess binds the subject’s loyalty to the symbolic object, whose safe-keeping functions as a totem of that loyalty. In the exchange of

⁸⁹ There is no such gift in either the classical tale or the *huaben*. In the classical tale, the missing animal is not a plot point, and the relationship between the Liang emperor and Wei Shu is unknown, as Wei Shu is described simply as a retired official (其鄰有韋恕者，梁天監中，自揚州曹掾秩滿而來). In Feng Menglong’s version, Wei Shu admonishes Emperor Wudi for his support of Buddhism. As punishment he is demoted to the supervisor of the imperial stables (蕭梁武帝普通六年冬十二月，有個諫議大夫姓韋名恕，因諫蕭梁武帝奉持釋教得罪，貶在滋生駟馬監做判院). The escaped animal that turns up in Zhang’s garden is a white horse also exiled to the imperial stables by the emperor: 這匹白馬，因為蕭梁武帝追趕達摩禪師，到今時長蘆界上有失，罰下在滋生駟馬監，教牧養. In Li Yu’s play, Wei Shu’s offense remains ambiguous, and rather than being put in charge of the stables, he retires (嚴尊韋恕，曾為揚州曹掾，遂於此地僑居. 向因給諫在都，今已任滿歸第.). The white donkey, a tribute gift from the western regions, was bestowed on Wei Shu by the emperor: 這白驢西域貢獻朝廷，日行千里，蒙聖上恩賜的.

melons for visit, the material gift moves in the opposite direction, as a humble offering to one's social superior. The counter-gift of the visit reiterates the particular social relation between peasant and local elite. When Wei, his wife, and his daughter arrive, Zhang is out; in his absence they freely wander his gardens, examining his melons. Upon his arrival, Zhang is shocked that they condescended to pay him a visit. Wei thanks him for the melons in a tone befitting a social superior, while Zhang protests that he cannot accept his thanks, as the gift was of such little value, comparing it to a gift of the "celery of rustics" (野人芹).⁹⁰

This early series of exchanges, linking the emperor to Wei and Wei to Zhang in a clear hierarchy of social relations, is disrupted by Zhang's next foray into gift-giving: a bride-price for the Wei daughter. Literalizing the unease of the late Ming elite towards the transgressive possibilities of extreme wealth, Li Yu stages the frightening possibility that anyone with money can insinuate themselves into your family. When Zhang arrives with the cash for the bride-price, Wei balks. Zhang, infuriated that Wei intends to renege on their oral agreement, threatens to kill himself in front of their gate. In its depiction of a gift exchange gone wrong, *Taiping qian* shows a world in which the anxieties, calculations, and tactics of the marketplace have permeated the most ritualized of exchanges, the "supreme gift" of woman.⁹¹

Certainly the notion of a marriage arrangement located outside of market dynamics or financial considerations has its basis in nostalgic imagination rather than historical experience. Indeed, the advent of marriage-as-transaction was bemoaned long before the late Ming, and the tremendous imbalance in wedding gifts was not a new phenomenon. The massive bride-price

⁹⁰ *Taiping qian*, 783. This is a reference to a story told by Yang Zhu 楊朱 in *Liezi* 列子, *juan 7*, *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 554:95.

⁹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer, ed. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press 1969), 65.

offered by the lower-status suitor for the higher-status daughter seems to reflect the Tang context in which the classical tale was written. According to Patricia Ebrey, betrothal gifts in the Tang were formalized as twice the size of the dowry.⁹² The stratospheric demands placed on the groom and his family became a trope in Tang classical tales. In *Huo Xiaoyu zhuan* 霍小玉傳 (Story of Huo Xiaoyu) by Jiang Fang 蔣防 (c. 792), the narrator explains that “because the Lus were an aristocratic family, if someone wanted to marry one of the daughters he would have to pay a bride-price of one million; any less and he would be rebuffed” (盧亦甲族也，嫁女於他門，聘財必以百萬為約，不滿此數，義在不行).⁹³ As in the Old Man Zhang story, the bestowal of massive bride-prices was often associated with supernatural beings. Indeed, who could produce so much money but a fox spirit?⁹⁴ In *Wei Mingfu* 韋明府, attributed to Dai Fu’s 戴孚 (*jinshi* 757) *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 (Record of extensive anomalies), a fox who insists on marrying a magistrate’s daughter is asked to provide a two thousand string bride-price.⁹⁵ Also attributed to that collection is *Qianyang ling* 汧陽令, another story of a fox forcing marriage on an unwilling family, in which we are told that after the wedding the family did not mind the uxori-local arrangement, as the wedding gifts given by the fox were quite lavish.⁹⁶

The lavish bride-prices demanded by Tang aristocratic families were replaced by an escalation of dowry in the Song. Though Ebrey claims that dowry demands lessen after the Song,

⁹² Patricia Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 62–88.

⁹³ *TPGJ*, 487:4008.

⁹⁴ In addition to having all of the resources of a supernatural being, foxes in classical tales were frequently associated with mercantile endeavors.

⁹⁵ *TPGJ*, 449:3674–75. As in *Taiping qian*, the coins are hidden in the eaves of the supernatural being’s house.

⁹⁶ *TPGJ*, 449:3670–71.

Ann Waltner's study of female infanticide shows continuing pressure to provide lavish dowries at all levels of Ming Jiangnan society.⁹⁷ This shift has been attributed to legal changes in the Yuan and early Ming that made the dowry a non-moveable part of the husband's family estate and hence the centerpiece of competitive marriage strategies.⁹⁸ The demands of a dowry-centered marriage economy can be glimpsed in the *huaben*, when Wei Shu explains that because he is an upright official, he is too poor to marry off his eighteen-year-old daughter (有個女兒，一十八歲。清官家貧，無錢嫁人).⁹⁹ While the appearance of the tremendous bride-price in the late Ming *huaben* and drama versions of the Old Man Zhang story echoes this contemporary concern with the financial burden of marriage, a bit of strangeness is generated in depicting the inversion of the late Ming Jiangnan norm. Rather than a lavish dowry procuring a hypergamous union, here an obscene bride-price begets an excessively hypogamous marriage.¹⁰⁰

In a sense, the inflation of bride-prices in the Tang and of dowries in the Ming generate similar anxieties, as the absence of corresponding gifts threatens to upend the symbolic logic of the ritual in which gifts appear to be exchanged for other gifts. However, the dowry and the bride-price are not conceptually equivalent exchanges. The dowry is a gift to the bride—or, more accurately, a gift that adheres to the bride. Before the erosion of women's property rights in the Yuan and early Ming, the content of the dowry often remained the legal property of the bride,

⁹⁷ Ann Waltner, "Infanticide and Dowry in Ming and Early Qing China," in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 193–218.

⁹⁸ Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China (960–1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹⁹ This concern is absent in the classical tale. In fact, the Wei family had begun employing matchmakers to search for a match for her.

¹⁰⁰ Ann Waltner, "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 8.3 (Fall 1981): 129–146.

occasionally returning to her family. Even when legal changes made the dowry a non-moveable part of the husband's family estate, the symbolism of the dowry as a gift from the bride's family to the bride retains this important distinction from the bride-price, which recompenses the bridal family for the cost of raising and/or the lost labor of the daughter. There is no monetary value placed on the groom, as he is not being exchanged; the dowry is a gift, the bride-price a payment.¹⁰¹

The nature of bride-price as payment is emphasized in *Taiping qian* by being rendered entirely in specie, rather than in those material objects whose aesthetic value and multi-functionality better mystify their roles as generalized mediums of exchange or stores of value (bolts of silk, embroidery, etc.). The disturbing prospect of the daughter's body as just another thing to be exchanged for other things is made even more explicit when the payment of money is followed almost immediately by the marriage ceremony. Bourdieu, in his discussion of the work necessary to obscure to the mechanics of the gift exchange, points to the importance of time elapsed, as gift exchange "protracts and so disguises the transaction that a rational contract would telescope into an instant."¹⁰² Li Yu stages such an instant, collapsing the exchange into two scenes: the money arrives in scene twelve and by scene thirteen Wei Shu's daughter is whisked away to be wed in a ceremony that the audience never sees.¹⁰³ The payment of money has effectively married them, obviating the need for further ritual.

¹⁰¹ In both cases, the money is 'invested' in the female body.

¹⁰² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 112.

¹⁰³ In the twelfth scene of the palace edition, there is a wedding ceremony sequence, befitting both the pomp of imperial household performance and the auspicious occasions for which such performances were often held.

As an index of the power of extreme wealth to sunder longstanding hierarchies of ritual exchange, this “rational contract” of cash for wife evokes the problematic of the newly rich merchant buying his way into prestigious gentry families. However, as their discussion with the matchmaker demonstrates, Wei Shu and his wife are not averse to marrying their daughter into a wealthy merchant family. When the matchmaker announces that she comes bearing a proposal for their daughter, Wei Shu and his wife inquire into the man’s background:

Wai and Lao: If we are discussing our family’s marriage matters... Then our daughter’s betrothed must be “a prince in tinkling ornaments” reciting “The Cry of the Ospreys,” a man of great office.¹⁰⁴

Fu: No he is not.

Wai and Lao: Or he is capable of writing thousands of poems, each composed in seven steps,¹⁰⁵ or his learning fills up the You Mountains, his words electrifying listeners.¹⁰⁶

Fu: He is not like that either.

Wai and Lao: Then he should be like Tao Zhu with gold piled up like hills.¹⁰⁷

外、老：若論我家姻事，定是鳴珂公子咏河洲，共羨蟬聯名胃。

付：不是。

外、老：或者文章七步詩千首，驚四座胸藏二酉。

¹⁰⁴ Reference to the famous first poem of the *Shijing* 詩經 [Classic of poetry] about a nobleman looking for a bride.

¹⁰⁵ Reference to Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), who supposedly wrote a poem in seven strides as recounted in Liu Yiqing’s 劉義慶 (403–444) *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 [A new account of the tales of the world], 4:66, in Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫, ed., *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 244.

¹⁰⁶ On the legend that countless books are stored in the two You mountains, see Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), comp., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [Imperial digest of the Taiping era], 49:3a, Song edition facs. rpt. in (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985 [1960]), 1:239.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter One, note 10 on Fan Li.

付：也不是。

外、老：想應是陶朱輩黃金似丘。¹⁰⁸

Wei Shu and his wife enumerate the acceptable matches for their daughter in order of declining desirability: a high official, a brilliant scholar-poet, and finally a rich merchant. While the first two types of suitors are mentioned without comment, the parents feel compelled to justify their inclusion of the merchant: “If he is from this kind of family, then they can avoid the bitterness and worries of poverty” (若得這樣人家，也免却壘鹽苦，廢彥愁).¹⁰⁹ The matchmaker reiterates that this is also not an accurate description of her client. When Wei Shu learns that the suitor is but a humble gardener, he mockingly suggests the extravagant bride-price.

Though Zhang produces the money—the magnitude of which is physically represented on stage in a procession of ten carriages that if piled up would certainly resemble the hills—he is not welcomed as a son-in-law. The problem with Old Man Zhang is not that he does not come from the scholar-official class (or, in the context of the Kaiyuan setting, the aristocracy), as the Weis make clear that a wealthy merchant would be a perfectly acceptable husband for their daughter. Rather, the problem posed by Zhang’s bride-price is the failure of money as a sign. Li Yu here undermines any contemporary resonances by making the *nouveau riche* man not *riche* (nor, for that matter, *nouveau*), but rather, poor. The rich merchant who offers a stunning bride price for a gentry daughter is not only recompensing the family for the devaluation of their daughter’s status through such a connection, but also demonstrating that what perhaps he lacks in literati bearing he makes up for in providing their daughter with a comfortable life. With the

¹⁰⁸ *Taiping qian*, 801.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

gentry daughter's upbringing and the merchant's deep pockets and literati aspirations, his elevation and her return through the entry of their sons into the bureaucratic system is almost assured. Here, however, the massive bride-price of one hundred thousand rare coins is not shorthand for great wealth; it is not the promise of material comfort for the daughter and status for their sons. Quite the contrary, this tremendous wealth is used to buy the daughter into, not out of, poverty. The appearance of the money neither marks nor heralds a change in Old Man Zhang's economic situation. Both immediately before and after (and during) the exchange of money, Old Man Zhang remains, by all appearances, a poor gardener. There are no more riches hiding in Old Man Zhang's eaves. When Wei Shu sends a servant to look in on his daughter, he is shocked to find her shoddily dressed and farming melons with her husband.

The disgust felt towards those who eke out a living on the margins is echoed in the narrative strand based on *Dinghun dian*, which offers a mirror image of the Old Man Zhang match: the impoverished gardener and the official's daughter, the official's son and the poor orphan girl. Wei Gu, who prides himself on his strict "Three I Won't Marry" (三不娶) policy, had gone to the capital hoping to secure a match to Miss Zhang, the daughter of a high official. When the Old Man in the Moon (月下老人) tells him that he is fated to marry a starving, shivering infant, he is livid. More than the delay in marrying age that this prophesy seems to imply (an aspect highlighted in the Li Fuyan version¹¹⁰), Gu is furious that his intended is his social inferior. Here, Li Yu diverges from his source material. In the classical tale, when Wei Gu asks about his intended's family background, the Old Man in the Moon replies that she is "the

¹¹⁰ The age difference is also highlighted in the source material for the Old Man Zhang thread as well. The Feng Menglong version depicts the age difference as the primary objection of the Weis.

daughter of the old woman who sells vegetables north of the inn” (店北賣菜家媼女).¹¹¹ When Wei Gu catches sight of the girl at the market, he is furious that he is fated to marry such a repugnant child.¹¹²

In *Taiping qian*, Li Yu widens the chasm in station between the official’s son and his future bride through the total debasement of the latter. It is not a peddler selling her wares in the marketplace, but a beggar who haunts Li Yu’s Wei Gu. Old Woman Chen and her young charge Hui’e first appear onstage as part of “a mass of starving people, young and old, raising a din” (老幼饑民喧嚷) in the street.¹¹³ A yamen official, drawing on the rolls of registered households, disburses food rations to the hungry villagers. When Old Woman Chen’s name is called, she implores the official to give rations to Hui’e as well, even though she is merely an infant and not properly registered. The official relents and Chen shuffles away with their food. Wei Gu happens upon them and is repulsed by the sight of “the poor hag in beggar’s clothes and the little wretch covered in dirt” (那老貧婆乞丐裝，小孽種腌臢相).¹¹⁴ To one on the precipice of officialdom and marriage and entry into their attendant networks of institutional and affinal obligations, the spectral beggar—the social null set, outside of all human commerce—is the uncanny surplus. So

¹¹¹ *TPGJ*, 159:1142–43. While Wang Bijiang corrects the line to “the daughter of Old Woman Chen who sells vegetables north of the inn” (店北賣菜陳婆女) following the Song dynasty Lin’an 臨安 edition of the *Xu xuanguai lu*, I am here following both the extant *TPGJ* edition and Feng Menglong’s *Qingshi leilüe* edition, as these more accurately reflect what Li Yu would have access to in writing his drama. *Qingshi leilüe*, 2:19a, facs. rpt. in *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng*, 318:135.

¹¹² In the Song edition of *Xu xuanguai lu*, Wei complains, “I am from an eminent official family; I should marry a woman of equal standing. If such a marriage is not possible, then I should at least take a talented sing-song girl or beautiful courtesan as a wife. Why should I marry the ugly daughter of this blind hag?” (吾士大夫之家，娶婦必敵，苟不能娶，即聲伎之美者，或援立之。奈何婚眇媼之陋女). This line does not appear in the *TPGJ* or *Qingshi leilüe* editions. See Wang Bijiang 汪辟疆, ed., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 唐人小說 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1955), 224.

¹¹³ *Taiping qian*, 786.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

visceral is Wei Gu's disgust that he attempts to murder Hui'e with his own hand. While Li Fuyan's Wei Gu promises his servant ten thousand cash if he kills the infant, Li Yu's Wei Gu dismounts his horse to stab the girl himself as his trusty strongman acts as lookout.

Old Man Zhang and Hui'e occupy a similar social position as both are outside of or excluded from human commerce—the buying and selling of the marketplace, the reciprocity of social obligations. Old Man Zhang describes himself as “neither merchant nor peddler” (不賈不商), his disengagement from mercantile activity rendering the Taiping coins he produces all the more uncanny—a man who does not circulate, circulating money that (as will be discussed below) does not circulate. Hui'e the beggar takes but does not give, subsisting off of surplus and largess. She is the dead end of circulation, a disturbing prospect in a story (and genre) that centers around a series of exchanges, around social ties formed through the circulation of objects.

The revulsion and upheaval that these unions provoke in the first third of the play is undone by twin revelations: in the second third of the play, that Zhang is a Daoist immortal and in the final third, that Hui'e is the daughter of a scholar-official and the adopted-daughter of the prime minister. Li Yu's rewriting makes both of these transformations more dramatic. Old Man Zhang appears to have received a promotion from the *huaben*, where he describes himself as the elder immortal Zhang Gulao of the Eternal Happiness Palace (我本上仙長興張古老). In *Taiping qian*, he is conferred the title of Donghua Great Emperor (東華大帝) and given the fief of Mt. Wangwu. While the Old Man Zhang of the *huaben* refers to himself using the prosaic *wu* 吾 and *wo* 我, Li Yu's Old Man Zhang uses the emperor's personal pronoun *zhen* 朕.¹¹⁵ Hui'e is

¹¹⁵ The significance of Zhang's use of the imperial pronoun becomes apparent in the final scenes of the play, discussed below, in which the “earthly” emperor's authority over the circulation of value is called into question.

similarly elevated: In *Dinghun dian*, the orphaned girl is the daughter of the unnamed magistrate of Songcheng and is later adopted by his younger brother Wang Tai, the prefect of Xiangzhou. Li Yu makes Wang Tai (here the magistrate of Pingyao) her father and gives her the more illustrious Han Xiu as her adopted father.¹¹⁶

Li Yu's heightening of these shocking reversals is an index of the hairpin turns in fortune experienced in times of rapid commercialization and political disruption. Furthermore, that the Wei men misrecognize their (social/cosmic) betters as their inferiors dramatizes an anxiety about the ability to "see" social station and cultural identity during such a period. The discovery that a powerful deity could disguise himself as a penurious old man functions as the inverse corollary of the anxiety surrounding the increasing ease with which a merchant could cloak himself in the accoutrement and affectations of the literatus.¹¹⁷ That people are somehow illegible, that their outward indications of identity are misleading, points to a rupture in which social meaning is no longer adequately conveyed through the available forms.

The extreme reversals through which Li Yu facilitates these unions heightens the impact of the final revelation that there are invisible economies in which even those on the margins who seem to be completely outside of systems of exchange—the beggars, the orphans, the hermits—are actually enmeshed. Zhang's abstention from human commerce masks his centrality in a cosmological economy through which infinite wealth and power circulates, while the orphan girl is incorporated into a larger economy of obligations between her dead father and his classmate.

¹¹⁶ Li Fuyan describes Wang Tai as the prefect (alternatively *cishi* 刺史 and *junshou* 郡守) of Xiangzhou, a junior third-rank (從三品) position in the Tang bureaucracy (according to Hucker: 3b to 4a), a position that outranks Wei Gu (who works under Wang Tai), his father Wei Shu, and his earlier desired match, the daughter of Adjutant Pan (fifth rank and lower—according to Hucker, a second or third executive officer in military guard). Li Yu recasts Wang Tai as the Pingyao county magistrate (the term *zhixian* 知縣 was not used until the Song; rank during the Ming varies from 6b to 7b). Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 158, 202, 558–59.

¹¹⁷ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 141–165.

These invisible or phantom economies reiterate that there is nothing outside of the circuits of exchange. That these various economies (cosmological, political, etc.) are brought into interrelation through the repeated exchange of the same coins points to an imagination of a social whole constructed out of the circulation of money—a circulation that, as will be discussed below, pointedly excludes the emperor.

Coins of Heavenly Peace

In merging the two stories into one, Li Yu remaps the circulation of the titular money, reorienting the networks of exchange into an entirely different economy. Li Yu's concern with circulation, with keeping the same coins in constant "play," is absent in the earlier source material. In the classical tale, the money that is disbursed throughout the narrative differs in kind, amount, and measure; no two monetary gifts are the same. After the initial payment of the five hundred strings (*min* 緡) bride-price to Wei Shu, Old Man Zhang gives a series of cash gifts to Shu's son Wei Yifang. When Yifang visits Old Man Zhang in his fairyland abode, Zhang gives him twenty *yi* 鎰 of gold and a straw hat that he can exchange for ten million coins when the gold is depleted.¹¹⁸ After Wei Yifang has exhausted both the gold and the cash, he is visited by Zhang's servant, who gives him ten catties (*jin* 斤) of gold.

The *huaben* rewrites the gifting of money into two parallel exchanges: Zhang gives one hundred thousand strings to Wei Shu as bride-price and then gives one hundred thousand strings to Wei Yifang through his pharmacist friend. The repetition of the hundred thousand strings implies some sort of relation between the two payments, drawing attention to the similar way in which they function in the narrative: where it once recompensed Wei Shu for taking away his

¹¹⁸ An *yi* is 20 or 24 taels, so this is approximately 400–480 taels.

daughter, here the same sum seems to recompense Yifang for taking away his parents. That the parents ascend to heaven plants the possibility that this money is literally the same: that this money is no longer needed by the parents, so it passes to Wei Yifang as an inheritance. Though the *huaben* constructs something more akin to a circulation, as in the classical tale, all of the money flows in a single direction from Old Man Zhang to the Wei family.

Both of the source texts effectively take Old Man Zhang's money out of circulation. The Wei family shows themselves to be particularly poor stewards of this money: they exhaust the five hundred strings of cash from the bride-price and the subsequent gift of the twenty *yi* of gold in five or six years (五六年間金盡), after which they cash in the straw hat. The final gift of gold is able to sustain them for a few more years (又以供數年之食). The story tells us that this is the last contact the family has with Zhang, who presumably imagined his debt to the family dispatched.¹¹⁹ Once these gifts are spent, the obligation of Zhang to his wife's family is similarly obliterated. Unlike those much-studied Melanesian exchanges that ensure a circulation of gifts and debts ad infinitum, here gift-giving effectively severs social relationships, dissolving the cycles of exchange.¹²⁰ Similarly, the *huaben* ends with the Wei son giving away his wealth to public works projects and alms for the poor with no expectation of recompense (except perhaps

¹¹⁹ The reader may imagine Old Man Zhang to be a bit exhausted from the repeated mooching of the Wei family. Indeed, it is a little suspicious that the family suddenly “misses” and attempts to reconnect with the daughter immediately after they learn that Zhang is an immortal and good for the money promised.

¹²⁰ Cf. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 1922); Marshall Sahlins, “Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5.3 (1963): 285–303; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).

karmic), in a sort of Derridean gift that is impossibly aneconomic (“that which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange”).¹²¹

In *Taiping qian*, however, the cash is neither forgotten nor abandoned. By merging the *Zhang Lao* narrative with *Dinghun dian*, Li Yu creates a chain of perfect exchanges radiating outward: Zhang gives one hundred thousand strings to the Weis as a bride-price for their daughter; Wei Gu then pays the one hundred thousand strings to Chancellor Han Xiu as the bride-price for his daughter.¹²² This money that is constantly in circulation is not only the constitutive force in generating families through the buying of women, but also delimits the social whole. In his first self-introduction, Zhang describes himself as “having neither wife nor child, a lonely man all by himself; being neither merchant nor trader, whose abode is a desolately empty four walls” (無妻無子，孑爾一身。不賈不商，蕭然四壁).¹²³ Just as the absence of wife and son is literally parallel with abstinence from buying and selling, Zhang’s entrance into commerce is his entrance into human society. The transfer of money from Zhang to Wei to Han traverses the register of status, from farmer to scholar to high official, and in doing so reverses the dynamic of the earlier series of exchanges in which gifts circulated from the emperor on down. The cash that passes from Old Man Zhang to Han Xiu links the margins and the center, the supernatural and the mundane, the immortal and the historical.

The nature of the money that flows through the narrative undergoes a significant transformation in Li Yu’s rewriting. In the classical tale, Wei tells the matchmakers, “If he

¹²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 7.

¹²² This is another of Li Yu’s narrative innovations. In *Dinghun dian*, no request for engagement gifts is ever made.

¹²³ *Taiping qian*, 763.

delivers five hundred strings by the end of today, then he can marry her” (今日內得五百緡則可).¹²⁴ In Feng Menglong’s *huaben*, Wei Shu’s request is rewritten as “If he wants to seek a marriage with my daughter, then tomorrow he must bring one hundred thousand strings of cash as a betrothal gift. And the coins must all be copper coins, with no gold coins mixed in” (要得成親, 來日辦十萬貫見錢為定禮, 並要一色小錢, 不要金錢准折).¹²⁵ While Feng’s *huaben* is set in the early sixth century, the concern for metallic purity expressed in this request reflects the complex currency marketplace of the late Ming, in which debased coins circulated alongside more reliable issues. The increase in amount from five hundred strings to one hundred thousand similarly reflects the changing landscape of prices and the expansion of the imaginative possibilities of wealth produced by the sheer volume of money in circulation and private coffers by the late Ming.

Li Yu changes Feng Menglong’s request from coins of a certain metal to an even more exacting standard: “Only if he has one hundred thousand strings of Taiping coins to serve as the bride-price will I marry my daughter to him” (除非有十萬貫太平錢作聘, 就把小姐嫁他便了).¹²⁶ As government and private issues fluctuated in legality and value throughout the late Ming and early Qing, this demand for a specific issue shows savvy in a marketplace of competing currencies. These coins, however, are not precious because of their metallic purity or favorable market rates; rather these coins are so highly valued because they are not in circulation:

¹²⁴ *TPGJ*, 16:112.

¹²⁵ Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshuo*, late Ming Tianxu zhai 天許齋 edn., 33:9a. Electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK.

¹²⁶ *Taiping qian*, 802.

“Taiping coins are the treasures of the treasury; even the emperor does not have one hundred thousand strings of them” (太平錢乃是鎮庫之寶，就是官家也沒有這十萬貫).¹²⁷

Coins bearing the “Taiping” inscription have long circulated throughout China. During the Three Kingdoms period, the Taiping hundred cash (*Taiping baiqian* 太平百錢) circulated as a widespread small denomination currency.¹²⁸ While these coins were used widely in the years following the Eastern Han, they were no longer in circulation by the Tang. During the Northern Song, the first imperial issue of Taiping coins—the Taiping Circulating Treasure (*Taiping tongbao* 太平通寶)—were circulated. The Northern Song *Taiping tongbao* is considered the first coin marked by reign date; first minted in 976, the coins were so named to commemorate the Taiping Xingguo era of Emperor Taizong’s reign.¹²⁹ With this coin, value is for the first time explicitly situated within time. This time is specifically imperial; it is a unit of time that is legible only vis-à-vis the state. Time and money are here twinned mechanisms of state legitimation: “Taiping” is fiat time just as “qian” is fiat value. In this context, “Taiping” functions as both a limit and an infinitude: at the same time that the reference to a specific reign era asserts the boundedness of imperial time and the historicity of value, it is also a promise of the utopian possibility of peace on earth, of the end of history. The Taiping coins are thus not merely descriptive (of the reign year, of the dynasty’s ambitions), but are the vehicles of heavenly peace itself. Just as “ping”, itself a pictogram of balanced scales, connotes both the evenness of

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ According to Peng Xinwei, Taiping hundred cash was first minted prior to 236 CE, probably during the final years of the Eastern Han. *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 135.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 400.

transactions and the flattening of time, the dynasty promises an expansive and eternal peace established through the regulation and circulation of value and time.

In addition to the large issue of *Taiping tongbao* copper coins, silver and gold *Taiping tongbao* were also minted throughout the Northern Song.¹³⁰ While the silver and gold *Taiping* coins had more limited circulations primarily as gifts, copper *Taiping* coins had an extensive circulation and were still in use in the late Ming.¹³¹ After this Northern Song issue, *Taiping* coins were not issued again until 1628, when the Chongzhen Circulating Treasure copper coin (Chongzhen *tongbao* 崇禎通寶) with the reverse inscription *Taiping* was issued.¹³²

While it is unclear if Li Yu is referring to a particular, historical issue, the specificity (and seeming impossibility) of the request for *Taiping* coins authenticates the singularity of the money that travels through the play. While the *huaben* seems to imply that the strings given to Wei Shu are the same as those given to Yifang, Li Yu takes pains to make it explicit that the money that flows from Old Man Zhang to Wei Shu to Wei Gu to Han Xiu is the same. In the twenty-third scene, Wei Gu's uncle tells of how he went to visit Han Xiu to seek a match between the chancellor's daughter and Wei Gu. While the chancellor happily approved of the match, he made a rather odd request:

The immortal Zhang once paid one hundred thousand strings of *Taiping* coins as a bride-price for the Wei daughter. To this day, it remains a delightful story. Those

¹³⁰ Ibid., 422–23. As Peng points out, the gold and silver *Taiping* coins were not minted during the *Taiping* period.

¹³¹ According to a local historian in Henan in the 1608 *Runan zhi* 汝南志 (Runan gazetteer), cited in Richard von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 168. The Northern Song *Taiping tongbao* seems to resemble most closely the *Taiping* coins that appear in the play, which are described as the *bao* “treasures” of the imperial treasury. As they were widely circulated in southern China during the late Ming, it is possible that Li Yu was familiar with this particular issue.

¹³² Peng Xinwei, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 643. *Taiping* coins were not minted again until the *Taiping* Rebellion.

Taiping coins are the possession of the Wei family, so they must still have it. He must use the original money as the bride-price, only then will I agree to the marriage.

張真人曾以十萬貫太平錢聘韋家小姐，至今以為美談，那太平錢是韋家之物，想必尚存。須得原錢為聘，纔好充諾。¹³³

Han Xiu proffers the exchange of coin for daughter in all seriousness, though not because he sees this amount as an embodiment of his daughter's value. Indeed, he already thinks that the *zhuangyuan* is a good match for the daughter of a chancellor—the exchange of his daughter for the social capital of a high-status son-in-law is already sufficient (furthermore, in the context of their uxori-local arrangement, the notion of ‘exchange’ is moot). Rather, Han views the money as a symbolic object whose value lies not in its face value or rarity, but in its history, in the story surrounding its prior exchanges. By this point in the play, the story of the Wei family and the hundred thousand strings of Taiping money had circulated far and wide: in the twenty-first scene, a renowned storytelling monk from Suzhou recounts the story to a rapt audience that includes a bewildered Wei Gu. The story has transformed from private family matter to public spectacle—a diverting drama, a fantastic bit of local lore, an instructive parable. It is, as Han says, a “delightful story.” His request for the money, then, should be seen as an attempt to insert himself into the drama: by play-acting Wei Shu and demanding the “original money” in exchange for his daughter, Han crosses over from audience to actor. The original money is the relic that links him to the vanished immortals of the first act and the prop that allows him to assume a central role in the drama's second act.

The fetish that Han Xiu makes of the coins can be read as a metacomment on the role money plays on the Suzhou stage. The prominence of silver ingots, copper coins, and paper bills

¹³³ *Taiping qian*, 861.

as props in these plays points to what Andrew Sofer calls a “semiotic crisis” in theatrical representation, where “objects drift toward center stage when they no longer quite mean what they used to say or say what they used to mean.”¹³⁴ In plays like *Longfeng qian*, *Shiwu guan*, *Jubaopen*, and *Taiping qian*, the new possibilities of the uses and meanings of money interrogate the roles that material objects play both on stage and in the broader cultural world of the late Ming and early Qing.

As a prop moves across the stage, it does work: narrative work, structural work, symbolic work. This work, however, often obscures another kind of work—the work that produces and circulates the prop. Indeed, the prop’s meanings are not limited to its orbit on stage. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda point out that “theatrical objects always potentially refuse to be subordinated to the *logos* of the play and instead make visible, by virtue of their conspicuous fabricatedness, alternate dramas of manufacture and the body.”¹³⁵ The conventions of theater attempt to erase the specific histories of bodies and objects: an actress with a name and hometown, a stone cup chiseled by a particular artisan. It is this occlusion of histories, especially economic histories (as the pre-stage history of the actress, much like the prop, was of a commodity bought and sold), that allows the body or object to be seen as a form (woman, cup) into which another matter (Xueyan, jade goblet) could be projected or embodied.¹³⁶ But just as the aficionado’s experience of his favorite actress is informed by her past performances and scandals, the pre- and post-stage lives of props often intrude on their path around the stage.

¹³⁴ Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, xii.

¹³⁵ Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, “Introduction: Towards a Materialist Account of Stage Properties” in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

¹³⁶ The *chuanqi* presumes this formal purity in the script itself, which uses role part rather than character name.

Similarly, the histories of money's materiality—its production, valuation, and circulation—are made visible by the circuit of the Taiping coins across the stage.

The materiality of money is a recurrent concern, foregrounded by the story of Hui'e's father, a district magistrate who was thrown in jail after the storehouse of paper money (*chaoku* 鈔庫) was burned down. The impermanence of this paper money is contrasted with the solidity of the Taiping coins. However, all of this money that appears on stage is deeply anachronistic. Paper money was not issued by the Tang court, and the system of *chaoku* storehouses managed by officials was instituted after the Tang.¹³⁷ Furthermore, there was no Taiping coin minted or circulating in the Tang.¹³⁸

The appearance of the money on stage not only has a troubled relationship to history, but also draws attention to the problematic ontological status of money prop-qua-money. Just as the stage is a place of disguise and artifice, the prop is a material object that is “acting” as something else. A white stone cup “acts” as the jade treasure of the Yan family, just as the *jing* “acts” as the emperor. But while a prop cup made of painted ceramic is not the rare jade cup of the Yan family, it is still a cup. All money props, however, will necessarily not be money; a prop coin could never function as a coin. As a kind of counterfeit that is not intended to circulate as such, it is doubly unreal. While a cup's cupness is formal—it is cup-shaped and thus can be used in a cup-way—prop money is form without functional possibility. In this way, prop money (especially

¹³⁷ Prior to the establishment of these storehouses, there were *maichaosuo* 買鈔所 where merchants could exchange certain kinds of paper certificates. However, the play indicates this was an official storehouse, and the earliest evidence of such *maichaosuo* post-dates the setting of the play. See Zou Zhiliang 鄒志諒, “Nan Song ‘maichaoku’ yinkao” 南宋“買鈔庫”印考, *Zhongguo qianbi* 中國錢幣 1 (2002): 21–22.

¹³⁸ While there were hundred cash and four cash Taiping coins that were minted in the Three Kingdoms and Liao, these coins were no longer in circulation in the Tang. These historical coins also do not match the description of the coins in the play as being imperially minted treasure coins.

prop paper money) draws attention to the problematic materiality of “real” money, which is authorized through abstraction rather than form.

The money on stage not only cannot be real, but it also cannot be represented. While the central fetish prop is always a material object on stage, the one hundred thousand strings present an impossibility of representation. As far as the minimal stage directions indicate, the audience never sees this money. Instead, the money is imagined through the ten carts pulled across the stage—the human effort required to move them, the space they take up, the sound they make. The matchmakers tells the Weis that Old Man Zhang “had loaded ten carts [with the Taiping money] and was personally delivering the bride-price and fetching his bride” (裝戴十車，親自賚來納聘迎親).¹³⁹ The transport of these carts is depicted in detail. In the twelfth scene, Zhang instructs his servant to find men to help him push the carts of money to the Wei house. We then see the servant pantomime leading a group of men to push the carts: according to the stage directions, “the group mimes exiting, then pushes a cart on stage” (引眾虛下，推車上)¹⁴⁰ When the matchmaker orders the men to push the carts into the Weis’ hall, the magnitude of the payment is made real; the stage directions state that “the men push the cart in, and the *wai* and *lao* act surprised” (推車進，外、老驚).¹⁴¹ This elaborate production is repeated when Wei Gu fetches the money from the pharmacist, with assorted carters (眾車夫) summoned to help move the cash.¹⁴² The magnitude of the value contained by these carts “overflowing with strings of coins like dragons” (錢龍盈乘) is conveyed not just by the size and weight, but also by sound.

¹³⁹ *Taiping qian*, 807.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 806.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 807.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 858.

When this team of lackeys pushes the carts into the Wei courtyard, the Weis hear the “rattling sound” (麟麟聲響) of the money before they see it.¹⁴³ Later the laden cart is described as making “a sound like the ocean waves” (聲如海潮).¹⁴⁴ The emphasis on the size, heft, and sound of the money simultaneously draws attention to both the materiality of money and its absence: there are no coins in the carts, the carts are not heavy, they do not make a grinding noise. The money that is experienced but not present offers a way of thinking about the theater as simultaneously embodied and ghostly, situated at the nexus of commerce and ritual, material and divine.

The Ways of Men and Immortals

The origin of the Taiping coins is never addressed. That this kind of money is known to Wei Shu implies that it is a kind of government issue that was at one point in circulation among elites. At the same time, the name Taiping, or Great Peace, suggests an alternative history as a supernatural, heaven-made object. Following Xiang Lingting’s 向陵亭 argument that the Taiping hundred cash of the Three Kingdoms period was a charm and not coin, Peng Xinwei suggests that the Taiping cash widely available in the Eastern Han was minted by a religious group like Taiping Daoists rather than by a state authority.¹⁴⁵ While a late Ming audience may not explicitly associate Taiping coins with the anti-Han *Taiping dao* followers, the mystical connotations of the money’s name and the importance of bullion and metallic specie in religious practices (as an alchemic or exorcistic tool) would be familiar to such an audience.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 807.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 859.

¹⁴⁵ Peng Xinwei, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 136–38, 140 n. 19.

The dual nature of this money—gesturing towards both human and divine origins—serves as an index of the changing understanding of Old Man Zhang’s divinity in relation to the human realm. At the end of the classical tale, the Wei family concludes that “the paths of men and immortals are separate” (仙俗路殊).¹⁴⁶ As in most medieval classical tales, these realms are not only separate but often unbridgeable. After arriving at Old Man Zhang’s ornate mountain villa, Yifang is received as a formal guest. His sister appears, magnificently attired, and greets him in a cold and perfunctory manner, her chilly reception gesturing towards the chasm that now separates them. Later it is made explicit that “this is the abode of immortals, ordinary humans cannot sojourn here” (此地神仙之府，非俗人得游), and just as Old Man Zhang and his wife were exiled from the human society by her family, Yifang is exiled from the realm of the gods by Zhang.¹⁴⁷ After this visit, much is made of the elusiveness of making contact with immortals. When the Weis want to contact their daughter again, Yifang is unable to retrace his path to Zhang’s villa. Later, Yifang encounters Zhang’s slave outside of a wineshop in Yangzhou and learns that Zhang and his pharmacist friend are inside. Though the slave promises to bring Zhang out to meet him, he never returns; when Yifang looks inside the shop, they are nowhere to be found. In the classical tale, the distance between mortals and immortals is mapped onto physical space—Old Man Zhang and his wife rising into the air on a phoenix and flying to the fairy island of Penglai; Yifang’s fruitless journey to find the path back to Zhang’s villa; Yifang waiting outside of the wineshop. This notion of a boundary that cannot be overcome, of a place humans cannot get to, is reiterated by the descriptions of finery “never before seen” (世間未見) and in

¹⁴⁶ *TPGJ*, 16:114.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the emotional distance (the terse exchanges, the chilly formality) that now separates brother and sister.¹⁴⁸

The *huaben*, however, depicts divinity as both less exotic (the Kunlun slave 崑崙奴, an enigmatic presence in classical tales, is here replaced with a young cowherd 牧童) and more bureaucratic. When Wei Yifang first sees Zhang in his immortal adobe, he is handing down sentences to two local gods for failing to protect their human charges against wild predators. While in the classical tale the long journey to the immortal abode signals a removal from mortal concerns, here the immortals show a deep investment in the world of men. And just as immortals can live as and for humans, humans can become immortals: almost all of the human characters in the story (Wei Shu and his wife, Yifang, the Wei daughter) are in the process of becoming immortal. Yifang learns that during his long absence, his entire family has ascended to heaven. When Yifang later runs into Zhang's servant outside a wineshop, he is invited to join Zhang and his friend inside, where Zhang tells Yifang his true identity and reveals Yifang's future elevation to city god. Immortality is not something that is outside of human experience but something that can emerge from it. Indeed, even very human failings, like Yifang's explosive temper, do not bar one from becoming a god (though such failings may result in a slight demotion).

While the *huaben* depicts a world in which the immortal and human realms are more easily traversed, the immortal at the center of the narrative remains enigmatic. Though he is the subject of the title ("Old Man Zhang grows melons and marries Wennü"), his is not the subjectivity through which the reader experiences the story. The narrator, affecting the storyteller's voice, announces that he "will now tell of a man who, because he lost a white horse in the snow, mysteriously achieved immortality" (且說一個官人，因雪中走了一匹白馬，變成一件

¹⁴⁸ *TPGJ*, 16:113. In some ways this is a reenactment (writ strange) of the ways marriage transforms natal kinship.

蹊躑神仙的事), i.e. Wei Shu.¹⁴⁹ The first half of the narrative is recounted as events that happen to Wei Shu, while the second half is framed as events that happen to Wei Yifang. While there is one scene to which neither father nor son is privy—Zhang’s interaction with the matchmaker—the story is told almost entirely through the observations of our reliable, human stand-ins. We do not have access to Zhang’s thoughts or the private conversations between Zhang and his wife. We are like Wei Yifang in the mountain fairyland, peering through a hole in a window into the strange goings-on of immortals.

Li Yu’s play continues the *huaben*’s work to make immortals more like humans, and humans more like immortals, by moving Old Man Zhang and his emotional inner life to the center of the narrative. In a departure from the *huaben*, Old Man Zhang is not only the first major character the audience meets, but he is played by the *sheng* 生, or male lead. This Old Man Zhang is not some sort of mystical force operating outside of or above the human characters—someone who might disappear for large portions of the narrative without warning. Rather, he is an emotional and structural pivot, anchoring one of the two parallel marriage quests on which the play is built.

The *chuanqi* form itself is central to the transformation of the Old Man Zhang figure. The conventions of the *huaben* are such that the narrator, while selectively omniscient, is largely unconcerned with interiority. In simulating a story-telling context, the forward propulsion of the narrative is privileged over introspection. The *chuanqi* scene, however, is structured around both the spoken exposition that moves the narrative forward and the sung aria that moves the narrative inward. The aria often functions as a reverie that occurs both within and outside of the narrative, wherein a character halts the action to offer insight into his inner-most thoughts. In this moment

¹⁴⁹ *Gujin xiaoshuo*, 33:3a.

outside of (narrative) time, the character becomes the narrator of his own unmediated subjectivity. By addressing this interior monologue to the audience—by speaking to himself through the audience—the character erases the boundaries between himself and the audience. We are cast in the role of his longing heart, his troubled mind. The intimacy of this confidence, in which the audience becomes the externalization of the character’s conscience and consciousness, renders the speaker entirely reliable.

At the same time, the aria is a mode of self-representation through metaphoric and allusive language, in which the character locates himself within history, understanding his place in the narrative by evoking the words and deeds of others. In this sense, the aria is a move both deeper within the self and radiating outwards to encompass the entire literary tradition and all of human history. The allusiveness and referentiality of the aria further draws attention to the fact that this heightened moment of emotional truth is occurring at a heightened moment of theatrical performance. The singing, the poetic diction and rhyme schemes, the direct address of the audience, all highlight the constructedness and artifice, all of the work that went into that moment. It is the very ‘art’fulness of the performance—the make-up and costumes, the carefully constructed lines, the impeccable technique and virtuosic skill—that calls genuine sentiment into being. That Li Yu’s Old Man Zhang is an immortal “playing in the human realm” (遊戲人間) thus does not render his arias-in-disguise disingenuous but rather gestures back to the revelatory possibilities of the actor playing on the stage.¹⁵⁰

While it is the chilly remove that differentiates man and immortal in the classical tale, here the immortal sings of loneliness and longing. Building a play around the figure of Old Man

¹⁵⁰ *Taiping qian*, 837. The character in disguise is of course a common metatheatrical trope in seventeenth-century drama. E.g. “Conceal me what I am, and be my aid / For such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent.” *Twelfth Night* (1:2:49–51).

Zhang is in keeping with thematics of other Suzhou circle plays that cast cultural others like merchants in the role of the hero, bringing the margins into the center.¹⁵¹ And just as money is the mechanism by which the marginal is brought to the center of new networks of exchange, it is also through money that the center is pushed to the margins.

Court Dramas

As in *Jubaopen*, which will be discussed in the following chapter, the origin of the vast riches at the center of the play appears to be supernatural. Just as Shen Wansan's riches are not generated by commerce, Old Man Zhang's fortune is not acquired through buying and selling. Though magical money allows the hero to avoid the taint of the market, neither play sets up a conflict between the mercantile/material and the divine. Rather, in both of these plays they are brought into synthesis, with the divinely produced money invested in a business or used to "buy" a wife. Instead, the tension in both of these plays is between heaven and the state as competing authors of value—and both end in a confrontation between an immortal and the emperor.

The path that the Taiping coins take as they wind their way through the play reverses the expected circulation of government issue from the imperial treasury to the far-flung reaches of the empire, the circulation of imperially minted coins often beginning with the payment of official and military salaries and trickling down to the likes of the lowly gardener. Instead, the coins are introduced into circulation by the seemingly impoverished and end up padding the coffers of a high official. Since these are rare treasury coins, however, their circulation becomes potentially sinister. No one in the play asks where these coins came from: Were they magically conjured out of nothing by the Daoist immortal? Or were they somehow removed from the Tang

¹⁵¹ See the discussion of the expansion of the merchant's moral and dramatic possibilities in Chapter One.

treasury?¹⁵² These questions of authorization and ownership become increasingly pressing in the final scenes of the play.

In staging the imperial confrontations of the final third of the play, Li Yu departs dramatically from his source texts. One such departure is Li Yu's incorporation of legends about Zhang Guolao 張果老, one of the Eight Immortals, into the play. Some of Li Yu's additions are minor details that deepen the foreshadowing of Old Man Zhang's divinity (for example, changing Wei Shu's white horse to a white donkey, as Guolao was often figured as riding backwards on such an animal). More significantly, however, is Li Yu's marshaling of the Guolao legend to stage a series of confrontations between his protagonist and Tang Emperor Xuanzong.

According to the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Former history of the Tang), Zhang Guolao, who was said to possess the secret to longevity, attracted the attention of multiple monarchs.¹⁵³ The Tang Empress Wu Zetian summoned him to court, but he feigned death. In the Kaiyuan period, Emperor Xuanzong was more successful in luring Zhang Guolao to court. While there, Guolao confounds the court magicians and resists a marriage to the emperor's daughter. Guolao is granted leave to return to his mountain abode; Xuanzong later builds a Daoist temple in his honor. Other accounts expand on Guolao's court visit, telling of how he mesmerized the court by pulling a horse out of a gourd or by killing and then reviving a court priest.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² While the classical tale and *huaben* are set in the early sixth century, Li Yu moves the story to the Kaiyuan period (713–741) of Xuanzong's reign.

¹⁵³ *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 191 in (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 16:5106–7. See also *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, *juan* 204, electronic rpt. of Northern Song edition in ZGJBGJK.

¹⁵⁴ See for example Li Kang 李伉 (ninth century; name also appears as Rong 冗), *Duyi zhi* 獨異志 [Record of singular anomalies], *Baihai* 稗海 edn., 3:7b-8a. Electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK.

Li Yu's rewriting of the Guolao story focuses on the impotence of the emperor to recall Zhang to his court. In the twenty-fifth scene, Emperor Xuanzong invites Zhang to perform magic for him and Yang Guifei. After several impressive transformations, Zhang jumps inside a gourd and vanishes; he is later seen riding a crane out of the city gate. In the final scene of the play, Wei Gu, Han Xiu, and Hui'e encounter the eunuch Gao Lishi in the mountains. He recounts how he was charged with bringing Zhang back to court, but even when faced with an imperial edict commanding his return, Zhang "resolutely refused" (決意不從允) to go back.¹⁵⁵ While the earlier scene figures Zhang as a court jester, amusing his royal hosts with marvelous tricks, his abrupt departure and refusal to return reveals a power beyond the emperor's control.

The inability of the emperor to regulate the movements of Old Man Zhang is parallel to a broader loss of control facing the emperor. Throughout the play, the money circulated by marginal actors—immortals and orphans, beggars and hermits—poses a very real threat to the monetary regime of the state. While the imperial state sought to hold things in place as objects of administration, by the late Ming, the mobility of money and men increasingly compromised such a logic of governance, and previously marginal positions gained a new autonomy that was deeply unsettling to the center. As the final coda declares, "The Taiping money acted as a matchmaker settling the accounts of yin and yang" (太平錢作合氤氲賬).¹⁵⁶ The cash that seems disruptive is really constitutive, generating a new web of relations that crosses the empire. The Taiping coin is truly the medium of great peace, linking high and low, inside and outside, human and divine. Li Yu transforms the coins into objects that not only have a history, but whose very circulation reconstructs the social whole around those previously excluded. Despite its Tang dynasty setting,

¹⁵⁵ *Taiping qian*, 876.

¹⁵⁶ *Taiping qian*, 878.

the questions raised by the play—How is value generated and authorized? Who controls the circulation of money and its meanings?—spoke directly to the anxieties and needs of an early Qing audience.

Chapter Four

The Usurer and the Alchemist: Staging the Infinite Surplus in *Jubaopen*

Zhu Suchen's *Jubaopen* 聚寶盆 (Cornucopia), an early Qing drama that pits heroic merchant Shen Wansan against the founder of the Ming dynasty, embodies the Suzhou circle's fascination with the mechanisms of the marketplace.¹ At the center of this play is Shen Wansan's cornucopia—the silver coursing through the seventeenth-century economy displaced and literalized in its endless productive capacity. However, the precious metals generated by the magical basin are not the only forms of value being produced and exchanged in the narrative, as paper and specie minted by the state circulate alongside and in competition with Shen Wansan's trove of bullion. In examining the various circulations of paper, copper, and silver money in three scenes from *Jubaopen*, this chapter will explore how the dematerialization of value (both the abstracted currencies of paper and specie and the new systems of credit into which they are integrated) is deployed as a symptom of the moral bankruptcy of the state. In a reversal of the myriad literati- and state-authored discourses that posit the merchant as usurer and counterfeiter, here it is the emperor who is cast as the purveyor of spurious commodities and truths, while the endless regenerating surplus of merchant capital is figured as an expression of divine will that supersedes the claims of the state.

Basins for Gathering Treasures

The play opens with humble fisherman Shen Wansan rescuing a supernatural clam-goddess named Che'e, who thanks him by giving him an enchanted bowl that reproduces

¹ While precise dating for *Jubaopen* is impossible, references to the Ming court indicate that the play was written after its fall. There is no mention of the play earlier than the early Qing compendia *Xin chuanqi pin* and *Quhai zongmu tiyao*.

whatever is placed inside. Shen and his wife use the bowl to generate a massive quantity of silver, which they use to move to Nanjing and enter trade. Shen's old friend, a woodcutter named Zhang You'er, marries his sister to Shen as a concubine in the hopes that he will benefit from Shen's sudden fortune. Though Shen gives You'er money to open a teashop, You'er's jealousy towards Shen festers. The Ming Dynasty founder Zhu Yuanzhang, who is dealing with a massive fiscal crisis, is angered that the millionaire Shen has built a compound with a tower overlooking the palace. You'er fuels the emperor's mistrust by slandering Shen, claiming that Shen harbors a desire to overthrow the dynasty. The emperor commands Shen to perform a series of trying tasks: to provide a banquet for the troops, to build a part of the city wall, and to pay an exorbitant interest on a bogus loan. The cornucopia is stolen and Shen is unable to repay the loan, causing the emperor to strip Shen of his rank and all his material possessions. When Shen's twin sons help secure the Ming's victory over the Yuan holdouts and are given high office, the emperor reevaluates his hostility towards Shen. Upon discovering evidence that Shen was a loyal subject unjustly slandered by You'er, Zhu Yuanzhang apologizes to Shen and punishes You'er. The mystical clam returns to reunite Shen with his cornucopia and bestow upon him the elixir of eternal life.

Zhu Suchen crafts his play from the myriad narratives about Shen Wansan in circulation since the early Ming, interweaving elements from histories, classical tales, local gazetteers, miscellanies, and oral lore. While there are a few tomb inscriptions that make reference to the Shen family fortune in the early Ming, detailed written accounts involving Shen Wansan and his fabulous wealth do not appear until the mid-fifteenth century. Many of these accounts gesture back to earlier oral tradition by prefacing their story with variations on the phrase "as passed down by legend" (舊傳, 俗傳, 相傳). Though most of these earlier accounts originate in the Wu

吳 region, especially around the cities that figure prominently in Shen Wansan lore (Zhouzhuang, Suzhou, and Nanjing), a number of radically different versions were circulating simultaneously.²

The one commonality across these various narratives is Shen's tremendous wealth, with which his name became synonymous and for which he was worshipped as a god. Several early versions of the story attribute Shen's wealth to his connections to a certain Lu Daoyuan.³ In the Wujiang gazetteer published in 1488, Lu is recorded as giving his property to Shen's family before joining the priesthood; a similar version can be found in Yang Xunji's 楊循吉 (1456–1544) *Su tan* 蘓談 (Suzhou stories), written around the same time.⁴ A more fantastical origin for Lu's wealth is provided in Zhu Yunming's 祝允明 (1460–1526) *Zhuzi zhiguai lu* 祝子志怪錄 (Mr. Zhu's record of the strange).⁵ In this telling, Lu Daopan had recently moved to Suzhou and had taken up residence in a haunted house. A confrontation with a pair of female spirits leads him to discover two jars of gold buried in the courtyard; it is this wealth that is then inherited by Shen, who had formerly served as Lu's money manager.

As Shen Wansan stories proliferated in the late Ming, so too did explanations for his vast wealth. Tian Yiheng 田藝蘅 (fl. 1570) mentions the Lu inheritance in *Liuqing rizha* 留青日札 (Daily jottings to preserve the past), but also credits the Shen family fortune to Shen's father,

² This can be seen in the divergent accounts given by Shen Zhou 沈周, Zhu Yunming 祝允明, and Huangfu Lu 皇甫錄, who were near contemporaries in Changzhou.

³ His name is alternatively given as Deyuan and Daopan.

⁴ *Wujiang zhi* 吳江志 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1987), 44:259–260.

⁵ Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460–1526), *Zhuzi zhiguai lu* 祝子志怪錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, between 1995–1999), 1266:628. This story is retold with minor changes in Lü Bi 呂毖 (between 1644–1735), *Mingchao xiaoshi* 明朝小史 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2000), 9:785.

who expertly and tirelessly managed their fields.⁶ Others accounts attribute Shen's riches to knowledge of alchemy. In *Weishuixuan riji* 味水軒日記 (Diary from the Pavilion of Tasting Water), Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635) records a conversation about Shen's use (or rather, misuse) of cinnabar.⁷ Tian Yiheng and Xie Zhaozhi 謝肇淛 (1567–1634) both repeat rumors that Shen's descendants had knowledge of alchemical arts.

A number of late Ming origin stories hinge on Shen's discovery of a strange object that appears humble but is in fact exceedingly valuable. In the 1618 edition of *Yunjiao guan jitan* 雲蕉館紀談 (Recorded anecdotes from the Yunjiao hall), Kong Er 孔邇 offers two such origin stories.⁸ In one, a mysterious old man gives Shen seven nets filled with silver. In another, Shen finds a trove of stones that turn out to be highly prized by connoisseurs. Kong Er tells us how the strange stones are appraised by someone with knowledge of the luxury market as being worth tens of thousands of cash each, and it is this cash that funds Shen's lucrative overseas trading network. While a few sources directly attribute Shen's fortune to mercantile activity, such as the Jiajing-era Wujiang gazetteer that credits Shen's wealth to foreign trade, more frequently trade is a consequence of (rather than the source of) wealth.⁹ It is only after fantastic wealth or treasures have been accumulated that Shen becomes a merchant—the supernatural and the strange transformed into commodities and capital.

⁶ Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938), 190:1.

⁷ Li Rihua, *Weishuixuan riji* (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 1996), 285.

⁸ Kong Er, *Yunjiao guan jitan* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 49–56.

⁹ An account from the final years of the Yuan tells of “a certain Mr. Shen from Dachang [near present-day Suzhou] in Jiading prefecture who became rich by trading with foreigners” (嘉定州大場沈氏，因下番買賣致巨富). Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 [Nancun's record of stopping the plow] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1998), 379.

This transformation of the rare, incommensurable object into discreet, saleable, and multipliable commodities also appears in a popular story about the afterlife of one of Shen's treasures. Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509) tells an early version of this story, in which an agate wine vessel, confiscated from Shen's collection, is found approximately one hundred years later floating in a ditch by a lowly tutor named Li Ming.¹⁰ Li's friend advises him to give the vessel to a powerful eunuch in exchange for rights to the salt monopoly. While transporting the prefecture's salt tickets, Li's boat capsizes and the tickets are destroyed. The magistrate insists that they reimburse the prefectural government for the value of the tickets. As a result, Li dies in prison and his friend goes bankrupt. Though this story is only tangentially about Shen, it rehearses many of the same tropes that come to define the Shen narrative: the discovery of a strange object by someone of low social standing that precipitates his entry into mercantile activities, and the underlying logic that the generation and proliferation of wealth leads inexorably to financial ruin and death.

Of these various origins of Shen's wealth, the most common in late Ming accounts is the cornucopia. He Mengchun 何孟春 (1474–1536) writes:

The tale of the cornucopia possessed by Shen Wansan's family has been passed down since olden times. According to the legend, whenever Shen placed a small amount of any object inside the cornucopia, the next day it would be filled to the brim. Every object he put inside had the same result. When other people tried to use it, it would not work. Emperor Taizu heard about this and had the cornucopia brought to him. The emperor tried to use it, but it did not work, so he returned it to Shen. After Shen's property was confiscated, the cornucopia was brought back to the palace. I am doubtful that such an object existed in the world. How could such a thing be?

¹⁰ Shen Zhou, *Kezuo xinwen* 客座新聞 (Qing manuscript edn.), electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK. This story also appears in Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 (1557–1632), *Yong chuang xiaopin* 湧幢小品 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1998), 398; Shen Maoguan 慎懋官, *Hua yi huamu niaoshou zhenwan kao* 華夷花木鳥獸珍玩考 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe chubanshe, 1997), 118:584; Wang Tonggui, *Ertan leizeng*, 11:2a.

舊傳沈萬三家有聚寶盆事，云在沈氏貯少物，物經宿輒滿，百物皆然，他人試之不驗。事聞太祖，取入試不驗，遂還沈氏，後沈氏籍沒，乃復歸禁中。嘗疑世豈有此物，物安有是理。¹¹

This account of a magical basin that would reproduce whatever was placed inside and that only Shen could operate was repeated by many late Ming writers. Some of these writers attempt to make sense of the cornucopia by placing it within the lore of other cornucopias. He Mengchun and later Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) repeat a story from Wu Shu’s non-extant Song dynasty collection *Mige xiantan* 秘閣閒談 (Idle talks from the secret pavilion) about an abbot who discovers a cornucopia that he uses to enrich his monastery.¹² Years later when he is close to death, the abbot throws the basin into a river to ensure that his disciples are not tempted into sin. Wang Kentang 王肯堂 (*jinshi* 1589) tells another such story, also allegedly from the Song, about a shepherd who finds a vase in an old tomb.¹³ When a passerby discovers that the magic vase is able to replicate coins, he attempts to steal it. In the ensuing fracas, the vase is smashed. Fundamental to these stories is the sense of crisis brought on by the cornucopia: this strange object that has the potential to create an unrecoverable imbalance in the world’s goods will either destroy or be destroyed by its own productive capacity.

The Song dynasty lineage for the cornucopia, as constructed by these Ming anecdotes, bespeaks the resonance of such an object during periods in which the commercial market

¹¹ He Mengchun, *Yudong xulu* 餘冬序錄 [Properly ordered writings of Yudong] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938), 52:8.

¹² While *Mige xiantan* is not extant, the story of the Badong monk survives in Zeng Zao 曾慥 (1091–1155), *Lei shuo* 類說 (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1955), 5:3428–3429.

¹³ Though Wang does not give a source, he is quoting the story told by Shao Bowen 邵伯溫 (1057–1134) in *Shaoshi wenjian houlu* 邵氏聞見後錄 (Shanghai: Boguzhai, 1923), 27:1b–2a.

economy had radically restructured the possibilities of wealth. However, while vessels capable of reduplicating money are attributed to Song sources, the object called *jubaopen* (lit. basin for gathering treasures) only emerges in connection with Shen Wansan stories in the Ming.¹⁴ Neither the abbot's bowl nor the herder's vase is referred to as a *jubaopen*. Rather, they are described simply as a green porcelain bowl (一青磁碗) or a small and narrow yellow porcelain vase (一黃磁小褊瓶). It is their common, unassuming appearance that is the source of wonder; their strangeness is generated by the commonness of the nameless, mundane object that could be interchanged with any other porcelain bowl or vase. The abbot's bowl and the herder's vase are disruptive and disquieting because of how they sit outside of categories—a bowl or vase that does something a bowl or vase could never do. The *jubaopen*, however, is itself a category of things in the world, a basin that by definition gathers treasures.

That this object has a name implies that it also has a history. However, most Shen Wansan narratives are unconcerned with how Shen acquired the basin, and do not attempt to answer who forged such a basin and why.¹⁵ The origin of the *jubaopen* within the Chinese imaginary is similarly obscure. While the literary tradition seems to indicate that an object called *jubaopen* emerged only with the Shen Wansan mythos in the Ming dynasty, an examination of extant *jubaopen* images paints a fuller picture of its multiple meanings and possible origins. Just as the earliest literary treatments of the cornucopia can be found not in official histories or poetry but in collections of local legend, rumor, and gossip, the earliest images of the cornucopia appear

¹⁴ For the remainder of this discussion I will refer to Shen's object as a *jubaopen* so as to differentiate it from other cornucopias.

¹⁵ Chu Renhuo 褚人穫 (fl. 1675–1695) provides an explanation for how Shen acquired the *jubaopen*: it was bestowed on him by frogs he had liberated from captivity. *Jianhu ji* 堅瓠集 [Hard gourd collection](Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, between 1995–1999), 1262:281.



Figure 1: Qing woodblock print from Zhuxianzhen

Source: Wang Shucun 王樹村, ed., *Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi tulu* 中國民間年畫史圖錄 [Historical catalog of Chinese folk New Year pictures] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1991), 1:124.

not within the literati painting tradition, but in popular woodblock prints. While some have taken this to mean that the cornucopia must have had a long and rich history as a folk icon, the images themselves point to another intriguing possibility.¹⁶

Like the written sources on the *jubaopen* discussed above, images of the cornucopia only appear in the late imperial period. The belatedness of the cornucopia in the literary and visual imagination is highlighted by the long history of the objects often represented alongside it. In a number of late imperial prints, money trees grow out of the cornucopia (Figure 1), while a

¹⁶ For example, John Lust assumes that there must have been a “long, unrecorded” history of cornucopia in folk legends prior to the Ming. *Chinese Popular Prints* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 200.



Figure 2: Qianlong-era calendar from Suzhou

Source: Miyama Ryō, ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng, Riben cangpin juan* 中國木板年畫集成, 日本藏品卷 [Compendium of Chinese woodblock New Year's prints, Japanese collections volume] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 180.

money dragon hovers above, spitting treasures into the basin (Figure 2). The money tree and the money dragon appear in medieval classical tales, as funerary objects in the Eastern Han (Figure 3), and as motifs on Western Han coins.¹⁷ The cornucopia, however, has left no such early or medieval traces.

Many of the visual motifs that come to be associated with the cornucopia in later prints can be traced back to several extant images from the Yuan. In two of these images, an urn sits atop the back of an animal flanked by several men (Figures 4 and 5). Though the urn is not marked as a *jubaopen*, the treasures overflowing from within and the wavy lines radiating out to

¹⁷ *Chinese Popular Prints*, 276; Richard von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 59; Susan Erickson, "Money Trees of the Eastern Han Dynasty," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 66 (1994): 7–115.



Figure 3: Money tree excavated in Sichuan
Source: Susan Erickson, "Money Trees of the Eastern Han Dynasty," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 66 (1994): 46.



Figure 4: Yuan woodblock print
Source: *Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi* 1:26



Figure 5: Yuan woodblock print

Source: Wang Shucun, *Ancient Chinese Woodblock New Year Prints* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1985), 16.

the heavens become tropes in later cornucopia images.¹⁸ The centrality of the cornucopia in these compositions, and its place of pride atop the animal, indicate that it is an object of great worth and deserving of reverence. That the urn is carried by a camel and accompanied by men with non-Han features in non-Han garb marks the cornucopia as an exotic object from a foreign land.

The representation of the cornucopia as foreign fits into a larger imagination of foreign exotica. Foreigners, especially from Silk Road cultures, have long been depicted as possessing riches whose sheer volume and monetary value are unfathomable to Chinese observers. A

¹⁸ Another extant Yuan image of a *jubaopen*-type object also has these wavy lines that seems to simultaneously signify brilliance and illumination while also gesturing to the heavens, recalling the steam rising from sacrificial vessels that carries the offerings to the ghosts and gods. Wang Shucun, *Ancient Chinese Woodblock New Year Prints* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1985), 18. These lines also echo the depictions of Zoroastrian fire altars that appear on Sasanian coins circulating on the Silk Road. For examples of these coins, see Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), plate 4b and Robert Göbl, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), vol. 3, plate 6–16.



Figure 6: Detail from Ming rubbing
Source: *Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi tulu*, 1:36.

number of tales from the Tang dynasty gesture to the historical role of Sogdian traders in the luxury trade, depicting foreign merchants who use their obscene wealth to procure marvelous treasures.¹⁹ That the jewels and pearls the foreign traders seek are worth much more in foreign lands and have histories to which the Chinese merchants are oblivious offered readers a glimpse of the larger systems of value and meaning in which Tang China was enmeshed.²⁰

Though many of these narratives show the foreign merchants returning a treasure to their native land, the Chinese word *bao* 寶 (treasure) that flies on the flag leading the non-Chinese

¹⁹ Edward H. Schafer, “Iranian Merchants in T’ang Dynasty Tales,” in *Semitic and Oriental Studies: A Volume Presented to William Popper, Professor of Semitic Languages, Emeritus, on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday, October 29, 1949*, ed. Walter J. Fischel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 403–422.

²⁰ Examples of this narrative include “Cui Wei” 崔煒 attributed to Pei Xing’s 裴鏞 collection *Chuanqi* 傳奇 (TPGJ, 34:216–220), “Baozhu” 寶珠 attributed to Dai Fu’s 戴孚 collection *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 (TPGJ, 402:3238), and “Cen shi” 岑氏 attributed to Xu Xuan’s 徐鉉 collection *Jishen lu* 稽神錄 (TPGJ, 404:3261).



Figure 7: Qing painting from Yangliuqing
Source: *Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi tulu*, 2:577.

procession in Figure 4 seems to imply that this is not necessarily the triumphant return of the treasure to its native land, but perhaps a tribute gift to the Chinese. Indeed, these images show the simultaneous entrance of the cornucopia into both Chinese land and the Chinese visual imagination. By the early Ming, a Sinicized version of this image appears, with the urn placed on the back of a goat and flanked by boys in Chinese dress (Figure 6). Over the course of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the image of the cornucopia becomes integrated into distinctly Han tableaux (Figure 7) and popular religious imagery (Figure 8).

The possibility of a foreign lineage, perhaps from overland trade along the Silk Road, is compelling in light of the long history of cornucopia-like objects in cultures that engaged in exchange with ancient and medieval China. Images of horns of plenty emerge as a theme in the iconography of ancient Greece, and over the course of classical antiquity, multiple origin myths



Figure 8: Qing woodblocks (modern print) from Shandong
 Source: Po Sung-Nien and David Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems: The Iconography of Everyday Life in Village China* (Berkeley: IEAS Publications, 1992), 26.

are given for the cornucopia.²¹ One of the more popular stories recounted by Greek and Roman authors center around the young Zeus and his nursemaid Amalthea, who was either the caretaker of a goat or a goat herself. When Zeus accidentally breaks off one of the goat's horns, he enchants it out of remorse.²² Another origin story tells of a wrestling match between Herakles and river-god Akhelous, who has taken the shape of a bull; Herakles breaks off his horn, which then becomes the horn of plenty or is traded for Amalthea's horn of plenty.²³ Images of the

²¹ The English word cornucopia derives from the Latin *cornū cōpiae* (horn of plenty).

²² Sophocles, *Fragments*, ed. Richard Claverhouse Jebb, W. G. Headlam, and A. C. Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 60; Ovid, *Ovid's Fasti: Roman Holidays*, trans. Betty Rose Nagle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 134.

²³ Apollodorus, *Gods and Heroes of the Greeks: The Library of Apollodorus*, trans. Michael Simpson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 103; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 303–307.



Figure 9: Sculpture of Hariti and Panicka from Pakistan, third century CE
Source: The British Museum

cornucopia abound in the art of classical antiquity, appearing frequently in representations of deities of fertility, the harvest, and wealth, such as Demeter and Ploutos.²⁴

The Hellenistic cornucopia was incorporated into diverse iconographies across and beyond the Greco-Roman cultural sphere, as can be seen in third-century BCE statues of Cleopatra, second century BCE coins from Hasmonean Judaea, third-century CE figures of fertility god Harpokrates in Roman Egypt, and eighth-century CE Kashmiri reliefs of the Hindu goddess of wealth Lakshimi. One such possible point of entry into China is the Iranian demon

²⁴ Both Pluto (Pluton) and Plutus (Ploutos) are associated with horns of plenty.



Figure 10: Coin with Ardoxsho from Kushan, second century CE

Source: Robert Göbl, *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kušānreiches* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), plate 71.

Ardoxsho (also called Hariti), a prolific progenitor and consumer of children, who was transformed by the Buddhist tradition into a protector of children.²⁵ Chinese pilgrims Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) and Yijing 義淨 (635–713) recorded seeing devotional images of and ritual offers made to Hariti in Buddhist temples, and Yijing translated the sutras that recounted her conversion by the Buddha.²⁶ As Hariti is frequently depicted as married to Panicka, the Buddhist god of wealth, and is herself a symbol of tremendous fecundity, she often holds a Hellenistic horn of plenty in Kushan period representations (Figure 9). Gold, bronze, and copper currency from the Kushan Empire that featured Ardoxsho/Hariti and her cornucopia circulated on the Silk Road (Figure 10).

Other *jubaopen*-like objects travelled the Silk Road and found a place in Buddhist iconography in China, such as the alms bowls of Buddhist monks into which donors would place food or money. In one possible antecedent of the basin filled with coins, a large begging bowl

²⁵ N. Peri, “Hārītī, The Mother of Demons,” in *Bamiyan, Hārītī and Kindred Icons*, edited by Nirmala Sharma (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2011), 56–138.

²⁶ “Hārītī, The Mother of Demons,” 90, 93–94, 109. It is this benevolent Ardoxsho/Hariti, or *guizi mu* 鬼子母, who is brought to China and Japan by Yijing and Xuanzang. At the same time, the more terrifying pre-conversion Hariti continues to appear in late imperial literary and visual culture. One of her many on-stage appearances is in *Jubaopen*.

was often placed in front of Kushan monasteries to collect monetary donations.²⁷ The magical properties of the *jubaopen* are further reminiscent of stories about the Buddha's alms bowl. In one such story, the Chinese monk Faxian 法顯 (337–c. 422) records seeing this relic while traveling through Peshawar:

When poor people throw into it a few flowers, it becomes immediately full, while some very rich people, wishing to make offerings of many flowers, might not stop till they had thrown in hundreds, thousands, and myriads of bushels, and yet would not be able to fill it.

貧人以少華投中便滿，有大富者，欲以多華而供養，正復百千萬斛，總不能滿。²⁸

The *jubaopen* is also evocative of the votive offerings placed on Buddhist, Daoist, and ancestral shrines that are usually filled with fruit or flowers. In the proto-cornucopia story attributed to Wu Shu, the abbot initially uses the magic bowl as an altar votive in which he offers a flower to the image of the Buddha; once he discovers its powers, however, he uses the bowl for a more worldly purpose. Ming and Qing woodblock images of the *jubaopen* frequently echo the arrangement of votive offerings in front of religious images by placing it at the feet of a seated deity, often a god of wealth. Because of the flattened perspective, the *jubaopen* appears at the bottom of the image as a kind of trompe-l'oeil, occupying the same space as the offerings that would be placed before such images (Figure 11).

²⁷ Liu Xinru, *The Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Interactions in Eurasia* (Washington D.C.: American Historical Association, 1998), 10.

²⁸ Faxian 法顯, *Faxian zhuan jiaozhu* 法顯傳校注 [Annotated biography of Faxian], annotated by Zhang Xun 章巽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 34. Translation from James Legge, tr. and ed., *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399–414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* (New York: Paragon Books, 1965), 34–35.



Figure 11: Modern recutting of Qing woodblock design from Jiangsu

Source: Po and Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems*, 62.

Though the sources of cornucopia lore are various, the object called *jubaopen* that emerges in the late imperial period is significantly dissimilar from those before it. While the horns of plenty of classical antiquity share the cornucopia's endless productivity, the differences between these objects extend beyond physical dissimilarities. The Hellenistic horn of plenty asserts a fundamental correspondence between the fertility of the body and the fecundity of the land, with the horn, suggestive of both male and female genitalia, overflowing with the fruits of the harvest. In the iconography of the horn of plenty, wealth is the superabundance of children and crops. While other symbols of plenty, like the Hindu kalash, bear a stronger resemblance to the basin-like *jubaopen*, the productivity of both body and land remains a core symbolic component.²⁹

²⁹ A metal pot often filled with a coconut, it is occasionally filled with coins and treasure. In the Vedas it is described as "overflowing" (*purno-asya*). Daniel Miller, *Artefacts as Categories: A Study of Ceramic Variability in Central India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 144–145.

Similarly, in the earliest of the medieval grail narratives, the grail is described as a large golden bowl into which the endlessly nourishing Eucharist is placed and which contains the possibility of healing both the body of the Fisher King and his Wasteland.³⁰ Though here the grail is filled with the body of Christ, later depictions of the grail as the Holy Chalice figure the vessel as being full of consecrated wine, i.e. the blood of Christ. This endlessly replenishing harvest of earth and body is the physical manifestation of the true wealth of the grail: the promise of boundless grace. In its promise of salvation, the grail is much like the kalash that, literalizing the promise of endless production, contains within itself the elixir of eternal life. The *jubaopen*, however, is not a totem of the fertility of body or soil; it does not hold the fruit of the earth, nor does it provide spiritual sustenance. The *jubaopen* imagery of Ming Jiangnan is associated not with agricultural plenty, but mercantile fortune. Wealth is shown to be one thing: the superabundance of metallic currency.

While the Buddhist alms bowl and the votive offerings at popular shrines offer compelling visual referents for the *jubaopen*, the *jubaopen* occupies a different imaginative space. Images of alms bowls and votive offerings are supplements, passive receptacles of little compositional or narrative importance. The *jubaopen*, however, is almost always placed in the center or foreground. In these images, we know what is being represented is a *jubaopen* not only because of its compositional importance, but because it is named. With the characters *jubaopen* etched on its sides, it is marked as a specific and singular thing, differentiated from all of the other bowl-like objects with which it could be confused. As this named object frequently appears in New Year's prints whose audience included rural villagers at all levels of literacy, the use of text allows the object to be "read" as important, even by those unable to decipher the characters.

³⁰ *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. David Staines (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 339–449.



Figure 12: Qianlong-era woodblock print from Suzhou

Source: *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng*, *Riben cangpin juan*, 39.

Unlike those static, inanimate objects, this name renders the *jubaopen* a subject. This agency is represented visually—the *jubaopen* is a dynamic figure to which the people in the composition often react (Figure 12). Lines and shadows radiating outward show that it is a thing in motion.



Figure 13: Early Qing (c.1660) woodblock print

Source: Yamato Bunkakan 大和文華館, comp. and ed., *Chūgoku no Min Shin jidai no hanga* 中國の明清時代の版画 [Chinese woodblock prints from the Ming and Qing dynasties] (Nara: Yamato Bunkakan, 1972), image 16.

The treasures falling in or shooting out intimate a state of constant flux; it is forever bringing into being and transforming.

In a mid-seventeenth century woodblock illustration, Shen Wansan and his wives watch, rapt, from a second floor pavilion while the *jubaopen* in the courtyard below emits billowing waves of activity (Figure 13). Surrounding the magic basin is a swirl of motion, a jumble of arms and legs, children and animals, while outsiders crowd the gate. The image generates a visual surplus, depicting a household almost exploding out into the street with its own productivity. It is this ability to render production visible that differentiates the *jubaopen* from the other vehicles of wealth that appear in Shen Wansan stories—those mysterious jars or sacks that deliver unexpected riches. Unlike precious stones or pots of silver, the cornucopia provides not only a way to imagine the suddenness and contingency of fortune in an unpredictable marketplace, but also a way to imagine the generation and circulation of value itself. As the stories surrounding

Shen Wansan begin to standardize in the mid-late Ming, the narratives turn from jars of coins to cornucopias, from a fixation on the money-form to a fascination with the mechanisms of the marketplace itself.

It is this fascination with the cornucopia qua market that Zhu Suchen exploits in his rewriting, with the cornucopia simultaneously the engine of Shen's commercial operations and a figuration of the infinitely expansive possibilities of a global market. Positioned against Shen and his cornucopia is Zhu Yuanzhang, for whom the cornucopia is no mere exotic trifle, but a very real threat to the monetary regime of the state. It is to this clash between the merchant with his cornucopia and the emperor with his mint that we now turn.

Paper

In the thirteenth scene of *Jubaopen*, the Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang dons the disguise of a commoner to seek out information about the fabulously wealthy Shen Wansan. His first stop is a teashop located at the front gate of Shen's mansion and managed by Shen's brother-in-law Zhang You'er. The emperor orders tea and begins to interrogate You'er on the connection of the teashop to Shen. You'er notices that underneath his customer's outer clothes are yellow robes, restricted by sumptuary law to members of the imperial family. He recalls a dream he had in which a yellow dragon visits his shop and spits out a pearl, which You'er "plays with in the palm of [his] hand" (在我掌中戲弄).³¹ Not letting on that he has uncovered his customer's identity,

³¹ Zhu Suchen, *Jubaopen*. N.d. MS. Collection of Mei shi Zhuiyu xuan 梅氏綴玉軒, fasc. rpt. in *Guben xiqu congkan sanji*, 18b. All selections are from this manuscript edition. I have also consulted the other extant Qing manuscripts in Fu Xihua's and Mei Lanfang's collections housed at the Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan 中國藝術研究院 (Chinese National Academy of Arts) in Beijing. There are no modern print editions of this play. All translations mine. The yellow dragon is intimately associated with the emperor as both symbol of imperial authority and mythical progenitor. The pearl that You'er plays with (prefiguring his manipulation of the emperor) refers back to the pearl that the dragon-king seizes from the

You'er proceeds to toy with the emperor like the pearl in his dream, feeding him lies about Shen's treasonous intentions that confirm the emperor's suspicions. When a palace eunuch enters the teashop searching for the emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang's identity is "revealed" to You'er, who begs forgiveness for speaking so freely. The emperor rewards You'er's "honesty" by bestowing on him the position of Commander of the Imperial Guards. The eunuch fetches him clothes befitting his new station and escorts the triumphant You'er to the palace.

The incognito inspection (*sifang* 私訪) for which the chapter is named is a trope of Ming-Qing drama, appearing most frequently in plays that center around a complex legal case. In these plays, the presiding magistrate, torn between several competing versions of events, disguises himself and returns to the scene of the crime. Many of these investigations follow a two part structure: in the first part of the investigation, the magistrate discovers an overlooked piece of exculpatory evidence at the scene of the crime; in the second part, the magistrate devises an ingenious scheme by which the guilty party will reveal himself. For example, in the seventeenth scene of *Shiwu guan*, the magistrate finds a rat's nest in which the missing strings of cash had been hidden. In the next scene, the magistrate disguises himself as a fortuneteller and elicits a confession from the unsuspecting villain. In these plays, the questionable orality of the courtroom (the unreliable testimony of witnesses, the confessions given under duress) is contrasted with the unassailability of the evidence discovered in the course of the on-the-ground investigation. Only the discovery of physical evidence at the scene is sufficient to establish the truth; only the unguarded speech of those far outside the precincts of power is to be believed.³²

clam in the opening scenes of the play. Here the pearl-stealing dragon and Zhu Yuanzhang, the mythical and the political, are explicitly linked.

³² The trope of the incognito emperor appears frequently in plays about the Zhengde emperor. See, for example, Li Liweng's play *Yu saotou* 玉搔頭 (The jade hairpin).

In *Jubaopen*, however, the incognito investigation is the site of both untrustworthy speech and unreliable sight. As the emperor descends from his palace to city streets, his geographical journey is accompanied by an aural one. The emperor enters, singing: “In the noisy hubbub of the three markets and six thoroughfares, sightseers swarm like flies” (三市六街喧哄, 遊人簇擁如蠓).³³ It is in this raucous marketplace of anonymous and diffuse speech that the emperor learns of the teashop owned by Shen: “Along the way, the street is rife with talk that there is a teashop at the front of his gate” (一路紛紛傳說他家門首有一茶坊).³⁴

The emperor is felled by his very awareness of the trope, rehearsed in countless plays before, that the gossip, rumor, and hearsay of the city streets constitute an alternative or unofficial discourse, a way out of the honeyed words of sycophantic eunuchs and courtiers. What the emperor does not realize is that he is not in the play he thinks he is, in which the wise official ferrets out the truth in the gutters. His is another trope entirely: that of the peasant (which Zhu Yuanzhang was, historically if not diegetically) who is unable to navigate the panoply of meanings, codes, and mores of the metropolis.³⁵ The emperor’s clumsy entrance into a marketplace of competing currencies whose values and legality are constantly in flux reflects this failure to distinguish truth from untruth, real from counterfeit. Like a country bumpkin in the big city, he accepts everything at face value.³⁶

³³ *Jubaopen*, 18b.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ On Zhu Yuanzhang’s humble beginnings, see Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355–1435* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 22–24.

³⁶ The trope of the peasant overwhelmed by sophisticated urban spectacles is most famously depicted in the *sanqu* song cycle *Zhuangjia bu shi goulan* 莊家不識勾欄 [The rustic doesn’t understand the theater] by Du Renjie 杜仁傑 (c.1201–after 1283).



Figure 14: Universally Valid Treasure Voucher of the Great Ming (1375)
Source: The British Museum

This issue of face value emerges as a theme early in this scene. When the emperor asks for tea, You'er offers him the choice of three services: an extravagant tea service priced in silver and second and third class tea services priced in copper cash. The emperor proffers neither silver nor copper: "I will pay you one string in paper money; bring the highest class of tea" (賞你寶鈔一貫，有上等果品取來).³⁷ You'er is a bit skeptical of the paper money—upon inspection he notices that this money has not yet been issued. You'er ultimately decides to accept this strange,

³⁷ *Jubaopen*, 19a.



Figure 15: Northern Song *jiaozi*

Source: Xinhua Publishing House and People's Bank of China, ed., *A History of Chinese Currency* (Hong Kong: N. C. N. Limited, 1983), 49.

new bill, thus reenacting the very first circulation of *Da Ming tongxing baochao* 大明通行寶鈔 (Universally Valid Treasure Vouchers of the Great Ming) (Figure 14).

Zhu Yuanzhang was not the first emperor to issue paper money. *Jiaozi* 交子 bills were issued by the Northern Song government in 1023, though these notes had circulated as private issues in the preceding years (Figure 15); these were followed by the *huizi* 會子 bills issued by



Figure 16: Southern Song *huizi*
 Source: *A History of Chinese Currency*, 49.

the Southern Song court in 1160 (Figure 16).³⁸ The Jin issued its own paper currency beginning in 1154, while the Yuan made paper money the centerpiece of its currency regime in 1260.³⁹ By the time the Yuan Dynasty fell, paper money was no longer in use, as the flood of bills issued during the final years of the dynasty led to rampant inflation and depreciation.

When Zhu Yuanzhang ascended the throne in 1368, he first turned to minting coins. These coins, however, had difficulty circulating, and a shortage in specie led the emperor to issue

³⁸ Peng Xinwei, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 428–440, 481–482.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 549–580; von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 51–60.

Da Ming tongxing baochao in 1375.⁴⁰ Unlike the Song *huizi* or Yuan *Zhongtong Yuan baojiaochao* 中統元寶交鈔, however, the Ming *baochao* were not convertible to silver, which Zhu Yuanzhang had banned as a medium of exchange. In his struggle to control the rates of exchange, Zhu Yuanzhang closed all state mints in 1375 (and again in 1387 and 1393), banned all specie in 1394, and flooded the market with his bills.⁴¹ The hyperinflation caused by these policies continued well into the reigns of his successors; the heavily depreciated *baochao* were finally discontinued at the end of Xuande's reign in 1435. Though debated as a fiscal strategy in the late Ming, no other paper money was issued until the early Qing.

The *baochao* issued by Zhu Yuanzhang in 1375 reads:

The Ministry of Revenue has memorialized the emperor for permission to print the Great Ming Treasure Notes, which will circulate interchangeably with copper cash. Users of counterfeits will be beheaded. Informers will be rewarded with 250 taels of silver as well as the property of the criminal.

戶部奏准印造大明寶鈔，與銅錢通行，使用偽造者斬，告捕者賞銀貳百伍拾兩，仍給犯人財產。

The bill is adorned with images that reinforce the above text and render the bill legible to all levels of literacy—the ten strings of one hundred coins provide a visual representation of the denomination, amount, and its functional relation to specie, while the dragon design and seals are an index of its legitimacy as legal tender. However, for all of the legitimating text—the declarations of universal circulation, the formal language of authorization, the motifs and seals—the bills undermine their own primacy: those who report on the use of counterfeit bills are not rewarded in *baochao* or even copper coins. Rather they are paid in taels of silver.

⁴⁰ Peng, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 637–639.

⁴¹ Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 70–73.

The state pegs *baochao*'s value to the very coins it pulls from circulation and polices its authenticity with the silver it refuses to acknowledge as legal tender. While the inscription attempts to traverse the chasm that separates paper from specie and specie from silver, the policy directives that sever paper bills from any metallic referents render the paper a meaningless sign. The "string" (*guan* 貫) in which the paper is denominated can never be worth the string of coins on which its value is based, as the bill's inconvertibility makes its value wholly self-referential.

The bill's anxiety over its own counterfeiting stems from its problematic ontological status as fiat currency whereby value is conferred entirely through a written enactment of imperial will. Though the *baochao*, lacking both metallic content and metallic equivalents, seems particularly unmoored from a legible system of value, the massive discrepancy between face value and market value that resulted from the *baochao*'s inconvertibility is the problem of all money writ large. Valerie Forman argues that it is this rupture between words and meaning, between sign and referent, that makes all money a kind of counterfeit. Counterfeited money, she argues, merely "mimics and reproduces a discrepancy that money itself generates."⁴²

The symbolic and social lives of the *baochao* in particular call the notion of "real" and "counterfeit" into question, as the "real" *baochao* is itself a literal fabrication, a copy for which there is no original (as the woodblock from which all *baochao* are printed is not itself a *baochao*).⁴³ However, the paper bill's authors are desperate to guard the boundaries separating this paper from another, less "real" paper. The preoccupation with counterfeiting extends beyond

⁴² Valerie Forman, "Marked Angels: Counterfeits, Commodities, and *The Roaring Girl*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 1539.

⁴³ Such a distinction is further complicated by the advent of capitalist modernity. Cf. Georg Simmel's reading of fiat currency as "pure concept" or Alfred Sohn-Rethel's theory of "real abstraction." Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 2011 [1900]), 127–138; Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978).

what is seen on earlier bills, which either do not mention counterfeiters, like the *jiaozi*, or, like the *huizi*, reserve the death penalty only for the makers of counterfeits.⁴⁴ According to the *baochao*, all who use counterfeit bills are guilty. This wide net that ensnares all who touch the bill is echoed in this scene, as the *baochao* binds the emperor and You'er in a web of misrepresentations and misinformation. Both parties are trafficking in counterfeits: the emperor, in the disguise of a commoner, offers You'er this paper in lieu of silver, for which he is proffered lies in lieu of the truth.

The court's fixation on stamping out counterfeiting speaks to the importance of the imperial minting monopoly as both a source of revenue and a mode of diffuse and ubiquitous control.⁴⁵ The currency produced by imperial mints funds the court's vast bureaucratic apparatus, securing the power of emperor while cloaking him behind layers of cabinets and ministries.⁴⁶ This scene, however, exposes both the emperor and his weakening grip on the monetary economy to the other characters in the play as well as the townspeople in the audience.

While there are some notable exceptions, the emperor is a spectral, if not invisible, presence on the late Ming and early Qing stage.⁴⁷ Such a role is typified by the final scene in

⁴⁴ While the *jiaozi* makes no mention of counterfeiters, the *huizi* states "By imperial edict, counterfeiters of the *huizi* will be punished by beheading" (敕偽造會子犯人處斬).

⁴⁵ The emperor realizes that Shen's power lies not in his wealth per se, but in his ability to generate wealth—the cornucopia allows him to function as his own mint. Later in scene thirteen he sings, "No matter how cleverly he mints copper from Mt. Shu, how can the authority of the emperor be divided?" (憑伊巧鑄蜀山銅，怎分得天王權重) Minting is the preserve of the sovereign and upon which his authority rests; it is, the emperor continues, the "golden precepts and jade laws" (金科玉律) that should give him sovereignty over the production and circulation of value.

⁴⁶ Indeed, the Ministry of Revenue is revealed to be a sham in the next scene under discussion, when Shen Wansan is made Minister under duress as part of an extortion scheme.

⁴⁷ On the representation of emperors in the early Ming, see Tian Yuan Tan, "Prohibition of *Jiatou Zaju* in the Ming Dynasty and the Portrayal of the Emperor on Stage," *Ming Studies* 49 (2004): 82–111.

Mudan ting, in which the emperor issues a judgment on the forgoing events as a disembodied voice offstage (or *nei* 內, “inside”).⁴⁸ In many other plays from this period, the emperor’s will is expressed through edicts read by messengers.⁴⁹ The erasure of the emperor from the stage was, in fact, legislated. In the legal codes of the early Ming, depictions of any emperor on stage were expressly forbidden:

Entertainers who appear onstage in dramas are not allowed to perform the roles of past emperors, empresses, imperial concubines, loyal ministers, martyrs, ancient sages and worthies, or the gods. Violators of this prohibition will be subjected to one hundred lashes; families of officials or commoners who permit the performance of these roles will be subject to the same punishment.

凡樂人搬做雜劇戲文，不許粧扮歷代帝王后妃忠臣烈士先聖先賢神像，違者杖一百，官民之家，容令粧扮者與同罪。⁵⁰

This edict was repeated word-for-word in the Great Qing Legal Code (大清律例).⁵¹ As enforcement of these edicts was uneven, a number of plays featuring emperors appeared on the late Ming and early Qing stage as substantive characters, rather than the *deus ex machina* who rights injustices and restores order in the final moments of the play. In keeping with the spirit of the edict, these emperor-characters are often presented in an exalted light as heroic defenders of

⁴⁸ *Mudan ting*, 262–65.

⁴⁹ Examples of such *deus ex machina* roles for the emperor in the late Ming and early Qing can be found in *Qingzhong pu*, *Yi peng xue*, *Dushu sheng*, *Hupo chi*, *San bao en*, and *Wannian shang*.

⁵⁰ *Da Ming lü jiangjie juan* 26 [Explanation of the Great Ming Legal Code, vol. 26], cited in Wang Xiaochuan 王曉傳, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* 元明清三代禁毀小說戲曲史料 (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1958), 10.

⁵¹ *Da Qing lü lie juan* 34 [Great Qing Legal Code, vol. 34], cited in *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, 16.

the people (as in *Yujia le*) or sympathetic romantics (as in *Changsheng dian*).⁵² In *Jubaopen*, however, Zhu Suchen puts an emperor on stage as the antagonist, as a fallible tyrant and gullible hick.⁵³ That the emperor who appears on stage is Zhu Yuanzhang—the very emperor who first banned theatrical depictions of emperors—is a meta-comment on the problem at the heart of the play: the emperor’s failure to remain invisible and all-seeing.⁵⁴

The emperor’s anxiety over Shen Wansan centers around this issue of visibility. The emperor leaves his palace and enters the marketplaces and teashops of Nanjing—where he is vulnerable, at constant risk of being exposed—because his fortress of invisibility has already been violated: Shen Wansan has built a tower overlooking the palace. In the previous scene, the emperor gazes up at the towering structure and exclaims: “Ya! This lofty pavilion that rises straight into the sky is directly across from the central palace. Who dares to so impertinently spy on me in my palace?” (呀，這高閣直矗雲霄，正對中宮，是誰無狀敢窺朕宮中形跡)⁵⁵ From his lofty perch Shen not only can surveil the surveiller, but can surveil that which the surveiller surveils, namely the imperial harem. The sanctity of the harem is maintained by limiting the desiring gaze—aside from the emperor, only eunuchs and maids are allowed to lay eyes (and by extension, hands) on the consorts. Shen’s unfettered view of these women, his access to the pleasure of looking, is a sort of theft, a mode of cuckolding.

⁵² The plays that deal with imperial usurpation are an exception, with one monarch necessarily vilified as an unfit leader. See Li Yu, *Qian zhong lu*, in *Li Yu xiqu ji*, 2:1014–1112.

⁵³ Only Li Yu’s *Taiping qian* comes close to *Jubaopen* in debasing the authority of the emperor. Both playwrights most likely took advantage of the chaotic first decade of Qing rule, during which imperial control over the Lower Yangzi region was uneven and incomplete.

⁵⁴ Marc Shell writes that “[t]he tyrant makes others visible to him and is himself invisible to them.” For a discussion of the “economics of visibility,” see Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 11–62.

⁵⁵ *Jubaopen*, 17a.

Shen, however, does not look; the pavilion was built not for looking outward, but for looking inward at an imperial shrine. In the eleventh scene, the renowned advisor Liu Ji pays a visit to Shen's new mansion. After touring the lavish grounds, Liu Ji warns Shen that building such a compound is not without perils: "At this present time, just when the borders of the empire are plagued with troubles and the court is expropriating the wealth of the rich to provide for the troops, you have nevertheless built such an expansive compound. You may not avoid disaster" (目下邊庭多事，朝廷正在拔富徵餉之時，你卻廣盈大廈，未必無禍).⁵⁶ Shen is shocked to learn that he is courting calamity and begs him for advice. Liu Ji instructs him thusly:

You must build a pavilion in the rear of the compound and call it the Tiansui Pavilion. Install in it dragon tablets for the reigning emperor and empress. On the first and fifteenth day of the month burn incense and prostrate yourself before them, recording the dates of these rituals in a register. Widely distribute alms to the needy and offer assistance to the distressed, all of which you record in the registers of the Tiansui Pavilion. This will be your miraculous salvation in the days to come.

要在後邊起造一閣，名曰天隨閣，供設當今皇上皇后龍位，朔望焚香頂禮，注籍填記日期，廣行布施濟貧救苦，多填載於天隨閣冊上，日後自有奇驗。⁵⁷

While the one who is believed to be looking is not, the one who is thought to be oblivious is the one who truly sees, as You'er literally sees through the emperor's disguise. While the not-yet issued paper money leads You'er to conclude that his customer must have some sort of imperial connections, it is the yellow robe he sees peeking through the commoner costume that convinces him that his customer is the emperor. A successful incognito investigation turns on the disguise as simultaneously concealing and revealing—in not being seen for whom he really is,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 16a.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the investigator is allowed to see all. Here, the emperor is seen for whom he really is, and he in turn sees nothing of the truth.

The emperor pretending to be a commoner and the commoner pretending not to recognize the emperor proceed to trade imaginary money for falsehoods. As the paper money passes from emperor to shopkeeper, what is being transacted is not so much tea as information—bills for gossip, written words for spoken words. And just as You'er accepts the paper bill at face value, so too does the emperor accept the slander that he has bought.⁵⁸ Shen Wansan, Zhang You'er confides, has forcibly taken his sister as a concubine and ruined him financially, giving him this teashop to run as a final humiliation. The teashop, You'er says, is part of Shen's plan to rule over the entire city. Playing to the emperor's fears, You'er asserts that the Tiansui Pavilion is a coded expression of Shen's desire to take the reins of power. Just as the emperor mistakes the function of the tower, so too does he misread the name. While Liu Ji intends for *tiansui* 天隨 to be read as “following Heaven,” You'er's gloss exploits the flexible and the elliptical nature of classical Chinese: “Its meaning is nothing less than a death curse to the emperor, that Heaven follows the will of man” (無非要咒殺勾皇帝，天隨人愿勾意思吓).⁵⁹

While the emperor initially interprets the name of the pavilion as a threat, his later discovery of the registers of sacrifices leads him to re-gloss the structure as a tribute. However, the pavilion and the reams of paper it contains are something far more calculating. Unbeknownst to the emperor, the ritual obeisance to the imperial throne is a carefully crafted and recorded performance. Indeed, the purpose of the ritual is to create a paper trail that can be used against

⁵⁸ This exchange is loaded with the language of the marketplace. After You'er slanders Shen Wansan to an unsuspecting Zhu Yuanzhang, he assures him: “Good customer, I am not cheating you!” (客人，我個個勿騙唔個虐)

⁵⁹ *Jubaopen*, 20a.

anticipated charges of treason. This display of loyalty is a strategy, and a successful one at that, as the emperor's discovery of the registers reassures him that Shen is a "loyal subject" (良民) who "should be praised and rewarded" (應該褒獎他才是).⁶⁰ The emperor, originator of paper promises, of words that try to will their meaning into being, is defeated once again by his inattention to depth. With his naïve preoccupation with surfaces and face values, the emperor misses the slippage of words and meaning, the possibilities of both submission and subversion, written on paper.

Copper

In the twentieth scene, Zhang You'er tells Shen that the emperor has appointed him chief of the Ministry of Revenue. He then presents Shen with a single copper coin (*wen* 文) from the emperor, with the orders that he is forbidden from giving it away (不得奉送). As with all feudal bestowals, both the position and the coin are presented as gifts, acts of generosity for which Shen should express his deep gratitude (謝恩). In the twenty-second scene, Shen is recalled to the court a month later, where the interest on the "gift" is calculated:

The principal was one copper coin, and interest accrued by doubling the total amount every day. On the first day he owed two coins, on the second day he owed four coins, on the third day he owed eight coins, on the fourth day he owed sixteen coins, on the fifth day he owed thirty-two coins, on the tenth day he owed one thousand twenty four coins, on the twentieth day he owed one million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy six coins. Today a month of thirty days has passed, so altogether he owes 1,073,741,724 coins. Since one coin is the equivalent of one cash, then we can calculate his debt in silver as 107,374,172 taels and four cash.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51b.

⁶¹ A cash is a unit of weight equal to one tenth of a tael of silver.

本錢一文，每日對合起利，第一日該二文，第二日該四文，第三日該八文，第四日該十六文，第五日該三十二文，第十日該一千二十四文，二十日該一百四萬八千五百七十六文，經今一月三十日，共該十萬七千三百七十四萬一千七百二十四文，每文重一錢，算該本利銀一億七百三十七萬四千一百七十二兩四錢整。⁶²

Since Shen buried the cornucopia in the city wall to prevent it from crumbling (or so he thought; the greedy Zhang You'er swapped the real cornucopia with a fake one), he no longer has unlimited resources. As Shen is unable to pay the debt in cash, the emperor-cum-usurer has his property appraised:

According to the calculations of the Ministry of Revenue, principal and interest in the amount of 107,374,172 taels and four cash is owed. After examining Shen Wansan's property, there are ten cellars of gold ingots appraised at ten million taels, one hundred cellars of silver ingots totaling 300,000 taels. Five hundred chests of pearls, jade, silks and other valuables worth 10 million taels, eight hundred thousand substantial articles of daily use appraised at 10 million taels, one hundred gold and silver utensils worth 20 million taels, various business accounts worth 27 million taels, one residence appraised at 300,000 taels, and household staff worth 74,000 taels. The value of the above items totals 107,374,000 taels, 172 taels and 4 cash short of what he owes.

據戶部臣實算，該本利一億七百三十七萬四千一百七十二兩四錢，盤得沈萬三家產，金錠十窖估價一千萬兩，銀錠百窖，計重三十萬兩，珠玉細軟五百箱，估價一千萬兩，粗重什物共八十萬件，估價銀一千萬兩，金銀器皿一百扛，估價兩千萬兩，田產房業及京省多項帳目，估價兩千七百萬兩，住房一所，估價三十萬兩，又抄仆從家業，估價七萬四千兩，以上共計估價一億七百三十七萬四千兩，照原算本利尚虧一百七十二兩四錢。⁶³

⁶² *Jubaopen*, 36a. It is through ledgers that Shen is both bankrupted and redeemed. While this scene is structured around an appraisal of Shen's debts and assets, a later scene hinges on an accounting of his loyalty. In the twenty-ninth scene, Zhu Yuanzhang discovers a ledger in the Tiansui Pavilion that details the frequency and expenses of the rituals performed in honor of the imperial family and the funds given to Zhang You'er. Like the ledgers of merits and demerits popular among Qing dynasty literati, this ledger collapses the distinction between fiscal and moral accounting. See Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁶³ *Jubaopen*, 36b.

After much remonstrating from his officials, the emperor forgives Shen of the outstanding 172.4 taels, contenting himself with confiscating all of Shen's property and stripping him of his official post. Whereas in the thirteenth scene the emperor pays silver in paper, here he expects repayment for his coin in silver, effectively refilling the metallically poor imperial coffers through the loan of a single copper coin.

The trope of the non-circulating imperial coin appears in another play by Zhu Suchen, *Longfeng qian*. In that play, Tang Dynasty Emperor Xuanzong throws two coins into the Luoyang city-center, declaring that the finder of the dragon coin will achieve official success and the finder of the phoenix coin will become an imperial concubine. When the hero is mistaken for a grave robber and the two female leads are magically entrapped in each other's bodies, the coins serve as the only reliable proof of identity. The coins, by virtue of their inalienability, remain the only stable system of signification. In *Jubaopen*, however, the inalienability of the emperor's coin—the purported giftedness of the exchange—disguises its status as a commercial transaction executed under duress. Collapsing the distinctions between feudal gift and predatory loan, the loan and its repayment play out like a farcical gift exchange, in which the exponential interest formalizes the obligation to give counter-gifts of escalating value: the gift of the single copper coin and the counter-gift of 107,374,172.3 taels of silver.⁶⁴

This story about Zhu Yuanzhang's exponential loan to Shen Wansan had circulated in a number of sources prior to this play. In those versions, however, Shen is the usurer.⁶⁵ The

⁶⁴ On the escalation of counter-gifts: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 52–54.

⁶⁵ The reputation of Shen Wansan as a usurer makes sense in the context of the Ming credit economy, in which lenders were often wealthy merchants. Unlike the fraught position of usury in the contemporaneous West, interest-bearing loans were considered an acceptable practice in seventeenth-century Jiangnan, though loans such as the one described above that far exceeded government-set interest rates were frequently condemned. While there were specialized shops that dealt with such loans, officials, local

emperor deploys the loan as a lesson in fair interest rates; though the emperor is temporarily donning the mantle of the predatory usurer, it is merely to provide Shen Wansan with a fitting comeuppance. In *Bili za cun* 碧里雜存 (Miscellaneous collection of Jade Village), Dong Gu 董穀 (*juren* 1516) writes:

Emperor Taizu summoned Wansan on the first day of the month and gave him one Hongwu coin, saying: “I shall trouble you to bear interest for me over the course of a month. Starting on the second day and ending on the thirtieth, every day I will receive double the total.” Wansan happily thanked him for giving him this task. Once he had left and began to think through the arrangement, he realized the difficult position in which he was placed. He would owe 536,870,912 coins; since one hundred sixty Hongwu coins weighed one catty and 16,000 coins equaled one stone, by calculating in stone, he would owe 33,554 stones and 43 catties.⁶⁶ Although Wansan was wealthy, how could he manage this in such a short time? The emperor’s reason for this exercise was to demonstrate that the interest rate should be capped at 3%, and even if the loan period ran on for many months or years, the interest should never exceed the amount of the principal. This was why this was written into law.

太祖高皇帝嘗於月朔召秀，以洪武錢一文與之，曰：「煩汝為我生利，只以一月為期，初二日起至三十日止，每日取一對合。」秀欣然拜命，出而籌之，始知其難矣。蓋該錢五萬三千六百八十七萬零九百一十二文。今按洪武錢每一百六十文重一斤，則一萬六千文為一石。以石計之，亦該錢三萬三千五百五十四石四十三斤零。沈雖富，豈能遽辦此哉。聖祖緣是利息只以三分為率，年月雖多，不得過一本一利，著於律令者，此也。⁶⁷

By rewriting the emperor as the usurer, Zhu Suchen sets up a parallel between his leading men. The extreme amount of wealth the emperor generates from loaning a single copper coin—and the rapidity with which this amount accumulates—clearly mimics Shen Wansan’s cornucopia, which spits out an unending stream of silver ingots for every one piece placed inside.

elites, and merchants also engaged in usury. See Liu Qiugen 劉秋根, *Ming Qing gaolidai ziben* 明清高利貸資本 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000).

⁶⁶ A stone is a unit of measurement similar to the picul (approximately one hundred catties).

⁶⁷ Reproduced in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1997), 240:139.

Usury is the emperor's cornucopia, generating surplus not through labor but (mathematical) magic. Eliding M-C-M' to M-M', he, like Shen, turns money into more money ad infinitum.⁶⁸

At the same time, the play presents two contrasting visions of capital accumulation. The emperor's usury depends upon abstractions and false equivalencies. The *wen* coin itself does not produce the interest; rather, value is generated by the monetization of time (i.e. the loan period). Here phantom agreements and numbers are commuted into material objects through commodified time. The two "tallying" passages quoted above convey the shocking contrast between the imaginary work of accounting (numbers begetting numbers) and the very real spoils (ingots, silks, buildings, bodies); the generative process of usury, in which the money-sign reproduces itself, is uncannily "both logically impossible and empirically real."⁶⁹

Shen's cornucopia attempts no such transfiguration: copper does not turn to silver; numbers do not turn into jewels. Rather, kind generates kind; a hoard of silver can only be produced by silver. While the language of usury turns on the metaphor of reproduction (the interest or "child" 息 is "born" 生 from the principal), it is Shen's accumulation—not the emperor's usury—that is generation in the sense of producing within the same species.

As depicted in this scene, the emperor's usury is not only 'unnatural' but also finite. The emperor computes the amount he is owed, but he runs up against the limit of existing wealth: Shen is 172.4 taels short. While the emperor is merely expropriating existing resources, Shen's cornucopia presents the possibility of infinite expansion.⁷⁰ The silver that appears in his basin ex

⁶⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 256–57.

⁶⁹ David Hawkes, *The Culture of Usury in Renaissance England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

⁷⁰ The infinite expansion of value that is imagined here is defined against the very modes of abstraction that enabled the growth of the global economy in this period; the cornucopia obfuscates the mercantile and usurious practices that were the historical sources of wealth for men like Shen.

nihilo echoes the silver that seemed to materialize in Jiangnan's ports from distant lands, drawn by some unseen power. The figuration of Shen's wealth as natural and infinite—as a bringing into being, rather than a taking away; as productive rather than parasitic—takes on richer meaning in the final scenes of the play, when Shen's divine destiny is revealed.

Silver

In the twenty-fourth scene, two mysterious figures visit Shen's palatial home, which had just been cleaned out by the emperor's men. According to the stage directions, two boys, one dressed as silver and the other gold, enter in a cloud of smoke. They address the audience in unison, saying that they are the star gods in charge of riches and were sent to restore Shen to his preordained position of wealth. They exit and an exhausted Shen enters. He muses on the vicissitudes of the last ten years—going from poverty to extreme wealth to sudden poverty again, this time only barely holding on to his life. Money, he declares, wears people out, and he looks forward to returning to a simpler life.

There is suddenly a flash of light and in a puff of smoke the gold and silver boys reappear. They silently beckon Shen over to the west side of the room, kowtow and, then vanish into a pit. His wife, concubine, and son rush in having heard the commotion and he tells them what transpired. His concubine conjectures that maybe they were spirits who felt that Shen had been treated unjustly and perhaps buried money in the pit. Shen is a bit dubious, but lo and behold they discover hidden in the pit a large cache of gold and silver. Having just been stripped of his fortune by the emperor, he is wary about keeping this treasure: “Now this has come looking for me again, *hai*, it is surely not an auspicious omen (如今又來尋我，咳，必非吉兆吓).⁷¹ His

⁷¹ *Jubaopen*, 43a.

wife and concubine try to convince him that perhaps the confiscated money caused his problems because he was never meant to possess it in the first place, and that maybe this new money is somehow different. As they continue to press him to accept this windfall, Shen decides to interrogate the bullion directly.

Sheng: Enough, get out of the way! I will talk to it myself and get to the bottom of this matter.

Two Dans: You see, he is mad! How can gold and silver speak?

Sheng: Since it was animated enough to come to my house, perhaps it is able to answer me—who knows? Here, I will speak to you. In ancient times, He Wen used you to become rich. Guo Kuang's stores of gold brought his family renown. Only I have obtained you and met with many disasters. You abandoned me, and yet now you have come back to my side. Perchance you have feeling and have followed me here? Hidden god above! If I, Shen Wansan, am truly blessed by the Star of Wealth, then from now on there will be no more unforeseen calamities. If it is not to be my lot to enjoy this wealth, then leave quickly and seek another fortunate master; you must not tarry here. I humbly pray that you honor my feelings on this matter and give me proof. If you are my wealth, you must answer me.

[From offstage:] I am your wealth!

All: Ya! Sure enough, an answer came from inside the pit as clear as day! From now on we will have no more worries.

生: 也罷，你們閃開，待我對他講個明白。

二旦: 你看他痴了。金銀那裡會說話。

生: 他既有靈來到我家，或者能應我，亦未可知。來，我對你講，古有阿文賴汝得富，郭况金穴名家，獨我沈萬三獲汝，幾遭身厄，棄之復又相倚，敢有感靈隨我處，藏神在上，我沈萬三若世間有福財星，自今不生意外之釁，若是沒福消受，當速去別投福主，休得在此留戀，謹祈一驗，以適愚心，若是吾財，必當應我。

(內應): 是君財。

合: 呀, 果然穴中應聲如朗。如今再無慮矣。⁷²

The role of the emperor in *Mudan ting*, proclaiming the fate of characters on stage from his hidden perch in the wings, is here usurped by pieces of silver and gold. Taking the Suzhou circle trope of money as the vehicle of destiny one step further, money itself is the sentient, self-directing agent of fate. Once Shen is reassured by the money that he was meant to possess it, he assents to being wealthy again. The restoration of his wealth precipitates his rehabilitation within the eyes of the state. After Shen's sons bravely serve the state, the emperor discovers that he has misjudged Shen's loyalty. The emperor returns Shen's confiscated property and restores his official position in a striking reversal of the historical and folk narratives that have a penniless Shen struck down in the city moat or exiled to the far reaches of the empire.

Shen Wansan's temporary fall from and quick restoration to riches and status also inverts the classic late imperial narrative that tracks the rise and fall of great wealth. From *Jin ping mei* to *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber), the inevitable downward trajectory from splendor to dissolution is often in service to a Buddhistic moral about the fleeting, insignificant, and ultimately misleading nature of all the titles, grand residences, and prized possessions that were previously so lovingly cataloged. In the many variations on the Tang dynasty tales *Nanke taishou zhuan* 南柯太守傳 (Biography of the prefect of the southern branch) and *Zhenzhong ji* 枕中記 (Record in a pillow), the richly realized depiction of one man's rise and fall is revealed to have occurred over the space of a few minutes so as to underscore the ephemerality of worldly

⁷² Ibid.

success.⁷³ While the loss of his wealth causes Shen to muse on this *topos* of ephemerality (“Who could have known that the mulberry fields change so quickly; it is like the dreamworld of the Southern Branch without end!” 誰料桑田忽變遷，似南柯夢境無邊),⁷⁴ the restoration of his wealth quickly dispels these thoughts. Shen does not ultimately reject the material world like those enlightened dreamers-turned-monks.

Though *Jubaopen* does not end with enlightenment, it does end with a transfiguration. In the final scene, Shen is about to test his newly recovered cornucopia with a silver ingot when he is visited by Che’e. She tells Shen how she gave him the cornucopia as a reward for saving her life. She then explains that he is the human incarnation of the Star of Wealth and presents him with the elixir of immortality. The source of endless wealth is also the source of endless life, but this wealth does not just stand in symbolic relation to the divine, with the infinitude of money as the metonymy of the boundlessness of the celestial realm. Rather, money is the bridge to the divine. Unlike Buddhist narratives that equate abnegation with transcendence, Shen’s limitless riches are not an obstacle to his eventual transfiguration but rather an irreducible part of his divinity.⁷⁵ As Che’e declares, “You are the Star of Wealth descended into the human realm,

⁷³ These stories were popular source materials for Ming and Qing *chuanqi*, such as Tang Xianzu’s *Nanke ji* 南柯記 [Record of the southern branch] and *Handan ji* 邯鄲記 [Record of Handan] and Bi Wei’s *Zhuye zhou* 竹葉舟 [Bamboo-leaf boat].

⁷⁴ *Jubaopen*, 42a. The changing mulberry fields is a reference to a story recounted in the Jin Dynasty *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 [Biographies of immortals]. In the biography of Wang Yuan, the immortal Magu greets Wang after a long separation: “Since we have last met, I have seen the Eastern Ocean thrice turn into mulberry fields (接待以來，已見東海三為桑田).”

⁷⁵ As this play ends with a revelation of divinity, it can be seen as a sort of deliverance play (*dutuo xi* 度脫戲). However, *Jubaopen* defies the conventions of deliverance plays in a number of respects; in the most evident departure, Shen Wansan does not reject the desires of his old life so much as embrace and embody them on a cosmic scale. For a description of the genre, see Wilt Idema, *The Dramatic Oeuvre of Chu Yu-tun (1379–1439)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 63–69.

riches and rank without end, blessings and virtue that fill the ends of the world” (公乃天財星下界，富貴無極，福德彌涯).⁷⁶

Shen’s ascension is a way out of the question of loyalty that hangs over the play. The nature of Shen’s allegiance to the Ming court remains obscure to the end. In his introduction, Shen tells the audience that his father was a high-ranking official under the Yuan; when Zhang Shicheng takes control of Suzhou, his father dies a martyr. In a description that would have been highly evocative for an audience of Ming remnant subjects (*yimin* 遺民), Shen narrates his predicament: “I was left behind all alone without any connections. Now I must forget my feelings among hills and vales and hide my traces among rivers and lakes, making my living by fishing back and forth on the waterways of the Yangtze delta” (遺下卑人一身無繫，只得忘情丘壑，遁跡江湖，往來吳松三泖之間，捕魚為活).⁷⁷

While earlier textual antecedents note Shen’s humble beginnings, Zhu Suchen’s insertion of the loyalist father-official makes Shen’s livelihood a loaded choice. When the cornucopia brings Shen back into the political regime from which he had disengaged, Shen’s allegiances are viewed with understandable skepticism. The Tiansui Pavilion, with its multiple meanings and functions, becomes the focal point of this skepticism, as the name itself contains the possibilities of both submission (“following Heaven”) and subversion (“Heaven follows [the will of man]”). Liu Ji encourages Shen to build this pavilion as a piece of “evidence” (*yan* 驗) that can be used against later charges of treason. To an audience of Ming remnants, such strategic loyalty echoes

⁷⁶ *Jubaopen*, 56b. The ascension of a merchant to godhood would not have been out of place in late Ming popular religious practice, as cults around gods of wealth exploded in popularity throughout the Jiangnan region. For a description of a particularly mercurial god of wealth that developed a large cult in the late Ming, see Richard von Glahn, “The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51 (1991): 651–714.

⁷⁷ *Jubaopen*, 2b–3a.

the fraught decisions of literati-officials like Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) and Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609–1671), who struggled to negotiate the expectations of the new regime, their own experience of trauma, and their responsibilities to history. Indeed, the twice-serving official Liu Ji, whose difficulties both before and after the fall of the Yuan were a source of poignant self-recognition for many early Qing literati, is the one who suggests this display.⁷⁸ While Liu Ji's advice ultimately saves Shen, this neat and satisfying resolution—in which the two remnant subjects prove their loyalty to the current regime while extracting an admission of wrong-doing from the emperor—is in self-conscious tension with the horror of history. Just as the darker versions of Shen's fate that were circulating in the mid-seventeenth century would have provided a stark contrast to the triumphant ending of the play, Liu Ji's sad end (slandered as a traitor, stripped of his position by Zhu Yuanzhang) would have been familiar to any early Qing literatus in the audience.⁷⁹

In the final scene of the play, Shen slips the net of dynastic fealty entirely: by elevating Shen to the position of immortal, Zhu Suchen absolves Shen of any obligation (moral, financial, etc.) to the current regime. Just as the merchant, enmeshed within a complex web of surpluses and needs that reach across administrative borders, frequently trespasses the edge of empire, so too does Shen participate in a larger economy of obligations (here figured as karma) that transcends state actors or actions.

That *Jubaopen* ends with Shen Wansan taking his place in the Daoist pantheon renders explicit the allusion to Daoist alchemic practice, in which precious metals are transformed into

⁷⁸ Kang-i Sun Chang, "Qian Qianyi and His Place in History" in *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, eds. Wilt L. Idema, Wai-yee Li, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 208.

⁷⁹ Zhao Yuan 趙園, *Ming Qing zhi ji shidai fu yanjiu* 明清之際士大夫研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 275–76.

elixirs of immortality. While alchemy is often figured as a progenitor of or metaphor for usury—as they both multiply value out of absence—alchemy, unlike usury, turns not on the abstraction of forms of value, but on the material transformation of a thing into the perfected thing it always already had the potential to become. This important distinction is thematized in the play with the practice of usury centering around government specie money, while alchemic transformation is effected through bullion of divine origin.

From the seminal Han Dynasty treatise *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (Inner canon of the Yellow Emperor) to the Jin Dynasty *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Inner writings of the Master of Preserving Simplicity) to the early Tang Dynasty *Huangdi jiuding shendan jingjue* 黃帝九鼎神丹經訣 (Instructions on the scripture of the divine elixirs of the nine tripods of the Yellow Emperor), the “inner” alchemy of bodily cultivation and “outer” alchemy of elixir preparation became increasingly interwoven in the Daoist quest for eternal life. In the late Ming encyclopedia *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (Compendium of materia medica), five volumes are dedicated to explicating the various medicinal uses of gold and silver and explaining the processes whereby materials like cinnabar could be transmuted into silver and gold.⁸⁰ Within the Daoist worldview that everything is composed of the same, constantly fluctuating universal energy (*qi* 氣), the act of transforming cinnabar into gold is merely a channeling of its already present nature—not unlike Shen Wansan’s final transfiguration into the deity he has always been.

The Daoist preference for silver and gold in metallurgic practices maps onto the concerns of both Shen Wansan’s and Zhu Suchen’s contemporaries. The thing-in-itself-ness of bullion—as both the symbol and embodiment of value—makes its worth appear legible, natural, universal,

⁸⁰ For the properties and transmutations of metals see, Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu*, vols. 7–11.

and constant. Unlike specie, an ingot of silver is unmarked by language and government and bears no date or stamp of value; it is a transhistorical and transcultural object of intrinsic, immortal value. The imagination of silver as outside time and place is reinforced by the periodic promulgation (though infrequent enforcement) of state policies that outlawed the circulation of silver as legal tender. Like Shen Wansan, Daoist alchemists are minters of value outside of the state's purview. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that some early anti-counterfeiting edicts were directed at alchemic practitioners.⁸¹

Government fiat money, by contrast, is situated value, value "in time." From the Ming founder's non-convertible fiat money to the increasingly desperate attempts by the last three Ming emperors to artificially adjust the value of debased government issue, the constantly changing monetary regimes sundered any correspondences between the face value, the official value, and the market value of government money. Shen's impulse to replicate an ingot of silver rather than government-issued specie bespeaks both the status of silver as the preferred currency of commercial exchange and the engine of international trade and merchant wealth, as well as the lack of confidence in government fiat money as a stable measure of value. Indeed, the confidence in copper coin and paper bills is such that throughout the play they are only used by the emperor, who is perhaps the only remaining person with confidence in his authority over value.

In great contrast to *Jin ping mei*'s searing critique of the merchant of seemingly unlimited wealth, *Jubaopen* posits Shen Wansan as the moral hero, a role the *sheng* 生 (male lead) is particularly suited to play. The expropriation of household wealth by the insecure emperor and the theft of the cornucopia by a venal official are framed as fundamental moral transgressions.

⁸¹ Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 27–28.

Though the emperor is misled by the scheming Zhang You'er, Zhu Suchen makes clear the direct role of the emperor in the cruel persecution of Shen and renders explicit the brutality and injustice of his actions through the pointed parallel story of the villainous dragon who attempts to seize the pearl of an innocent clam.

Not only is the nouveau riche merchant the moral hero, but the central relationship of the narrative is framed as that of the merchant and his money. In late Ming and early Qing *chuanqi* 傳奇 (southern drama), the play's eponymous object often serves as a conduit through which social relations are generated, solidified, or recovered. In *Jubaopen*, however, the eponymous object is not the conduit but rather the end in itself; Shen's relationship with the cornucopia (and the riches it generates) is at the very heart of the play. Like a pair of romantic heroes, Shen and the cornucopia are separated by scheming rivals, territorial demons, and the vagaries of history. The final scene, which in all *chuanqi* dramas is the grand reunion scene, is entitled *Bao yuan* 寶圓 (Reunion with the treasure); while the scene brings together all of the major figures from the play, the central reunion is Shen with his treasure, the cornucopia. The riches are fated to be his eternal companions. While in his human life he has a wife and a concubine and two sons, as the God of Wealth, riches are his family—his wife is silver, his concubine gold.

The political is figured as that which intrudes on this cosmic pairing of merchant-god and money. Through the emperor's interventions—minting increasingly abstract and dematerialized currency, creating a culture of credit and usury—the state's authority over money is completely discredited. At every turn, the power of the emperor is subordinated to a market he can no longer control; his various attempts to regain fiscal control are depicted as morally bankrupt and economically ruinous.

This critique can be seen as participating in a larger mid-seventeenth century discourse on the limits of imperial sovereignty. The disastrous fiscal policies of the crumbling Ming state that attempted to extract revenue from the flourishing urban centers and hinterland industries of Jiangnan made economic autarky a compelling possibility and, in some areas, a forgone conclusion during the years of dynastic transition. The notion of imperial ownership over the land and the materials produced therein was increasingly questioned by contemporary observers, as prominent intellectuals such as Huang Zongxi and Gu Yanwu called for the devolution of central authority.⁸² In *Jubaopen*, Zhu Suchen brings together the mercantile heroics of *Zhan huakui* and *Shiwu guan* with the latent political critique of his other drama of confiscation, *Feicui yuan*. While veiled in the mystical and historically displaced, *Jubaopen*'s interrogation of the presumptive rights of the state bespeaks concerns that were urgently contemporary.

⁸² Huang Zongxi, *Mingyi daifang lu* 明夷待訪錄 [Record for awaiting an enlightened ruler] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995); Gu Yanwu, *Ri zhi lu* 日知錄 [Record of daily learning], 32 vols. (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983).

Coda

Reading the Riot Act

A thousand people boldly stride forward;
Ten thousand others watch from both sides of the road.
Chop your trees, raise your pole.¹
Come with me to kill the tax inspector.

千人奮挺出，萬人夾道看。
斬爾木，揭爾竿。
隨我來，殺稅官。

Shuiguan yao 稅官謠 (Ballad of the tax inspector)²
Qin Shuyang 欽叔陽, early seventeenth century³

Early in the sixth month of 1601, a crowd gathered at the Xuanmiao Temple in the heart of Suzhou.⁴ Under the newly installed tax inspector, Palace Eunuch Sun Long, heavy levies had

¹ I.e. to make weapons. This line is an allusion to the Dazexiang 大澤鄉 rebellion led by former military captains Chen Sheng 陳勝 and Wu Guang 吳廣 against the Qin Dynasty in 209 BCE. This rebellion was recounted in the *Shiji*: “They chopped down their trees to make weapons and raised their poles as flagpoles” (斬木為兵，揭竿為旗). *Shiji*, 48:1964.

² Seventh of thirteen poems included in the Chongzhen era Wu county gazetteer. See Wang Huanru 王煥如, comp. and Niu Ruolin 牛若麟, ed. *Wu xian zhi* 吳縣志 [Wu county gazetteer], 50 vols., electronic rpt. of 1642 woodblock edition in ZGJBGJK. This poem is also the second of three poems from this series compiled in Zhu Yijun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709), *Ming shi zong* 明詩綜 [Compendium of Ming poetry], 100 vols., *Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 edn., 68:19b–20b, electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK. As both the gazetteer compiler and Zhu Yijun note, this poem is an explicit reference to the 1601 Suzhou uprising. The line in the ninth poem, “Out of twelve men, three were beheaded” (十二人，三授首) matches the various accounts about the uprising, including that given in *Wan min an*.

³ According to Zhu Yijun, Qin Shuyang 欽叔陽 (courtesy name Yugong 遇公) hailed from Wu county and was appointed to the Imperial Academy. Zhu Yijun, *Ming shi zong*, 68:20a.

⁴ While the Chongzhen-era *Wu xian zhi* and Wu Lüzhèn give the date of this assembly as the third day of the sixth month, other sources claim the first day of the uprising was the sixth day. See Wen Bing 文秉 (1609–1669), *Dingling zhulüe* 定陵注略 [Miscellaneous notes from Dingling], 10 vols. MS n. pag. in *Zhongguo yeshi jicheng xubian* 中國野史集成續編, 30 vols. (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2000), 19:699. The gathering in Xuanmiao guan is also mentioned in Zhu Yijun, *Ming shi zong*, 68:20b.

been imposed on the textile industry.⁵ Unable to maintain profitability, the large firms (*jihu* 機戶) that dotted the eastern side of the city were forced to shut down production, leaving thousands of Suzhou residents without any source of income. Meanwhile, Sun's cronies continued to line their pockets by extracting fees on the myriad goods coming into and going out of the city's gates, causing the price of goods within the city to skyrocket.⁶

Since much of this increasingly desperate crowd was presumably made up of laid-off textile workers, it was not surprising that they would assemble in Xuanmiao Temple. This Daoist temple, which was located near the concentration of textile factories in the northeastern part of the city,⁷ was where wage-laborers would habitually gather to be hired by the larger textile firms.⁸ However, Xuanmiao Temple was not merely the patron temple of the weavers and spinners. The temple grounds were host to a flurry of activities and entertainments, from rituals (Daoist and otherwise) to markets and theatrical performances. As a “loc[us] of urban activities,” Xu Yinong argues, the temple “afforded all sections of the people of Suzhou a notable venue

⁵ According to the *Ming shilu* 明實錄 [The veritable records of the Ming], a levy of three *qian* 錢 on every *zhang* 張 of fabric produced incited the factory strike. *Da Ming Shenzong Xian huangdi shilu*, 大明神宗顯皇帝實錄 [The veritable records of Emperor Shenzong of the great Ming], 500 vols., 361:5b, rpt. in *Ming shilu*, 133 vols. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966), 112:6742.

⁶ Chongzhen *Wu xian zhi*, 40a; Shen Shixing 申時行, *Cixian tang ji* 賜閒堂集 [Collected writings of the Cixian hall] (Wanli edn.), 40:11a–11b, electronic rpt. in ZGJBGJK.

⁷ Paolo Santangelo, “Urban Society in Late Imperial Suzhou,” trans. Adam Victor, in *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, ed. Linda Cooke Johnson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 96 n. 97.

⁸ See Duan and Zhang's citation of Jiang Yihua's 蔣以化 (*juren* 1567) observation that small loom households gathered by the gates every morning to be hired by the large household firms. Duan Benluo 段本洛 and Zhang Qifu 張圻福, *Suzhou shougong yeshi* 蘇州手工野史 [Unofficial history of Suzhou handicrafts] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1986), 11. They also assert that the first textile guild, the Jiye gongsuo, was founded in Xuanmiao Temple, but it should be noted that the source they are using for this claim (*Wumen biaoyin* 吳門表隱 [Descriptions of hidden things in Wu]) dates from 1834.

where various religious, social, and economic activities were conducted, and thus functioned as a practical link between the local residents of different class, profession, and place of residence.”⁹

It is fitting, then, that on this day and in this space the various weavers and peddlers and shopkeepers and beggars gathered together and became townspeople.

In seventeenth-century accounts of this event, we are told of the various grievances of each segment of the Suzhou population: the large factory owners cannot keep their factories open in the face of such heavy taxes; the hired workers cannot feed themselves or their families without income; the small-time peddlers cannot bear the confiscation of their meager profits at the city gates. But once they have gathered in this space, they are no longer called weavers or peddlers or shopkeepers. Rather they become a crowd (*qun* 群), a group (*tuan* 團), an economic ecosystem made manifest in its totality. At the same time, it would be a mistake to argue, as some have done, that this gathering in Xuanmiao Temple effaced the social distinctions between all residents of Suzhou. While the gentry and the scholar-officials and the students will later find themselves drawn into the uprising as observers, mediators, and authors, in this moment, this is a crowd comprised of *min* 民, a mass of common people with intersecting economic interests.

Reports vary as to what happened within the walls of the temple—the number of people gathered there and whether and how they organized themselves varies across seventeenth-century sources, which is not surprising as they were written by local elites.¹⁰ What happened

⁹ Yinong Xu, *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 183–185.

¹⁰ Many were also written years after the events. The Chongzhen *Wu xian zhi* says a textile worker named Ge Cheng was elected their leader; Wen Bing leaves the “leader” unnamed and casts doubt on Ge Cheng’s role in inciting the uprising. Wen Bing, *Dingling zhulüe*, 699. While the *Wu xian zhi* emphasizes that the assembled selected Ge, the more florid account attributed to Chen Jiru depicts a valiant and martial Ge Cheng actively taking charge of the group. The estimates of attendance vary widely. Wen Bing gives the most specific accounting, stating that there were twenty seven men, barefoot with their hair askew, dressed in short white robes. Wen Bing, *Dingling zhulüe*, 699. Shen Shixing in his *Cixian tang ji*

when they left the temple grounds, however, is clear: the city of Suzhou erupted in violence. The townspeople converged on the houses of the tax collectors, who were dragged into the city streets and beaten to death as their houses were burned to the ground.¹¹

Over the course of the seventeenth century, this event was memorialized in poems and diaries, official and unofficial histories, industry reports and local gazetteers, epitaphs and stele inscriptions. While many of these accounts and tributes survive to this day, one particular retelling of this event—one with perhaps the largest reach, with the potential to fix both the narrative contours and its meaning in ways the aforementioned texts never could—is missing. *Wan min an* 萬民安 (Peace for the ten-thousand people) is generally attributed to Li Yu, based on its inclusion under Li Yu's name in the *Xin chuanqi pin* and its strong similarities to Li Yu's *Qingzhong pu*, which recounts another Suzhou-wide uprising against a eunuch's abuse of power. Though no copies of the play are extant, an extensive summary survives in the Kangxi-era *Chuanqi huikao*.¹²

gives the figure of a hundred men. Chen Jiru and Qin Shuyang, in their more lyrical accounts, describe the crowd as a thousand men, while the Chongzhen *Wu xian zhi* estimates that there were over two thousand.

¹¹ According to Wen Bing and Sun Pei, Sun Long escaped to Hangzhou. Sun Pei 孫珮, *Suzhou zhizaoju zhi* 蘇州織製造局志 [Report on the imperial silk-weaving workshops of Suzhou, 1686], 12:1a–2b, fasc. rpt. in volume 2 of *Zhonghua zaizao shanben, Qingdai bian, Shi bu* 中華再造善本, 清代編, 史部 [Reproductions of Chinese rare editions, Qing dynasty volume, Histories], 2 vols. (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2013).

¹² The *Chuanqi huikao* author states that *Wan min an* was “written by a late Ming person from Suzhou, but I don't know who” (明季蘇州人作, 不知誰筆). *Chuanqi huikao* 傳奇彙考 (Shanghai: Gujin shushi, 1914), 2:35b. This is not unusual, as the *Chuanqi huikao* fails to identify Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, Zhang Dafu, and other Suzhou circle playwrights as the authors for many of the plays commonly attributed to them in other seventeenth-century sources. As Deng Changfeng points out, this not only shows that the author of the *Chuanqi huikao* had not read the *Xin chuanqi pin*, but that he was not from the Suzhou area. On the dating and authorship of the *Chuanqi huikao*, Deng Changfeng argues against Du Yingtao 杜穎陶 (1908–1963), one of the editors of the *Quhai zongmu tiyao*, who had dated the composition of the *Chuanqi huikao* to between 1715 and 1722. On the basis of a statement that You Tong had not yet passed the civil service exams (which he did in 1679) and a reference to an event in 1673, Deng argues that the initial

According to this summary, *Wan min an* centers around the exploits of Ge Cheng 葛成, the silk worker employed by a large textile firm who figures prominently in most accounts of the 1601 riot. When the play opens, Ge Cheng is a widower in his early thirties with a young son. His neighbor, Old Woman Han, is a widow whose deceased husband produced yellow silk for the Imperial Household. The Wanli court in Beijing dispatches two men to collect from Old Woman Han the thirty taels of silver in back taxes that she supposedly owes. When they take Old Woman Han's daughter, Yunnian, as collateral, Ge Cheng uses all of his savings to pay off his neighbor's debt. A grateful Old Woman Han wants to give him Yunnian as a wife, but Ge Cheng refuses—even though he was planning on using his savings to pay for a second wife to help care for his son.

At that time, Fang Zhuangli, an exam failure from Baoding, is traveling to Suzhou to look for his uncle Zheng Shangfu, who had gone to Suzhou to do business but never returned. While in Suzhou, Fang Zhuangli buys Yunnian from Old Woman Han as a concubine. Old Woman Han tries to use the money to repay Ge Cheng, but he refuses, insisting that the money be used for Yunnian's dowry. Fang Zhuangli reunites with Zheng Shangfu, who had taken a local girl surnamed Shen as his concubine. When Zheng hears of Ge Cheng's generosity towards his nephew's new concubine, he is deeply moved. Zheng, who is old and childless, writes a letter to Ge Cheng in which he gives him Miss Shen along with one hundred taels of silver. As before, Ge

compilation of the *Chuanqi huikao* began between these dates. Deng conjectures that the original compiler of the *Chuanqi huikao* was the poet-official and Ming loyalist Lai Jizhi 來集之 (1604–1683). See Deng Changfeng, “*Chuanqi huikao tanwei*,” 237, 240. On the various editions of the *Chuanqi huikao*, see Jiang Jurong 江巨榮 and Urabe Yoriko 浦部依子, “*Chuanqi huikao jiqi xiangguan xiqu kaoshi shumu—cong Chuanqi huikao ji Quhai zongmu tiyao bubian*” 《傳奇彙考》及其相關戲曲考釋書目—從《傳奇彙考》到《曲海總目提要》及《曲海總目提要補編》 [*Chuanqi huikao* and the related drama title index—From *Chuanqi huikao* to *Quhai zongmu tiyao* and *Quhai zongmu tiyao bubian*], *Xiju yanjiu* 戲劇研究 3 (2009): 125–145. According to Jiang and Urabe, this summary of *Wan min an* was also included in the newly discovered editions of the *Chuanqi huikao* held in Japanese collections.

Cheng is unwilling to accept these gifts of wife and cash. Locking Miss Shen in his house, he goes to find her mother so that he may send Miss Shen back to her. When Ge Cheng returns home, it is quite late; wanting to avoid the appearance of impropriety, he spends the night outside. The Changzhou county magistrate Deng Yunxiao, patrolling the streets of Suzhou on night duty, finds Ge Cheng asleep in his doorway. After learning that Ge Cheng is not a thief or an adulterer, but an upright and virtuous man, Deng Yunxiao is filled with admiration. The next day, Ge Cheng sends Miss Shen (and all the silver) back to her natal home. Miss Shen decides to become a nun, and she and her mother set off for the nunnery, taking Ge Cheng's son to raise out of gratitude to him.

Meanwhile, the official Huang Jianjie is sent by the court to Suzhou to oversee taxation. Huang, along with his retinue and hangers-on, sets up checkpoints at each of the city gates and levies taxes on all goods: peddlers are assessed a tax rate of ten percent, shopkeepers a rate of twenty percent, and workshops a rate of thirty percent. Unable to make a living, the residents of the city go on strike. Ge Cheng identifies the twelve men responsible for the extortionate taxation, and with Ge as their leader, a mob of city residents sets off to bring them to justice. In the street they encounter a young melon peddler named Man Lali, whose wares were confiscated by Huang Jianjie's thugs. Ge Cheng leads the crowd to the taxation office established by Huang Jianjie by Feng Gate, where they find his henchman Xu Cheng. While Ge Cheng wishes to make an example of him by sending him to Huang in a cangue, the crowd's anger cannot be contained—they strip him and throw him in the river. Then they set Huang's office on fire, beat Huang to death, and throw him into the fire.

The rioting continues from the sixth day of the month to the ninth. The prefectural magistrate Zhu Xieyuan and the county magistrate Deng Yunxiao try to placate the crowd, but to

no avail. A military commander is sent in to pacify the eastern part of the city and ferret out the party responsible for inciting the riot.¹³ Ge Cheng bravely claims responsibility for the incident, earning the admiration of the local officials and literati, who now call him Ge Xian 葛賢 (Ge the Worthy). The military defense commissioner for the Suzhou and Songjiang region, Zou Chi 鄒擘, arrives to adjudicate the case against Ge Cheng. Even though Zhu Xieyuan and Deng Yunxiao, along with the celebrated literatus Zhang Xianyi 張獻翼 and various students and licentiates plead for leniency, Zou Chi sentences Ge to death.¹⁴ Miss Shen (who has taken the name Jingzhen) visits Ge Cheng in jail; he is worried about the safety of his son and asks her to change his name and hide his true parentage from him. When Ge Cheng is brought to the execution ground, a sudden earthquake interrupts the proceedings. Taking this as a sign that there might have been an injustice, Zou Chi issues a temporary stay and sends Ge Cheng back to jail.

Ten years pass, during which time Old Woman Han and Zheng Shangfu both die. Fang Zhuangli is now a *jingshi*, having finally passed the civil service examination. After serving as the imperial censor of Henan, Zhuangli is given the position of inspector general of the Suzhou and Songjiang region. Meanwhile, Man Lali wants to right the injustice done to Ge Cheng by registering an official complaint, but while he is on the road he is caught in a rainstorm and his complaint becomes soaked. He stops at a nunnery to dry out the papers in the sun, where they are seen by Jingzhen. Weeping, she comes clean to Ge Cheng's son—who is now thirteen—about the true identity of his father. Ge Cheng's son rushes to the jail to see his father and, with the help of Man Lali, goes to register a complaint with the new inspector general. Fang Zhuangli reexamines the case and overturns Ge Cheng's conviction of guilt. The emperor agrees with

¹³ The eastern part of the city is Changzhou county, where the textile firms are located.

¹⁴ Earlier in the play, Zhang Xianyi went on a sightseeing trip to Tiger Hill with Fang Zhuangli. Zhang Xianyi (d.1604) was the brother of playwright Zhang Fengyi 張鳳翼 (1550–1636).

Zhuangli's memorial asking for leniency, and orders Ge Cheng released. The play ends with the celebration of Ge Cheng's noble actions by all strata of Jiangnan society. The famous hermit Chen Jiru is impressed with Ge Cheng's righteousness and invites him to his mountain abode, while the residents of Suzhou install a shrine for "General Ge" inside the Xuanmiao Temple.¹⁵

Wan min an draws from a number of elements circulating in late Ming and early Qing accounts.¹⁶ The heroic leadership of Ge Cheng was immortalized in a few well-known sources, though others mention him only in the context of taking responsibility for the uprising,¹⁷ and some postulate that he was merely a participant (and in some cases, a latecomer) who sacrificed himself to save others from punishment.¹⁸ The palm-leaf fan that Ge Cheng carries was an often

¹⁵ This is a "living shrine" (生祠) as Ge Cheng is still alive when it is erected.

¹⁶ Though the *Chuanqi huikao* appends Wen Bing's entry on the uprising to the summary of *Wan min an*, the plot of the play more closely resembles the tomb inscription attributed to Chen Jiru. Wen Bing's version describes a mob of twenty-seven haggard-looking men and expresses doubts about Ge Cheng ever being the actual leader of the group. While the version attributed to Chen Jiru shares a number of elements with the play, it is impossible to say if these materials served as sources for the play. The date of the play's authorship is unclear, though if the attribution to Li Yu is accurate and its placement last in the list of Li Yu's plays in *Xin chuanqi pin* is any indication, it was probably written during Shunzhi or early Kangxi. However, the omission of the palace eunuch Sun Long from the play could indicate a Ming-era authorship. Meanwhile the dating and authorship of the inscription is also problematic. Although Chen Jiru's name is attached to the inscription, he died thirty-four years prior to its erection in 1673. As Kai-wing Chow points out, Chen Jiru frequently commissioned his friends to write tomb inscriptions in his name (*Nan Wu jiu hua lu*, 21.7a cited in *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 103, 323 n. 59) Furthermore the popularity of Chen Jiru as a writer of such inscriptions would encourage the production of forgeries. Whoever wrote this inscription did so between Ge Cheng's death in 1630 and 1673. There remains, then, the possibility that the author of the inscription was influenced by the story told by the play, and not the reverse. There is also another piece attributed to Chen Jiru, "Inscription on a Portrait of General Ge" (題葛將軍像), that is much shorter and less descriptive than the tomb inscription, though it indicates that the two men were friends. There is a discrepancy between these texts, as the "Inscription on a Portrait of General Ge" gives the date of Ge Cheng's death as the twenty-sixth day of the ten month, whereas the tomb inscription says it is the twenty-third day. See Chen Jiru, *Chen Meigong quan ji* 陳眉公全集 (Shanghai: Zhongyang shudian, 1936), 2:186.

¹⁷ Shen Shixing, *Cixian tang ji*, 11b.

¹⁸ Wen Bing, *Dingling zhulüe*, 698–99.

noted symbol of the uprising,¹⁹ and the broad outline of Ge Cheng's incarceration (death sentence, commuted to a decade in prison and eventual release) tracks those appearing elsewhere.²⁰ Some of the more minor narrative elements also appear in these sources, such as the story about the melon peddler sobbing in the street after being harassed by tax inspectors.²¹

At the same time, the play makes a number of interventions into this well-known story. One of the most obvious is the omission of Palace Eunuch Sun Long, which even the *Chuanqi huikao* author remarks upon. Although the play depicts Huang Jianjie as the tax inspector sent by the court, the *Chuanqi huikao* notes that this was not, in fact, the case: "The author avoids as taboo the name of Sun Long. [Huang] Jianjie was in the tax inspector's retinue; he was not himself the tax inspector" (作者特諱孫隆不言耳。建節乃稅使參隨，非即稅使). Such an omission could indicate that the play was written during the Ming,²² or perhaps that an author in the early Qing thought it imprudent to vilify a palace eunuch on stage.²³ Such a rewriting could also reflect the popular opinion that the blame lies less with the officials sent by the state, than with the local ruffians and "vile youths" (惡少年) who took bribes or imposed taxes at the city

¹⁹ *Wu Ge Jiangjun mubei* 吳葛將軍墓碑 [Tomb inscription for General Ge of Wu] in *Jiangsu sheng Ming Qing yilai beike ziliao xuanji* 江蘇省明清以來碑刻資料選集 [Selected stele inscriptions in Jiangsu province from the Ming and Qing periods], edited by the Jiangsu sheng bowuguan 江蘇省博物館 (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1959), 415–17; Sun Pei, *Suzhou zhizaoju zhi*, 12:1b; Zhu Yijun, *Ming shi zong*, 68:20b.

²⁰ *Wu Ge Jiangjun mubei*, 416.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² One assumes that this is the rationale behind the *Chuanqi huikao* author's assertion that the play was written during the Ming.

²³ If this were the case, it would be unlikely that the play were written by Li Yu, as the eunuch Wei Zhongxian figures prominently in his *Qingzhong pu*.

gates.²⁴ Switching the role of antagonist from Sun Long to Huang Jianjie might have motives more related to dramatic effect than self-censorship. While Sun Long escaped the crowd's wrath by fleeing to Hangzhou, Huang Jianjie was beaten to death in the city streets; focusing on Huang allows for a more fulfilling reenactment of the crowd's triumph against its enemies.

Nevertheless, the omission of Sun Long, be the reasons political or artistic, does not substantially alter the shape of the narrative as it appears in contemporaneous accounts, as Huang Jianjie now performs Sun Long's role (sent by the central government, imposing a new tax regime on workshops) as well as his own (setting up a tax collection office by Feng Gate; getting beaten to death in the street). Rather, it is through the unassuming insertions of love interests and literati allies that the play turns a story about a tax riot into a meditation on the economic, social, and political configurations of seventeenth-century Suzhou.

Marriage [as] Market

The introduction of two potential love interests—the neighbor's daughter Yunnian and Zheng Shangfu's concubine Miss Shen—at first seems to signal a conventional *chuanqi* ending in which the worthy protagonist is rewarded with two virtuous women.²⁵ *Wan min an*, however, defies the expectations of its genre by having Ge Cheng refuse both women. While Ge Cheng was saving his thirty taels of silver specifically for the purpose of procuring a new wife, once he has given the money to his neighbor for her daughter's ransom, he denies it any potential economic meaning—it is not a payment for a wife; it is not debt to be repaid. His refusal to allow

²⁴ Zhu Yijun, *Ming shi zong*, 68:20a.

²⁵ Cf. *Dushu sheng*.

the money to ever function as money is the ultimate testament to his moral nature, as the acceptance of woman or cash might cast aspersions on the giftedness of his gift.

In the interconnected kinship of the play, Miss Shen is not a gift from an unrelated merchant. Rather, this merchant is the uncle of the man who was able to take Yunniang as a concubine due entirely to Ge Cheng's generosity. Zheng Shangfu's gift thus functions as a delayed repayment with interest—a concubine given for a concubine not taken, one hundred taels of silver for the thirty owed. Ge Cheng's refusal of this gift is a continuation of his efforts to make his first gift an aneconomic dead-end that generates no further obligations. Ge Cheng takes on everyone's debts—from his neighbor's back taxes to the crowd's guilt—but incurs none himself.

Ge Cheng's refusal to take money—either as silver or as a commodified female body—recalls many of the accounts about the rioters in which their moral authority is synonymous with a kind of economic abnegation. The Chongzhen-era *Wu xian zhi* 吳縣志 (Wu county gazetteer) describes the formation of the mob: “They swore an oath to propagate righteousness and not take a single cent” (矢誓倡義，不取一錢). This account is repeated verbatim in Sun Pei's 孫珮 1686 account.²⁶ In the account of Wu Lüzhèn 吳履震 (d. 1645), this phrase transforms from a pledge to a report: “They then set fire [to the tax official's home], but they did not take a cent” (乃縱火，不取一錢).²⁷ A tomb inscription attributed to Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639) describes an incident when this ethos was violated: “There was a man who stole an antique vessel [from the

²⁶ Sun Pei, *Suzhou zhizaoju zhi*, 12:1b. Much of Sun Pei's account is identical to the wording of the Chongzhen *Wu xian zhi*.

²⁷ Wu Lüzhèn, *Wurong zhiyi* 五茸志逸 [Wurong gazetteer], 8 vols., Ming manuscript edn., *juan 7*, facs. rpt. in *Zhongguo fangzhi congkan, Huazhong difang, Jiangsu sheng* 中國方志叢書, 華中地方, 江蘇省 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983), 454:593. One account in the *Ming shilu* also stresses that the mob did not steal anything.

home of a tax collector]; [Ge] Cheng promptly tied him up and killed him” (有竊得一古鼎者，成即縛而殺之).²⁸ Later in the inscription, it becomes evident that it is not only stolen goods that are off-limits to Ge Cheng. Rather, any windfall has the potential to taint the moral purity of the project: “A group of merchants from far and wide who admired Ge Xian’s righteousness pooled together one hundred taels of silver and sent it to him. But [Ge] Xian would not accept it, saying: ‘I am a criminal, why would I need this?’” (四方商賈之慕義者，醵百金遣之。堅卻不受，曰我罪人也，焉用諸)²⁹ Implicit in these examples is the idea that the enrichment of the self alone is fundamentally at odds with the goals of the uprising, which is concerned with the continued functioning of an economic ecosystem of weavers, spinners, peddlers, shopkeepers; they are fighting for an economy, not for money.

The plot line about Ge Cheng ransoming his neighbor’s daughter seems to have no analogue in seventeenth-century accounts of the uprising. However, the concubine-as-gift plot appears towards the end of the tomb inscription: “There was a wealthy merchant from Xin’an named Cheng Shangfu. He had great admiration for Ge Cheng, so he sent him a concubine as a present. Ge Cheng laughed and accepted the gift” (有新安富商程尚甫者，敬而愛之，贈一艾姬，成笑而納焉).³⁰ In *Wan min an*, Ge Cheng not only refuses this gift, but is deeply concerned with any perception that he has accepted, sleeping in the streets so others will not think they shared a room. Of concern here is not Miss Shen’s chaste reputation (as she has served as Zheng Shangfu’s concubine for a number of years), but Ge Cheng’s adherence to what appears to be an almost parodic performance of Neo-Confucian propriety. The extremity of Ge Cheng’s moral

²⁸ *Wu Ge Jiangjun mubei*, 416.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

behavior is what attracts the attention of the county magistrate—it is not merely that a commoner is comporting himself as someone versed in Neo-Confucian precepts, but that he is doing so in way that exceeds what would be expected of a literatus. While in the tomb inscription the concubine-gift occurs after Ge Cheng is released from prison, in *Wan min an*, Ge Cheng is sent Miss Shen before the uprising occurs. By dispatching these two romantic entanglements prior to the uprising, *Wan min an* is able to establish Ge Cheng’s character within the parameters of literati exemplarity as a way to blunt his potentially problematic role in the riots.

Role Models

The importance of inscribing Ge Cheng within the (literati-authored) moral order before his disruption of the (literati-privileging) social order dovetails with the other substantial transformation of the source material: the insertion of a cast of magistrates, circuit inspectors, students, licentiates, and literary personages who seem to dominate the final section of the play. Other accounts of the uprising occasionally feature a local official who is sympathetic to the rioters. The tomb inscription features a prefect who objects to a military suppression of the uprising and who tries to dissuade Ge Cheng from pleading guilt when his actions are blameless; when Ge Cheng insists on being punished, the prefect gives him the moniker Xian. The Chongzhen-era *Wu xian zhi* shows an attempt by the Changzhou county magistrate Deng Yunxiao 鄧雲霄 to accommodate the demands of the crowd: “Yunxiao saw how volatile the present situation was, so he shackled the villainous [Tang] Xin and [Xu] Cheng at Xuanmiao

Temple, where the crowd beat them to death and tore apart their corpses (見勢洶湧，再械辛、成二兇於玄妙觀，衆毆立死，裂其尸).³¹

With expanded—and heroic—roles for the county and prefectural magistrates and the inclusion of notable literati like Zhang Xianyi, *Wan min an* is not unlike *Qingzhong pu* in its depiction of a confederation of Suzhou residents against agents of the state. In *Qingzhong pu*'s portrayal of the 1626 uprising against the corrupt eunuch Wei Zhongxian, what begins as a factional dispute among elites comes to involve an entire city, as various occupational and social groups align against outside forces. What is elided in that play, however, is the way in which those shopkeepers and workers were acting in defense of their own economic interests by overthrowing the oppressive tax regime implemented by Wei Zhongxian.³² Instead, these concerns are subsumed by the moral, i.e. political, outrage at the persecution of the Donglin faction. In a sense, *Wan min an* represents a reversal of *Qingzhong pu*—while *Qingzhong pu* depicts a group of townspeople rioting in support of the political interests of the local elite, *Wan min an* shows the local elite rallying behind the economic interests of the townspeople. But as in *Qingzhong pu*, the stories of the commoners quickly become co-opted by the literati characters—while *Wan min an* might have opened with a denunciation of corruption and crippling taxation, it ends as a celebration of one man's moral exemplarity.

³¹ Chongzhen *Wu xian zhi*, 40a–40b. This is repeated in Sun Pei's 1686 *Suzhou zhizaoju zhi* as Yuanmiao guan 圓妙觀 (12:1b–2a); *yuan* 圓 was one of the alternatives for taboo character *xuan* 玄 during Kangxi. On post-mortem dismemberment as a punishment, see Timothy Brook, Jérôme Bourgon, and Gregory Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 13–14, 50, 61, 88.

³² Paolo Santangelo, "Urban Society in Late Imperial Suzhou," 104. Li Mei criticizes the participants of the 1601 uprising as "not going beyond the scope of protecting their own interests" (沒有超出維護自身利益的範圍) and praises the "feeling of social responsibility" (社會責任感) of the townspeople involved in the 1626 uprising who are motivated by a "sense of integrity" (正直態度) (even though she notes that obviously they had a personal interest in eradicating Wei Zhongxian). Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 107–109.

Like Tao Fuzhu in *Shiwu guan*, Ge Cheng becomes a cause célèbre among the local elite because of an unexpected display of “righteousness.” While some sources point to Ge Cheng’s noble self-sacrifice as his righteous act, the summary of *Wan min an* is more ambiguous: “Ge Cheng then stood tall and accepted responsibility [for the uprising]. Yunxiao told Xieyuan about the time he was on night duty and saw Cheng refuse to accept the Shen girl. Xieyuan thereupon changed Cheng’s name to Ge Xian” (葛成乃挺身出認。雲霄告變元以巡夜見成不納沈女事。變元遂改成名曰葛賢). His chaste comportment during the Miss Shen incident apparently displays the same virtue as his moment of self-sacrifice. He is praised for a quality and not a stance, and he is rescued by the motley crew of local elites—magistrates, students, etc.—not because of their sympathy for the uprising but because they recognize in him a quality by which they define themselves. This name they give Ge Cheng stands in stark relief to the moniker bestowed on him by the townspeople. While Ge Cheng’s comrades-in-arms worship him as “General Ge” in a move that explicitly recalls Ge’s role in the uprising while legitimizing the uprising as an act of war, the literati-officials inscribe Ge Cheng within the conventional and transhistorical category of “worthies.”

At the same time, it would be incorrect to assert that the local elites in the play are only concerned with moral behavior; they are also clearly invested in issues of jurisdictional authority. The play seems to set up twin modes of governmental authority: the bureaucratic chain of command and the autocratic despotism of the eunuch stand-in (who is himself a stand-in for the autocrat at the head of the state). While it is an emissary of the state functioning in an autocratic mode that plunges the city into chaos, order is restored by a veritable army of bureaucrats. Once Ge Cheng is imprisoned, the drama shifts focus from the blood-soaked streets and burning buildings to the appeals and complaints that travel up the chain of command from county

magistrate to prefectural magistrate to circuit inspector to inspector general. But with the exception of the pro forma edict from the emperor, that chain never leaves the region—the highest official involved is the Inspector General for Suzhou and Songjiang Prefectures. In stark contrast to the emperor’s emissary, who takes but does not give, Inspector General Fang Zhuangli is an outsider who is nonetheless deeply enmeshed in Suzhou’s commercial, political, and affective economies.³³ The play’s reaffirmation of local bureaucratic channels—in which both elites and commoners alike are shown to participate—accords with modern understandings of the role local administrators played in the immediate aftermath of the uprising, asserting autonomy from the central government and quickly altering the unpopular tax policies.³⁴

On the one hand, *Wan min an*’s depiction of local elite participation in these events undermines the reading of the 1601 uprising (and Suzhou circle plays generally) as generating a new category of “urbanite” that seamlessly subsumes elite and commoner interests. On the other, the play shows how these various and distinct interests might productively align.³⁵ But while the

³³ While the summary describes Fang Zhuangli’s various connections to Suzhou (through affines, friends, kin, etc.), no such connections are listed for his subordinate Zou Chi, who sentences Ge Cheng to death.

³⁴ Xu Jin and Zhao Dingxin argue the Suzhou riot was short-lived relative to a similar riot in Wuchang for these reasons. Xu Jin 徐進 and Zhao Dingxin 趙鼎新, “Zhengfu nengli he Wanli nian jian de minbian fazhan” 政府能力和萬曆年間的民變發展 [State capacity and the dynamics of tax riots during the late Ming dynasty], *Shehui yanjiu* 社會學研究 [Sociological studies] 1 (2007): 2.

³⁵ While I agree with von Glahn’s criticism of the common formulation of ‘urbanites against the autocratic state,’ I disagree with his assessment that the 1601 uprising was an attack by certain exploited segments of the urban population against wealthy households. Von Glahn makes this argument based on the writings of Shen Shixing, a former Grand Secretary under Wanli whose own abuse of authority was denounced by Tang Xianzu in his 1591 memorial to the throne. Shen Shixing’s account not only shields members of the court’s inner circle, but also depicts attacks on local wealthy families that do not appear in other accounts of the uprising. In fact, a number of other sources emphasize that rich merchants were left unharmed and only those directly involved in the tax collection were targeted. While the veracity of all of these accounts is unknown, the imagination of the uprising throughout the seventeenth century seems quite different than Shen’s account. Furthermore, von Glahn argues that the destruction of private homes while leaving the yamen unscathed supports his reading of the conflict as not being about the state. However, other accounts describe the destruction of the offices of the tax commissioner—while the county and prefectural yamen were seen as local interests aligned with those of the city’s residents, the

play's plot, even in synopsis, reveals the irreducible complexity of urban identities, the play's performance contains within it the seeds of a more expansive urban culture.

Southern Capital

While other accounts describe Ge Cheng as an outsider from Kunshan³⁶ or leave his native place unnamed,³⁷ in *Wan min an* he is described as hailing from the Changzhou county section of Suzhou. In *Shiwu guan*, Suzhou was a place no one was from, but to which everyone was drawn—the geographic center where overlapping circulations of cash converge. Here, Suzhou is generated not by the accumulation of cash but by the accumulation of bodies. According to the *Chuanqi huikao* summary, a crucial scene is set in the Xuanmiao Temple (which, during the Kangxi era in which this summary was written, was renamed Yuanmiao Temple to avoid the taboo word *xuan*): “All of those who could no longer support themselves, the common people of the city, arranged to strike. They assembled in Yuanmiao Temple; the sound of their cries shook the heavens” (俱不聊生，滿城百姓，相約罷市，齊集元妙觀中，呼聲震天).³⁸

One imagines it was not just heaven that their cries shook. While no evidence exists that this play was performed, if the attribution to Li Yu is correct, it can be assumed that the play was

government offices of the court emissary are seen as hostile outsiders. See Richard von Glahn, “Municipal Reform and Urban Social Conflict in Late Ming Jiangnan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.2 (1991): 300.

³⁶ Chongzhen *Wu xian zhi*, 40a; this account is repeated in a number of sources, including Sun Pei's *Suzhou zhizaoju zhi* and Zhu Yijun's *Ming shi zong*.

³⁷ *Wu Ge Jiangjun mubei*, 415–17.

³⁸ *Chuanqi huikao*, 2:35b.

intended for performance.³⁹ For an audience in Suzhou to feel the vibration of those cries—perhaps in the very same place where those cries were originally cried⁴⁰—is an instantiation of the immediacy of theater, in which the past is experienced as the present. But unlike those plays (including many by Li Yu himself) that depict the heroics of Yue Fei or the perfidy of Zhu Di in present tense and with an eye toward current events, in this play the characters on stage are explicitly telling the story of the audience itself.

The Suzhou audience would have been primed to have such a moment of self-recognition. Seventeenth-century drama made frequent use of the metatheatrical, and, as previously discussed, the Suzhou circle's plays are particularly rife with plays (and storytelling)-within-plays.⁴¹ Just as Youlan in *Shiwu guan* and Wei Gu in *Taiping qian* are struck with the sudden realization that the story being told is their own—that they are not audience but actor—the audience realizes that they themselves are also implicated in the on-stage crowd. This is their story, not only because it is the story of their past, but because it is their present. They, too, represent a cacophony of interests that are momentarily subsumed by a shared role (here: “audience”). More than just depicting the townspeople of Suzhou, this performance brings them into being, with the

³⁹ As noted previously, many of the extant plays of Li Yu and other members of the Suzhou circle contain copious stage directions. Li Yu and Zhang Dafu were both authors of musical treatises and their work was frequently praised for its attention to music and meter, which would be of importance for performance. These plays were performed both during the playwrights' lifetimes (see Chapter Three, note 19 on Qi Biao's attendance at a 1643 performance of Li Yu's *Yi peng xue*; also Qian Qianyi's preface to *Qingzhong pu* on the popularity of Li Yu's plays among musicians and singers) and after (the eighteenth-century anthology *Zhuibaiqiu* includes scenes from numerous Suzhou circle plays). Based on the scenes anthologized in the *Zhuibaiqiu*, some of the most popular scenes on the eighteenth-century stage depicted the kind of violence and mass uprising that might have been found in *Wan min an*, like the “Shu nao” 書鬧 scene from *Qingzhong pu*.

⁴⁰ As dramatic performances were held in the Xuanmiao Temple, and Suzhou circle plays were frequently performed in such venues, it is not impossible to imagine this play being staged there.

⁴¹ For a discussion of this trope in the plays of the Suzhou circle, see Li Mei, *Ming Qing zhiji Suzhou zuojia qun yanjiu*, 216–232.

experience of spectatorship transforming the assorted merchants, laborers, literati, and officials into a thing with a shape and a memory.

The audience of townspeople that becomes both an object and a subject gestures towards the myriad ways the Suzhou circle transforms that which is debased or forgotten into agent and actor. Just as those spectators become the spectacle itself, the plays discussed above take the benighted merchant and his money and turn them into heroic subjects. The agency of silver and the subjectivity of the merchant are but two examples of the ways the Suzhou circle expands the narrative possibilities of *chuanqi*. Though their attention to the market—its ethos and structure, its currency and commodities—may seem unusual for *chuanqi* drama, it is precisely the Suzhou circle's use of the *chuanqi* form that captures the dynamism of commerce. From the circulation of the fetish prop to the final reunion scene, the conventions of *chuanqi* that elsewhere are used to construct a community of connoisseurs or loyalists are employed by the Suzhou circle to construct an economy that crosses geographic and social space.

While the contours of this economy vary, all six plays discussed in this dissertation must contend with the place of the state (however constituted) within these networks of exchange.⁴² The first two plays, *Shiwu guan* and *Kuaihuo san*, end with attempts to subsume their sprawling networks of people and places into the state's jurisdiction. *Dushu sheng*, *Taiping qian*, and *Jupaoben*, however, reveal a fundamental tension between the state's claims to universal sovereignty and its exclusion from the circulation of people and things. The violent rupture of these fault lines in *Wan min an* shows the economy coming into its own as a politics.

⁴² “The state” is of course a problematic reification—here, however, I am not attempting to make historical claims about the existence of something that can be called the state. Rather, this is the imagination of the center as constituted in these plays. While local or regional officials are sometimes able to be integrated into these economies (such as Han Xiu in *Taiping qian* or Deng Yunxiao in *Wan min an*), the emperor and his emissaries are always figured outside.

While the Suzhou circle's thematizing of commerce is unusual for late Ming and early Qing *chuanqi* drama, their interest in the dramatic and political possibilities of money, merchants, and the market bears a striking resemblance to what was happening on stage a few decades earlier half a world away. From William Shakespeare to Philip Massinger, late Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists grappled with similar issues across a range of genres: the extreme prodigality and extreme debt in *Timon of Athens*; the predatory usury of *Merchant of Venice* and *A Trick to Catch the Old One*; the merging of religious and economic discourses in the contract law of *Measure for Measure*; the problematic feudal gift in *King Lear*; the unjust confiscation of property in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*; the cultural boundary-crossing of the merchant class in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*; the integration of social identities in *Beggar's Bush*.

In English Renaissance drama, as in the Suzhou circle plays, the kinds of social relations made possible by the commercial economy engendered new ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking.⁴³ However, while the plays of the English Renaissance are plays of debt, the plays of the Suzhou circle are plays of surplus. The promissory notes and breached contracts that litter plays like *Merchant of Venice* and *A Trick to Catch the Old One* are not merely narrative devices—they are the medium and the language through which characters make sense of the world.⁴⁴ In the plays discussed in this dissertation, however, the economic imaginary is one of

⁴³ On the penetration of economic thinking into the literary worlds of the English Renaissance, see Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 [1982]), 47–83; Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*; Theodore B. Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 42–80; Linda Woodbridge, ed. *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

glut, where there is always more money than expected: the three sets of fifteen strings in *Shiwui guan*; the foreign silver showered on Jiang Chi in *Kuaihuo san*; the pirate's trove discovered by Song Ru in *Dushu sheng*; the one hundred thousand strings of rare coins in *Taiping qian*; the endlessly productive cornucopia in *Jubaopen*. Only in *Wan min an*, in which the market is forcefully stopped, does this profusion of copper coins and silver ingots abate.

Whether these riches are from foreign lands or supernatural realms, they all flow in the same direction: into Jiangnan. While these plays are situated in the particularities of Suzhou—its temples and waterways, its government offices and workshops—the thematic and structural innovations of the Suzhou stage were rooted in those global processes that were drawing precious metals from Europe to China. In taking the market as both their theme and their structure, the plays of the Suzhou circle illuminate not only the economic imaginary of the late Ming and early Qing, but also the increasing interconnectedness of the global seventeenth century.

⁴⁴ On the density and scope of credit networks (and paucity of hard currency) during this period, see Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

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TPGJ: Li Fang 李昉, comp. *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Extensive records from the Taiping Era], 500 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986 [1961].

WYGSKQS: *Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 [Pavilion of Literary Profundity edition of the *Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries*], 1500 vols. Facsimile reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986.

XXSKQS: *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 [Continuation of the *Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries*], 1800 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995–2002.

ZGJBGJK: Beijing Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin 北京愛如生數字化技術研究中心, comp. *Zhongguo jiben guji ku* 中國基本古籍庫 [Database of Chinese classic ancient books]. Beijing: Beijing Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin, 2009, <http://server.wenzibase.com/dblist.jsp>.

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